

The Basics of Media Writing

# The Basics of Media Writing

A Strategic Approach

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# Preface

Welcome to this textbook, and to what we believe is a fundamentally better way to teach and learn media writing.

We wrote this as a text for use in introductory media writing courses in the United States and worldwide. As you will see throughout these pages, we are excited about the concept of applying *professional strategy* to the task of media writing. We believe that a strategy-based approach will help students become stronger thinkers and writers as they prepare for careers in the media professions.

### The Story Behind This Book

If you are an instructor in a journalism and mass communication program, you probably have grappled with the challenges of teaching media writing to the millennial generation of students. Born sometime between 1982 and the early 2000s, millennials represent a new and different group of learners. They are technology driven and demand relevance. They spend considerable time on social media and often become bored with traditional instructional methods.

Millennial students across the globe view the task of writing differently, and sometimes less seriously, than their counterparts of a generation ago. Influences including K–12 education, family life, and technology negatively impacted their writing skills in many cases. As a result, too many college-level students today lack the skills in reading, critical thinking, and writing that are required for entry into the media professions.

If you are a millennial student living anywhere in the world, you may question the importance of professional media writing to your own career. Since the media world these days seems to be mostly about image and appearance, how important can writing possibly be? And isn't the personal writing you do for social media good enough? As you will discover in this text, these are dangerous misconceptions. Writing is *the* critical skill that you must possess in order to succeed in a media career. Regardless of the medium (print, digital, or broadcast), writing is where it all begins and ends. No other skill will so strongly limit or advance your success as a media professional. And in the digital age, the need for strong writing skills has not decreased. It has increased. Readers who devour 140-character tweets in one or two seconds demand text that is compelling, easy to read, and technically flawless.

But writing well is hard work. As a student, you may lack the background and confidence you need to do it well. Perhaps you find yourself frequently stuck as you begin a writing assignment. Without a clear understanding of your situation, audience, and message, you might simply write down the first thing that comes into your head and turn it in to your instructor. Or, maybe you have a hard time spotting and correcting your own mistakes. If this sounds a bit like you, know that you are in good company with many other collegelevel writers. But there is no need to stay stuck where you are. This textbook will arm you with the strategies and skills you need to overcome these obstacles and begin to write as a media professional.

As journalism and mass communication instructors at Clarion University (a public statesystem university in Western Pennsylvania), we have wrestled with all of these challenges. In our classrooms over the past fifteen years, we have been nagged by a disquieting sense that traditional instructional approaches are no longer working very well, and that millennial students need fresh instructional approaches to media writing. A study we conducted in 2013 proved that many students enrolled in media writing courses were unsure of how to begin the task of writing and lacked confidence in their abilities. The same study showed that some students did not grasp the importance of writing skills in a media career and were bored by the conventional instruction offered in their classes.

Reviewing current media textbooks on the market, we found that too many of them still offered the same old newsroom scenarios, drill-and-practice exercises, and generic-sounding lists of advice. The problem is that these texts do not give students a specific *strategy* for becoming proficient media writers. We knew it was time for a better textbook that helps students break through and makes their instructors' jobs easier. We hope we have accomplished that here.

### Major Approaches of This Textbook

A focus on professional strategy: *The Basics of Media Writing: A Strategic Approach* is fundamentally different from other media writing texts because it focuses on *professional strategy* and the type of thinking that millennial students need to do when writing. Beginning in <a href="Chapter 2">Chapter 2</a> and throughout the text, we use the *Professional Strategy Triangle* model to show students how to use situation and audience factors to shape their news and persuasive pieces. Illustrations and exercises make it easy for instructors to teach. This model was developed based on extensive interviews with media professionals working in journalism, public relations, and advertising. Here, we dug into the thought processes and strategies they use to create winning news stories, public relations pieces, and advertisements. The Professional Strategy Triangle nicely captures how it all works and enables students to emulate professional writing in a step-by-step fashion.

Professional perspective: In our view, the media professions and the writing one does for them are inseparable. That's why we wrote this book from a professional's standpoint. In our experience, the media writing class is a gateway course in which students explore potential media careers for the first time. Hopefully, they'll grow interested in one of those careers. Each chapter begins with a profile on a leading media professional, followed by an overview of the profession, employment trends, job duties, and personal qualities of successful practitioners. Chapters are infused with professionals' real-world experiences, ideas, and tips for success.

The fundamentals: The basic writing principles of good journalism, public relations, and advertising endure. You will find them alive and well in this textbook. We drive home the tried-and-true principles behind the First Amendment. We offer ample coverage of Associated Press style, grammar basics, reporting and interviewing, lead writing, and media law and ethics. Throughout the text, we make the point that in today's digital media environment, these media writing fundamentals have grown more important than ever.

Equal treatment of news writing and persuasive writing: Graduates working in today's converged media environment are likely to hold a variety of positions throughout their careers. At various points, they may be called upon to produce news stories, public relations pieces, or advertisements for clients and employers. Most students in a media writing class have not yet landed firmly on a career choice, and they need exposure to both types of writing. This text shows students the difference between news writing and persuasive writing and demonstrates strategy-based techniques for each.

Emphasis on the digital news environment and social media: From beginning to end, this text addresses the realities of working in digital news settings. It uses real-world examples to demonstrate how media professionals use social media tools for research, networking, and writing. We have also devoted separate chapters to social media, writing

for the web, and blog writing.

Freestanding chapter content: Although this text is designed to be read and taught in sequential order, instructors can break the chapters apart and teach them in whichever order they wish. Material from this textbook is also easy to integrate into existing lesson plans and instructional materials.

Key Features of This Textbook

### In Each Chapter

The following features reinforce key media writing principles and provide material that instructors and students can use for class discussions or individual assignments:

- Frontline Media Writing Profile: Profiles on leading media practitioners with discussion of their professional writing strategies
- Pro Strategy Connection: Career-based guidelines and tips from media professionals
- Craft Essential: Brief skill-building exercises that students can complete individually or in groups
- The War Room: In-depth skill-building exercises that place students in real-world writing scenarios
- Learning objectives: Identify key takeaways for a close, focused reading
- Chapter summaries: Revisit the key points of the chapter and connect them to a larger context
- Key terms
- Discussion questions
- Chapter exercises
- Additional resources
- Appendices: The MWSP and GSP are designed to be taken early in the course to
  assess a student's confidence and perceptions of their skill levels. Additional chapter
  exercises are provided to reinforce key grammar and style concepts, and help students
  get a handle on some of the most common writing issues.

# Across the Textbook

## The Media Writer's Self-Perception Scale

We believe it is possible to identify individual students' skill and confidence levels and to meet students where they are with targeted writing exercises. Instructors can accomplish this by using the Media Writer's Self-Perception Scale included with this text. Using our course website, students can fill out this scale early in the course to assess their confidence and perceptions of their skill levels. In our experience, there is great value in knowing our students better as writers.

### Instructor and Student Resources

Instructor materials at edge.sagepub.com/kuehn include a test bank, PowerPoint slides, video and multimedia resources, discussion questions, suggested class activities, and a sample syllabus.

The open-access SAGE edge site for students at edge.sagepub.com/kuehn features mobile-friendly quizzes and flashcards, video and multimedia resources, learning objectives, and more.

# Acknowledgments

#### Scott A. Kuehn

First, I'd like to offer sincere thanks to the readers whose comments helped us produce this edition. Our editors at CQ Press provided the right kind of professional support, special thanks to Terri Accomazzo, Matt Byrnie, Anna Villaruel, and Eric Helton who went above and beyond to help this book reach the publication stage. Thank you Elisa Adams and Diane DiMura for your interpersonal skills as well as your editing excellence.

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#### Andrew Lingwall

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Finally, we wish to acknowledge the many faculty members who took the time to carefully review this book and offer their feedback during its development. They scrutinized chapter drafts and responded with many useful, in-depth comments. We took everyone's feedback to heart, and adjusted our content and approaches based upon their wisdom. The reviewers for this text were

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Dora R. Fitzgerald, The University of the Incarnate Word

Garry J. Gilbert, Oakland University

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As in every other discipline, the teaching and learning process in journalism and mass communication is ongoing. We would appreciate hearing from all of you—instructors and students alike—to learn of your insights and observations on this book. We want to know how it is working out for you. Please be in touch!

Scott A. Kuehn Andrew Lingwall

Clarion University of Pennsylvania

### About the Authors

#### Scott A. Kuehn,

PhD, is Professor of Communication at Clarion University of Pennsylvania. He earned his doctorate in Speech Communication at the Pennsylvania State University in 1987. Kuehn teaches courses in mass communication research, communication law, new media effects, social media for media professions, mass media criticism, and photography. His research focuses on the perceptions of communication skills and communication competence, and he has been published in *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator and Communication Education*. He currently serves as advisor for WCUC 91.7 FM, Clarion University's 3800-watt radio station. Kuehn is an amateur photographer with expertise in medium- and large-format film photography. He is also a part time musician who records jingles and other radio, television, and cinematic music.

#### Andrew Lingwall,

EdD, is a Professor of Communication at Clarion University of Pennsylvania. He earned his doctorate in Education from the University of Washington in 2002. Lingwall teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in journalism, public relations, and strategic communication. He has more than 25 years of professional media experience as a journalist at daily newspapers and as a public relations practitioner in agency and higher education settings. From 1993 to 2002, Lingwall worked as a freelance features writer with *The News Tribune* and as a public relations specialist with Tacoma Community College, both in Tacoma, Washington. He previously taught at the University of Washington Tacoma and Weber State University. Lingwall's research agenda focuses on strategic communication and writing skills of millennial students in programs of journalism and mass communication. His research has been published in Journalism and Mass Communication Educator, Journal of Public Relations Education, and Journal of Advertising Education. Lingwall serves as a subject matter expert in public relations for a range of textbook publishers. He is a member of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) and serves on PRSA-Pittsburgh's Board of Directors.

# Section I Media Writing Foundations

# Chapter 1 You as a Writer

### Chapter Outline

**Learning Objectives** 

Frontline Media Writing Profile: Jaime Fettrow-Alderfer, Television News Reporter

Welcome to Media Writing!

Media Consumption and Production, All at Once

Media Responsibilities and Challenges

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"As a journalism student, I know that good writing encompasses more than just adhering to grammar rules or AP style. Good writing transforms complex issues and events into effective, compelling stories. For me, writing skills have unlocked career possibilities beyond public relations and journalism."

—Nora Faris, University of Missouri

# Learning Objectives

- 1. Explain how the dynamics of media consumption and production affect the media professional's work.
- 2. Identify the responsibilities and challenges that media professionals face.
- 3. Describe the importance of skilled writing in the media professions.
- 4. Identify your self-perceptions as a writer.
- 5. Explain how the Media Writer's Self-Perception (MWSP) Scale helps diagnose writing skills.
- 6. Diagnose your own writing skills with the Grammar, Spelling, Punctuation (GSP) Test.

Frontline Media Writing Profile
Jaime Fettrow-Alderfer, Television News Reporter
Collegeville, Pennsylvania



Recalling her life as a television news reporter, Jaime Fettrow-Alderfer says that journalism has enabled her to achieve so much that would have been impossible in another career.

"If you are a successful journalist, you can open the door to opportunities for other people who do not have a voice," she says. "You have a chance to make a difference through the stories you tell. When people call and say 'thanks for telling our story,' you know that's why you got out of bed that day."

Fettrow-Alderfer, thirty-eight, describes her work in the news business as a highly addictive pursuit. The reporting and writing process gave her an adrenaline rush every day. A journalism career also put her face-to-face with many interesting people in a job where no two days were ever alike.

"I've always loved that aspect of being a journalist," she recalls. "One day I would be interviewing a homeless man, and then the next day, John Kerry when he ran for president in 2004. I had the opportunity to tell some really good stories."

Fettrow-Alderfer earned her bachelor's degree in journalism from Penn State University in 2000. She landed her first reporting job with WENY-TV, a small station in Elmira, New York. Within two years, she

moved up to WBNG-TV, a CBS affiliate in Binghamton, New York. "There, I worked with a really good hands-on news director who ripped my writing apart every time," she recalls. "From there on out, my writing got a hell of a lot tighter." In 2004, Fettrow-Alderfer became a general assignment reporter at TWC News 14 in Charlotte, North Carolina, and after that, a general assignment sports reporter with WHP CBS 21 in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. She worked there until 2009 as weekend sports anchor and weekday sports reporter.

Fettrow-Alderfer has faced some demanding assignments in her journalism career. Eleven months into her first job at WENY-TV, she covered an arson story involving a woman who set her house on fire and killed one of her three children. "I don't know that you're ever fully prepared for writing in a breaking news situation and for the emotional toll it takes on you," she says. "But you can be prepared for the story. When the scanner went off in the newsroom, I asked myself, 'How would I have this phone conversation with my parents, a friend, or family member later? What would they want to know and how would I describe the scene?' When you write television news, you're essentially having a conversation with the people who were not there."

According to Fettrow-Alderfer, the best news stories come from journalists who are strong critical thinkers. "A reporter should never just accept a statement as fact," she says. "Think more critically. A successful journalist, regardless of the platform, will always find better stories by being curious and inquisitive. That's what separates the really good journalists from the others."

#### Welcome to Media Writing!

Whether you are considering a career in journalism, public relations, advertising, or another area, you are exploring these fields at a time of unprecedented change, excitement, and career opportunity. Whether you are a traditional-age college student or a returning student, this textbook is designed to provide you with the writing skills and strategies you will need to break into these professions and thrive in them. The text also discusses career trends in the media professions and how you can use them to maximize your professional success.

Perhaps you are opening this book as a confident writer with a solid set of skills. You feel that you've got the basics down and you're ready to jump into some major assignments. That is great news. You are probably on track for success with everything you encounter in this book. On the other hand, it could be that your confidence is a bit shaky. Perhaps you could use a review of the basics, some hands-on instruction, and specific strategies for success. If this sounds like you, then you are in luck. This textbook will provide you with all three of these essentials. All you have to supply is the willingness to think and work hard, and the determination to transform yourself into an aspiring professional.

Photo 1.2: As people continue to get more information from a variety of sources, they will reshape their media habits in ways that best serve their interest.



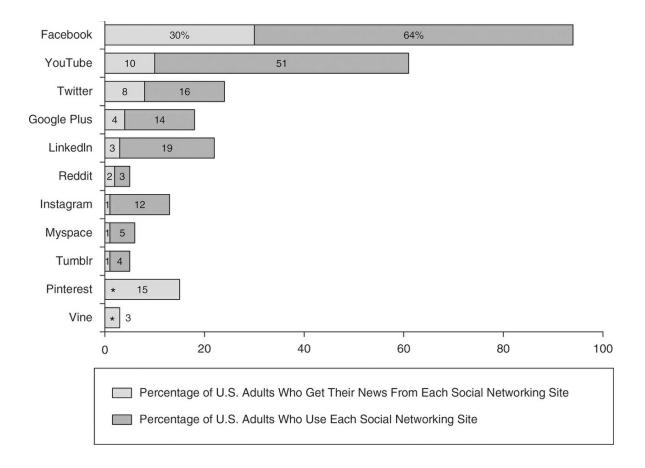
## Media Consumption and Production, All at Once

As the digital transformation of media enters its third decade, news audiences have become both *consumers* and *producers* of a diverse array of media. Today's converged environment has blurred the lines between news writing and persuasive writing. Media professionals must now be able to create and deliver content that is accurate, relevant, and on point for fragmented, time-pressured audiences.

Throughout this text, we underscore the fact that professional media writing is not the same thing as amateur media writing. The informal writing you do for friends on social media or in your personal blog may be fun and entertaining. If applied properly, it can help build your abilities to choose the right words and to assemble coherent sentences. Professional media writing, by contrast, requires a highly developed skill set and the ability to produce pieces that are accurate, ethical, thorough, clear, and tailored to your audience's media preferences. Professional writing strategy is driven by an understanding of your situation and audience. These may appear to be daunting challenges, but with diligence and focus, you can meet them.

You may be reading this text simply because your advisor said you needed to take a media writing course, or because your program requires it. This is all right, as well. No matter which way your life unfolds, you must learn how to be both a skilled media producer and a savvy media consumer. Consider for a moment the flood of online content you encounter every day. It is produced not only by official media organizations, but by people like you. As a media producer, you might be working on a blog that you fill with posts on a given topic. Maybe you publish your own videos or post on Instagram to publicize news events or personal causes. Do you comment on blog posts and then tweet their links to them to your friends? As you can see in Figure 1.1, life these days is an endless cycle of producing and consuming media.

Figure 1.1 The Pew Research Center: 8 Key Takeaways About Social Media and News



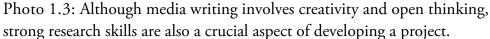
Source: "8 Key Takeaways About Social Media and News," PEW Research Center, Washington, DC (March, 2014). Retrieved from http://www.jorunalism.org/2014/03/26/8-key-takeaways-about-social-media-and-news/.

Note: Asterisk indicates the percent of U.S. adults who get news on Pinterest and Vine; each accounts for less than 1%.

Beyond helping you to become a skilled media producer, this text should help you to grow into a literate media consumer. In the role of a twenty-first-century media consumer, you should be able to understand the difference between fact and opinion, truth and fiction. In the twentieth century, when a small handful of newspapers, magazines, television networks, and radio stations dominated the media landscape, separating fact from opinion was a relatively simple matter. Not so these days. How can we think critically about important, life-changing news stories and issues with so much conflicting information at our fingertips? Modern life demands a much higher level of discernment as more people have learned how to manipulate and send messages through digital media. You will need to figure out what to learn, what to ignore, and how to shut out the noise.

## Media Responsibilities and Challenges

In the United States, media organizations bear great power and responsibility for informing audiences, influencing publics, and preserving a democratic system of government. These are high public trusts, and they are upheld primarily through the writing that media professionals do. If you choose a career in any media sector (journalism, public relations, or advertising, for example), you will quickly find that strong writing skills are required for any type of position. In the media, skilled writing is a craft that not only is appreciated, but demanded by employers and audiences alike. Those who develop strong writing skills will rise to the top of their profession, whether it means a seat at the editor's desk, a place at the corporation's management table, or in an executive slot at a public relations or advertising agency.





Writing for the media is demanding work. Media professionals define themselves as professionals through their commitment to writing excellence. They value their own writing skills and those of their colleagues. They rely on each other's expertise to work effectively under heavy deadline pressure. Employees who write poorly or place little value on good writing will not succeed.

If writing for the media is such a challenge, then why do so many people love to do it? Tough as it is, media writing is a fun and highly rewarding enterprise. In it, you gain the opportunity to engage diverse audiences, to influence them, and to play a key role in the marketplace of ideas that we enjoy in a democratic society. Equally important, the media serve as the watchdogs of government, providing information and ideas that citizens need in order to understand significant issues and make important decisions for themselves. As a media professional, you bear ultimate responsibility for being honest, accurate, and fair in all that you write. You also must provide models of good writing for others to understand and emulate.

# The Role of Skilled Writing

It would be a serious mistake to think that many media jobs do not involve writing. In reality, most media jobs require a tremendous amount of writing. Whether you are working behind the scenes in a television newsroom or preparing advertising copy for a client proposal, writing is a frontline skill that your bosses, clients, and audiences expect. Even news photographers must record information about their subjects and write clear photo captions. A radio DJ often writes news tags that engage his or her audience, and inform them of critical local news events such as weather emergencies, school cancellations, or traffic updates. In public relations settings, the social media campaign you create for your managers will succeed or fail largely on the strength of your writing. Regardless of the medium, it's all about skilled writing.

# Understanding Yourself as a Writer

"Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom."

—Aristotle, Greek Philosopher

Let's think about *you* for a moment. At this point in your life, how do you view yourself as a writer? You and your fellow students might have a hard time answering this question. Consider the above quote by Aristotle, the ancient Greek philosopher. Understanding your writing skills and perceptions of your own writing abilities are the keys to becoming a better writer and a media professional. Consider factors in your life that have influenced your writing development, such as the quality of writing instruction you received in grade school and high school, your family life, how much you read, and how much you watch television. Today, your writing skills as a college student may be well served by your past instruction, technology use, and home life. On the other hand, you may need review and practice.

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# Jaime Fettrow-Alderfer's Top Seven Tips for Becoming a Skilled Journalist

According to television news reporter Jaime Fettrow-Alderfer, becoming a skilled broadcast journalist takes much more than just looking good in front of the camera. Here are her top seven tips for success:

- 1. Reporting: Never assume that you have the facts, or that you know something just because you heard or saw it. Ask the dumbest and most routine questions too. Get everything you can on record (where a source is willing to have information attributed to them).
- 2. Observation: Soak in everything you see and hear using all five of your senses so that you can describe the story for someone who is not there.
- 3. Interviewing: Don't rely only upon official sources. Speak with unofficial sources too. The people standing around a story scene may have seen something important, and you never know where that will lead. Don't be afraid to ask them.
- 4. 4. Writing: Writing is *the* essential skill in the news business. It is communication. Writing skills have deteriorated in recent years, which is even more reason to excel at it, because not enough people write well. In most broadcast markets, there is a good chance you will be writing everything you say on the air.
- 5. More on writing: Writing competent leads and stories is crucial, but the use of description takes it to the next level. Use vivid descriptions and metaphors to take the viewer to the scene of the story. Let the story breathe through the use of characters, descriptions, and emotions.
- 6. Ethics: Pause anytime you are asked to do anything that doesn't feel right. Ask yourself, "What is it that makes this feel uncomfortable to me?" When in doubt, ask someone else. It is much better to ask beforehand than to have to defend your decision later.
- 7. Credibility: Credibility is everything, and it is always up for grabs. People can quickly forget the good things you have done as a journalist or media organization if you make one mistake.

Photo 1.4: As the lines between print, broadcast, and online writing continue to blur, remember that what works for Twitter may not work in the newsroom.



#### Social Media Influences

If you are a millennial or postmillennial student (born roughly between 1982 and the first decade of the twenty-first century), you are standing at a unique juncture of history. New media technologies have enriched your life in countless ways. Over the past decade, social media have become well established in the media professions. In your career, you can expect to write for employers and clients across a range of social media platforms.

But technology is a double-edged sword. According to recent research, most millennial students appear to be using social media in a highly personal and nonprofessional style. Some critics argue that their writing skills have suffered as a result of their attention to these fast-paced new media. The same social media tools you might use to communicate with friends and the outside world also create pressures that can work against sound thinking, writing, and editing. For example, the daily writing you might do for Twitter or Instagram would probably not meet professional standards in a newsroom, advertising agency, or other professional media setting.

More than any other previous generations, millennial and postmillennial students face online distractions. Poor writing seems to be accepted as the norm in many circles. Professional social media writing is much different from personal, informal social media writing. The chapters that follow will show you how and why.

# Self-Knowledge Leads to Career Success

Regardless of your age, knowing your strengths and weaknesses enables you to see where you need to improve and perhaps identify a career direction. For example, if you are skilled at explaining facts, details, and issues, then you would probably make a strong journalist or public relations writer. If you can write inspiring commercial copy, you could be headed for a successful career in advertising.

But first, we have to build the right skill sets. Do you frequently encounter difficulties with grammar, spelling, or punctuation? Do you often draw a blank when it's time to begin writing? How do you come up with creative ideas when facing deadline pressure? You'll rest easier once you begin to work on overcoming these challenges using the strategies that media professionals employ. Media professionals carefully consider their situations and audiences as they write news stories, blogs, or advertisements. They identify the facts and determine what is most important for their readers or viewers to know. Before setting their fingers to the keyboard, they think hard about how they will approach their writing task. You can learn these strategies too. Over the next thirteen chapters, we'll show you how it's done.

#### Good Writers Are Made, Not Born

Do you believe that good writers are born or made? We have all observed that some people seem to be gifted writers from an early age, while others struggle to master the basics. As true as this is, writing is a skill you can learn. It can be fully developed by nearly anyone who is willing to put in the time and effort. To paraphrase inventor Thomas Edison, writing, much like genius, can be viewed as "1 percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration." But simply having a few ideas and being able to express them coherently are two very different things. Writing requires the mental "heavy lifting" of developing those ideas into prose that is clear, concise, and well ordered.

No one is born literate and eloquent. Becoming a good writer takes self-understanding, mental effort, strategies, and practice. That is what we focus on in this book: getting to know how we perceive ourselves as writers, and then developing the strategies and skill sets needed to overcome past deficiencies and grow into media professionals. This chapter addresses two diagnostic instruments that you and your instructor can use to get you started on this pathway. First, the Media Writer's Self-Perception (MWSP) Scale will help you to understand your own *perceptions* of your writing. Second, the Grammar, Spelling, Punctuation (GSP) Test will help you to pinpoint your current *skill levels* in these areas.

Craft Essential: Exploring Your Writing Background

Think about the factors in your life that have influenced your development as a writer. Do you feel as though you received competent writing instruction in grade school and high school? How much did you read as a child? Are you a heavy social media user these days? How do you think these factors have shaped the writer you are today?

- 1. Consider these questions on your own for a moment or two.
- 2. Partner with one or two classmates and explore the questions. Share your own experiences and ideas for five minutes.
- 3. Regroup as a class to discuss your thoughts and conclusions for another five minutes. What sorts of main themes or issues are emerging? How might you address them in your college coursework?

# The Media Writer's Self-Perception (MWSP) Scale

As noted above, you must first understand yourself as a writer and establish where you are now in order to become a media professional. We all approach the task of writing with our own unique strengths, weaknesses, experiences, and personal histories. It only makes sense to begin the process with a hard look at ourselves and how to get there from here. That's why this book gives you the option to use the Media Writer's Self-Perception (MWSP) Scale to reveal your self-perceptions about writing.

Located in the Appendix, the MWSP Scale is an instrument developed to measure how college students think and feel about themselves as writers. Research studies have revealed three main areas of self-perceptions that influence your performance as a writer:

# Writing Apprehension

Writing apprehension refers to feelings of anxiety connected with the various phases of writing. Researchers have connected writing apprehension with trouble getting started, worry about mechanical skills (e.g., grammar, spelling, punctuation, sentence structure), career skills, fear of being evaluated, anxiety about procrastination, and worry about which ideas to use.

# Writing Self-Efficacy

Writing self-efficacy is your confidence in your writing skills—how strongly you believe you can succeed at the writing task that faces you. High self-efficacy translates to high self-confidence. On the other hand, low self-efficacy translates to low self-confidence. If you are a student with low self-efficacy, you may feel as though you cannot learn. However, as we will discover, this is not true.

# Writing Approaches

Writing approaches describe the way you think about undertaking a writing task. Do you plan it out and employ a strategy? Or, do you simply write whatever pops into your head first? This is a critical distinction because, as noted above, professionals rely upon specific strategies when they take on any writing assignment. Equally important, writers who have developed strategies *believe* they can write well, and therefore enjoy higher self-efficacy. Finally, developing a set of writing strategies enables you to take a *deep* approach to your writing, exploring new meaning and insight instead of relying upon a *surface* approach, which means repeating or reproducing ideas already developed by others. Once you have completed the MWSP Scale, you can consult with your instructor to discuss ways to approach your development as a writer.

# The Grammar, Spelling, Punctuation (GSP) Test

The Grammar, Spelling, Punctuation (GSP) Test is a diagnostic exam you can take to determine your skill levels in grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Links to this test are located in the Appendix. You can take this test and then consult with your instructor to work on any deficiencies you find.

Once you have established your writing self-perceptions and skill levels, you can practice writing for the media professions in the upcoming chapters and consult with your instructor to complete exercises and assignments. Then, you can meet periodically with him or her to review progress and continue your pathway to success.

So let us get started. It's time to get to know yourself as a writer, to build new skills, to learn professional strategy, and to explore the many exciting career pathways in the media professions. If you are willing to apply yourself, you can accomplish it all.

Craft Essential: Write a One-Minute Paper

Now that you have finished reading Chapter 1, take out a sheet of paper and complete the following:

- 1. Write down one or two main points you took from this chapter.
- 2. List one question you still have, or an issue you don't understand.
- 3. Submit the paper to your instructor. This exercise will help you to synthesize the main lessons from this chapter and to identify elements that you want to review further. It also gives your instructor direct access to your thoughts about the chapter material, and help him or her to consider main points for your next lecture or discussion.

#### Summary

- 1. Explain how the dynamics of media consumption and production affect the media professional's work. As the digital transformation of media enters its third decade, news audiences have become both consumers and producers of a diverse array of media. Professionals must now be able to create and deliver content that is accurate, relevant, and on point for fragmented, time-pressured audiences.
- 2. Identify the responsibilities and challenges that media professionals face. Media organizations carry with them a high public trust and are central to a functioning democracy. Employers and audiences expect media professionals to be skilled writers.
- 3. Describe the importance of skilled writing in the media professions. News audiences, employers, and clients demand writing that is accurate, clear, and concise for both news and persuasive writing situations.
- 4. Identify your self-perceptions as a writer. Our informal social media writing experiences may influence our perceptions of our writing skills, but good writers are made, not born.
- 5. Explain how the Media Writer's Self-Perception (MWSP) Scale helps diagnose writing skills. The MWSP Scale can help you identify your self-perceptions as a writer. It addresses writing apprehension, writing self-efficacy, and writing approaches.
- 6. Diagnose your own writing skills with the Grammar, Spelling, Punctuation (GSP) Test. This is a diagnostic exam you can take to determine your skill levels in grammar, spelling, and punctuation. You can use it to interpret your test results and then consult with your instructor to work on any deficiencies you find.

# Key Terms

professional media writing 6
professional writing strategy 6
media producer 6
media consumer 6
Media Writer's Self-Perception (MWSP) Scale 12
Grammar, Spelling, Punctuation (GSP) Test 13

# Discussion Questions

- 1. Experts have observed that writing is an important life skill, regardless of the type of career you pursue. Do you agree with this statement? Explain your reasoning. Beyond your career, in what other areas of life is writing an important skill?
- 2. Consider the fact that news audiences are both major consumers and producers of media. Discuss some ways in which this fact impacts the work of the media professional as a journalist, a public relations practitioner, or an advertising professional.
- 3. In the twenty-first century, media professionals are both major consumers and producers of media. Discuss some ways in which this fact impacts their work as journalists, public relations practitioners, or advertising professionals.
- 4. What are some of the ways in which you are already working to build your professional writing skills? Consider your social media posts, the blogs you write, student media work, or the writing you do for student clubs or volunteer organizations. How are these experiences helping to sharpen your writing, and how might you use this work to secure an internship or career position? Alternately, think about some of the ways in which you *should be* building your professional writing skills. Brainstorm a list and discuss as a class.
- 5. Based on what you know about journalism, public relations, and advertising, which of these careers, if any, might interest you? Explain your thinking.
- 6. Do you believe that the everyday writing you do for social media is good enough for professional work? If not, what are the differences? Explain your reasoning.
- 7. If you have completed the Media Writer's Self-Perception (MWSP) Scale, how did the results compare with your own thoughts of yourself as a writer and your skills? In which areas of your writing do you most want to improve in order to meet your career or personal goals? Where do you need to build confidence? How will you get there?
- 8. If you have completed the Grammar, Spelling, Punctuation (GSP) Test, what were the results? How did they compare with the skill levels you thought you had? Which skills do you most need to build in order to meet your career or personal goals? How will you get there?

#### Chapter Exercises

- 1. The Poynter Institute is a leading journalism education organization staffed by a range of media professionals. Team up with a classmate and tour the Poynter site at <a href="www.poynter.edu">www.poynter.edu</a>. Explore the site for fifteen to twenty minutes. Try to discover what makes a journalist a true professional in terms of how they work, think, and write. What sorts of professional strategies are evident? What separates them from the amateurs? Prepare to share your findings with the class in a three-minute "professional strategy" presentation.
- 2. Write a 250-word paper about a news event that was significant to you, your family, or your community in some way. Try to recall how that news event was covered by the media you used and how the news coverage helped you to make a major decision or form an opinion on the issue. Did you check different news outlets for coverage of the story, or just rely on one source? How did the work of professional journalists and editors help to advance your life, or the life of your family or community? Once you have finished, prepare to share high points from the paper in a class discussion.
- 3. Go online and visit a few of your favorite news websites. Carefully read through the headlines, leads, and opening paragraphs of several stories. Do they appear to be straight news stories, opinion pieces to persuade the audience, or a mix of the two? Do you believe this approach is appropriate? Note the most useful websites, record your findings, and prepare to share them with the class in a two-minute minipresentation.
- 4. WordPress is one of the most popular blogging sites in use on the web, with more than 409 million people viewing its blogs in 2016. Go to <a href="https://www.wordpress.com">www.wordpress.com</a> and create an account. Once you've signed up, locate two or three blogs that are personally interesting to you. Observe the writers' styles and prepare to share your findings with the class.
  - a. Which writers appear to be the best storytellers?
  - b. Does the writing seem to flow well and make sense to you as a reader?
  - c. How many followers has this blogger attracted?
  - d. Besides personal interest, what keeps you reading their blog?
- 5. Once you have gained a good sense of what makes for a successful blog from Exercise 4 above, try starting one yourself.
  - a. Choose a topic that is personally interesting or fun to you. It is OK to make your first entries brief and simple.
  - b. Before finalizing your posts, proofread and edit them carefully to ensure that they read well and are free of errors in fact, grammar, spelling, and punctuation.
  - c. After posting, observe your blog for a week and see what types of followers you attract. What are their comments, and what do they add to your observations?
  - d. Respond to your audience members' comments and interact with them as much as you can.

Prepare to share your findings with the class.

- 6. Complete the Media Writer's Self-Perception (MWSP) Scale provided with this text. Write a 350-word paper describing how your scores compare with your own thoughts of yourself as a writer and your skills. Which items seemed to describe you most accurately and which did not? Describe the personal attributes and skills that you are happy with, and those you most want to improve in order to meet your goals. Exchange papers with a classmate. After reading each other's paper, share your impressions, common points, and differences. Prepare to discuss your findings with the class.
- 7. Complete the Grammar, Spelling, Punctuation (GSP) Test (see the Appendix for links to test). Write a 350-word paper describing your areas of strength and weakness. How did your score compare with what you anticipated? Discuss the areas in which you most want to improve and how you plan to do so. Exchange papers with a classmate. After reading each other's paper, share your impressions, common points, and differences. Prepare to discuss your findings with the class.
- 8. Interview a classmate on the subject of writing. Prepare a list of three or four questions exploring the

writing challenges this student faces and how he or she attempts to overcome them. For example, what does he or she enjoy most about writing? Which career paths is this student considering, and why? From your interview notes, draft a 300- to 400-word profile story on this student. Write a catchy headline and a news lead. Be sure to include plenty of quotes from your interview source.

#### Additional Resources

Blogger.com: <a href="https://www.blogger.com">https://www.blogger.com</a>

The Pew Research Center: <a href="http://www.pewresearchcenter.org">http://www.pewresearchcenter.org</a>
Public Relations Society of America (PRSA): <a href="https://www.prsa.org">https://www.prsa.org</a>
Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ): <a href="https://www.spj.org">https://www.spj.org</a>

WordPress: https://www.wordpress.com

# Chapter 2 Media Writing Professions and Strategies

# Chapter Outline

Learning Objectives
Frontline Media Writing Profile: Alycia Rea, Group Director, The Zimmerman
Agency
Twenty-First-Century Media: A Rapidly Changing Landscape
Overview of the Major Media Professions
Journalism: Print to Digital
Journalism: Broadcast and Cable
Public Relations
Advertising
What Is Strategic Communication?
Pro Strategy Connection: Nathan Crooks's Seven Tips For A Successful Journalism
Career
Professional Media Writing Strategy
<u>Situation</u>
Audience
<u>Message</u>
Craft Essential: Create Your Own Professional Strategy Triangle
In the Center of the Professional Strategy Triangle: The Active Thinking
Process
The War Room: Writing A Message To Put "Heads In Beds" And "Butts In Seats"
Using the Professional Strategy Triangle in Health Care Public Relations
Writing
Situation
<u>Audience</u>
The Center of the Professional Strategy Triangle: The Active Thinking
<u>Process</u>
<u>Message</u>
Pro Strategy Connection: The Top Five Things That Chris Kraul Loves About Being
<u>A Journalist</u>
Using the FAJA Points in Your Writing
<u>Fact</u>
<u>Analysis</u>
<u>Judgment</u>
Action
Scenario 1: The Journalist and the Straight News Story
Scenario 2: The PR Professional in Crisis Management Mode
Scenario 3: A Local Radio Salesperson Writes a Commercial
Summary
Key Terms

<u>Discussion Questions</u> <u>Chapter Exercises</u> <u>Additional Resources</u>

"In my profession, my writing has to be 'on point' all of the time. I know that the audience I write for gets so many mixed messages every day, so it is up to me to relay the information in a clear, concise, and accessible way. To me, solid writing skills are a reflection of strong critical thinking and reasoning skills."

—Cailyn Lingwall, Emory University

# Learning Objectives

- 1. Describe the changing landscape of twenty-first-century media.
- 2. Discuss the major professions in today's media environment.
- 3. Explain professional media writing strategy in terms of the Professional Strategy Triangle.
- 4. Apply the Fact-Analysis-Judgment-Action (FAJA) Points to the writing process.

Frontline Media Writing Profile

Alycia Rea, Group Director

The Zimmerman Agency, Tallahassee, Florida



For Alycia Rea, writing is an anywhere, everywhere, around-the-clock enterprise.

"I usually check my email from my phone before I'm even out of bed," says Rea, thirty-one, a group director with The Zimmerman Agency. "Our bosses, clients, and teams are communicating 24/7, so you're crazy to think that you're not getting emails in the middle of the night."

Based in Tallahassee, Florida, Zimmerman is an advertising and public relations agency specializing in hospitality and consumer industries. Its clients include SpringHill Suites, Hard Rock Hotels, Cooper Tires, and Party City. Rea works remotely from her home in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and travels the globe to work with clients.

Rea quickly learned that she must be able to write wherever she lands, day or night. "I have had to get used to pushing my work out from anywhere," she says. "Initially it was hard to do my best writing from a car or airport or hotel room. But these days, Wi-Fi is everywhere, so I really don't have an excuse for not getting it done."

Rea earned her bachelor's degree in communication from Clarion University of Pennsylvania in 2007.

At Zimmerman, the "average day" does not exist. "Recently, I spent a big chunk of time putting together a deck (visual presentation) for one of my hospitality clients to present to the hotel owners," she says. "Another day, it may be all about writing press material. Then, one of our new clients needed a fresh media kit, so I put together some creative fact sheets that spoke to the brand messaging in a way that would make sense from an editorial perspective."

Rea puts her professional writing skills on the line every day as she engages in media relations on behalf of her clients. She's built lasting relationships with editors and writers at key travel and consumer publications largely on the strength of her writing skills. "At Zimmerman, we have so much respect for the journalists we pitch," she says. "That means our writing has to be distinctive, tight, and on point so we don't waste their time. If our writing isn't relevant, it will be ignored."

Today, most editors and journalists want pitches via email, according to Rea. "You have to be able to deliver your message clearly and efficiently to get your client noticed," she says. "Our clients need to be able to see, hear, believe, and trust that we can take their message and 'brand voice' and tell their story effectively to the press. And nothing can get lost in translation. At the end of the day, it's all that matters."

To ensure that the right messages are conveyed through all media channels, Rea works with a team of social media strategists who write and blog every day for Zimmerman clients. The team works hard to protect the brand voice they have carefully cultivated. She notes, "You can't lose brand voice, otherwise you end up making it confusing or boring to your audience."

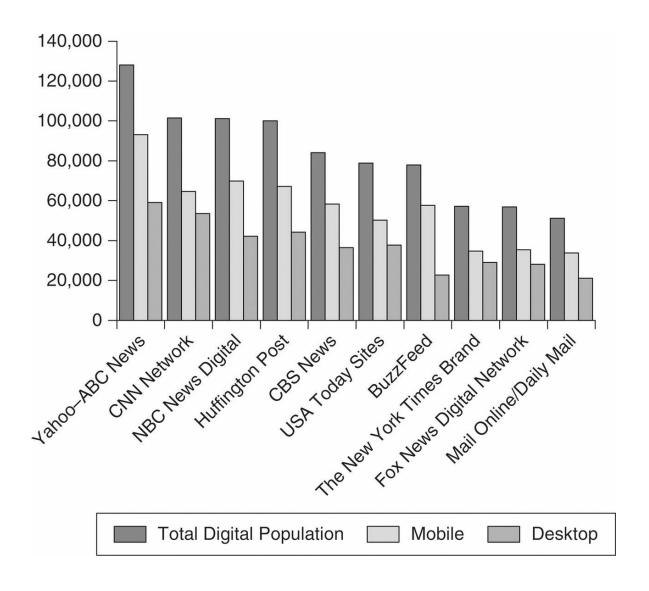
## 21st-Century Media: A Rapidly Changing Landscape

If you are contemplating a career in the media professions, you are exploring the field in a time of unprecedented upheaval and rapid change. Major newspapers that have thrived for a century are cutting back their publication schedules or going mostly online. Wellestablished radio and television stations, facing declining advertising revenues, are laying off news staffs. Indeed, the entire mass media industry, which appeared to be so solid a few short decades ago, is rapidly evolving into a digitally driven, interactive enterprise. Here, the spoils go to those who can convey the news to audiences wherever they are and whenever they want it, on their own customizable terms as they consume and produce media all at once.

The "good old days" of the mass media are not returning. Media ownership has largely been consolidated into several large corporations over the past three decades. All of this upheaval is being driven by a chaotic outside world. Consider for a moment the global conflicts, environmental crises, and political battles that make news headlines every day. In order to stay relevant in the information marketplace and keep up with ever-shifting audience demands in this complex environment, media organizations and professionals must be flexible and agile in terms of their business models, technologies, and skill sets. As a professional, you will need to be able to produce high-quality content across multiple platforms.

At the same time, there is much to celebrate in today's new media environment and to anticipate in your own potential career. With media industry upheaval has come tremendous new opportunities for change and growth. Many digital media outlets have emerged, such as BuzzFeed or the *Huffington Post* (see Figure 2.1). Likewise, traditional media operations such as *USA Today* and NBC News have discovered new life and popularity online. As a media professional, you have huge volumes of information at your fingertips and can converse with anyone in the world, thanks to the Internet and social media. Digital reporting tools (most of which are now contained in your smartphone) enable you to write, edit, shoot photos and video, and instantaneously share your stories with readers, friends, and audiences from almost any location on the globe. It has never been easier to quickly convey breaking news and be an innovative content creator.

Figure 2.1 Top Digital News Entities



Source: "State of the News Media 2015," Pew Research Center, Washington, DC (April, 2015). Retrieved from http://www.journalism.org/2015/04/29/state-of-the-news-media-2015/.

Yet, amid this massive media churn, one thing will never go out of style: the need for skilled, professional writing, produced by people who know how to select interesting topics and tell compelling stories with accuracy and speed. Regardless of the channel, your writing skills will ensure that you have a rewarding career, provided that you take the time to build your skills and learn professional strategies now.

# Overview of the Major Media Professions

Let's explore the major media professions including journalism, public relations, and advertising. Today, the public relations and advertising industries have largely combined under the banner of *strategic communication*. This means that organizations are integrating their communications with key stakeholders and speaking with one *brand voice* across public relations, advertising, and marketing channels.

#### Journalism: Print to Digital

In the early twenty-first century, journalism spans a rich tradition of print and an exciting future of interactive technologies that connect with and engage audiences in new ways. It is truly an exciting time to be working in the profession. While many critics predicted the death of print journalism in the 1980s and 1990s, newspapers and magazines have proven to be remarkably resilient in the new century. Many of them, such as *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, have attracted new readers and advertisers through their online publications while retaining their print editions. Others, more specialized or located in smaller communities, such as *The Derrick* in Oil City, Pennsylvania, and *The Bemidji Pioneer* in Bemidji, Minnesota, have survived as print publications by serving a traditional (and often aging) readership with news and advertising content they cannot get elsewhere. Still others like Mashable and BuzzFeed were born online and have never existed in print form.

According to the Pew Research Center, 2013 and early 2014 brought new levels of energy and optimism to the news industry, thanks in part to digital advertising revenues that have encouraged reinvestment in news operations. In 2014, the Pew Research Center counted roughly 5,000 full-time professionals working at nearly 500 digital news outlets. Most of these jobs were created in the past half dozen years. However, the vast majority of original reporting still comes from the newspaper industry.

Modern journalists connect with their audiences and create content for them on a 24/7 basis. Online newspapers provide "comments" sections for reader input at the end of many articles. Journalists maintain ongoing conversation with readers through their news websites, along with email and social media channels. Similarly, online publications are updated more frequently than print-based newspapers and magazines. News writers face constant pressure to update their stories. Reporters also spend considerable time doing research, obtaining background information, and conducting interviews before they begin the task of writing.

#### Journalism: Broadcast and Cable

Broadcast refers to radio or television where the signal is transmitted by radio wave to the receiver. Broadcast television channels include ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox, and PBS. Cable television programming is delivered directly to paying subscribers. Examples of providers include AT&T, Comcast, and Time Warner Cable. Regardless of the medium, there has never been more competition to tell stories through video and audio channels. Career opportunities are abundant in a variety of market sizes and locations. Regardless of your staff position, your ability to write well will mark you for advancement throughout your career.

Table 2.1 Media Occupations, Salary Ranges, and Job Outlook for Journalists

2015 Median Pay	\$37,720 per year/\$18.13 per hour	
Typical Entry-Level Education	Bachelor's degree	
Work Experience in a Related Occupation	None	
On-the-Job Training	None	
Number of Jobs, 2014	54,400	
Job Outlook, 2014–24	-9% (Decline)	
Employment Change, 2014–24	-4,800	

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2016–17 Edition, Reporters, Correspondents, and Broadcast News Analysts. Retrieved from <a href="http://www.bls.gov/ooh/media-and-communication/reporters-correspondents-and-broadcast-news-analysts.htm">http://www.bls.gov/ooh/media-and-communication/reporters-correspondents-and-broadcast-news-analysts.htm</a>.

As a broadcast or cable news professional, you must be able to write quickly, clearly, and effectively under intense deadline pressure. You must also be able to operate in a highly competitive media environment that often encourages staff members to scoop the competition.

Just like print journalists, television journalists also face new writing challenges in today's converged media environment. For example, broadcast and cable station websites provide running audience commentary in response to each story, while reporters who write TV, video, and radio stories often post print versions of their stories on their stations' websites. As a media professional working in a converged newsroom, you will need to learn several styles of writing and be able to switch quickly between them.

For information about salaries and the career outlook for print, digital, and broadcast journalists, see <u>Table 2.1</u>.

#### Public Relations

If you are considering working in public relations, you can anticipate a bright career future. Public relations is a dynamic and fast-growing profession. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts average job growth for public relations through 2024, at around 6 percent per year (see <u>Table 2.2</u>). Job growth is predicted to be especially strong in the health care industry.

Table 2.2 Media Occupations, Salary Ranges, and Job Outlook for Public Relations Specialists

2015 Median Pay	\$56,770 per year \$27.29 per hour	
Typical Entry-Level Education	Bachelor's degree	
Work Experience in a Related Occupation	None	
On-the-Job Training	None	
Number of Jobs, 2014	240,700	
Job Outlook, 2014–24	6% (As fast as average)	
Employment Change, 2014–24	14,900	

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2016–17 Edition, Public Relations Specialists. Retrieved from <a href="http://www.bls.gov/ooh/media-and-communication/public-relations-specialists.htm">http://www.bls.gov/ooh/media-and-communication/public-relations-specialists.htm</a>.

Public relations practitioners work to influence public opinion, manage relationships with key publics, and create favorable publicity for their clients and employers. Work settings can range from agencies and corporations to hospitals, sports teams, school districts, and nonprofit organizations. Throughout the public relations process, you can expect to work extensively with print, digital, broadcast, and cable media. You will also utilize a range of social media channels to tell your client's or employer's story. Many times, you will plan for and manage crises.

It should come as no surprise that the bulk of the public relations professional's work and the biggest career rewards are directly related to writing skills. Whether you are writing a speech for a corporate CEO, releasing new product information through your company's Facebook page or Twitter feed, drafting an online news release in response to a crisis, or editing the company newsletter, you will be polishing your writing skills every day.

# Advertising

Like public relations, advertising offers promising career pathways to college graduates. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts 9 percent job growth for advertising professionals through 2024 (see <u>Table 2.4</u>). Possible work settings include ad agencies such as Crispin Porter + Bogusky in Miami, Florida, media employers including *The Dallas Morning News*, corporations such as 3M, or a range of small businesses.

Table 2.3 Top 25 Public Relations Agencies and Their Worldwide Fees, 2015

	•	
1.	Edelman, New York, NY	\$797,328,238
2	APCO Worldwide, Washington, DC	\$118,112,600
3.	Waggener Edstrom Communications, Bellevue, WA	\$106,676,000
4.	W2O Group, San Francisco, CA	\$82,625,000
5.	Ruder Finn, New York, NY	\$73,891,000
6.	Finn Partners, New York, NY	\$52,796,000
7.	MWWPR, New York, NY	\$51,775,000
8.	ICR, New York, NY	\$50,687,714
9.	DKC Public Relations, New York, NY	\$41,500,000
10.	Zeno Group, New York, NY	\$39,921,576
11.	Allison+Partners, San Francisco, CA	\$37,000,000
12.	Global Strategy Group, New York, NY	\$32,378,000
13.	PadillaCRT, Minneapolis, MN	\$31,624,111
14.	Racepoint Global, Boston, MA	\$27,274,597
15.	G&S Business Communications, New York, NY	\$25,438,112

16.	Coyne PR, Parsippany, NJ	\$23,010,000
17.	Taylor, New York, NY	\$21,700,000
18.	Prosek Partners, New York, NY	\$20,300,000
19.	Hunter PR, New York, NY	\$20,250,000
20.	5W Public Relations, New York, NY	\$18,961,046
21.	French   West   Vaughan, Raleigh, NC	\$18,753,747
22.	Fahlgren Mortine, Columbus, OH	\$18,616,471
23.	LEVICK, Washington, DC	\$17,231,618
24.	Sparkpr, San Francisco, CA	\$16,424,750
25.	Peppercomm, New York, NY	\$16,294,726

Adapted from "Worldwide Fees of Top Public Relations Firms with Major U.S. Operations," O'Dwyer's: Inside News of Public Relations & Marketing Communications, March 2015. Retrieved from <a href="http://www.odwyerpr.com/pr-firm-rankings/independents.htm">http://www.odwyerpr.com/pr-firm-rankings/independents.htm</a>.

Photo 2.2: Many advertising firms may hold brainstorming meetings in their offices to come up with new concepts or ideas about a new client or project.



Advertising is about creating messages that move people to action. Arguably, it is the most creative of the media writing sectors. Copy writers create new messages with fresh approaches to selling clients' brands, products, and services. Advertising professionals must understand pop culture and current events, and use what they know to generate attention among consumers in key demographic groups.

Copy writers listen to the needs of their clients and use their creativity to compose messages that will sell. They then work with production staff to shape those messages for particular media platforms. You can expect to write outdoor slogans, web page banner ads, radio and television commercials, print newspaper ads, and other types of promotions. You may also be a team member involved in developing an entire advertising campaign, where your key messages carry through all aspects of the campaign.

# What Is Strategic Communication?

Over the past three decades, the public relations, advertising, and marketing disciplines have largely merged in the industry world and are now collectively known as strategic communication or *integrated marketing communication* (IMC). The central idea is that organizations are always communicating with a *brand voice*, saying something positive or negative about their brand through their public relations, advertising, product packaging, customer relations, and everything else they say and do. As an example, consider Walmart. Which type of brand voice do they use? Strategic communication takes a consumercentered approach to messaging. Did you ever notice how Southwest Airlines or Subaru seem to be intensely focused on you as the consumer? As <u>Table 2.3</u> indicates, the world's top communication agencies earn considerable revenues by taking a highly integrated approach to promoting their clients. We discuss this concept further in the public relations and advertising chapters. As a writer in this setting, you are always telling your organization's "brand story" across multiple platforms using a variety of methods.

Table 2.4 Media Occupations, Salary Ranges, and Job Outlook for Advertising Professionals

	U	
2015 Median Pay	\$124,850 per year \$60.03 per hour	
Typical Entry-Level Education	Bachelor's degree	
On-the-Job Training	None	
Number of Jobs, 2014	225,200	
Job Outlook, 2014–24	9% (Faster than average)	
Employment Change, 2014–24	19,700	

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2016–17 Edition, Advertising, Promotions, and Marketing Managers. Retrieved from <a href="http://www.bls.gov/ooh/management/advertising-promotions-and-marketing-managers.htm">http://www.bls.gov/ooh/management/advertising-promotions-and-marketing-managers.htm</a>.

Pro Strategy Connection

# Nathan Crooks's Seven Tips for a Successful Journalism Career

In a decade of work as a journalist, Nathan Crooks has learned a lot about how to report and write the news. His career has taken him across South America, from *The Santiago Times* in Chile to *Bloomberg News* in Caracas, Venezuela, where, at age thirty-three, he now serves as bureau chief.

Here are his seven career tips for aspiring journalists:

- 1. Be ready to jump on a new story. "Everything in Venezuela happens by surprise," says Crooks. "For example, the president likes to speak late at night and on weekends. But it's always 2 p.m. somewhere. Just because we are asleep doesn't mean the markets aren't open somewhere else."
- 2. Be flexible and willing to work long hours. "If the president speaks on Saturday evening, you will be writing the story that night," he says. "It's not always fun. But it is rewarding to make the front page. Then you can start tweeting it out to others."
- 3. Be skeptical at all times. "This is especially true with enterprise stories, scoops, and off-the-record information," Crooks says. "Ask yourself what this really means."
- 4. Learn how to write interesting story pitches. At *Bloomberg*, these are called "enterprise stories." "Here, you have a bit more leeway to think about how you want to develop and write the story," he says. "But you still need to be able to write the pitch clearly. Editors get so many of these every day, and your pitch must be compelling."
- 5. Pick up an outside area of expertise. "I learned how to speak Spanish, which came in very handy living in Chile and Venezuela," he says. "Pick up something extra like a foreign language or some type of technical expertise. This will give you authority and a leg up on the competition."
- 6. Be hardworking and relentless. "There are many jobs in journalism, but not where everyone thinks they might start," Crooks adds. "For example, many people in journalism get their start in specialized publications. So be flexible. Be willing to go anywhere and start at the bottom."
- 7. Be willing to present the truth—even if you don't like it. "There's such an appetite out there for truth and for unbiased news," he concludes. "If you provide these types of stories, you can make it in journalism."

# Professional Media Writing Strategy

Regardless of whether you report the news for a digital media outlet or create advertisements for an agency, you will face the task of writing a news or persuasive piece for your employer or client. Getting started with that writing can present real challenges to your thinking and creative abilities. If you often have trouble getting started with a piece of writing, know that you are not alone. Understand that media professionals use specific strategies to begin and organize their writing. These strategies must be simple and direct, because professionals face deadlines every day. They don't have time to sit back and ponder their approaches. You can benefit from their professional experience when you adopt their strategic approaches to carry out your own writing projects. Using strategy to tackle writing enables you to work more effectively and efficiently.

Figure 2.2 The Professional Strategy Triangle

# Thinking Professional Strategy Doing Message

The Professional Strategy Triangle (Figure 2.2) summarizes a strategy that many media professionals employ in any writing situation they encounter. We will return to the triangle regularly throughout upcoming chapters.

**Audience** 

As you can see above, the Professional Strategy Triangle features three corners that are critical to every media writing task: the Situation, the Audience, and the Message. Let's consider them in the order that professionals do, beginning with situation:

## Situation

When you begin to write, always first assess the situation for which you are writing. Here is a brief list of questions to ask yourself in this step to help define your situation:

*News versus persuasive writing:* Am I writing a news story, an editorial, a public relations piece, or advertising copy? For example, if your editor asks you to observe a protest march by fast-food workers demanding higher pay, and to write a piece for the evening news, you will be writing a news story.

## If news:

- What type of story is this—a hard news story on a news event or a feature story based on human interest?
- What are the facts of the story? Which ones are most relevant to my audience?
- Who are the key players in the story?
- Where will I go to get the information I need? For instance, at the protest march, you
  might interview marching workers and speak with a restaurant manager or city or
  county official.

If persuasive (e.g., opinion pieces, public relations or advertising situations):

- Is this a positive or a negative situation?
- Who are the key players?
- Which arguments should I use?
- Which rational or emotional appeals should I use?
- How should I structure my argument and appeals?

For instance, let's say that you are a community activist working for an organization advocating child adoption rights for gay and lesbian couples in the state of Missouri. You are writing a guest editorial to submit to the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, a large metro daily. You reason that this situation could be viewed as either positive or negative, depending on one's involvement with the issue and their personal convictions. Key players in your state include the governor, the state legislature, activists, religious leaders, and community members who have not yet made up their minds. Your arguments would likely include a mix of rational and emotional appeals, including the fact that every child deserves a family, or that people of all backgrounds can love one another and become functioning families.

#### In either scenario:

- What are the organizational objectives for my employer or client?
- How does my message advance my employer's or client's agenda, profit, or return on

## investment?

In the above scenario, your organization's immediate objectives are to encourage successful passage of legislation allowing gay and lesbian couples to adopt children in the state of Missouri. If you write a forceful and convincing editorial that helps shift public opinion in favor of the legislation, you will have significantly advanced your organization's policy agenda.

## Audience

The second corner in the triangle refers to the people who read, hear, or see your message. You must be clear about who they are so that you can tailor your message to them.

## Whether news or persuasion:

- Who are my readers, listeners, and viewers?
- What are their likely predispositions toward the issue?
- Which of their demographic factors are relevant (race/ethnicity, sex, occupation, income, education level)?
- Which psychographic factors (attitudes, dispositions, life stages, hobbies) are relevant?
- How is my audience likely to interpret my message?
- How credible is my organization in their minds?

For example, imagine that you work as a public relations staff member at a major state university that is trying to more effectively promote its online courses and degree programs. You are charged with creating a multimedia campaign to reach out to prospective students and to boost the university's reputation as a provider of high-quality online education.

Initial research reveals that your audience members are largely adult students, parents, working professionals, and military members. They are diverse in terms of their ethnic background; many have completed some college and want to finish their degrees. For the most part, these students are paying their own tuition, and their families are heavily invested in their academic success. Since many of the students finished some of their degree work at your university, you have some built-in credibility from the start. You also know that your audience members are likely to view attainment of a college degree as a significant professional achievement and personal milestone, no matter how old they are. This knowledge arms you with powerful background information on which to base your campaign and the pieces you will write for it.

# Message

The final corner of the triangle encompasses the message. You've actively thought about your situation and audience, and assembled the pieces you need to create an effective message. What will it take to write a piece that meets the unique demands of your situation and audience?

Next, we move to the center of the Professional Strategy Triangle, described below. Here, you will learn about the importance of creatively envisioning your final story, getting outside of your comfort zone to actively learn, and refocusing your thinking once more before you begin to write.

Craft Essential: Create Your Own Professional Strategy Triangle

Employing professional writing strategy becomes a personal pursuit. You work best with strategy when you own it. With that in mind, it is worth pausing now and thinking more about the Professional Strategy Triangle. Record your answers to each of the following items:

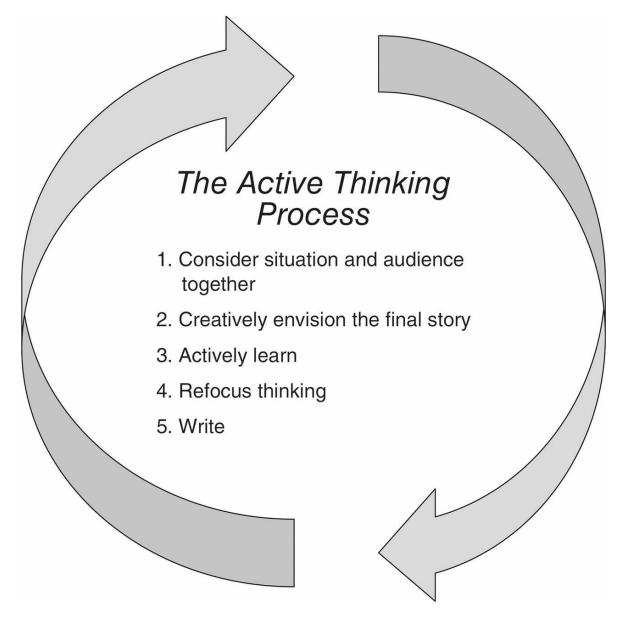
- 1. Referring to Figure 2.2, use your own words to explain the corners on the triangle.
  - a. Explain the concept of *situation* as you see it. Situation can relate to the jobs that media professionals do, the news articles they post, or the advertisements they create. How would you characterize situation?
  - b. What does *audience* mean to you? Is audience a collection of individuals or a like-minded crowd?
  - c. How do you define *message*? It certainly is more than text on a page. It refers to information that carries meaning for people.
- 2. Think about a recent social media post you have created, perhaps on Twitter or Instagram.
  - a. Consider the Professional Strategy Triangle and your social media postings.
  - b. Explain how you considered (or perhaps should have considered) audience, situation, and message as you created your social media post.

# In the Center of the Professional Strategy Triangle: The Active Thinking Process

Notice that the middle of the Professional Strategy Triangle contains a continuous circle. This illustrates the active thinking process that will help you gather the information you need and determine how situation and audience will drive your message. In preparing to write, professionals undertake an active thinking process as illustrated in Figure 2.3:

As you can see in <u>Figure 2.3</u>, writing is a multistep process. The quality of your final written piece will be determined by the strength of your vision and the thinking you do in these five steps. Let's explore each one:

Figure 2.3 Center of the Professional Strategy Triangle



- 1. Consider situation and audience together. In your mind or on paper, answer the situation and audience questions listed above. Ask yourself how situational factors affect your audience, and vice versa. Suppose that you work as a general assignment reporter for your city's television station, a local CBS affiliate. You have been covering a story on funding for local school districts and how the state legislature's new funding formula is devastating their operating budgets. Recent school board meetings have been emotional and heated. You know that many of your viewers are parents, families, and community members who have children in the schools or work there.
- 2. Creatively envision the final story. Try to form a mental impression of what your final piece will look like in a major publication. Think about how it will look, feel, and read in finished form. Envision the characters and what they might say or do. Which visual elements can you see alongside the story? Visualizing in this way is a powerful technique professionals in other fields frequently use to break through to their best work. Just as a professional composer envisions a beautiful piece of music or a tennis player can see that

winning shot, you can envision your finished story headlining *The New York Times* or your ad copy selling 100,000 new energy-saving solar panels.

Using the school scenario above, close your eyes and picture your finished story package (a self-contained prerecorded news report) on the 6 p.m. news. You envision your lead-ins, camera angles, and cutaways to interviews and shots of kids walking the school hallways. You can hear the impassioned pleas of parents and troubled responses from administrators. The story is already coming together in your mind.

- 3. Actively learn. Get out of your comfort zone. Head out into the world and feed your creativity. This might mean interviewing district officials, asking bystanders what they think and why, or researching school databases and governmental websites. Get the facts and assemble the most complete picture possible. In this scenario, you would pack up your camera gear and venture out to speak with average citizens about the school budget issue. Securing advance permission, you drive over to two schools located in areas of town that you would not normally visit. You ask the superintendent's secretary for budget records from last year and minutes from previous school board meetings.
- 4. Refocus your thinking. Stop and sift through all the information you gathered in Steps 1 to 3. Figure out how it all adds up and which key themes and messages are emerging. Who appears to be credible, and what needs further investigation? Run a mental "sort" on everything you have. You can also use the FAJA Points, described later in this chapter.

It's getting to be a late night, but you are still going strong. Replaying your interview footage, considering background information from anonymous sources, and reviewing your documents, you begin to realize that the local school district has actually been operating inefficiently for the past ten years. The district ran far over budget on several major construction projects and spent well above the state average on coaching staffs and sports equipment for its football program for the past eight years. You begin to see that administrators could have better prepared their district for this budget crisis if they had managed taxpayer dollars more carefully and built up budget surpluses in previous years.

5. Write. Finally, it's time to set it all down in words. As your mental gears begin to turn and your fingers start to click away at the keys, you can see that your story is headed in an exciting new direction. You know your situation and audience; you are inspired by your creative vision and armed with the information gleaned from interviews and research. Now it's time to write a story that will be driven by facts, insights, and a new perspective. Remember, you would have not gained all of this had you bypassed the Professional Strategy Triangle and the active thinking process at its center. It still takes you most of the night to assemble and edit the story, but you and your news director are extremely happy with the final package. Best of all, the story makes a major splash on the news that evening!

In the section below, we will see how a public relations professional uses the Professional Strategy Triangle and the active thinking process in the center to write a news release that is both news oriented and persuasive in nature.

The War Room

# Writing a Message to Put "Heads in Beds" and "Butts in Seats"

Before Alycia Rea, group director with The Zimmerman Agency in Tallahassee, Florida, sets her fingers to the keys, she first applies professional strategy to the task of writing. To her, the ultimate question is, "How does the writing advance the client's business goals?"

"We're all about storytelling—how does our writing land compelling coverage that puts heads in beds or butts in seats?" she says.

Whether Rea is creating a visual presentation outline, drafting a news release, or pitching a hotel feature to a travel editor, she considers these types of questions:

- What are hotel management's overriding business goals? To boost occupancy rates or the average daily rate?
- Which markets are crucial for that hotel?
- How do guests travel to this hotel—by air? Train? Car?
- What are potential customers' demographics?
- What are the considerations related to seasonality?

"When I am writing on behalf of a client, I always begin with a sound strategy that's going to culminate in impactful results," Rea says.

- 1. Review the above list of questions and recall the Professional Strategy Triangle. Which of them are related to situation? Which ones are related to audience? Explain your reasoning.
- 2. How would situation and audience considerations impact the message you write to persuade someone to book a stay at your hotel?
- 3. Go online at <a href="www.zimmerman.com">www.zimmerman.com</a> to check out the work Zimmerman does for its various clients in the hospitality and consumer industries. What types of situation and audience considerations are evident in the work?

# Using the Professional Strategy Triangle in Health Care Public Relations Writing

You are the public relations director for Twin Lakes Regional Hospital, which will soon be building a new urgent care clinic in the heart of downtown Beldaire. To be known as City Centre Urgent Care, the new clinic will expand medical services to an underserved sector of your community. However, the project has created some controversy because its construction will displace the New Day Homeless Shelter, which has been a lifeline in the community for the past twenty years. Twin Lakes' management has placed you in charge of announcing the opening of the clinic and creating positive publicity around it. You decide to begin by writing a news release for local and regional media to announce the project.

## Situation

Reviewing the Situation corner the Professional Strategy Triangle, you quickly realize the following:

- 1. You are writing a piece that, like much public relations writing, is both news oriented and persuasive in nature.
- 2. In general, the story is positive. However, it also contains potentially controversial or even negative aspects because of the homeless shelter that will be displaced. You will need to address this.
- 3. Key story players include community residents, hospital physicians and staff, city officials, people who are homeless, and their advocates.
- 4. You will need to conduct research on the background of the building, the homeless shelter, and hospital management's reason for selecting it as the new clinic site. You will also need to interview key story players.

## Audience

Moving to the Audience corner of the Professional Strategy Triangle, you consider who will be reading about the urgent care clinic project, and who will be most affected by it, either positively or negatively. You put together the following list:

- 1. Downtown Beldaire residents who will be served by the clinic
- 2. Homeless people who will be displaced by the project, along with their advocates
- 3. Readers, listeners, and viewers of local media including the newspaper, the TV station, and two area radio stations
- 4. Reporters for local, state, and regional media
- 5. Social media users who follow the community and the hospital through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or other social media sites; visitors to the Twin Lakes website

- 6. Twin Lakes' administration, physicians, and staff
- 7. City officials

# The center of the Professional Strategy Triangle: The active thinking process

- 1. Consider situation and audience together. As a savvy public relations practitioner, you know that the strength of the writing in your news release will largely be determined by how carefully you have considered these two factors. You are excited about City Centre Urgent Care and the services your doctors will soon be able to provide to downtown Beldaire residents who badly need access to urgent care. At the same time, you are thinking hard about the homeless people who will have to relocate to another shelter several miles away. Where will these people go, and how could their difficulties reflect upon Twin Lakes' image as the hospital rolls out this new project? How are local and social media audiences likely to perceive the story? What are their educational levels and predispositions? For now, it appears that local and regional media will approach it as a positive news story, but it could easily turn negative if not handled in a sensitive manner.
- 2. Creatively envision the final story. Because you have invested time thinking about the situation you face and the audiences who will be affected by your news release, you can now begin to creatively envision the final story—even before you know everything about it. You picture the story being picked up by *The Beldaire News-Herald*, your local newspaper, and running on the front page of its website with a photo of hospital leaders at the clinic site. You think about the overall positive tone of the story, and how much local residents will appreciate a new urgent care clinic downtown. You also envision the story playing out on the Twin Lakes Facebook page, and how you can tweet the story link out to your followers, who will comment positively on it. Just for fun, you brainstorm some possible news leads and jot down a few.
- 3. Actively learn. That afternoon, you get busy with research and interviewing. After reviewing internal planning documents and blueprints for the clinic, you get out of your office to interview Yolanda Graves, your hospital administrator, along with two physicians who are spearheading the project. Next, you run some online research to review recent media coverage of the hospital and the downtown homeless shelter. Fortunately, the coverage is mostly positive. You pore over the hospital's Facebook page and community blog postings to get a sense of what people are saying about the new clinic.

The next morning, you drive downtown to check out the clinic site and interview Jennifer Longhurst, the director of New Day Homeless Shelter. She says her organization regrets giving up this location, but she is now finalizing plans for a new location only two miles from the current site. Longhurst invites you to attend a meeting of the shelter's board members the next night so you can learn more. You gladly accept the invitation.

On your way out of the shelter, you engage in a conversation with a middle-age woman and her friend, who are both homeless. They tell you how distressed they are to see that their shelter will be moving somewhere else, and say they are against the City Centre Urgent Care project.

Curious about the conversation, a younger man joins you. In excited tones, he tells you he is glad to hear about the new clinic. After all, he says, there are no others in the downtown area, and his family may need urgent care sometime. You make careful mental notes of this information.

All three community residents agree to let you interview them for the news release. Once you are back at the office, you place a call to Ken Jorgenson, Beldaire's director of Zoning and Planning. He fills you in on more project details and enthusiastically expresses his support for the project, which has been developed in partnership with the Beldaire Community Redevelopment Council.

- 4. Refocus your thinking. Fast-forward two days. A draft of the news release is due to the hospital administrator in four hours. You begin to pore through all your information, reviewing your planning documents, website research findings, and interview notes. Focusing your thinking sharply, you consider the following:
  - 1. The type of story is this shaping up to be, and how to tell it in the most positive way possible for your organization while still truthfully representing it to people on all sides of this issue.
  - 2. Whether the media is likely to approach it in a positive or negative manner, and how community members are likely to perceive it.
  - 3. The information gaps and anything you need to further investigate or verify. For example, what if you discover that the project is being slowed by costly construction delays? Or what if you find out that a small but vocal group of homeless advocates is planning a demonstration on the urgent care center's opening day? What does all this mean, and how might it impact your story?
- 5. Write. Finally, it's time. You think one more time about what you want to say, how to best say it, and where you will start.

# Message

Moving to the Message corner of the Professional Strategy Triangle, you once again consider situation and audience. What type of message best addresses this situation and all of the concerned stakeholders who are interested in the new urgent care center? Three hours later, you email the copy (Figure 2.4) to your hospital administrator:

Figure 2.4 City Centre Urgent Care News Release

September 17, 2016
For Immediate Release
Contact: Jennifer Huang, Community Relations Director
803-344-5605 office
813-347-9662 cell
jhuang@twinlakes.com

## Twin Lakes Regional Hospital Announces New Urgent Care Center in Downtown Beldaire

Thanks to a community partnership with the Beldaire Community Redevelopment Council, Twin Lakes Regional Hospital will open a new urgent care center in September 2017 in downtown Beldaire, hospital officials announced today.

"After several months of work alongside city planners and members of the downtown community, I am so happy to kick off this project today," said Twin Lakes hospital administrator Yolanda Graves. "The people who live and work in downtown Beldaire will finally be able to access the urgent care services they have been lacking for so long."

Construction on the new facility at 756 Union Ave. will begin December 1. Known as City Centre Urgent Care, the 10,000-square-foot building will house a triage suite, 10 examination rooms, a poison treatment unit, X-ray equipment, and two nursing stations. Two full-time physicians will staff the center, assisted by four nurses and a radiologic technician. Hospital management has now secured all necessary building and Department of Health permits, according to city officials.

The site's current occupant, New Day Homeless Shelter, is in the process of relocating to another facility two miles away at 4604 S. Fourth St. Since last June, Twin Lakes officials have been helping the New Day board of directors to secure a new space. Owner John Beesom, who is also a hospital trustee, is reducing the rent by 50 percent for the shelter as a service to the Beldaire community.

Jennifer Longhurst, director of New Day Homeless Shelter, expressed her support for the City Centre Urgent Care project. "When we first heard the news, we felt uncertain about the future of the shelter," she said. "But thanks to the hard work of the Twin Lakes board, we have found a new location that is newer and larger than our current facility. And because of Mr. Beesom's generosity, we can now allocate more funding to food, clothing, and social services for our clients. It's a win-win situation for everyone."

Community members interested in learning more about City Centre Urgent Care should call Twin Lakes Regional Hospital at 914-566-0443 or visit the hospital online at www.twinlakesmed.org.

As you can see from the above example, strategy plays a critical role in crafting a piece that is newsworthy, well researched, and built around key messages that the medical center's diverse publics will understand and appreciate. An afternoon's worth of work invested in active thinking and getting out of one's comfort zone can result in a piece of writing that is much more likely to be picked up and run in traditional and social media channels.

Pro Strategy Connection

# The Top Five Things That Chris Kraul Loves About Being a Journalist

Chris Kraul, a freelance reporter in Bogota, Colombia, and twenty-two-year veteran with the *Los Angeles Times*, loves what he does. Here's why:

- 1. Journalism is a license to find out all kinds of things.
- 2. The job allows him to meet new people and have new experiences all the time.
- 3. Deadline pressure brings an adrenaline buzz. You stare at that blank piece of paper and wonder, "Will I be able to do it this time?"
- 4. There's no limit to what you can do as long as you can package your writing and sell it to your editors.
- 5. Seeing your own name in the media is a thrill.

# Using the FAJA Points in Your Writing

The FAJA Points stand for *Fact-Analysis-Judgment-Action*. Every message should contain a basic organizational structure that fits the situation and audience needs. Broadly speaking, there are four basic types of message structures:

- 1. Messages based on simple *facts*, such as a news story about a recent Supreme Court decision regarding national health care.
- 2. Messages based on more detailed *analysis* of facts, such as a news story examining what the Supreme Court decision means for individual states and the people who live in them.
- 3. Messages that use *judgment* to show what is positive, negative, or otherwise about an incident or event. This could include an editorial about how the Supreme Court decision will benefit large numbers of people who do not currently have health insurance.
- 4. Messages that encourage the audience to take *action*, such as an online petition for signatures in support of a decision the writer wants the Supreme Court to make.

How do you choose the right structure for your message? Expanding upon the Message corner of the Professional Strategy Triangle, the FAJA Points provide a starting place for the more specific kind of thinking you need to do to begin your piece. The points feature a series of questions that you apply to your topic. Memorizing them gives you built-in starting points every time you begin a writing task.

Photo 2.3: The story is much livelier and interesting when a journalist has done their homework, researched the subject, prepared good questions, and can provide insights based on their findings.



You may need to address the basic information, or facts, behind a news event that occurred. Perhaps you need to dig deeper into the definition of exactly what something is—providing analysis. Or, in persuasive writing situations, you may need to persuade an audience that an idea or product has essential aspects that make it positive or negative, happy or sad—discussing judgment. Finally, you may be seeking to move people to do something—to adopt a companywide policy on sick leave, to purchase a prescription medication, or to try a new vacation destination. All of these ideas suggest an action to be taken.

Notice how the four structures are focused on particular media writing tasks. Writing news largely employs the fact and analysis components. Creating opinion and editorial pieces and writing for public relations sometimes involves the judgment component. And finally, advertising focuses on persuading people to make a judgment and to take action and

purchase something.

Here is a list of the questions to clarify each of the FAJA Points:

## Fact

This relates to questions that identify the essential details of situations and events. Suppose that you are working as a general assignment reporter on your campus newspaper. This fall, university police have reported an unusually high number of sexual assaults in two dormitories on the west end of campus. Your editor has assigned you the story. The following questions will help focus your thinking as you begin your initial research and interviewing:

- What happened?
- Is there a problem or issue?
- How did it begin?
- What are its causes?

We've noted that journalists use fact-based questions to work on straight news stories. At the same time, however, public relations and even advertising writers also need to consider these questions in persuasive situations.

# Analysis

Analysis questions help define and explain situations, problems, or issues. Again, these tend to be largely news oriented. Returning to the campus sexual assault scenario, you decide to do some investigative reporting. You learn that sexual assault is a major problem on many college campuses across the country and suspect it may indicate bigger societal problems behind the scenes (alcohol abuse, unhealthy sexual attitudes, or a lax university culture, for instance). These questions would help you to analyze what might be operating underneath the initial facts of the story:

- What kind of problem or issue is this?
- To what larger class of things or events does the problem or issue belong?
- What are the pieces of it, and how are they related?
- Which experts support this analysis? Which ones reject it?

While fact provides only the initial information and surrounding details, analysis gets at the heart of what explains or defines a situation or issue. Both fact and analysis are essential starting points for journalists. They also provide "first stops" for public relations and advertising writers.

# Judgment

Judgment enables you to apply critical thinking to judge a situation, issue, idea, or opinion. In the campus sexual assault scenario above, a fellow student or the director of your university counseling center might submit a letter to the editor or opinion column addressing the issue of sexual assault or sexual violence. He or she would be likely to consider these questions in drafting the piece:

- Is this a positive or negative situation?
- How serious is the situation or issue?
- How does it affect people?
- What standards should be used to judge its effect on people (happy versus sad, fortunate versus tragic, etc.)?

News audiences often criticize media organizations for saying they are delivering straight news, when in reality, they are essentially making judgments. For example, regardless of whether they are liberal or conservative, not many television news viewers would argue that commentators Rachel Maddow on MSNBC or Bill O'Reilly on Fox News are just delivering straight news, devoid of any judgment. In this environment, judgment seems to be inseparable from the facts and analysis behind key news issues of the day.

## Action

Throughout the ages, communicators have used various theories and techniques to move people to action. From the days of Socrates to the modern marketing era, professional persuaders have made a living creating messages to change behaviors.

The action starting point identifies what the writer must persuade people to do—for example, to support a new policy, purchase a product or service, or vote for a candidate. The action questions are as follows:

- Why should action be taken?
- What kind of action should be taken?
- Who should take the action?
- When should the action occur?

The FAJA Points trace their roots to ancient times. In the days of the ancient Greeks and Romans, before paper was used, people organized their thoughts to deliver speeches by using a system of "starting points" to ask questions about the topic and the material they would use to deliver it. You may have learned in another class that one system was called *stasis*, or starting points; a second was called *topoi*, or topic points.

Figure 2.5 Using the FAJA Points (Fact-Analysis-Judgment-Action) to Focus Your Thinking

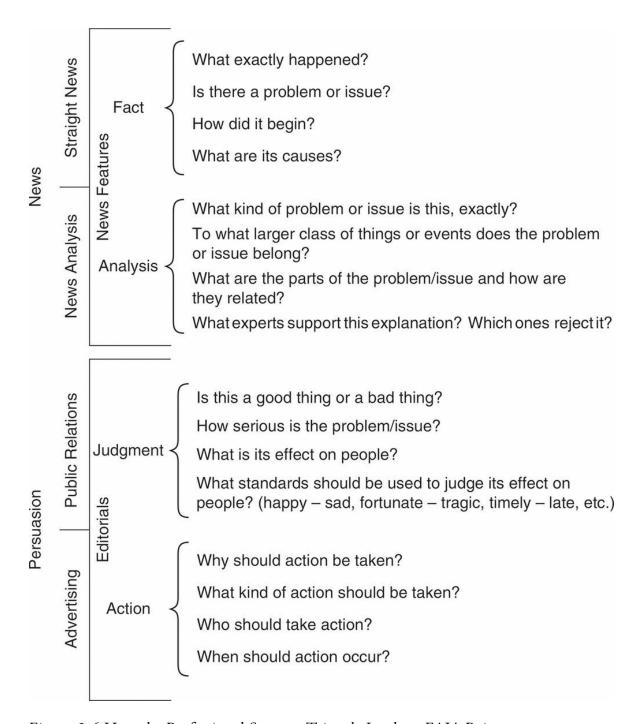
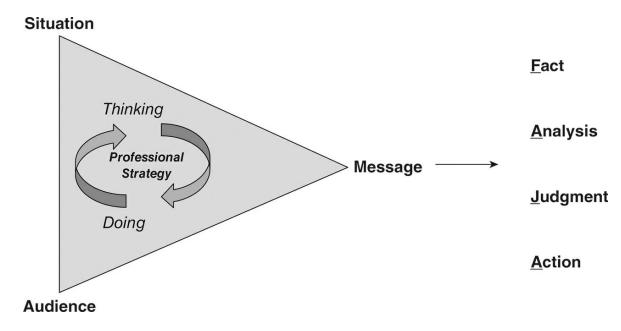


Figure 2.6 How the Professional Strategy Triangle Leads to FAJA Points



Remember that the FAJA Points are just that—starting points. They are also thinking points that help you quickly find the focus of your piece. Professionals become so accustomed to these questions that after a short time they begin to use the questions like automatic tools they can quickly put to work. Whether you are working as a journalist, a public relations practitioner, or an advertising copy writer, the FAJA Points serve as valuable tools in your writer's toolbox (see Figures 2.5 and 2.6).

Next, let's take a look at three media scenarios utilizing the FAJA Points:

# Scenario 1: The Journalist and the Straight News Story

Katrina Sweet works for a small-town newspaper located in the Midwest. Called to the scene of a major car—truck accident on the nearby interstate highway, she arrives and surveys the situation. As she pulls out her notebook, she knows she has to begin to ask questions, establish the facts, and get the details right within a few short minutes. Her story is due within an hour. To begin, Sweet focuses her mind on the fact questions from the FAJA Points:

- When did this accident occur?
- What exactly happened in this accident?
- How did this accident occur? Was it caused by a person or persons, the weather, mechanical failure, or something else?
- Who were the passengers?
- How many people were hurt? Were there any fatalities?
- What do road crews have to do to clear the accident?
- What impacts did the accident have on traffic?

Once Sweet has the answers to these questions in her notes, she will move on to writing the story. When she arrives back at her desk in the newsroom, she will pull up her notes and think about the answers to these questions. The facts she chooses will serve as the lead for her story. They will probably center on the number of people killed and/or injured. Sweet has used the fact portion of the FAJA Points to quickly gather the details she needed to work with later at her desk. Thinking ahead helped her to write an accurate and concise story on deadline. This is how journalists work on a daily basis.

# Scenario 2: The PR Professional in Crisis Management Mode

Ryan Southerman is a junior-level public relations manager at a major hospital in a Southwestern community. One Saturday afternoon, he gets a text message from the administrator, his boss, that health officials suspect a major MRSA (a type of staph-related infection) outbreak in his facility. Several elderly patients are near death, and one child is showing early symptoms of the infection.

First off, Southerman needs to determine the *facts* of the situation. Next, he *analyzes* the extent of the problem, working to understand how hospital management and staff are focused on addressing this crisis. Then, he uses *judgment* to create messages that communicate the good work being done by hospital employees to contain the MRSA outbreak. Finally, Southerman will advise audiences on what needs to be done to control the outbreak and ensure the safety of patients and employees (*action*).

Southerman's audiences will likely include hospital patients and their families, employees, the media, and community members. His questions will likely focus upon the following:

#### Fact

- What was the situation leading up to the outbreak?
- What has caused the outbreak?
- What type of germ is behind the outbreak?
- How far has the outbreak spread?

## Analysis

- Is this outbreak connected with a larger trend occurring at hospitals elsewhere?
- Will this outbreak cause panic or anxiety among community members?
- What are the short-term and long-term outlooks for resolving it?

## Judgment

- How serious is the MRSA outbreak?
- Is the outlook for resolution negative or positive?
- Are the costs (human, financial) of a permanent solution affordable?

#### Action

- What needs to be done to control the outbreak and ensure the safety of patients and employees?
- Why is this the best course of action? Is the hospital doing these things?
- What are the possible consequences of each course of action?

Southerman immediately begins making calls to hospital administrators and health officials to establish the *facts* of the situation. He glances at his phone and notices that two reporters —one from the local television station and another from the nearby metro daily newspaper —have each called several times. They are already working on stories and plan to run them whether hospital officials return their calls or not.

Once Southerman has tracked down all the details, he begins to draft an initial media statement and news release for the television and newspaper reporters. He also knows he needs to get busy assembling a news conference for tomorrow morning. This will require fact sheets, a background paper, and other written pieces that the hospital's chief administrator will need to have in hand when she addresses members of the media.

As you can see, Southerman is concentrating on *analysis* and *judgment*, the two FAJA Points he needs to understand this public relations crisis and to prepare the communication pieces that will help hospital administrators resolve it. These public relations pieces will become part of an overall crisis communication plan to include news releases, media statements, fact sheets, backgrounders, and perhaps position papers. Once Southerman has written these pieces and gained management approval, he will post them to the hospital's website, update the hospital's Facebook page, and notify his media contacts of the pieces via Twitter.

# Scenario 3: A Local Radio Salesperson Writes a Commercial

Rosalina Martinez, a salesperson with WCTP-FM 98.5, is working with a local auto dealership in Connecticut that plans to hold a clearance sale of certified used vehicles next month. Martinez meets with her client and seals the deal for a series of thirty-second spots to be aired over a period of ten days next month. Like many other radio salespeople, Martinez wears two hats. She sells the advertising, but she also writes the ad copy because she knows her clients.

Martinez begins finding selling points for her client by drawing upon the *fact* and *action* starting points:

#### Fact

- When does the sale take place?
- What vehicles are included in the sale?
- How long does the sale last?
- What do customers need to do to participate?

#### Action

- What do customers who show up for this sale gain that they would not normally gain at other sales?
- How do customers benefit from buying the high-demand vehicles in the sale?
- What price savings come from buying during the sale?

Following these starting points, Martinez drafts three copy ideas. In one, a personality at the auto dealership yells responses that answer the above questions she just listed. The second version is a brief narrative to be read by a radio DJ and focuses on the high demand for and price savings on the vehicles. The third idea enlists an actor playing a husband explaining to his wife why they need to go to the sale to replace their car.

Martinez reads each of the three copy ideas over the phone to her client, who says he likes the first and the last ones. She turns the copy over to the production engineer, who produces rough copies of both ads over the next two days. Martinez brings the semi-finished commercials to the auto dealership managers for final approval. They decide they would like to go with commercial three. The production staff finishes the commercial the following week, and it is ready to run in time for the sale.

## Summary

- 1. Describe the changing landscape of twenty-first-century media. This landscape is uncertain, yet full of opportunities for aspiring journalists, public relations practitioners, advertising professionals, and others who are strong storytellers, able to write well across media platforms.
- 2. Discuss the major professions in today's media environment. These include print and digital media, broadcast and cable, and strategic communication in terms of both public relations and advertising.
- 3. Explain professional media writing strategy in terms of the Professional Strategy Triangle. Media professionals use the Professional Strategy Triangle to understand situation, audience, and how these two factors influence one another as they create a message. This process involves considering situation and audience together, creatively envisioning the final story, actively learning, refocusing thinking, and writing.
- 4. Apply the Fact-Analysis-Judgment-Action (FAJA) Points to the writing process. The FAJA Points enable media professionals to determine the facts of a situation or issue, to analyze those facts, and in persuasive writing, to make judgments about them and encourage audiences to take action. Answering key questions from each of the FAJA Points will enable you to begin any type of news story or persuasive piece.

# Key Terms

journalism 24
public relations 25
advertising 26
strategic communication 28
Professional Strategy Triangle 31
active thinking process 35
FAJA Points 43

#### **Discussion Questions**

- Reviewing the Frontline Media Writing Profile on Alycia Rea at the beginning of this chapter, what do
  you think would be the most enjoyable and most challenging aspects of her job? Think especially about
  the writing and media relations Rea conducts on behalf of her clients in the hospitality and retail
  industries.
- 2. If you completed the MWSP scale in <a href="Chapter 1">Chapter 1</a>, how does your score fit in with the media professions covered in this chapter, and the career paths you might be considering? Which areas of your writing do you think need the most improvement in order for you to meet your career goals?
- 3. Do you believe that the good writers working in journalism, public relations, or advertising are born or made? Explain your thinking.
- 4. Explain why it is important for media professionals to pursue writing as a planned activity, with a clear audience and purpose in mind. Why can't a professional simply "write naturally"?
- 5. In the age of digital media and social media, where messages are short-lived, do you believe that writing skills have become more important or less important for media professionals? Explain your reasoning.
- 6. As a media professional, you are likely to write both news-oriented and persuasive pieces over the course of your career. Describe the necessary skills for each type of writing. Explain how they differ and how they are similar.
- 7. Pick out a recent news story published in a newspaper, posted online, or on radio or television. Apply the Professional Strategy Triangle to analyze how the piece was constructed. Discuss the story's situation and audience, and then carefully read the story or message. Identify the relationships between the three corners of the triangle as you see them revealed in the news piece.
- 8. Think again about the FAJA Points we have learned about in this chapter. As a journalist, which components (Fact, Analysis, Judgment, or Action) are you most likely to use? Explain. How about as a public relations practitioner? As an advertising professional? Again, explain your thinking.

#### Chapter Exercises

- 1. Recall the media professions we have explored in this chapter. If you completed the MWSP scale in <a href="Chapter 1">Chapter 1</a>, write a 350-word paper describing how your score fits with career paths that you might be considering. Discuss the areas of your writing that you most want to improve in order to meet your career goals. Proofread and edit your paper carefully, making it as professional as possible.
- 2. Interview a classmate on the subject of professional careers and his or her own potential career path. Prepare a list of six to eight questions to explore this student's thinking and life experiences so far. Which career paths is this student considering, and why? From your interview notes, draft a 300- to 400-word profile story on this student. Write a catchy headline and lead paragraph. Be sure to include plenty of quotes from your interview source.
- 3. Writing is a core activity that takes place across all the various media. Someone is writing all those news and persuasive pieces we hear, see, and read every day. Locate some local examples of media messages in your region. Search online for the following:
  - a. *A newspaper*. Locate the largest nearby metropolitan daily newspaper. Write down the names of some of the reporters who have bylines with their stories. List some of the types of stories in this newspaper that are of interest to you and your family.
  - b. A broadcast television station. Locate the web page for the TV news program for that station. Follow one of the news team reporters and examine the recent stories on which he or she has worked. Check out the TV reporter's social media links, especially Facebook and Twitter activities.
  - c. *A public relations firm.* From the PR firm's website, find out what services they offer their clients. If they list their clients, take note of some of these businesses and organizations that you recognize.
  - d. *An advertising firm.* Find out which clients they serve and see if their website offers links to television and radio commercials they have created for clients.

Prepare to discuss your findings with the class.

4. Work with a classmate to find either a compelling news article or a highly persuasive advertisement for a product or service. The samples may come from print, online, or broadcast and cable media.

Apply the FAJA Points to determine the piece's

- Fact
- Analysis
- Judgment
- Action (if applicable)

Discuss and record your conclusions. As necessary, refer back to the FAJA Points in this chapter. How did the media writer use them to effectively tell this story? What, if anything, would you have done differently? Prepare to report your findings and share the news story with the class.

- 5. Visit your university library. Consult with a reference librarian and conduct some research on the writing skills and strategies that media professionals employ in their careers. Which ones seem to be most common and easy to use? You may explore the work of journalists, public relations practitioners, or advertising professionals. Prepare a three- to four-minute talk for the class, highlighting what you learned in your research. You are also encouraged to develop visual aids to help tell your story.
- 6. Working with a partner, review the Professional Strategy Triangle. Visit the website for a major media organization (MSNBC, *The New York Times*, etc.) and locate a news story that interests you. Together, carefully read the story along with any connected links. Write a brief analysis of your news story that addresses the Situation, Audience, and Message corners as outlined in this chapter. Describe how you think the journalist in this case utilized the four-step active thinking process in writing the story. Be specific as you can. Explain why it was important for this journalist to utilize the Professional Strategy

Triangle. Which key elements might have been missed otherwise?

- 7. Interview a journalist, public relations practitioner, or advertising professional from your community or a nearby city. Assemble a list of questions to determine the following:
  - a. How this media professional first entered the field and advanced to his or her current position.
  - b. The types of writing assignments the professional encounters in a typical week.
  - c. The kinds of writing strategies he or she uses to generate ideas for their written pieces.

Note: You must interview your source either in person or by phone. Email is not acceptable for this assignment (or for any interview). It does not give you the opportunity to closely observe your source or their surroundings, or to ask follow-up questions. Also, your sources will tend to manage their quotes in an email message and will sound unnatural. They may even have someone else write the quotes for them.

From your interview notes, draft a 500-word profile story on this professional. The story should focus on strategies that the professional employs in the writing process. Write a catchy headline and a lead paragraph. Be sure to include plenty of quotes from your interview source. Prepare to share your story with the class.

#### Additional Resources

American Advertising Federation: <a href="http://www.adfed.org">http://www.adfed.org</a>

The Poynter Institute: <a href="http://www.poynter.org">http://www.poynter.org</a>

Public Relations Society of America (PRSA): https://www.prsa.org

Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSA): http://www.prssa.org

Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ): <a href="http://www.spj.org">http://www.spj.org</a>
The Zimmerman Agency: <a href="http://www.zimmerman.com">http://www.zimmerman.com</a>

# Chapter 3 Media Writing Style and Language Conventions

# Chapter Outline

<u>Learning Objectives</u>
Frontline Media Writing Profile: Nathan Crooks, Bureau Chief, Bloomberg News
Style: Your Audiences Are Counting on It
Media Writing Style Conventions
Be Accurate
Be Brief
Be Clear
The Connection Between Thinking and Writing
A Note on Plagiarism
Style Guides
Selected Points of AP Style
Abbreviations and Acronyms
<u>Capitalization</u>
Dates
Numerals
Punctuation
Spelling  Dro Stratogy Connection: The Placemberg Way: A Cuide for Penartors and Editors
Pro Strategy Connection: The Bloomberg Way: A Guide for Reporters and Editors
Additional Language Rules  Lies the Active Veice and Strong Verba
Use the Active Voice and Strong Verbs
Be Precise Conf. Forming One Common de Misson de marco d'Wonde
Craft Essential: Sorting Out Commonly Misunderstood Words
Be Concise
Craft Essential: Try to Use the Best Single Word
Make It Accessible
The War Room: Making Your Copy More Accessible to Readers
Write With Sensitivity
Grammar, Spelling, and Punctuation
The Professional Connection
Use Grammar Correctly
Common Language Errors
Sentences and Sentence Types
Common Sentence Errors
<u>Spelling</u>
<u>Punctuation</u>
Summary
Key Terms
Discussion Questions
Chapter Exercises

#### Additional Resources

"For me, the hardest thing about writing is trying to be completely passionate about everything I write. There are going to be times you have to write about things you don't care about, and it is a lot harder to push through those pieces. I overcome that difficulty by realizing that in the end, those pieces of writing make me a stronger writer. It pushes me out of my comfort zone, and I like that."

—Valerie Spears, Texas Wesleyan University

# Learning Objectives

- 1. Describe media writing style conventions including accuracy, brevity, and clarity.
- 2. Identify the connection between thinking and writing.
- 3. Apply major Associated Press style points to news writing.
- 4. Apply additional language rules including the use of strong verbs, the active voice, precision, conciseness, and accessibility.
- 5. Use correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, and mechanics in news and persuasive writing.

Frontline Media Writing Profile
Nathan Crooks, Bureau Chief
Bloomberg News, Caracas, Venezuela
When major financial news breaks in Venezuela, it's "go time" for Nathan Crooks, bureau chief with Bloomberg News in Caracas.



"We operate in real time," he says. "There's not much time to think when news is breaking. I have to write an accurate, succinct headline and story summary for the wire within seconds. The competition is stiff, and people are trading on our headlines. If I make a mistake, I will lose clients' money. So it's a fine balance between accuracy with the need for speed."

That's why Crooks, thirty-three, has developed a professional writing strategy that quickly captures his situation, audience, and message for any story. In that moment of pressure, he can't pause to think about writing a sentence correctly or using the right word. Those skills must already be internalized and come naturally to him.

Crooks earned his bachelor's degree in political science and Spanish at the University of Toronto in 2006. Following graduation, he caught on as a reporter with the *Santiago Times* in Chile. That job ultimately led to his next reporting position with Bloomberg News in 2010. Crooks was named chief of Bloomberg's Caracas, Venezuela, bureau two years later.

In 2010, Crooks helped break one of the biggest news stories of the year in Chile's Atacama Desert, at the rescue site where thirty-three lost miners were pulled from the earth after being trapped for sixty-nine days. "I didn't know where I was going to eat or sleep that night," Crooks recalls. "I had a satellite phone and had to run up the hill to call in the story. I learned that it all depends on where and how the news breaks, and how the technology is working. You have to be flexible and confident across all writing platforms."

When seconds count, editors and reporters alike must be able to call up writing strategy on deadline. For example, a Bloomberg correspondent might be calling or texting in live headlines from a press conference somewhere in South America. "If he or she stumbles or if I don't sense 100 percent confidence from that reporter, it makes me hesitate," he says.

Crooks advises aspiring media professionals to practice hard on media writing basics including lead writing, story structure, grammar, spelling, and punctuation. "Once those skills become internalized," he notes, "you can concentrate on getting the news out, and on the higher-level issues that matter."

According to Crooks, the journalism profession is not about glamour. It's more like fighting in the trenches. As a journalist, you must be willing to present the truth even if you don't like it. You must also be willing to go where the story is, or sit at a desk and write the story your editor wants you to write.

"It's always a rush to be first with breaking news," Crooks concludes. "But even these days, there's such an appetite out there for truth and fresh stories. If you can provide these types of stories, you can make it in journalism."

## Style: Your Audiences Are Counting on It

What is media writing style? Why do professional media writers in all sectors put so much time and effort into using it? Media writing style provides a set of conventions that dictate how you approach and execute your writing. Media professionals employ style because their audiences expect it, and because it helps them work together effectively and efficiently. Style conventions dictate the way that you write material for the media, whether you are a journalist, a public relations practitioner, or working in a related occupation. Your writing must be brief, concise, and aimed at a high school reading level. Above all, it must be factual and accurate.

Professional media writers use style conventions for consistent application of language on many critical items including spelling, grammar and punctuation, abbreviations, job titles, numbers, and sports and weather terms, to name a few. The Associated Press, Reuters, and other major media organizations have produced style manuals that have been used for decades in newsrooms across the world.

Media writers also rely upon style conventions because their use and practice represent professionalism. Journalists, public relations practitioners, and advertising professionals all rely upon each other's skill with style to produce high-quality writing under deadline pressure. Over the course of their careers, media professionals internalize style conventions and use them automatically. This knowledge helps them to quickly and effectively write any type of piece for the media. In order to advance in your media career, you will need to learn professional style and build it into your writing.

## Media Writing Style Conventions

Media writing style is built upon accuracy, brevity, and clarity. In addition, media professionals strive to produce copy that is active, vivid, and direct. These adjectives describe a stylistic approach that audiences rely upon and appreciate. As a media professional, you are expected to be a master of the English language.

With their interactive, nonlinear format, new media have changed the way audiences read and interpret information. It is easier than ever to click to another web page or social media source to find fresh information. In this technology-driven age, accuracy, clarity, and brevity have never been more important.

#### Be Accurate

Above all, the media writer must write everything with accuracy. News audiences rightly expect truth and honesty in what they read in the media. You must earn their trust by digging into the hard work it takes to make sure that your writing is factually correct. This means double-checking facts, verifying information from interview sources, and rechecking routine information such as name spellings, addresses, phone numbers, and web addresses. Accuracy also means establishing the context of your story fairly so the reader understands it correctly. Professional media writers check and recheck their work for accuracy because it is a professional requirement they have internalized. This is the mark of a true professional.

The entire media industry is founded upon the credibility of the information it presents. The responsibility for maintaining that credibility on a daily basis rests with you and your fellow media members. A media or professional organization that acquires a reputation for inaccuracy and sloppy reporting will soon lose its audience. Advertisers and sponsors will exit shortly thereafter, driving the operation out of business. Never forget this connection between credibility, audience, business, and the accuracy of your writing!

Journalists must also embrace objectivity and balance, two key characteristics of accuracy. Journalistic objectivity refers to a lack of bias, judgment, or prejudice in reporting, interviewing, and writing. It means that you base your news stories only upon the facts and evidence you have gathered, and that you exclude your personal opinions. Objectivity also refers to being fair, impartial, disinterested, and nonpartisan in your news writing. In order to be as objective as possible, journalists conduct thorough research, reporting, ansd interviews with multiple sources. They attribute all information to sources. Balance, a related concept, means that journalists do not take sides in a news story. They research all sides of an issue, and present the facts and viewpoints in an even manner. This gives the audience the opportunity to hear both sides of the story and reach their own conclusions. Striving for balance also means that you attempt to grasp the relative significance of the news events you are covering, taking care not to overemphasize or underemphasize any one of them in your story.

#### Be Brief

"If you can't write your idea on the back of my calling card, you don't have a clear idea."

—David Belasco, American Theatrical Producer

Readers appreciate brevity. They need writing that forcefully conveys key ideas with the fewest words possible. In your career, you will need to learn to practice brevity because it is an industry standard. Publication space, bandwidth, and airtime are limited. Editors can publish or air only a fraction of the information presented to them. The less trimming your piece needs at the copy desk, the better for your employer and your career.

Practicing brevity means writing short sentences and paragraphs. Readability drops off dramatically in sentences exceeding twenty words. As a rule, strive for sentences between twelve and sixteen words in length. Does this mean that all media writing should contain short, choppy sentences? Certainly not. Carefully constructed longer sentences add color and variety to your writing. Let your ear be the judge. Read the story out loud to yourself or a roommate. Listen to the way the words and sentences flow. They should sound natural, as in an everyday conversation.

Brevity takes clear and forceful thinking, careful proofing, and judicious editing to cut unnecessary words from your piece. Ask yourself whether every word in your sentence is necessary to make the audience understand the ideas you are trying to convey. Watch for redundancies, which are a sure sign of careless writing or editing.

#### Be Clear

The processes of thinking and writing cannot be separated. Think first and write second. Resist the temptation to simply write down the first thing that comes into your head. Fuzzy thinking always results in fuzzy writing. Clarity, on the other hand, is achieved by using language in the most efficient manner possible.

Simplicity is one key to clarity. Audiences are impressed not by big words and complex sentences, but by writing that is clear and straightforward, conveying what they need to know without wasting any words. When writing distracts readers from the message by calling attention to itself, it loses its effectiveness.

Precision is another key to clarity. If a writer chooses words poorly, through carelessness or misunderstanding of their meaning, readers are left confused. They may doubt the accuracy of what they are reading, and even the media channel's credibility. Professional media writers use concrete terms and choose the exact words needed to represent the ideas they want to express. The perfectly chosen word makes writing compelling and interesting.

## The Connection Between Thinking and Writing

"Writing is thinking. To write well is to think clearly. That's why it's so hard."

—David McCullough, Author

Unclear thinking always leads to unclear writing. Clear thinking, with enough effort, leads to prose that is clear to both you and the reader.

Now add the elements of news writing style to this equation, and consider the Audience corner of the Professional Strategy Triangle first discussed in <a href="Chapter 2">Chapter 2</a>. Media professionals who can write with accuracy, precision, and clarity are sweating the details and thinking hard. To readers, this means the professional is also likely to be carefully considering the facts, opinions, meanings, and contexts behind his or her story. They get a sense that this writer is a good thinker.

A professional writer knows the tools of the trade. He or she is able to construct sentences well, spell words correctly, and punctuate properly to enable readers to understand the ideas he or she is trying to convey. Readers appreciate this level of attention to detail. It makes them more likely to trust that the writer is competent and applying due diligence in researching matters of fact, opinion, meaning, and context.

Clear thinking is hard work. Civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "Rarely do we find men who willingly engage in hard, solid thinking. There is an almost universal quest for easy answers and half-baked solutions. Nothing pains some people more than having to think." Do not allow mental laziness to limit your writing abilities. Adopting a professional writing strategy such as the Professional Strategy Triangle will separate you from the amateurs.

Photo 3.2: Writing well is hard work, but it will pay off handsomely regardless of your career path. Fuzzy thinking always results in fuzzy writing, but clear thinking leads to clear writing.



## A Note on Plagiarism

The act of plagiarism involves using another person's words without attribution and without enclosing those words in quotation marks. Plagiarism may also be defined as the act of taking the ideas or expression of ideas of another person and representing them as one's own. This can occur even if the original work has been paraphrased or modified. A close or extended paraphrase of that work may also be considered plagiarism, even if the source is named. Acts of plagiarism have ended the careers of many journalists and tarnished the credibility of their media employers. Throughout your career in the media, you must make sure that you do not plagiarize the work of another.

## Style Guides

Style guides provide the rules for consistency, usage, and precision that a media writer relies upon daily. Style guides address everything from abbreviations, capitalization, and dates to punctuation, grammar, spelling, and word usage. Media professionals consider style guides to be their working "bible."

Many media organizations use the *Associated Press Stylebook*. Major media organizations such as *The New York Times* publish their own style guides or supplements to the *Associated Press Stylebook*. In addition, broadcast and cable media use industry-specific guides, often based on the *Associated Press Stylebook* but focused on the necessities of reading copy on the air. Public relations practitioners utilize the *Associated Press Stylebook* in their media relations work. Although each organization may utilize some unique style conventions, style guides are largely based upon Standard English usage. As a media professional, you will need to carefully study style guides and learn their rules.

Style guides provide consistency, or a common ground on which media writers stand to effectively and efficiently convey the news. They model a common news language that all professionals understand and that audiences expect. Major media organizations work with large staffs of writers each day, and style guides provide a set of uniform rules on which everyone can rely. Style guides save considerable time and effort on deadline.

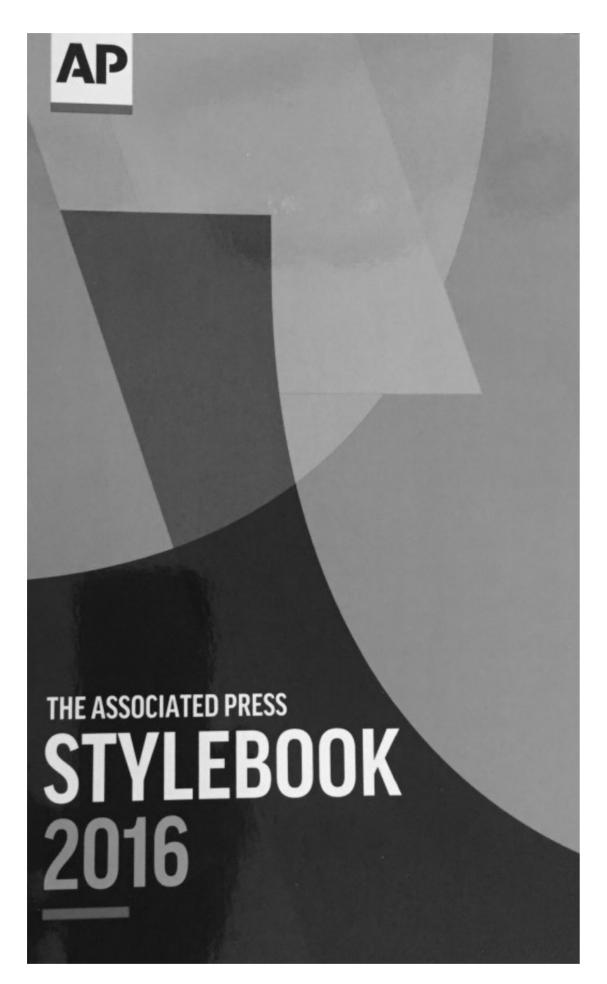
#### Selected Points of AP Style

The *Associated Press Stylebook*, or *AP Stylebook* (Figure 3.1), is used by reporters, editors, and news directors in print, online, and broadcast journalism. First produced by the AP in 1953, the stylebook has grown from a 60-page guide into a 500-page publication published in English, Spanish, and across digital platforms. The *AP Stylebook* is the most widely accepted style and usage guide in the US news industry.

Headquartered in New York, the AP is a not-for-profit news cooperative owned by its American newspaper and broadcast members. It is one of the largest and most trusted sources of independent newsgathering worldwide.

The idea behind the *AP Stylebook* has always been simple: to make the rules clear and unambiguous, allow few exceptions to them, and when in doubt, refer users to a standard dictionary. Beyond promoting consistency and explaining proper usage, the *AP Stylebook* defines terms and covers topics that you are likely to encounter in your media career, such as weather terminology, business and sports guidelines, and photo captions. For instance, did you ever wonder how to write out legislative titles such as "representative" or "senator"? Look under "L" in the *AP Stylebook* for the rules and examples of usage.

Figure 3.1 Image of the Associated Press Stylebook Cover



The *AP Stylebook* is a work in progress. Its print version is updated once a year, and its online version is updated continuously as style and language conventions change. However, the key thing to remember is that the *AP Stylebook* (and others like it) governs the rules of professional media writing. This benefits both you and the diverse audience members who will read your writing and make important decisions on the accuracy and strength of the information you convey in it. Next, we review some of the highlights of AP style. If you cannot find a listing in the *AP Stylebook* for a particular word or phrase, consult *Webster's New World College Dictionary*.

#### Abbreviations and Acronyms

Use abbreviations and acronyms sparingly. If an abbreviation or acronym helps conserve space and simplify information, it may be warranted, but unless the reader would quickly recognize it, do not use it. For example, most people know that the abbreviation "CIA" stands for the Central Intelligence Agency. However, many readers will not know that "UFCWIU" stands for the United Food & Commercial Workers International Union.

The *AP Stylebook* contains guidance on how to use a particular abbreviation or acronym within individual alphabetized entries. For example, to find out whether it is acceptable to use the acronym "SWAT" for "Special Weapons and Tactics," consult "SWAT."

*Before a name:* Abbreviate the following titles when used before a full name: Dr., Gov., Lt. Gov., Rep., Sen., and certain military titles. For further guidance, see "military titles."

After a name: Abbreviate "junior" or "senior" when they follow an individual's name. Abbreviate "company," "corporation," "incorporated" and "limited" when they follow the name of a corporate entity.

Academic degrees: Some degrees are abbreviated after a person's name. Consult the "academic degrees" entry.

## Capitalization

In general, less is better. Avoid unnecessary capital letters; they can slow down comprehension and confuse your readers. The "P" section of the *AP Stylebook* tells you to capitalize "president," for instance, only as a formal title before one or more names and use lowercase in all other uses. Example: Yesterday, President Barack Obama addressed the United Nations. The president later departed for a tour of the flood zone.

Proper nouns: Capitalize nouns that denote the unique identification of a specific person, place, or thing. Examples: James, Cheryl, Minneapolis, South Africa. Proper names: Capitalize common nouns such as "party," "river," or "street" when they are integral to the full name of the person, place or thing. Examples: Republican Party, Allegheny River, Wall Street. Lowercase them when they are used alone in later references.

## Dates

In all cases, use Arabic figures without "st," "nd," "rd," or "th." Example: The publicity committee will meet on July 23. For months of the year, spell out March, April, May, June, and July when they are used to indicate a specific date. Abbreviate all others. Spell out all months when using them alone or with a year alone. Examples: Jan. 29, next January, January 2016.

#### Numerals

Generally speaking, spell out most whole numbers below 10 and use numerals for 10 and above. However, there are many exceptions to this rule. For specific guidance, refer to the "numerals" section of the stylebook.

Sentence start: Avoid beginning a sentence with a number, but if you must, then spell out the number. Example: "Seventeen refugees drowned when their boat capsized." Exception: to start a sentence, a year is expressed as a numeral. Example: "2017 will be a year of record high temperatures."

Casual uses: Spell out casual expressions such as, "I spent ten times that much on gas," or "He ran half a mile."

Proper names: Use words or numerals according to an organization's practice.

Examples: The Big Ten, 3M, 20th Century Fox.

#### Punctuation

Think of punctuation as a tool designed to help audiences understand the news stories they are reading. According to the *AP Stylebook*, there is no alternative to correct punctuation. Incorrect punctuation can change the meaning of a sentence and as a result, convey the news incorrectly. It can also confuse readers, cause them to give up on reading your piece, and ultimately damage your credibility.

Because matters of punctuation can run into gray areas, the stylebook offers guidelines rather than strict rules The AP admonishes us to use punctuation sparingly. If a punctuation mark does not help to clearly express your intended meaning, do not use it. Excessive punctuation can slow the reader down and interrupt the flow of ideas you are trying to convey. This caution applies especially to exclamation points, dashes, and parentheses. Consider the following example:

*Incorrect:* He (the father of the injured girl) said his daughter was playing at the construction site (which was fenced off for safety) when she fell into a deep hole. *Revised:* The father of the injured girl said his daughter was playing at the construction site when she fell into a deep hole. The site was fenced off for safety.

Above all, use common sense. As a test, read your piece aloud to determine whether the punctuation works. This is a useful approach because punctuation marks mimic the pauses and stops the human voice makes when a person speaks.

## Spelling

According to the Associated Press, a word can have only one spelling. When in doubt, first consult the *AP Stylebook*, and if necessary, a dictionary. You may be accustomed to using variations and alternatives in your own writing, but style consistency dictates a specific spelling for every word. For example, you should write "toward" not "towards." Write "draft beer," not "draught beer."

SOURCE: The Associated Press (2016).

Pro Strategy Connection

The Bloomberg Way: A Guide for Reporters and Editors

## By Matthew Winkler, co-founder and former editor-inchief, Bloomberg News

When former New York mayor Michael Bloomberg and Matthew Winkler co-founded *Bloomberg News* in 1982, the company's mandate was "to provide definitive coverage of economies, markets, companies and industries worldwide." Bloomberg editors and writers have always strived to convey the most significant facts quickly and clearly.

The Bloomberg Way<sup>2</sup> is a stylebook written by Matthew Winkler, co-founder and former editor-in-chief of Bloomberg News. All Bloomberg employees are required to learn this book and write according to its rules. Throughout the book, Winkler stresses accuracy and integrity in gathering and publishing news. Here are some highlights:

Above all, be accurate. "Accuracy is the most important principle in journalism," Winkler writes. "There is no such thing as being first with news if we're wrong."

Show, don't tell. "The best reporters assemble the details, anecdotes and comments and then let the readers decide who's right, wrong, guilty or innocent," Winkler writes.

Fulfill "The Five Fs." Bloomberg stories must be:

- First
- Factual
- Fastest
- Final
- Take future events into account

Include "five easy pieces" of information about:

- the markets
- the economy
- government
- politics
- companies

Write the headline first. "Before reporters write a word of narrative—even the lead—they should write the headline," Winkler writes. "Asking, 'What's the headline?' helps to focus leads, which are often too long or have too many thoughts."

For feature stories, write a lead that runs four paragraphs long and includes:

- a theme
- a quotation
- details
- a "nut paragraph" explaining what is at stake

Do not rely on modifiers. Adjectives and adverbs are imprecise.

Avoid characterizations and labels. Instead, focus on facts. Report what people say and do.

Be concise and clear. "Prefer the short word to the long. Prefer the familiar to the fancy. Prefer the specific word to the abstract," he writes.

Avoid the word "but" except when you are signaling an "about-face" in your story. Clauses that start with

"although," "but," "despite," or "however" will confuse readers by connecting dissimilar ideas and taking readers in two different directions.

## Additional Language Rules

Here are some additional rules and tips to follow in professional media writing. Some may be familiar to you; review them all carefully.

## Use the Active Voice and Strong Verbs

In contrast to what you may have learned in your English classes, media writing stresses greater use of strong verbs and the active voice. From a grammatical standpoint, active voice tells the reader that *the subject performs the action*. It utilizes the *subject-verb-object* sentence structure. For example, "I ate the cake." Media professionals favor active voice because it strengthens their writing. It helps readers, listeners, and viewers envision the events described in stories and enlivens otherwise uninteresting sentences.

In contrast, passive voice emphasizes *the object being acted upon* and reverses sentence structure by putting the object first. For example, "The cake was eaten." Passive voice, while not always incorrect, can water down sentences and weaken your writing, and it may cause you to omit key information (such as who ate the cake, in our example). Passive sentences can also sound overly formal.

Consider the following examples of passive voice and note how they are improved by the use of active voice identifying the actors and by strong verbs or verb phrases (identified in bold):

Passive: A year-end report criticizing corporate officers was submitted last week.

Active: Last week, independent auditors submitted a year-end report criticizing corporate officers. Passive: A draw-down has been implemented at the Clinton Lake Dam while engineers perform repairs and maintenance.

Active: County engineers have implemented a draw-down at the Clinton Lake Dam while engineers perform repairs and maintenance.

*Passive:* At the Thursday college trustees' meeting, concerns were expressed that the university would not be able to meet its budget for the 2016-17 fiscal year.

*Active:* At the Thursday college trustees' meeting, faculty and community members expressed concerns that the university would not be able to meet its budget for the 2016–17 fiscal year.

Passive verbs describe the *action done by the subject* of a sentence. They use a linking verb alongside the main verb. With passive verbs, the subject of the sentence may not be named. Passive verbs can include any form of the verb "to be." Examples:

```
is
are
was
will be
were
have
has
had
```

Does this mean you must use the active voice and active verbs at all times? No. In some cases, passive voice and passive verbs express your ideas most effectively. You can use passive verbs when you want to downplay the *actor* in your sentence. Here, the actor may not be known, may have already been named, or may be relatively unimportant.

However, as a professional media writer, you should always favor active voice over passive voice. It clarifies your sentences and adds force to them. Your readers will appreciate this every time.

#### Be Precise

"Without knowing the force of words, it is impossible to know more."

—Confucius, Chinese Philosopher

Words are powerful. As a media professional, you must understand precisely what words mean and use them correctly in your writing. Mistakes will mark you as an amateur, irritate your audience, and cause them to question your accuracy and credibility.

For example, is it possible for a motorcycle to "collide" with a building? Of course not. A collision can occur only between two moving objects. However, a motorcycle can "strike" a building, since a building is a stationary object.

Craft Essential: Sorting out Commonly Misunderstood Words

Here is a quick list of commonly misunderstood words that frequently confuse writers. Working with a classmate, cover up the answers and see whether you can correctly express the differences between the words in each set.

- 1. Comprise, compose
- 2. Principle, principal
- 3. Fewer, less
- 4. Further, farther
- 5. Emigrate, immigrate
- 6. Carat, caret, karat
- 7. Conscience, conscious
- 8. Rack, wrack
- 9. Averse, adverse
- 10. Then, than
- 11. Capitol, capital
- 12. Complementary, complimentary
- 13. Reluctant, reticent
- 14. Premier, premiere
- 15. Every day, everyday
- 16. Faze, phase

#### Answers:

1. To "comprise" is to include or to enclose. To compose is to make up or be a constituent of something. "Comprise" is a verb used in active voice, while "compose" is used in passive voice.

*Example:* The county comprises six municipalities. Congress is composed of two chambers.

2. "Principle" is a noun that means "rule" or "axiom." "Principal" carries three meanings. As an adjective, it means "foremost" or "major." As a noun, it means "chief official." In finance, it is also a noun and means "capital sum."

Example: There is one major principle we need to discuss here.

Example: Today, Robyn Newstrander became principal shareholder in the company.

*Example:* If you make an extra principal payment on your mortgage each month, you will pay it off faster.

3. "Fewer" refers to numbers that can be counted, even very large numbers that can be counted in theory only, such as the number of stars in the sky. "Less" is used for quantities that can't be counted.

*Example:* This spring, California will have to get by on 20 percent less water than in previous years.

Example: There were fewer cars on the roadway this holiday weekend.

4. "Further" means "to advance" or "in addition." "Farther" refers to physical distance.

*Example:* My son plans to further his knowledge of Spain by studying abroad next spring. *Example:* The company moved its largest restaurant farther from the downtown district.

5. To leave the country is to "emigrate," or to be an emigrant. To enter the country is to "immigrate," or to be an immigrant.

Example: My mother's family emigrated from Germany after the war.

Example: Laurel immigrated to the United Kingdom.

6. A "carat" is a unit of weight for precious stones, equal to 200 milligrams. A "caret" is a V-shaped proofreader's symbol indicating something is to be inserted. A "karat" is the proportion of gold used with an alloy.

Example: Can you measure rhinestones in carats?

Example: Carets should be placed within the text, not in the margin.

Example: Pure gold is 24 karat.

7. To have a "conscience" is to have a sense of right and wrong. To be "conscious" is to be awake or

Example: My conscience tells me this joke is going to be a bad idea.

*Example:* The patient remained fully conscious throughout the operation.

8. The verb form of "rack" means to arrange on a rack, to torture or torment. The noun form of "wrack" means ruin or destruction.

*Example:* I racked my brain but still could not think of a headline.

Example: Under his leadership, the company will come to wrack and ruin.

9. "Adverse" is used when something is opposed to the subject in a sentence. "Averse" is used when the subject is opposed to something.

Example: Union members last week filed a grievance in response to adverse working conditions

Example: Noah is averse to any criticism about his artwork.

10. "Then" is most often used in describing a sequence in time or events. "Than" is a conjunction. It is used to compare two or more things.

Example: First I left the building; then I grabbed a cup of coffee.

Example: Premium gas is much more expensive than regular gas.

11. "Capital" is the city where the seat of government is located; it also means money, equipment, or property. "Capitol" refers to the building in which a legislative body meets.

Example: Austin is the capital of Texas.

Example: To start our own communications firm, we need to raise capital.

Example: The senator invited me to her office in the Capitol building.

12. "Complementary" means "to add to, complete, or reinforce" something else. "Complimentary" means flattering or given away for free.

*Example:* Multimedia storytelling and cross-channel marketing use complementary content to create the full experience.

*Example:* Complimentary drinks will be served at the event.

13. "Reluctant" means unwilling to act. "Reticent" means unwilling to speak, to be reserved or restrained.

Example: I was reluctant to correct the CEO's grammar.

Example: I am often reticent around people I don't know very well.

14. "Premier" means first in importance, principal or chief. "Premiere" means a first performance.

Example: Our company offers premier writing and editing services.

Example: We attended the premiere of the musical "Annie."

15. "Everyday" is an adjective meaning "used daily" or "common." "Every day" is a term consisting of the noun "day" modified by "every."

Example: Levi's jeans are ideal for everyday wear.

Example: I take a walk at lunchtime every day.

16. To "faze" means to embarrass or disturb. "Phase" means a stage of development or an aspect or part. *Example:* The typo in her headline did not seem to faze her.

Example: Developers are building the new condominiums in three phases.

## Be Concise

"The most valuable of all talents is that of never using two words when one will do."

—Thomas Jefferson, Third US President

Even experienced professional writers work hard to provide a lot of information clearly in few words. Writing with conciseness means writing straight to the point, removing superfluous details and polishing your writing into smooth expression. You can make your writing more concise by following these guidelines:

### Choose specific and powerful words.

Think hard and focus on the words you need to convey your idea most effectively. If you skip the "think first" step, weak, ambiguous words and phrases can easily creep into your writing. Eliminate them mercilessly until you have honed your phrases and sentences to their essential meanings.

#### Example:

*Wordy:* In the interests of the many other parents in attendance at the meeting, the superintendent said he preferred to speak with the group after it ended.

*Concise:* The superintendent said that because other parents were attending the meeting, he preferred to speak with the group afterward.

### Eliminate redundant words and phrases.

Often, you will discover that you have written two or more words when just one will do. Some words add little to your meaning.

#### Example:

*Redundant:* The university provost detailed the many new academic programs making their way onto campus for the upcoming 2017–18 academic year.

Concise: The provost discussed new programs that will start in the next academic year.

You may encounter redundant word pairs in which the first word carries nearly the same meaning as the second. Choose just one.

Examples:

complete and total always and everywhere each and every one

Craft Essential: Try to Use the Best Single Word

Beginning writers may believe they are adding an air of professionalism by overloading sentences with extra phrases. In reality, this only slows the reader and reduces understanding.

Working with a classmate, cover up the answers at the bottom and come up with a single word to substitute for each of the following wordy phrases. Can you think of any other suitable words not listed below?

# Wordy Phrase

- 1. it is necessary that
- 2. in light of the fact that
- 3. in the event that
- 4. to be sure
- 5. is required to

```
Words

1. must
2. since or because
3. if
4. surely or certainly
5. must
```

Favor simple words over complex ones.

Like excess words, complex words slow your readers and interfere with their understanding of your writing. They may then skip terms they do not understand and search for meaning elsewhere in the sentence. Help prevent this by choosing simple words instead of complex ones.

```
Examples:

Complex Simple

consolidate join
parameters limits
proficiencies skills
commensurate equal
terminate end
ascertain learn
```

### Cut the jargon and buzzwords.

Government organizations, businesses, and technology companies are famous for using jargon in their materials. Your job is to translate it into terms your audience can understand. If you cannot replace jargon, define or explain it.

```
Examples:

Jargon Simple word(s)

utilize use
core competency skill
buy-in agreement
move the needle make a difference
leading edge modern
tiger team team
```

### Make It Accessible

As a media professional, you will write for a diverse audience of readers and listeners. That's precisely why you must write to provide accessibility to audiences of all types. The average person reads and comprehends writing between a sixth-grade and an eighth-grade level. Many experts advise aiming your writing at roughly a high school level.

However, don't take this to mean you are supposed to "dumb down" the content or information in your article or that people with less formal education will not be able to grasp its complexities. In fact, the opposite is true. The media professional's writing challenge is to convey all the important information in a manner the average reader can comprehend. And that's the irony: it is much more difficult to distill complex issues into everyday language than it is to simply turn in a complicated piece readers will not fully understand.

Steer by the language and style conventions described in this chapter, and you will accurately convey your intended meanings to readers and listeners. Regardless of your audience, always remember that good writing communicates. Bad writing fails to communicate.

The War Room

# Making Your Copy More Accessible to Readers

Over the past several decades, language experts have developed tools that can be used to analyze the readability and approximate grade level of a piece of writing. These include:

- Flesch Reading Ease
- Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level
- Gunning FOG Index
- SMOG Readability Formula

The website <a href="www.readabilityformulas.com">www.readabilityformulas.com</a> can help you find the reading level and grade level readers need to read and comprehend your writing.

- 1. Working with a classmate, locate a piece of your own writing. Go to the above website and learn about the readability formulas. Then, test your writing sample according to two or three of the website's seven readability formulas.
- 2. Where does your writing appear to be targeted in terms of reading level and grade level? How did the results vary according to each individual test?
- 3. Rewrite your piece according to the guidelines suggested by any one of the readability tests. Compare the original to the rewritten version. How, specifically, did you have to edit the document to make it more readable?
- 4. Share your findings with the class. Discuss their implications for news and persuasive writing. How can these guidelines help your writing to meet its objectives and succeed with target audiences?

## Write With Sensitivity

As a media professional, you bear a serious responsibility to use English with skill and language sensitivity. The words you write travel far and wide and affect everyone who comes into contact with them, for better or for worse.

Words are powerful and carry tremendous meaning. They can be used to inform, uplift, and inspire your audience. They can also be used to hurt, demean, or offend. For example, what does it mean when you refer to someone who uses a wheelchair as a "handicapped person" or a small African nation as a "third-world country?" If you don't think carefully about the meanings of your words as you set them down in writing, someone else certainly will when they read your news article, press release, or advertisement. Audiences are diverse and are likely to interpret your writing in a variety of ways. As much as possible, you must eliminate any chance of misinterpretation or offense.

The responsibility to be sensitive comes into sharp focus when you are working on deadline as a journalist or public relations practitioner. As you and your editor put the finishing touches on a news story, web page, press release, or annual report, your eyes will usually be the last to see the piece before it goes public. Once you hit the "send" key, there is no taking back your message.

The world is diverse, and so are your audiences in terms of their:

- gender
- ethnicity
- age
- education
- socioeconomic status
- geographic location
- sexual orientation
- physical abilities

What other areas of diversity can you think of to describe a target audience for news or persuasive communication?

Language sensitivity starts long before you set your fingers to the keyboard. It begins as you review your news beats, choose story topics, conduct research, and decide whom to interview. It continues out in your community as you speak with news sources and build rapport with them.

One of the best ways to build language sensitivity is to work according to the center of the Professional Strategy Triangle introduced in <u>Chapter 2</u>. Recall that Step 3 is labeled "active

learning." This means getting outside of your comfort zone to places you would not normally visit and connecting with people you would not normally talk to in the course of a day. Where else can you go and with whom can you speak to gain a different perspective and be more inclusive in your story? Getting to know new people as individuals goes far in breaking down stereotypes and helps prevent them from creeping into your writing.

Here are some of the areas of language sensitivity you should watch for:

### Stereotypes.

What sorts of images come to mind when you think of the terms "blue-collar worker," "welfare mom," or "urban youth?" Contrary to stereotypes, a blue-collar worker may be a laid-off accountant with a business degree. That welfare mom might be a military veteran struggling to raise her children as a single parent. The urban youth could be a concert pianist headed to college on a music scholarship. Again, the more we get to know people as individuals, the less stereotypes apply. Always question the assumptions behind any label before you use it.

#### Titles.

Until recently, terms such as "policeman," mailman," or "congressman" were commonly used in news writing and across society. But today's media professionals must look for more accurate and gender-neutral terms to describe their story subjects' titles. "Police officer," "mail carrier," and "representative" are not only more accurate; they are more descriptive.

#### Pronouns.

If you were a woman living in previous decades or centuries, you might think you hardly existed based upon the many sexist pronouns in use. Consider just one example, "All men are created equal," from the US Declaration of Independence. Thankfully, such sexist language is not a legitimate part of today's world. Avoiding sexist pronouns such as "he" or "his" can still be tricky for the beginning writer. However, with care you can achieve it. Here is an example:

Sexist:

An army officer must be loyal to his troops.

Neutral:

An army officer must be loyal to his or her troops. Army officers must be loyal to their troops.

### Descriptions.

Is it important to your story to refer to someone's physical appearance, clothing, or ethnicity? At times, it may be—but not always. For instance, in a sports feature story about a female volleyball player, is it necessary to note she is a "dark brunette clad in a bikini"? How would you describe a male in a similar story? Sensitivity about race and ethnicity is just as important. Would you refer to someone as "Kayla Martinez, the new Latina CEO?" Probably not.

However, in other types of stories, race or ethnicity may become critical. For example, when Michael Brown, an unarmed black teenager, was shot and killed in 2014 by Darren Wilson, a white police officer, in Ferguson, Missouri, the story became international news and prompted painful discussions on the meaning of race in the United States. Or, suppose you are reporting on a string of home invasions in your community, and victims describe the suspects as "Asian males in their mid-20s." For such stories, descriptions of race and ethnicity become important because they are central facts of the story.

To avoid demeaning sexist or racial descriptions, always ask yourself whether these descriptions would be equally important if the story subject were white, a male, or someone else. Would the reader need to know about this? If not, then drop the description.

#### Disabilities and illnesses.

Disabilities and illness can become labels for people if you aren't careful with your writing. For example, to describe a child in your story as "mentally retarded" demeans that individual and would clearly be inappropriate. The AP advises us to instead use the terms "mentally disabled," "intellectually disabled," or "developmentally disabled."

The AP offers similar advice when you are tempted to use terms such as "cripple," "disabled," "handicapped," "blind," "deaf," and "mute" in a story. If someone uses a wheelchair, explain the reason why to your readers. The AP advises journalists to avoid describing an individual as disabled or handicapped unless that fact is clearly pertinent to a story.

In some cases, you may be able to introduce the person first and the term second in order to avoid labeling someone. Perhaps you could write, "a child with a mental disability" instead of "a mentally disabled child" or "a woman with a hearing impairment" instead of a "hearing-impaired woman." Let the context of your story determine what is most appropriate.

As you write, always ask yourself these questions:

- Have I treated people fairly and equitably in my writing?
- How would I feel if this story, phrase, or term were written about me?
- Have I avoided stereotypes?

- Have I avoided phrases or descriptions that could be demeaning?
- Have I included everyone in my story who might have something important to say about it?

Grammar, Spelling, and Punctuation

### The Professional Connection

Earlier in this text, we noted that good writing communicates, and that bad writing fails to communicate. It really is that simple. Good writing requires the use of proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation. There is no reason to write a news story or any other piece of professional communication that contains errors. In the media marketplace, which depends so heavily upon the exchange of ideas and the words that build those ideas, the use of proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation distinguishes you as a professional who knows how to use the tools of the trade.

Recall the Professional Strategy Triangle from Chapter 2, and put yourself in the role of your audience. Think of the times you tried to read a poorly written news story or advertisement. Do you remember how poor grammar, spelling, or punctuation interrupted the flow of your thoughts and ruined the reading experience? Your audience feels exactly the same when they encounter this in any written piece. Even more damaging, writing marred by errors will cause your readers and listeners to doubt your credibility and intelligence, along with that of your employer (see Photo 3.3). Credibility is the ultimate asset for media organizations of all types. In the final analysis, it is all they have to sell. Proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation stand on the front lines in defending that credibility.

Photo 3.3: Misspellings can be deadly to an organization's credibility and cause readers to doubt the intelligence of the writer. What does the above sign say about the writer's English language skills?



You might be tempted to believe that proper grammar is just a boring set of English rules from the past. After all, writing is all about self-expression, isn't it? Not in the media professions! Even if you do not pursue a career as a journalist, public relations practitioner, or other media professional, you will always need to use correct grammar in writing or speaking situations to avoid misunderstandings and to make sure the other person can understand you easily. Turning in cover letters or résumés with errors will even cost you job interviews and career opportunities. Employers who find them will assume you are lazy or do not care about this position or a job with their organization. But if you can write well, your audience will assume that you are probably a good thinker and a reliable person who can be trusted with clients, customers, and audiences.

The good news is that proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation can be learned. Once you have acquired these skills, they are yours to keep. Knowing them will enable you to operate at a professional level and advance more rapidly in your career.

# Use Grammar Correctly

While complete coverage of the rules of grammar is beyond the scope of this book, a review of the basics is useful (see <u>Figure 3.2</u>).

Figure 3.2 Words: The Eight Parts of Speech Words form the building blocks of sentences, and by extension, the entire English language. Here are the eight parts of speech:

- Nouns. Common nouns refer to a person, place, or thing. Examples: manager, city, holiday. Proper nouns refer to a specific person, place or thing. Examples: Jonathan Tremont, Seattle, Christmas.
- 2. *Pronouns*. Pronouns take the place of a noun. Examples: He, she, his, her, they, them, my, me.
- 3. Verbs. Verbs are "action" words that show action or a state of being, whether in the past, present, or future. Example: Maria **stood** up quickly, **spotted** her mother, and **shouted**, "I'm over here!"
- 4. Adjectives. Adjectives describe or modify nouns and pronouns. They can specify appearance, size, number, or other characteristics. Examples: the distracted manager, the large city, the beloved holiday.
- 5. Adverbs. Adverbs modify the meaning of a verb, an adjective, or another adverb. They specify where, when, how, and how much. Examples: The student **angrily** walked out of the classroom. The jury **quickly** returned a unanimous verdict.
- Prepositions. Prepositions show how a noun or pronoun is related to another word in a sentence. Examples: The manager stood **behind** his desk. The city lay **across** the river.
- 7. *Conjunctions*. Conjunctions join words, phrases, or clauses. Examples: for, and, now, but, or, yet, so, while, as soon as, although, before.
- 8. *Interjections*. Interjections are exclamations and usually carry an exclamation mark. Example: "Well! I never saw boys behave in such a way."

# Common Language Errors

As a media professional, you must learn to use the correct words to form sentences. As you write or edit the writing of others, you may encounter these typically misunderstood words:

### That/which

If you can read the sentence without the subordinate clause and the meaning does not change, then use "which." Otherwise, use "that."

#### Examples:

Go to the third house that has green drapes. vs. Go to the third house, which has green drapes. The deadlines that went into effect last year have passed. vs. The deadlines, which went into effect last year, have passed.

Do you see how the above sentences carry different meanings?

# You're/your

"You're" is a contraction of "you are." (The apostrophe stands for the missing letter.) "Your" is a possessive pronoun.

Example: You're starting to neglect your daily exercise.

### Its/it's

When the meaning is "it is," the apostrophe, which normally symbolizes possession, creates a contraction. When the meaning is possession, the correct word is "its."

Examples:

It's [It is] only fair that you share the chores with me.

The hawk fiercely defended its nest.

# Lose/loose

To lose something is to misplace or miss it. "Loose" refers to something that is free, slack, or not tight enough.

Examples:

Be careful out there, or you may lose your hat.

I looked under the hood and discovered that a belt had come loose from the engine.

# Their/there/they're

If you are referring to something that belongs to more than one person, use "their." When referring to a location, use "there." "They're" is a contraction of "they are."

#### Examples:

The children should comb their hair more often.

"Bundle up, because it's cold out there."

"After work, they're heading out for dinner."

### To/too/two

"To" is a preposition used to express motion, direction, limit of movement, contact, purpose, or intention. "Too" is an adverb that means "also" or "besides." "Two" is a number.

#### Examples:

Drive to I-74 and turn west.

The movies sound like fun tonight. Can I go too?

Smaller trailers need only two tires.

## Affect/effect

"Affect" is a verb. "Effect" is usually a noun.

#### Examples:

High temperatures this week will affect crop yields.

The effect of industrial pollution is well documented on this river.

# Would of/would have

"Would've," "could've," and "should've" are all verb contractions and stand for "would have," "could have," and "should have," respectively. "Would of," "could of," or "should of" are all incorrect.

Example: "If I could've made it through the snow tonight, I would have gone to the concert."

# I/me/myself

You can determine whether to use "I" or "me" by removing the other person from the sentence and using the pronoun that sounds right. Use "myself" only when referring to yourself in a more direct manner.

#### Examples:

My wife and I will be celebrating our fifth anniversary this year. Only two people agreed with the idea: the manager and me. Sometimes, I just don't understand myself.

### Who/whom

"Who" is used as the subject of a sentence clause. "Whom" is used as the object of a verb or preposition.

#### Examples:

Who gave you the scarf?

The new teaching assistant, whom I met yesterday, is also doing research.

Here is a simple tip for remembering which word to use: turn the sentence around and replace "who" or "whom" with "he," "she," "him," or "her." If "he" or "she" works, use "who." If "him" or "her" works, then use "whom."

# Sentences and Sentence Types

Sentences express a complete thought. At their basic level, sentences usually contain:

A subject: the person or thing doing the action.

A verb: the word that describes the action.

A direct object: the person or thing acted upon.

or

an indirect object: to whom or for whom an action was done.

```
Example: The coach praised the team. (subject) (verb) (direct object)
```

In some cases, a sentence needs only a subject and a verb. At times, the subject can be merely implied.

```
Example with subject and verb: You leave! Example with implied subject and verb: Leave!
```

Sentence *clauses* refer to groups of words containing a subject and a verb. Sentences may contain independent and dependent clauses:

*Independent clause:* expresses a complete thought or sentence, can stand on its own and make sense on its own.

Dependent clause: expresses an incomplete thought or sentence if it is removed from the rest of the sentence.

There are four types of sentences:

1. *Simple:* usually contains a subject, verb, and object; it is the same thing as an independent clause, with no dependent clauses.

```
Example: I rode the motorcycle. (independent clause)
```

2. Complex: contains an independent clause and a dependent clause.

```
Example: I slipped on the ice after the sidewalks froze last night.
```

```
(independent clause) (dependent clause)
```

3. *Compound:* contains two independent clauses. These should be separated by a comma and a coordinating conjunction.

```
Example: I slipped on the ice, but I got up quickly and continued on my way.

(independent clause) (independent clause)

(comma and coordinating conjunction)
```

4. Compound-complex: contains two independent clauses and a dependent clause.

```
Example:

I slipped on the ice after the sidewalks froze last night,
(independent clause) (dependent clause)
but I got up quickly and continued on my way.
(independent clause)
(comma and coordinating conjunction)
```

As a media professional, you need to understand the differences between the above sentence types, how to combine them effectively, and how to avoid mistakes. As you build experience, you will learn how to create a natural rhythm in your narrative by varying your sentence structure. Your readers will appreciate it.

### Common Sentence Errors

Learn to recognize and avoid the following sentence errors:

Run-on sentences. Run-on sentences occur when the writer makes the sentence confusing by piecing together too many words and phrases.

Example: I'll never be able to study for the midterm this weekend I think I'll just head home instead.

This flawed sentence could be easily fixed by punctuating in one of two ways:

I'll never be able to study for the midterm this weekend. I think I'll just head home instead. I'll never be able to study for the midterm this weekend, so I think I'll just head home instead.

*Comma splice.* In other instances, the writer misuses the comma by placing it between two complete sentences.

Example: Let's head over to the football game tomorrow, it should be an exciting time.

This sentence can be fixed in one of three ways:

Let's head over to the football game tomorrow. It should be an exciting time. Let's head over to the football game tomorrow, because it should be an exciting time. Let's head over to the football game tomorrow; it should be an exciting time.

### Agreement problems.

The nouns, pronouns, verbs, and adverbs in your sentences should agree with one another. A singular subject should take a singular verb, while plural subjects should take plural verbs.

*Incorrect:* The faculty have scheduled a no-confidence vote for the president.

Correct: The faculty has scheduled a no-confidence vote for the president.

*Incorrect:* Some people find mathematics boring, but I love them.

Correct: Some people find mathematics boring, but I love it.

*Incorrect:* The general, along with the men, are marching tomorrow.

Correct: The general, along with the men, is marching tomorrow.

### Split infinitives.

Split infinitives occur when adverbs or adverbial phrases are placed between the sign of the

infinitive—"to"—and the infinitive itself. When misplaced, these modifiers can muddy your meaning. Try to shift them elsewhere.

#### Examples:

*Incorrect:* He planned to soon complete the forms.

Correct: He planned to complete the forms soon.

Incorrect: The board decided to at the end of the year terminate all outstanding leases.

*Incorrect:* The board decided to terminate all outstanding leases at the end of the year.

### Misplaced and dangling modifiers.

Modifiers make writing more descriptive and interesting. But to work, they must refer clearly and logically to some specific word in the sentence. Misuse can result in confusion and unintentional humor.

#### Examples:

Incorrect: Standing at the edge of the cliff, the snow caused her to fall down.

Correct: The snow caused her to fall down as she stood at the edge of the cliff.

*Incorrect:* Skiing down the trail, my ears got cold.

Correct: As I skied down the trail, my ears got cold.

#### Parallel construction.

Proper use of parallel construction helps give a sentence balance, rhythm, and unity. Improper use hinders understanding. The basic rule is that items in a series must take the same grammatical form.

#### Examples:

Incorrect: You can promote colon health through exercising frequently and a good diet.

Correct: You can promote colon health through frequent exercise and a good diet.

Incorrect: Velcro is popular for fastening shoes and to keep handbags closed.

Correct: Velcro is popular for fastening shoes and keeping handbags closed.

*Incorrect:* He was charged with drunken driving, carrying a weapon, resisting arrest, and possession

of cocaine.

Correct: He was charged with driving while drunk, carrying a weapon, resisting arrest, and

possessing cocaine.

# Spelling

Spelling is a basic matter of literacy and professional skill. Spelling errors can lead to inaccuracies and reader confusion. For example, the consequences can be serious if a reporter incorrectly spells a murder suspect's name or the street name for an upcoming community event. Readers or listeners may rightfully wonder whether other facts in the story are also incorrect. The same holds true for public relations practitioners and advertising professionals.

The spell-check and grammar check functions on your computer or phone may be helpful, but do not rely upon them blindly. Your computer does not know how you intended to use a word in a sentence or the proper context for its use. It is no substitute for your brain.

#### Punctuation

Think of punctuation marks such as periods, commas, and semicolons as the "traffic signals" for your sentences (see <u>Figure 3.3</u>). They indicate the stops, pauses, and voice inflection. Punctuation marks indicate to readers where they should pause, and how long those pauses should last.

#### Figure 3.3 Punctuation Marks

Comma (,) creates a short pause within a sentence.

Period (.) ends a sentence.

Colon (:) indicates that a sentence (or a portion of it), quotation, or list is to follow.

Semicolon (;) connects two independent clauses in a sentence without the use of a conjunction.

Dash (—) sets apart different clauses within a sentence, creating a longer pause than a comma. Do not confuse this with the hyphen (below).

Hyphen (-) connects words, often to form a compound modifier.

Apostrophe (') forms contractions and possessives.

Exclamation point (!) indicates strong emphasis or emotion.

Question mark (?) forms the end of the sentence that asks a question.

Differences in punctuation can completely change a sentence's meaning. Consider the following example:

Woman without her man is lost.

How is the meaning of this sentence changed by adding a dash and a comma? Woman—without her, man is lost.

Errors in punctuation call attention to themselves and detract from the message's meaning, as shown in Photo 3.4.

Photo 3.4: Incorrect punctuation confuses the reader and reflects poorly upon the organization responsible for it. Can you spot the error on this parking lot sign?



### Summary

- 1. Describe media writing style conventions including accuracy, brevity, and clarity. Accuracy means that the facts in a story are correct, and that the story is true. Brevity refers to the ability to convey key ideas with the fewest words possible. Clarity refers to clearly stating what you mean. It also requires simplicity and precision.
- 2. Identify the connection between thinking and writing. The ability to think and write cannot be separated. Clear thinking results in clear writing.
- 3. Apply major Associated Press style points to news writing. With practice and repetition, media professionals internalize AP style and use it automatically.
- 4. Apply additional language rules including the use of strong verbs, the active voice, precision, conciseness, and accessibility. Strong verbs and the active voice hold readers' attention. Precision requires understanding what your words mean and using exactly the right words in your writing. Conciseness means providing much information clearly in few words. Accessibility refers to writing in a straightforward manner so that it is understandable to many readers.
- 5. Utilize correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, and mechanics in news and persuasive writing. Like AP style, rules of good writing require practice and repetition. Media professionals know that their audiences and employers expect them to be experts in grammar, spelling, punctuation, and mechanics.

# Key Terms

accuracy 62
journalistic objectivity 62
balance 63
brevity 63
clarity 64
simplicity 64
precision 64
Associated Press Stylebook 66
active voice 72
passive voice 72
conciseness 77
accessibility 79
language sensitivity 81

## Discussion Questions

- 1. Review the Frontline Media Writing Profile at the beginning of this chapter. How are media writing style and language conventions important to Nathan Crooks in his position as bureau chief at Bloomberg News?
- 2. As we have learned so far in this text, accuracy, brevity, and clarity are three chief goals of media writing. How do style and language conventions help writers to advance those goals?
- 3. Beyond getting the basic facts right, what else does accuracy require the journalist to do?
- 4. Explain how objectivity and balance are related to accuracy. What is the difference between the two?
- 5. Why should journalists strive to be brief in their writing? Why not just provide all of the details for the readers and let them decide what is important?
- 6. What is the connection between clear thinking and clear writing? Why is it sometimes difficult to think clearly? How can you improve your thinking abilities?
- 7. How does strict adherence to AP (or any) style help the reader?
- 8. Recall that media writing uses strong verbs and the active voice wherever possible. Discuss the importance of this convention. When is it OK to use the passive voice and linking verbs instead?
- 9. What does it mean to write with sensitivity as a media professional? Describe some of the areas in which you need to be especially careful.

## Chapter Exercises

- 1. Locate a piece of writing that is written in an overly complicated fashion, using long sentences, excess punctuation, or big words. Rewrite the piece according to the principles you have learned in this chapter, working to make it easier for the reader to understand. Place the original article next to yours and note the differences. Is the updated article better? If so, how?
- 2. Go online and visit the Purdue University Online Writing Lab. Explore the exercises and try several of them. Check your work against the answers provided. How did you do? Where do you need to improve?
- 3. After reading this chapter, list the top five areas in which you most need to improve your skills. Next, write a 350-word paper that lays out a work plan for you to improve those skills over the course of this class. What, specifically, will you practice and how will you do it?
- 4. Go online to the Student Resources provided with this textbook. Work through selected AP exercises assigned by your instructor. Once you are finished, team up with a classmate and compare your answers. As necessary, consult the *AP Stylebook*. Turn in the corrected version of your work to your instructor.
- 5. Work through selected grammar, spelling, or punctuation exercises assigned by your instructor. Once you are finished, team up with a classmate to discuss and compare your answers. Make sure that you understand why they were right or wrong. Turn in the corrected version of your work to your instructor.
- 6. Locate a piece of writing that you have done for this class. Contact the editor of a local news organization and ask them to critique your piece. Which errors in grammar, style, or punctuation appear most frequently? What improvements does the editor suggest? If a news editor is not available locally, you can complete this exercise via email. Select one of your favorite books and scan through it. Identify how the prose differs from or is similar to media writing in terms of brevity, clarity, precision, conciseness, strong verbs, or the active voice. Mark some key passages that are especially striking to you and bring the book to class for discussion.

#### Additional Resources

American Copy Editors Society (ACES): http://www.copydesk.org

Free Readability Formulas: www.readabilityformulas.com

The Poynter Institute: <a href="http://www.poynter.org">http://www.poynter.org</a>

Purdue University Online Writing Lab (OWL): <a href="https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/">https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/</a>

The Slot: http://www.theslot.com

# Section II News Settings

# Chapter 4 Reporting and Interviewing

# Chapter Outline

<u>Learning Objectives</u>
Frontline Media Writing Profile: Chris Kraul, Freelance Journalist
Journalism: A Higher Calling
The First Amendment Guarantee
How Does the First Amendment Affect the Media in the United States?
Professional News Writing Standards
Truth and Accuracy
<u>Objectivity</u>
<u>Fairness</u>
<u>Balance</u>
Legal and Ethical Standards
<u>Deadlines</u>
Verification and Attribution
It's All About Credibility
The Converged Media Environment
Applying the Professional Strategy Triangle to Reporting
News Situation
The Six Situational News Values
Craft Essential: Identifying Situational News Values
News Audience
Message
Craft Essential: The Caitlyn (Bruce) Jenner Story: News Values and Audience
News Reporting
Get to Work in the Center of the Triangle
Putting the 5 Ws and H Topic Points to Work
Pro Strategy Connection: How to Boost Your Writing Using Creative Visioning
The Role of Skepticism
Research: Developing the Story Background
Interviewing
Types of Interviews
Preparing for the Interview
Interviewing Procedures
Types of Interview Questions
The War Room: Interview With a Classmate
Taking Notes
Pro Strategy Connection: Note-Taking Tips for a Successful Interview
Concluding the Interview
Sorting It All Out
Summary

Key Terms
Discussion Questions
Chapter Exercises
Additional Resources

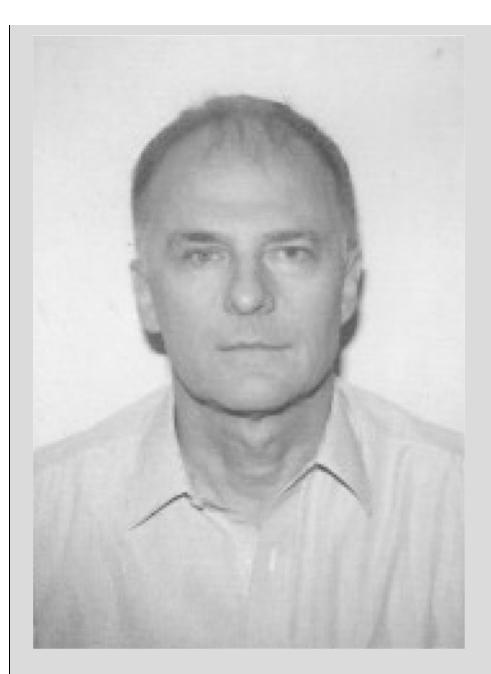
"Finding a human interest angle is hardest, but I ask about backgrounds, motivations and experiences and lead with that when I can. I also try to observe actions that paint a picture. I need to plan what sort of story I'm going to write about something, so I can be looking for a creative angle while I am gathering material."

—Richard Chambers, Purdue University Calumet

# Learning Objectives

- 1. Describe the First Amendment and its impact on media in the United States.
- 2. Discuss professional news writing standards.
- 3. Identify skills needed in the converged media environment.
- 4. Apply the Professional Strategy Triangle to reporting.
- 5. Research and report on a news story.
- 6. Conduct an interview with a news source.

Frontline Media Writing Profile
Chris Kraul, Freelance Journalist
Bogota, Colombia
Chris Kraul cares dearly about the journalism profession. So dearly, in fact, that he nearly laid down his life for it covering the Iraq War in 2003.



"At the time, I was a foreign correspondent for the *Los Angeles Times*, working in Baghdad," Kraul says. "Some friends and I were going out to a restaurant to celebrate New Year's Eve. Just as we arrived, a car bomber pulled up beside us. I was only five meters from the blast, which killed seven people inside the restaurant."

Miraculously, Kraul survived. However, the explosion dealt him a severe concussion, blinded him in one eye, and knocked him out of commission for six months. "But the main effect was that it gave me a lot more sympathy for what our soldiers were going through," Kraul says. "After the injury, I went back to Iraq twice to cover stories about injured soldiers."

That misadventure was the roughest Kraul faced in his twenty-two years with the *Los Angeles Times*. During those years, the newspaper also sent him to cover stories in Mexico, Afghanistan, and across South America. Kraul was named chief of the paper's Bogota, Colombia, bureau in 2006. When the paper closed the bureau in 2009, Kraul stayed on as a freelancer. Now sixty-four, he oversees a staff of six stringers (other freelance reporters) covering politics, economics, and popular culture news in Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, Chile, Bolivia, and Argentina.

As a freelance journalist, Kraul also covers Colombia's oil industry for a McGraw-Hill newsletter and for the Yale Environment 360 website. He serves as the Colombia correspondent for *Women's Wear Daily*, a fashion industry journal, and also writes for *Automotive News*.

Kraul utilizes technology extensively in his work. "I usually use my laptop for writing, but I'm also plugged into social media at all times," he says. "The *LA Times* is pushing us to tweet stories and link them on Facebook. They want eyeballs. So, I tweet all my stories. I notice that a lot of my colleagues will promote other reporters' stories, as well."

As Kraul envisions, researches, and writes, he constantly thinks about his audience. What are their needs and interests? What sorts of news stories will be relevant to them, and why should they care?

In 2012, Kraul broke a major story for the *LA Times* on Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff, a prominent Colombian anthropologist who turned out to be a former German Nazi SS officer whose dark past had remained a secret for decades. "Much to my surprise, this story was intensely interesting to my U.S. audiences," Kraul notes.

# Journalism: A Higher Calling

Journalism is a time-honored profession that is significant to everyone in society whether they realize it or not. Journalists inform audiences about important events that occur every day in their hometowns, across the nation, and throughout the world. Audiences rely upon their skills in reporting, interviewing, and writing to deliver news they need to live as informed citizens.

At the same time, journalism is much more than a profession. It is a higher calling that fulfills a public trust. Journalists play a vital role in advancing the marketplace of ideas and the healthy functioning of a democratic society. In the media environment, readers, viewers, and news organizations expect journalists to exercise accuracy, objectivity, and fairness at all times. Journalists must also develop a keen sense of ethical behavior and a general understanding of legal principles relevant to the media.

As a reporter, you assume an important responsibility as you apply professional news judgment to select the issues and events that become news. You learn what your audience considers to be newsworthy, what affects their daily lives, what interests them, and what entertains them. Accuracy, objectivity, and fairness are the hallmarks of professional journalism. The credibility of the reporter, and by extension his or her news organization, rests upon these principles.

In today's converged media environment, sensationalism is epidemic. Readers face a tough task in separating fact from opinion. It has never been harder to tell the difference between a blogger, a cable TV news personality, and a true professional journalist. Yet the search for truth and the need to uphold professional journalistic standards have grown more important than ever in the twenty-first century.

# The First Amendment Guarantee

Journalism as we know it in the United States is built upon the guaranteed freedoms found in the First Amendment to the US Constitution (Figure 4.1).

#### Figure 4.1 The First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

# How Does the First Amendment Affect the Media in the United States?

Freedom of the press is one of the five rights guaranteed by the First Amendment. In the United States, the media act as the essential watchdog of government, including not just the federal government but also state and local governments and state-funded institutions. The nation's founders despised the idea of government-imposed prior restraint or censorship, and major legal decisions over the years have reinforced their idea that it is for the most part unconstitutional.

Photo 4.2: In 2015, when Univision journalist Jorge Ramos (left) was ejected from a Donald Trump event, many media professionals viewed it as an attempt to suppress public discourse and limit freedom of the press.



It is little wonder, then, that so many media professionals were disturbed when Univision journalist Jorge Ramos was ejected from a 2015 political event for presidential candidate Donald Trump in Dubuque, Iowa (Photo 4.2). When Ramos persistently questioned Trump's positions on immigration and other issues, a member of Trump's security team escorted Ramos from the room. Although Trump was not a government official at the time, the incident was widely viewed as an attempt to suppress public discourse and to limit

freedom of the press.

# Professional News Writing Standards

# Truth and Accuracy

Truth and accuracy are the most important of the professional news writing standards. The Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) advises journalists to "seek the truth and report it." In journalism and all the other media professions, the cardinal rule is to never lie. As journalists have noted through the decades, accuracy means telling the truth and making sure it's the truth. That means checking and double-checking the facts, often under considerable deadline pressure. A commitment to truth and accuracy also means establishing *context* carefully and giving readers all the facts they need to know to fully understand your story.

## Objectivity

Objectivity refers to a lack of bias, judgment, or prejudice in the news reporting, interviewing, and writing process. It means being fair, impartial, disinterested, and nonpartisan. To try to achieve objectivity, you must base your news stories only upon the facts and evidence you have gathered and keep your personal opinions out of your news stories. Readers and listeners trust you as the journalist to gather the facts, interview your sources, and present the information in a neutral way so they can form their own opinions —not so that you can decide for them.

Being objective does not mean avoiding news stories based on issues that are important to you or trying not to feel strongly about events going on in your community. However, you should avoid covering news stories about issues in which you are directly and personally active. Often, even the mere *appearance* of subjectivity can damage a media organization's reputation for thoroughness and responsibility.

Being objective also means that reporters do not insert themselves in the news they are already covering. Suppose a community reporter at a major metropolitan newspaper is also a highly visible LGBT activist in that same community who has spoken at several public rallies. Lately, much of her reporting has shifted to local LGBT causes. Although the reporter has worked hard to gather all the facts, interview the relevant people, and present all sides of the story in her work, her editors would rightly be uncomfortable with the situation and remove her from the community beat. Whether or not the reporter's involvement in LGBT issues ever influenced her reporting is up for debate, but again, appearance is just as important as reality here. You may agree or disagree with the editors' decision, but understand that it is not a reprimand. It is a simple matter of maintaining objectivity and professionalism.

## Fairness

Exercising fairness means treating people as human beings, employing consideration and an effort to understand others, and not simply using them as a means to your own ends. The Golden Rule, which exists in similar form in many cultures, says, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." In other words, put yourself in the other person's shoes and act accordingly. How would you feel as a grieving family member being interviewed after losing a loved one in a home fire? If you were a local business owner, would you appreciate being contacted for your side of a story on a new zoning ordinance that could seriously damage your business? Fairness in dealing with your sources and coworkers carries an added benefit: they will probably remember you and treat you equally well the next time around.

## Balance

Although reporters are not obliged to give all sides of an issue equal length or depth of coverage in news stories, they strive for balance by presenting as complete a picture as possible based on the available information. This gives audiences the opportunity to hear all sides of the story so that they can reach their own conclusions.

For example, suppose you show up to cover a local school board meeting and find a group of parents out front protesting a proposed school closing. You attend the meeting and listen to the consultant's report about the proposal and the potential cost savings. Your reporting should include not only the conflict between the school board members and the protesters, but also the points each side is trying to make. The school board wants to save taxpayer dollars; the protesters' families do not want to send their children to a school that is farther away. Your story would also include quotes from sources on both sides of the issue.

# Legal and Ethical Standards

In your career as a media professional, you will regularly encounter difficult situations that could create legal issues and ethical dilemmas for you. That's why you need to learn about legal standards and ethical standards practiced in the industry. *Legal standards* refer to knowing the basics of media law including libel, privacy, and copyright. *Ethical standards* mean that you must also have a solid system of ethics to guide you through these situations. The law tells us what we *must* do, while ethics tell us what we *should* do. Clearly, your own and your employer's legal position must always be the first consideration. When in doubt on any legal matter, always consult your supervisor or your employer's attorney. We discuss these topics in depth in <a href="Chapter 8">Chapter 8</a>.

## Deadlines

The media industry lives and dies on deadlines. As a media writer, you must be able to write accurately, quickly, and forcefully under considerable time pressure from wherever you happen to be working. And you have to be able to repeat this performance reliably every day. Even if your story is the best work you have ever done, it is worthless if you miss your deadline.

Audiences need news in order to make critical decisions in their daily lives. Who is running for state representative this November? Did the school board pass that big bond issue last night? Is Highway 29 still closed in my neighborhood? News breaks continuously, and competing news organizations are always ready to step in and grab the scoop. If you want to keep readers coming back to your publication, you must meet your deadlines every time.

## Verification and Attribution

Being accurate in your news writing means practicing verification of facts and attribution of those facts to sources. In other words, seek the truth and then make sure it's the truth. Trust but verify. Attribute all information to sources. Journalists bring a healthy degree of skepticism to every assignment they tackle. They conduct background research; they double-check everything they are told and seek out additional sources for corroboration. As a rule, a reporter will interview a minimum of three sources for any news story. Although not every source will appear in the final story and you will probably not use every piece of information you gathered, everything you write should be cross-checked and verified.

# It's All About Credibility

Media is a business, with credibility at its foundation. Once a news organization loses its reputation for accuracy, thoroughness, and responsibility, audiences will look for more accurate and reliable information elsewhere. Advertisers will soon follow, along with their dollars. Credibility is a priceless commodity for both you and your employer, and it must be carefully guarded at all times.

# The Converged Media Environment

By 2000, it was clear that much of the news audience was beginning to turn away from paper media and move online. Starting in the mid-1990s, many major newspapers began to move toward online versions that included audio and video content along with traditional text and pictures. Television network news continued to lose audiences to cable news networks, but both saw revenue streams increase from their websites. Many local television and radio news stations today continue to earn a major portion of their revenue from on-air spot advertising, supplemented by website and social media advertising. This converged media environment combines all the elements of the older media into single sources online, removing the old distinctions between print and electronic journalism.

Photo 4.3: In the twenty-first century, journalists generate and produce news content for the converged media environment. This involves conducting interviews, shooting photos, and recording video and audio for stories that will run simultaneously on digital, broadcast, and print platforms.



The convergence of the media is a story in progress, particularly when it comes to the role of personal media devices such as smartphones. People still want news and entertainment. What's different is the way they want to experience them. Today's journalists must generate and assemble content in new ways for the converged media environment, using photos,

video, and audio that they gather and edit themselves. Journalists work for companies that own many different media outlets, and their stories are formatted and rewritten across two or three media channels. For instance, a television news reporter may produce a report for a local television station; write and format the same copy for the station's website; provide short updates including video and audio on Facebook, Twitter, and Google+; and then provide copy and audio feeds to a sister radio station. He or she must accomplish it all within a few short hours for each story, every day of the work week.

Many of the professional attributes and skills of journalism that you are learning about in this text are timeless. They include

- a healthy curiosity, keen observational skills, and broad general knowledge;
- the ability to understand one's situation and audience;
- the ability to network, make contacts, and develop sources;
- the ability to think critically about facts, opinions, and events; and
- the ability to be accurate, objective, and balanced in one's reporting and writing.

At the same time, a host of new twenty-first-century skill requirements are rapidly lengthening this list. As a news reporter and news writer today, you are expected to master new digital methods of gathering and delivering news and information, and to analyze and synthesize large amounts of data. You are also expected to produce compelling content across multiple digital platforms.

For that reason, today's media employers will expect you to have developed these core skills:

- Shooting and editing photographs
- Shooting and editing video
- Recording and editing audio including sound bites
- Telling stories through design and visual elements

# Applying the Professional Strategy Triangle to Reporting

Recall the Professional Strategy Triangle introduced in <u>Chapter 2</u>. Note how journalist Chris Kraul, featured in the Frontline Media Writing Profile, uses professional strategy. Journalists are strong strategists. They must quickly figure out what makes a story newsworthy and focus on the essence of the news as they write the story. The Professional Strategy Triangle (<u>Figure 4.2</u>) is the first strategy step. It clearly focuses a journalist's thinking about a news story into what is newsworthy.

Figure 4.2 The Professional Strategy Triangle for Reporting

# News Situation Thinking Professional Strategy Doing News

Figure 4.3 The Six Situational News Values

**Audience** 

# **News Values**

- Impact
- Proximity
- Timeliness
- Conflict
- Prominence
- Oddity or Novelty

## News Situation

- Which media am I writing for? This could include print, broadcast, online, social media, and their combinations.
- What are the facts of the story? Which ones are most important?
- What are the 5 Ws and H (who, what, where, when, why, and how)?
- What type of news story is this—a hard news story, a feature story, or something else?
- Who are the key players in the story?
- Where do I need to go to get the information I need? Is it located in online databases, public records, or somewhere else? Who needs to be interviewed?
- What are the key *situational news values* at play in this situation?

We answer this last question next.

#### The Six Situational News Values

The six situational news values (Figure 4.3) speak to the qualities of a story that make it news to our readers and viewers. Valued by journalists for decades, situational news values are driven by what makes the story useful, relevant, valuable, and at times, entertaining to readers, viewers, and listeners. They are impact, proximity, timeliness, conflict, prominence, and oddity or novelty.

*Impact.* Always consider the way your news story touches the lives of your readers, and then write accordingly. As many newsroom editors have asked their reporters, "What is the givea-damn factor?" Consider a local employer laying off workers, a newly dedicated nature park, or a national retailer opening a store in the community. All these things affect the community.

*Proximity.* How close to the audience did the event, situation, or issue occur? In many cases, proximity to a news event will influence its impact on audiences. For example, the water crisis that erupted in Flint, Michigan, in 2014 deeply affected thousands of children and adults who live in the city.

*Timeliness.* When did the news occur—now, this morning, or tonight? How current is the news? News events break quickly and evolve continuously. Readers and viewers want the latest information on pressing issues—not yesterday's news.

*Conflict.* Conflict is a fact of life, and while most of us are fortunate not to face it on a daily basis, people want to read about how other people experience and overcome it. Reporters often find conflict in local government, school boards, and local political issues. What issues are at the center of such conflicts, and why do they lead to conflict?

*Prominence.* Readers will often follow a story with very little impact, proximity, or timeliness simply because the people in the story are prominent or famous. The 2016 death of pop star Prince did not affect most of us in our daily lives. However, millions of people around the world followed the story with intense interest. Reporters find out which local prominent people are most newsworthy and follow what they do in their communities.

Oddity or novelty. As the old saying goes, it is not news when a dog bites a man. However, it is news when the man bites the dog. The more unusual it is, the more likely an event will be of interest to your news audience. Once-in-a-lifetime events such as the Chicago Cubs making it to the World Series definitely qualify as oddities. After all, they last played in the World Series in 1945, and last won the World Series in 1908. Reporters understand local habits and routine events. They learn to spot anything that stands out from the ordinary.

Next, we consider audience, the second part of the Professional Strategy Triangle.

Craft Essential: Identifying Situational News Values

Brainstorm and discuss several news story topics from your local community that are focused on each of these situational news values:

- Impact: an issue that directly affects people in your community.
- Proximity: an event, issue, or situation that occurs close to you.
- Timeliness: an event, issue, or situation that is happening right now.
- Conflict: a local controversy that pits one person or organization against another.
- Prominence: local public figures or other people well known where you live.
- Oddity or novelty: an event, person, issue, or situation that is clearly out of the ordinary for your community.

#### News Audience

Journalists must cover stories that are clearly focused on what audience members want to know. To begin understanding your audience, ask yourself this series of questions. Once you have gained experience working as a journalist in a locale, you will internalize the answers to these questions and gain a deeper perspective of what your local audience wants to know from your story.

- Who are my readers, listeners, and viewers?
- What is the news that my audience needs or wants to know? How might they use it?
- What are their demographics (age, race/ethnicity, gender, occupation, income, education)?
- What are their psychographics (personality, values, opinions, attitudes, interests, and lifestyles)?
- How is my audience likely to interpret my message?
- How do I maintain the credibility of my news organization with this audience?

Your personal perspectives on your audience will come from your own experiences living in your community. You can assume that what you consider to be newsworthy will resemble what similar people in your community will also consider to be newsworthy. But audiences are made up of many different types of people, who many times come together because of their interest in a given issue, topic, geographic area, or leisure activity. For this reason, you may want to think of an audience as a collection of individuals rather than as a mass of people with similar tastes and ways of thinking.

# Message

Once you have fully considered your news situation and news audience, you are ready to begin the reporting and interviewing process that will form the outlines of the message you convey in your news story. We address the hard news and feature writing process in detail in <a href="#">Chapter 5</a>.

Craft Essential: The Caitlyn (Bruce) Jenner Story: News Values and Audience				



Go online and locate a 2015 story of former Olympic star and current reality-TV personality Bruce Jenner undergoing a series of transgender procedures in order to become a woman named Caitlyn Jenner.

- Identify the key situational news values at play in this story.
- Explain two situational news values you see at the foundation of this story. Show how they apply to this story.
- Discuss how you would maintain objectivity and respect for the LGBT community (part of your audience) had you written this story.

# News Reporting

While the format and style of news content evolves around audiences' use of new technologies, the basic process of news reporting remains timeless and takes place today much as it always has. First comes the idea for a story, which grows from a reporter's curiosity and observations, informed by an understanding of what is important to the audience. Reporters watch for news. Many times events are thrust upon journalists, but often investigative reporters must dig out stories that take time, effort, and skill to uncover. Second, once reporters have found a story idea, they search for background information and interview sources. Finally, they verify their facts and write the story.

As a newspaper reporter, you may be assigned to a specific news beat or area of coverage. News beats vary according to the size of your media organization and the community in which it operates. They range from city government, business, education, sports, and agriculture to police, fire, courts, medicine, and entertainment. On your own news beat, you constantly watch for any news that might affect your readers or viewers. You attend local meetings and events, scour public records, and cultivate sources who can provide you with news tips on emerging stories. Whatever happens on your beat, your editors and readers expect you to know about it first.

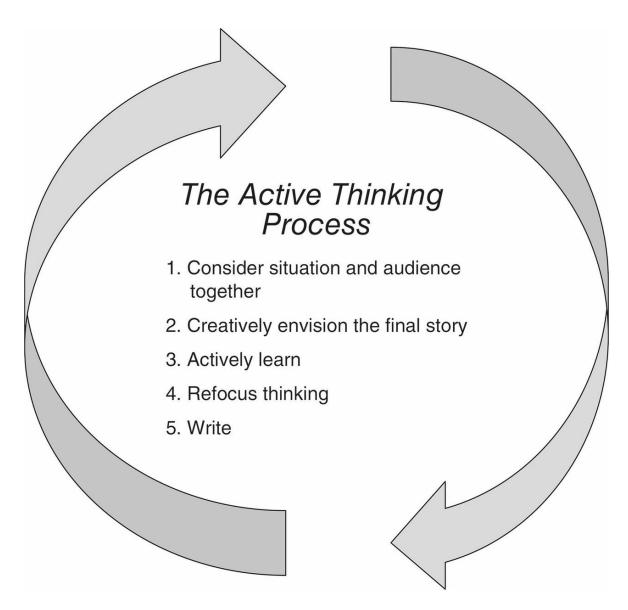
# Get to Work in the Center of the Triangle

As detailed in <u>Chapter 2</u> and in <u>Figure 4.4</u> below, the circle in the center of the Professional Strategy Triangle illustrates the *active thinking process* you use as a reporter to develop your story, track down the information you need, interview sources, and write the news story.

Good reporters practice observation diligently. They are keen observers with active minds. They notice things that the average person might overlook. For example, what does it mean when you walk across a college campus and notice the interior condition of students' cars? How many are messy? Which ones are neatly kept? What do you observe inside—textbooks? Fast-food bags? Energy drinks? What does it say about how students on your campus study and work? Or, consider construction projects that seem to pop up by surprise, offhand board meeting comments, a CEO's ambiguity at a press conference, or subtle data trends you spot in your own research. The world is full of interesting people and things, even when so much of it appears to be routine. Your next big story could be sitting right under your nose if you are keen enough to observe it.

Knowing what is important to your audience arms you with clues about what to look for as you creatively envision a story. For example, if you work in a rural area with many farms, then you know that long-term weather impact is important in your community. If weather reports point to the beginnings of a drought in such an area, a story featuring the impact of drought weather will be valuable to cover. Similarly, if your community is home to a number of large employers and some are facing closure, you know such changes are critical to the economy of the entire area. Knowing and caring about what affects your community and your audience will help you to evaluate story ideas.

Figure 4.4 Center of the Professional Strategy Triangle

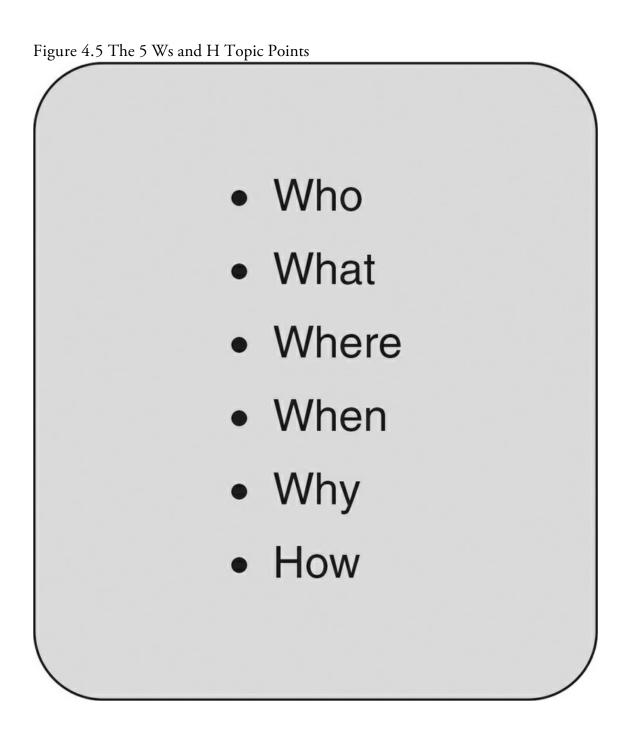


Observation draws upon the six situational news values mentioned above. Reporters consider which of those news values drive the local events, issues, and people that make news in your community. In the two examples above, notice how potential stories are driven by *impact*, *proximity*, *timeliness*, and possibly, *conflict*.

Reporters always try to witness news events firsthand in order to clearly observe what they are writing about. They do not rely solely on the accounts of other people. Instead, they are *active observers* who usually know what they need to watch for and what kind of information they will need to gather on the scene. Being an active observer also means physically positioning yourself so that you can see the news event. For instance, a reporter covering a race-related riot in downtown Minneapolis would not stand inside and watch from a fourth-floor window.

# Putting the 5 Ws and H Topic Points to Work

As a reporter, you will need to develop your story topics by looking for distinctive elements that make them newsworthy. For example, what makes a locally prominent person newsworthy today? What is the conflict between two city council members? Why is a win by the local college football team a novel occurrence? Look for the heart of the story and the central facts that revolve around it by considering the 5 Ws and H, as shown in Figure 4.5.



*Who:* If your story involves a prominent or famous person, you would probably choose to focus your lead on the *who* topic point. Notice that it may be related to the prominence news value above.

What: What happened in the news event? Before beginning to write the news story, reporters carefully establish the facts, conducting background research and interviewing as many sources as possible.

Where: Be as precise as possible in reporting the location of a news event in terms of addresses, counties, regions, states, countries, and other locational elements. Always verify locations and double-check them for correctness. Often readers are most interested in news that occurs closest to them because it has the greatest potential to affect their daily lives. However, news that is breaking across the globe can affect our audience's lives with equal magnitude. Notice that the where topic point is related to the proximity news value above.

When: When did the news occur? Is it breaking now or coming up this afternoon? In general, readers are most interested in news that just happened or will soon be happening. Reporters always strive to be as precise as possible in reporting the time element in their stories in terms of times, time zones, days, and dates. Critical news events turn upon time elements, and you must make sure you have it right. This topic point is related to the timeliness news value above.

Why: Because human beings are curious, the why can often become the most important news element of your story. For instance, what led to the crash of Malaysia Airlines Flight 370? In 2014, audiences across the globe scoured the news for months on end to find out why it happened. Addressing this topic point can also help you to uncover important trends related to your story subject or address the motivations behind the people in your story.

*How:* Focusing on the *how* (related to the why) can help your audiences understand how a process works, how to approach a problem, or how to accomplish an everyday task. It can also help explain to readers how events in a news story led up to where we are today.

Early in the development of the story, settle on the types of facts you need to observe in order to tell your story. For instance, a story featuring *conflict* will probably first center on *who, what,* and perhaps *where.* Try to find the distinctive nature of the conflict that makes it interesting to the audience. Look for new elements of the conflict. In the case of a criminal prosecution, you might ask, "What new charges are being made? Who is making them? Why now? What is different about these charges from those made in the past?"

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# How to Boost Your Writing Using Creative Visioning

Whenever reporter Chris Kraul (from the Frontline Media Writing Profile that opened the chapter) encounters a new story idea, he jumps right to the center of the Professional Strategy Triangle (Figure 4.2) and creatively envisions his final story, as shown in Step 2.

"Visualize what a dynamite story will look and feel and read like," he says. "How will the headline, lead, and quotes read? What about the photos running alongside the story? It's like envisioning that shot you would take as a pro golfer or tennis player."

Of course, your reporting may take you in another direction, and that's fine. Thinking in advance about how you will conduct an interview, cast the news lead, or structure your story will help you avoid walking into stories cold or getting into trouble on deadline.

Whenever Kraul is preparing to travel for a story, he uses *creative visioning* to generate several ideas in advance. This enables him to tell his editor what to expect. "Remember, part of your job as a journalist is to sell your stories to the editors," he says. "Promote it so that they'll work on it, and maybe campaign for your story to get prominent placement." As Kraul edits and translates his reporters' work, he constantly reminds them of the importance of creative visioning. "I tell them, 'Don't just send me raw notes. Send me a story that you can imagine writing for Reuters or the Associated Press—a famous story to run on the wires. Visualize your writing success!"

Kraul adds that aspiring media writers can strengthen their own creative vision by reading the work of top reporters at the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, and other leading media outlets.

# For further exploration

Go online and run a keyword search on Chris Kraul. Learn about him and read a few of his best stories. Where do you see evidence of Kraul's creative visioning process?

# The Role of Skepticism

As the old journalism saying goes, "If your mother says she loves you, check it out." As media professionals, journalists learn to develop a healthy degree of skepticism for everything they see and hear, whether it comes from a live source or a stored source, such as a website or set of public records. Simply because someone told you something (even if that person is a powerful authority figure) or you located a piece of information in a Google search does not make it automatically true. Good reporters always search for the missing piece, the illogical statement, or the answer that falls short in all that they observe. This healthy skepticism drives the need for verification, a process that reporters undertake to double-check the accuracy of what they have seen or heard.

# Research: Developing the Story Background

Once you have developed a story idea based on your situation and audience, and you've creatively envisioned that story, it's time to begin research to develop your story background through active learning, as indicated in Step 3 of Figure 4.4. Story background can include the following:

- 1. Your own background information. Examples include material about the community and your audience, or information you have gathered covering similar stories.
- 2. Information explaining the news event. This refers to facts you will uncover as you conduct research for the story. You may need to examine public records, research the web, or speak with people who are familiar with the story.
- 3. Information that sources don't want attributed to them. In rare instances, news sources want to remain anonymous. Before granting this request, always check with your editor or news director first. If he or she allows it, you will still need to cross-check the information with other sources before using it.

Reporters also often examine records to construct background for their stories. Combined with interviews, public records are foundational sources for facts used to build a story. Court case records such as a court docket are public records, for example, and may be found in many county clerks' offices. Other records available through similar offices include county budget information, police arrest records, zoning rules and variances, tax records, and building permit applications. Usually, you do not have to gain permission to use this information, as it is available to the general public. However, you must always attribute this information to its source in your story.

Not all information is created equal. Wherever possible, try to obtain key information from officials or expert sources. This applies to human sources, paper-based records, and any information you find online. You would probably assign more credibility to information on a website from a hospital (.org), university (.edu), or scholarly database than you would from a business website (.com) or an independent blogger with no professional credentials.

You may find that your information is out of date, incorrect, incomplete, or misleading. Once you locate information that appears to be relevant to your story, cross-check it carefully against other records and verify it with at least one human source. That person can help you clarify what the information means, add credibility to it, and perhaps update it with new information. Even better, he or she may be willing to serve as a source for your story or suggest other people to interview.

Photo 4.5: Early in the reporting process, journalists often research public records to establish the background facts for their stories.



What kinds of material do you need to take note of when you are out covering a news event —for instance, a court hearing or a community festival? Many beginning reporters mistakenly try to write down everything they observe and all that people say to them in an interview. Of course, that would be an impossible task. Instead, use the Professional Strategy Triangle (see Figure 4.2) to look again at your situation and audience factors.

- Am I working on a hard news or feature story?
- What is my deadline?
- Which situational news values are driving the story?
- Who are my readers, listeners, and viewers?
- Which information will be most important to them in this story?
- What type of information do I need to gather, including audio and video?

To bring back the information you need for your story, concentrate on recording three different types of material:

1. *Important facts and details.* The facts and details you gather should answer as many of the 5 Ws and H as possible. Finding this information requires you to be proactive. Get it down on your notepad and confirm it with your sources on the scene. You will need to approach people you may not know and ask them for information.

- 2. *Key quotes*. Carefully write down the names, ages, and addresses of everyone with whom you speak. If they are speaking too fast, ask them to slow down. After you note a possible quote, read it back to the subject to verify you have recorded it correctly.
- 3. *Personal observations*. Reporters often refer to personal observations as "color." These details will enhance your story and bring it to life. Even if you have taken video on your smartphone, having notes about your impressions at the scene will make it easier to describe when you write the story back in the newsroom.

Consider the impressions you might record at this news event:

- A man has jumped into zoo polar bear pit
- Chaos: parents, children shout and point as man fends off bear
- Zoo workers fire rubber bullets at bear; screaming all around
- Workers rescue man, who is behaving oddly
- Unreality returns to normal

Most reporters use their own shorthand system to quickly note observations. Many use their own stock abbreviations for common words, while others might leave out vowels in familiar words. You will need to experiment and test different methods to find one that works for you.

## Interviewing

Often, essential facts for a story can only be obtained directly from people, or human sources. This situation calls for interviewing. As a reporter, you must possess strong interpersonal skills. You must be able to convince people to talk to you, make them feel at ease, and obtain their permission to use information that perhaps only they can provide. You must enjoy talking to people and understand how to relate to them. You must also be willing to speak with people in many different types of places, often outside your comfort zone. You may be able to connect to your sources only by phone, which calls for persistence and solid phone communication skills. Shy people rarely become good reporters.

The purpose of an interview is to gather the information you need for your story. Be friendly but be careful; do not allow your source to use the interview to advance a personal agenda or manipulate you into writing a biased or overly favorable story. One way to guard against this is to understand the story topic well enough to ask the right questions. Story research provides you with this understanding.

# Types of Interviews

Face-to-face. Whenever possible, interview your sources in person. Face-to-face interviews give you the best opportunity to put your powers of observation to work and look for additional story angles or photo opportunities. It also does the best job of informing the five senses, which always boosts your writing and the quality of the final story. Suppose you are interviewing the mother of a US soldier killed in the Iraq War for a Veterans Day feature story for your local newspaper. Interviewing her in the home will give you the opportunity to observe her surroundings and items in the home such as medals, folded flags, or photos on the wall. Perhaps the mother has preserved her son's bedroom. A home visit might also give you the opportunity to meet the soldier's father or other family members and to absorb the somber tone that will likely provide the rich sensory input you need to do your best writing.

You might also observe expressions on the face of the soldier's mother as she tells the story of her son's life and career as a soldier. Voice inflections and pauses in the conversation could provide valuable cues about what she was feeling at the moment or about to say next. A face-to-face conversation gives you the opportunity to establish trust. In this setting, sources are much more likely to open up to you and provide information, anecdotes, and quotes that can take your story to a new level. Such intimacy would be impossible with a phone or Skype interview.

Photo 4.6: Successful news reporters possess strong interpersonal skills and are adept at convincing people to share information with them.



Person on the street. As a reporter, you will often interview subjects in person while you are out on a story. You will need to muster up your courage and approach people you may not know and who may not want to talk to you. You will need to employ a mix of friendliness, salesmanship, and interrogation skills. These types of interviews represent the truest form of reporting and often yield the most important information. Recall the Professional Strategy Triangle, first introduced in <a href="Chapter 2">Chapter 2</a>. In the center of the triangle, Step 3 requires you to get out of your comfort zone and actively learn. Go to places you would not normally go and talk with people you would not normally engage. Be curious and ask questions. That's good reporting.

When you spot a likely source, politely introduce yourself and your media organization. Explain the story you are covering, and ask whether he or she would be willing to speak with you for a few moments. Never forget that no one has to talk to you for your story; you must persuade them to do so, and this may take some convincing if your source is reluctant or in a hurry.

Phone or Skype. You may be unable to interview your source in person, or working against a tight deadline and need to briefly interview sources or verify information before filing your story. In these cases, phone or Skype interviews will do the job. If you can project a positive personality and establish a rapport with your source using just your voice or a screen image, you can gather the information and quotes you need. Interviewing the Iraq War soldier's mother by phone would not yield the rich results that an in-person interview would.

However, it would still enable you to hold a conversation with her and make the human connection you need for a good story.

Phone interviews give you the added advantage of being able to use a speaker phone or headset and type your notes on a computer as you talk with your source. A word of caution: when conducting phone interviews, make sure you can verify your source's identity.

*Email.* Use email only as a last resort, when there is absolutely no other way to reach your source. Email carries many disadvantages. It does not give you an interactive dialogue or conversation. It does not give you the ability to see your source's face, hear his or her voice, seek clarification, or ask follow-up questions. It does not provide the human connection or sensory input of an in-person, phone, or Skype interview.

Email also presents problems related to quotes and authenticity. People do not write the same way they speak. When sources write out their quotes, they tend to manage them and make them sound overly formal, which may not play well in your story. In addition, email is a "thin" medium, which means that all you have is your source's words. You cannot look the person in the eye, hear his or her voice, or ask what he or she meant in a statement. As a result, it is easy to take a source's information or quotes out of context.

Finally, how do you know it's really your source communicating with you? Perhaps the business owner you thought you were interviewing asked her secretary or husband to write the responses and send them back to you. Using email, it is impossible to know. That said, email can provide an indispensable tool for reaching out to news sources, setting up interviews, requesting background information, or sending routine documents back and forth. Remember that email is just one reporting tool among many others, and use it sparingly.

## Preparing for the Interview

Once your editor has assigned you a story and you have identified some promising interview leads through your story research, begin preparing for your interviews by following these steps:

- 1. Contact your sources immediately to request interviews. As a rule, news stories should include a minimum of three sources. Do not delay in contacting them; they may be out of town and take some time to get back to you. Or perhaps they are available to speak with you now, but not three days from now.
- 2. Get your questions ready. When you make your initial call to a source, he or she may surprise you by saying, "Now is a good time. Can we talk right now?" Be ready with at least a half-dozen interview questions you have developed through your story research and make sure your notepad is within easy reach. You can expect to depart from this list of initial questions as other interesting material comes up during the interview, but having your essential questions ready will ensure that you are not caught unprepared.
- 3. Make notes and follow up. Some sources will fail to get back to you promptly or ignore your calls altogether. Others will be reluctant to speak with you and will avoid your calls or emails. Getting through to these people and landing interviews with them will require diplomacy, persuasion, and persistence. Keep meticulous notes of whom you contacted and when. If someone has not responded to you after several hours or days (depending on your deadline), contact them again. Don't assume that one attempt will be enough. While you are waiting for responses, continue researching your story.
- 4. Consider your source's communication preferences. Is your source more likely to respond to voice mail, email, or social media? Everyone prefers different communication methods, so always call *and* send an email message at the least. Otherwise, you could leave five voice mail messages only to have your source later say, "I never check my voice mail. If you had sent me an email, I would have gotten right back to you!"
- 5. *Make use of other people.* Secretaries, assistants, and other helpers can be invaluable in helping you to track down sources and set up interviews. They may also be able to provide you with background information, materials, or additional leads for your story. Always remember to ask for these extra items when you make your initial call and mention your deadline. Leave both your phone number and email address for your source to get back in touch with you.
- 6. Confirm arrangements with your source. Once your source responds to you, make a friendly introduction and confirm the interview date, time, and place. Tell your source how long you expect the interview to last, and if appropriate, the kinds of questions you plan to ask. A positive, diplomatic attitude will go far here and help begin the interview on the right note. Ask whether your source can give you any

- background material now to help you prepare for the interview.
- 7. *Check your equipment.* Is the battery in your phone, camera, laptop, or digital recorder charged? Do you have a reporter's notebook and several pens that work?
- 8. *Groom and dress appropriately.* Regardless of the interview situation, you are always representing your media organization. Be professional. If you are interviewing your subject in person, shower, shave, and dress appropriately.
- 9. Be early. Verify the address and make sure that you know how to get there. Allow extra time for traffic delays, parking, and finding your interview location. It is always better to arrive early; this will give you time to collect your thoughts before the interview begins. If you are interviewing your subject by phone, Skype, or FaceTime, check all your connections 30 minutes beforehand to ensure that everything is functioning. When the appointed hour arrives and the phone rings, you should be seated with your notes in front of you, ready to go.

## Interviewing Procedures

Interviews are semiformal interpersonal communication situations—part conversation and part interrogation. Unlike everyday one-on-one communication, interviews should be planned, with questions thought out before discussion takes place. As a journalist, you should be prepared to lead your subject through a series of questions to obtain the information you seek. As you can see from the section above, carefully planning your interview enables you to ask effective questions that are likely to yield valuable facts for your story as it develops.

All interviews contain an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. The introduction occurs as you and the source greet each other. Rapport-building small talk helps set the subject at ease, so plan a few conversation starters ahead of time: the weather, results of recent sports events, or major news topics of interest in the local area. Through careful observation of your subject during small talk, you can also determine whether he or she is likely to be cooperative or evasive and get a sense of how much time you may have for your questions.

The question-and-answer section forms the body of the interview. Ask a question or two based on your story research, and then let your source speak for a while. Open your eyes and your mind and absorb what he or she is saying. Take notes and ask the source to slow down or restate anything you didn't get at first. Think ahead to your next question, and other new ones that may arise, but resist the temptation to jump in with them too quickly. Often, sources will make some of their most important statements near the beginning of the interview. When you sense that your source has finished answering the question or is drifting too far from it, it is time to ask your next question.

## Types of Interview Questions

Many reporters find it useful to begin their interviews with more general, less challenging questions and then proceed to more specific challenging questions. The best approach depends upon the situation.

In general, reporters ask three basic types of interview questions.

The closed-ended question seeks brief answers like confirmation of a date, time, address, or some other objective response. For example,

- Where were you when the tornado occurred?
- Did you get a look at the man who stole the car?
- What time did you see the plane go down?
- What is your name and address?

Closed-ended questions are easy to answer and often work very well to move a subject into a deeper line of conversation.

The open-ended question allows the subject to give details and perspective in long answers. They are most useful for uncovering descriptions and explanations. For example,

- Can you describe how this wedding gown is made?
- How was the dog behaving just before it bit the neighbor?
- What inspires you to run in so many marathons?
- Which organic ingredients are used in this skin care line?

Subjects have to think a bit more to answer open-ended questions, so be patient as they answer. A healthy mix of open-ended and closed-ended questions works well for most interviews.

Reporters use probing questions to seek additional information from their subjects. A subject may tell you only part of what he or she knows. Ask probing questions to gather more details. Probes are not usually planned. Reporters learn this technique through experience and use it to ask follow-up questions.

In general, there are three types of probes. *Clarification probes* ask for verification and precise detail. They are usually closed-ended questions. *Amplification probes* seek out more in-depth explanations of events and issues, and usually consist of open-ended questions. *Silent probes* work well when you hear someone give a description or make a statement and then pause. In this case, patiently wait for the subject to resume talking and listen carefully to what he or she says next. Subjects often naturally want to fill in silent spaces with more explanation. This is precisely when some of your most valuable information may emerge.

Consider this example from a reporter covering a celebration at a national park:

Reporter (clarification probe): Are you the person in charge of planning efforts for the 100th anniversary celebration at Mount Rainier National Park this summer?

Subject (the park's chief ranger): Yes, ma'am, and we are already working hard on it.

Reporter (amplification probe): Can you describe the kinds of activities you are planning?

Subject: There are so many. Several communities around here are organizing big festivals. Inside the park, we're hosting alpine hikes and wildflower viewing. And President Obama will be giving a speech at our official ceremony at Sunrise Visitor Center.

Reporter (clarification probe): That's pretty exciting. Will the president actually be here at the park?

Subject: You bet. He and First Lady Michelle Obama plan to stay at the National Park Inn for a night.

Reporter (amplification probe): All in all, how many people do you think will be attending the 100th anniversary celebration?

Subject: Based on interest so far, we are expecting around 3,000 visitors from across the country.

Reporter (silent probe): (waits for the subject to say something further . . .)

Subject: And do you know what? Those 3,000 visitors should bring more than a million tourism dollars into our region during that week.

The War Room

## Interview With a Classmate

Interview a classmate to discover three distinctive things about him or her and his or her life.

- 1. Prepare at least three closed-ended questions and three open-ended questions for the body of your interview.
- 2. Be ready to ask several probing questions. You will want to include at least one clarification probe, one amplification probe, and a silent probe.
- 3. Run the interview as follows:
  - a. Provide an introduction allowing for small talk.
  - b. Ask your closed-ended and open-ended questions.
  - c. Ask your probe questions where needed.
  - d. End the interview with verification questions.
  - e. Take interview notes for later use.

As a class, debrief this process. Discuss the different approaches class members took in asking interview questions. Discuss what made some questions seem effective and others less effective.

## Taking Notes

Even in the twenty-first century, the reporter's notepad remains a key tool for journalists. Sometimes reporters use digital pads that allow them to write on the screen, and an app that translates the written characters into type. Either way, notetaking is part of the reporter's tool set. Reporters know that important details can be lost or incorrectly recorded without good notes.

You are probably thinking, "Why not simply record interviews with my smartphone?" This is a fair question, and many reporters do record audio with a personal communication device. However, on its own, it is a dangerous practice. Too many reporters have returned to their desks after an interview only to find that their device failed, and they are left with no interview notes. Veteran journalists also frown upon this practice because they believe it makes the reporter lazy and dulls their powers of observation. In addition, journalists can run into legal problems in securing permission to record people in interviews. Laws in some states make it illegal to record people without their permission. Finally, it takes a tremendous amount of time to transcribe recorded notes following an interview. It is usually quicker and easier to simply look at your notes on a notepad as you write the story. Note-taking is, therefore, still a valuable skill for journalists. Some reporters opt for a combined approach in which they use devices to record a few key facts and quotes, and use their notebook for the rest of the interview.

But this doesn't mean you should keep your smartphone in your pocket. Rather than taking notes describing a scene, use your smartphone to take pictures or video. Smartphone audio and video has risen to broadcast quality, and it is likely that well-composed images and video will be useful for your website and social media. If you can record some sound-bite quality statements from witnesses on your smartphone, they will probably be useful. But once you have surveyed the scene and taken some initial video and general statements from story subjects, it's time to put your smartphone away and start talking face-to-face with people. Using a notepad, you can engage subjects with eye contact and focus on details.

A top spiral-bound reporter's notepad and a pencil are your foundational note-taking tools. The advantage of the good old notebook and pencil is that you can count on them to work every time you use them, as there is no possibility of mechanical or electronic malfunction with these simple tools. You can also easily fit them into a pocket, purse, or small pack. Carefully observe people's reactions to your note-taking. Sometimes you will encounter people who are uncomfortable talking to reporters who take notes or use recording devices. Be sensitive to this, and if necessary, explain their importance.

Pro Strategy Connection

## Note-Taking Tips for a Successful Interview

- 1. Record and double-check your subject's name, address, and age.
- 2. Establish his or her connection to the story.
- 3. Ask story-related questions and gather quotes.
- 4. Write down as much of the key information as possible. Do not try to record every single word. Instead, try to remember as much as you can so that when you return to the newsroom you can create a more complete set of notes.
- 5. If your source is speaking too quickly, ask him or her to slow down or repeat the information.
- 6. Write down the person's phone number and email address for later follow-up.
- 7. If you are shooting photos or recording video or audio, carefully record names, places, and physical descriptions.

## Concluding the Interview

Once you believe you have obtained the information you need from a subject, you can bring the interview to a close. Briefly recount the details you have gathered from your subject. Summarize the important points you've learned and recheck all specific details such as name spellings, addresses, ages, dates, and times. Many reporters find it helpful to close their notebooks and ask the subject whether there is anything else he or she would like to say. This gives your subject a chance to relax and think for a moment. It also provides one more opportunity for fresh information or a revealing quote to emerge. End the interview by checking your contact information for the subject and asking whether you can call back if you need further verification of facts or quotes. Thank the subject for his or her time.

At this stage, your subject may ask you to see a copy of the story before it runs to verify that you wrote it correctly. Although it may seem like a harmless request to the subject, it is an unethical practice and may violate your media employer's policies. Allowing your sources to take an advance look at a story offers them the opportunity to see it before other sources or your readers. It also places your sources in the position of serving as unofficial copy editors or censors if they don't like what they see in the story. Explain diplomatically that the story is the property of your news organization, and that sources are not allowed to see it before it is published. If the source is worried about the correctness of facts or quotes, you can calm those fears by offering to call and verify anything that may be unclear.

## Sorting It All Out

Moving toward Step 4 of the Professional Strategy Triangle (Figure 4.4), return to the newsroom as soon as possible. Go online to verify additional facts and flesh out your notes while they are still fresh in your mind. Sift through all the information you gathered through your reporting and interviewing. Try to figure out how it all adds up, and which key themes and messages are emerging. Who appears to be credible, and what needs further investigation? Run a mental sort on everything you have.

Should you type your field notes into a neater, more complete set of notes? That depends. If you are writing a straight news story on deadline, this is probably not an efficient use of your time. If you are writing a longer story and have a day or more to work on it, then you may wish to type up your notes for later use. This may be especially important if you are reporting on a complex or controversial topic, and you want to make sure you have correctly recorded relevant facts and quotes.

### Summary

- 1. Describe the First Amendment and its impact on media in the United States. Freedom of the press is one of the five rights guaranteed by the First Amendment. In the United States, the media acts as the essential watchdog of government.
- Discuss professional news writing standards. These include a commitment to accuracy, objectivity, fairness, and balance. They also include adherence to legal and ethical standards, meeting deadlines, verification and attribution, and maintaining journalistic credibility.
- 3. Identify skills needed in the converged media environment. Today's journalists must generate and assemble content in new ways for the converged media environment. They must be able to shoot and edit photographs and video footage, record and edit audio including sound bites, and tell stories through design and visual elements.
- 4. Apply the Professional Strategy Triangle to reporting. Journalists must understand how their news situation and news audience shape the message, or news story. Journalists also utilize the four-step active thinking process in the reporting and interviewing process.
- 5. Research and report on a news story. Reporters examine records and published information to research the background and all sides of their story.
- 6. Conduct an interview with a news source. Reporters interview a variety of news sources and present a range of viewpoints and quotes in their stories.

## Key Terms

First Amendment 103 truth 104 accuracy 104 objectivity 105 fairness 105 balance 106 legal standards 106 ethical standards 106 deadlines 106 verification 107 attribution 107 credibility 107 converged media environment 108 situational news values 110 news reporting 113 news beat 114 observation 114 5 Ws and H 116 skepticism 118 interviewing 121 closed-ended question 127 open-ended question 127

probing question 127

## Discussion Questions

- 1. What is the significance of the First Amendment to journalism as it is practiced in the United States? What does it mean for the media to act as the watchdog of government?
- 2. Do you believe that journalism is more than just a profession? If so, how? How do journalists help democratic societies to function?
- 3. Why do you think that truth and accuracy are listed first in the professional news writing standards in this chapter? What makes them the most important standards in journalism?
- 4. Define and discuss *objectivity*. Is it possible for any reporter to ever be truly objective? If not, then what are some measures he or she can take to remain as objective as possible when covering a story?
- 5. Considering the Professional Strategy Triangle, explain how the news situation and news audience impact the reporting and interviewing process.
- 6. Discuss the importance of observation in news reporting and some techniques for developing strong observational skills.
- 7. How do reporters put the five Ws and H to work in the news reporting process?
- 8. Why is it essential for reporters to conduct background research on their stories before conducting interviews?
- 9. What are the different types of interviews available to reporters? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each type?
- 10. Since it is impossible to write down everything your sources tell you in interviews, what are some techniques for retaining as much of the information as possible for use in your news story?

## Chapter Exercises

- 1. Visit the First Amendment Center at <a href="www.firstamendmentcenter.org/tag/online-journalism">www.firstamendmentcenter.org/tag/online-journalism</a>. Explore the website thoroughly, concentrating on the "Press" link. What are the most pressing First Amendment issues in journalism today? How are journalists and media organizations responding to people who attempt to limit their First Amendment rights? Why should it matter to you as a media writing student? Draft a 350- to 500-word paper on this subject. Proofread and edit your paper carefully, making it as professional as possible.
- 2. Interview a professional journalist about his or her career and the work he or she does in the converged media environment. What strategies does this journalist employ in reporting and writing? Which types of reporting and writing skills does he or she practice (e.g., recording and editing video and audio, blogging, social media tools) in the converged media environment?
  - a. Prepare for the interview and conduct it according to the principles presented in this chapter.
     Take careful interview notes.
  - b. From your interview notes, draft a 300- to 400-word profile story on this journalist. Write a catchy headline and a news lead.
  - c. Be sure to include plenty of quotes from your interview source. Attribute all information to sources. As necessary, refer to <a href="#">Chapter 5</a>.
  - d. Proofread and edit your paper carefully before submitting it.
- 3. Consider journalism as a profession. Do you believe that it is a true profession requiring specialized training, or can it be practiced by any citizen with a digital camera and a notebook? What separates a professional journalist from a citizen journalist? Conduct some research into the "citizen journalism" debate and prepare a three- to four-minute talk for the class to report what you learned in your research. You are also encouraged to develop visual aids to help tell your story.
- 4. Use your curiosity and observational skills to generate two campus news story ideas. Start by reviewing the Professional Strategy Triangle. Consider your news situation, news audience, news message, and the active learning process you are about to undertake. Then,
  - a. Grab your notebook and phone. Head off in any campus direction that you think might be interesting.
  - b. Use any of the following techniques to generate potential story ideas:
    - Observing people's interactions and discussions (eavesdropping).
    - Talking to friends and strangers.
    - Looking in unusual places (bulletin boards, dining areas, buildings, etc.).
    - Making associations between unlikely people, places, or things.

Do not hurry this process. Take some time to clear your mind and open up to what is going on around you. Spend at least thirty minutes exercising your curiosity and observing people and events around you.

- c. Jot down two possible campus news story ideas. If you have digital recording capabilities, you can also make audio notes. Then, write up your two ideas as follows:
  - News situation: What is the story idea? What makes your story news to readers? Which
    news values does your story idea capture? Recall impact, proximity, timeliness, conflict,
    prominence, and oddity or novelty.
  - News audience: Who are your audience members? How are they likely to interpret this story? Which demographic factors (race/ethnicity, gender, occupation, income, or education level) might be relevant to this story?

- Message: How will your situation and audience guide your writing and the angle you pursue in this story? Where will you start in terms of research and interviewing?
- 5. Research and report on a campus event of your choice using the techniques you have learned in this chapter. Contact your student newspaper to see whether they would be interested in publishing the story.
  - a. Start by using the Professional Strategy Triangle to determine your news situation and news audience.
  - b. Attend the event and cover the story. Conduct interviews with at least two sources and take careful notes.
  - c. Write a 500-word news story on the event. Quote your sources and attribute all information to sources. As necessary, refer to <a href="#">Chapter 5</a>.
  - d. Proofread and edit your paper carefully before submitting it.
- 6. Research and report on an issue that has created controversy or debate in your community. Contact your student newspaper to see whether they would be interested in publishing the story.
  - a. Start by using the Professional Strategy Triangle to determine your news situation and news audience.
  - b. If the story involves meetings or hearings, attend them and cover the story. Conduct interviews with at least two sources and take careful notes.
  - c. Write a 500-word hard news story on the issue. Quote your sources and attribute all information to sources. As necessary, refer to <a href="#">Chapter 5</a>.
  - d. Proofread and edit your paper carefully before submitting it.

#### Additional Resources

Columbia Journalism Review: http://www.cjr.org

The First Amendment Center: http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/tag/online-journalism

The Freedom Forum: <a href="http://www.newseum.org/about/freedom-forum/">http://www.newseum.org/about/freedom-forum/</a>

News University: <a href="https://www.newsu.org">https://www.newsu.org</a>
The Poynter Institute: <a href="http://www.poynter.org">http://www.poynter.org</a>

Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ): https://www.spj.org

Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) Journalists' Toolbox—Reporting Tools:

http://www.journaliststoolbox.org

# Chapter 5 Hard News and Feature Writing

# Chapter Outline

Learning Objectives
Frontline Media Writing Profile: Kelly Boldan, Editor, West Central Tribune
Versatility Is the Key
The Multiplatform Story
Writing the Hard News Story
The News Lead
Writing the Summary Lead
Lead Writing Guidelines
Craft Essential: Analyzing Summary Leads
Combining Strategies to Write a News Lead on Deadline
<u>Immediate Facts</u>
Background Information
Additional Facts and Situational News Values
The 5 Ws and H Topic Points
Writing This Story's News Lead
Hard News Story Structure
Writing the Body of the Hard News Story
The War Room: Writing the Highway Traffic Accident Story Using the Inverted
<u>Pyramid</u>
<u>Using Quotations</u>
Direct Quotes
Indirect Quotes
Partial Quotes
Can Quotes Be Changed?
Handling Attribution
Pro Strategy Connection: Want to Boost Your News Writing Skills? Check Out
These Tips From an Editor
Writing the Feature Story
Feature Story Categories
Looking for Feature Story Topics
Writing the Feature Lead
Organizing the Feature Story
Other Feature Story Structures
Writing the Body of the Feature Story
<u>Summary</u>
Key Terms
<u>Discussion Questions</u>
Chapter Exercises
Additional Resources

"From writing reports to crafting stories, our culture prizes the ability to turn emotions, events and facts into words. The hardest thing about writing is the responsibility that comes with telling someone else's story. I overcome this through staying true to their voice and investing myself in the story."

—Callie Shipley, West Texas A&M University

# Learning Objectives

- 1. Discuss the components of a multiplatform story.
- 2. Write a hard news story using a summary lead and inverted pyramid structure.
- 3. Quote sources effectively using direct quotes, indirect quotes, and partial quotes.
- 4. Write feature stories using various lead styles and story structures.

Frontline Media Writing Profile
Kelly Boldan, Editor
West Central Tribune, Willmar, Minnesota



Get to know Kelly Boldan and you'll learn why so many small-town newspapers are alive and well across the United States. You'll also learn why opportunities in news writing and editing are equally healthy for graduates entering the job market.

Boldan is editor of the *West Central Tribune* in Willmar, Minnesota, a town of twenty thousand, about two hours west of the Twin Cities. Since his first job out of college in 1980 at the *Sulphur Springs News-Telegram* in Texas, Boldan has pursued his journalism career with great enthusiasm. "For me, it's all about the search for information and truth," he says. "Perhaps a really big story comes along only once in a generation, but there are so many other smaller stories that are successful all the time. And that's what journalism is all about: telling people's stories."

A native of Leader, Minnesota, Boldan earned his bachelor's in journalism and agriculture from the University of Wisconsin–River Falls and his master's in business administration from the University of St. Thomas. During his stint in Texas, he launched *Country World*, a regional agriculture paper. Returning to Rochester, Minnesota, in 1983, he assumed the editorship of *Agri-News* and *Successful Business*. Boldan's

current employer, the *West Central Tribune*, is owned by Forum Communications Company, a Fargo, North Dakota–based media group that operates several dozen print, digital, and broadcast media outlets.

Boldan supervises a staff of a dozen people including four news editors, six reporters, a photographer, and a news assistant. He also researches and writes most of the editorials and opinion columns. Boldan says that no two days are alike at a small daily newspaper. On a typical morning, he checks in with his reporters to provide reporting and writing guidance. Next, he sifts through piles of email messages from news sources and other editors, making a range of decisions about which news stories to cover and how to cover them. Boldan also lays out some of the news pages each day.

Since his early days, Boldan has been a newsroom leader and technology enthusiast. Today, he works closely with Forum's digital team as they develop interactive news and advertising strategies to drive traffic to the company's revenue-generating websites. On sites such as Ag Week and Northland Outdoors, the team aggregates specialized content from the thirty-five Forum-owned newspapers.

"My staff uses Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest for reporting and crowdsourcing," Boldan says. "Much of our success depends upon serving local markets. For example, one of them serves several four-year colleges, so its readership is much more digitally oriented."

Reflecting upon the many college graduates whose careers he has helped to launch, Boldan notes that journalism provides an excellent launching pad for any type of media work. "Starting in print journalism, you can enter so many different careers in reporting, editing, public relations, or other media sectors," he says. "If you can write well and you are willing to put in the work and look for opportunities, you can go far in your career."

## Versatility is the Key

Journalists at print and online publications devote considerable time to writing hard news stories to serve readers with information about events, issues, and people that are vital to their everyday lives. From accidents, disasters, crime, and the courts to speeches and obituaries, hard news stories stand as the prevalent story form in the media environment. Reporters write hard news stories by placing the essential facts in the lead and the details in succeeding paragraphs. This story structure is designed to serve news audiences, who are usually harried, time pressured, and perhaps not interested in reading an entire news story on the subject. In the twenty-first century, this format works especially well for online publications.

At the same time, most reporters also write many feature stories over the course of their careers. Features are composed in a more leisurely and descriptive style. They explore their topics and human subjects in greater depth than hard news stories. Feature stories play a valuable role in the daily news lineup because they provide readers with entertainment and an escape from daily routines. They are "evergreen" in nature and do not have to be as timely, local, or hard hitting as hard news stories. Reporters write features using a range of story structures, some of which we will explore in this chapter.

Today, hard news stories are often written in feature story formats. For the past several decades, media organizations have listened harder to their readers who said they wanted to see more articles written in a livelier fashion and stressing human interest. *USA Today* was one of the first publications to begin using feature formats for hard news stories in the early 1980s. For you, this makes news writing a more creative endeavor than it might have been a generation ago.

Virtually all media organizations today operate in a multiplatform environment in which they produce print, video, and audio versions of stories simultaneously. If you aspire to work in this environment, you will need to develop multiplatform writing and production skills to produce online news content. This includes the ability to write copy for video and audio stories, shoot and edit photographs, and record and edit video and audio. If you can build a set of solid reporting skills, learn to write news proficiently, and then execute those skills in the digital environment, you can look ahead to a bright career path in journalism.

## The Multiplatform Story

In the twenty-first century, most newspapers operate as online entities supplemented by print editions. This trend is driven by readers' technology preferences and the ways in which they prefer to receive and read their news. A 2016 Pew Research Center survey found that audiences are increasingly using digital sources for their news, with mobile device use creating most of the new growth. The survey also found that more than 50 percent of US adults now get their news on social media. Publishers want to be where their readers are.

A 2014 international readership study by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism found that more readers now access their news through a greater number of digital devices than ever before—primarily smartphones and tablets. In that study, 58 percent of respondents said they used a smartphone for news, an increase of 12 percent over 2013.<sup>2</sup>

Going digital has provided newspapers with a valuable set of advantages. As the above data indicate, it enables them to reach audiences who might not purchase the print versions of their publications. This means greater circulation, and in some cases, greater advertising revenues. Online versions also provide newspapers the opportunity to run the multiplatform story, which feature digital content including audio and video elements, links to related stories, and links to Twitter, Facebook, and other social media channels to enhance the story experience for digital readers. Here is an excerpt from a multiplatform story written by Wade Rupard of the *Grand Forks Herald* (Figure 5.1):

As online editions gain popularity, newspapers are examining best practices for writing in online editions. They are adapting hard news writing styles to work better for multimedia content and to match the way people read online content. In general, you should observe these principles when writing copy that will be read on small smartphone screens, tablets, and computer screens:

Figure 5.1 Multiplatform Story Example: *Grand Forks Herald*: "Determined Hawk' Adopted as New UND Fighting Hawks Logo"

To read the rest of this story, along with the dialogue generated via social media between participants and readers, search the article title online.



Source: Rupard, Wade and Wagner, Steve. Forum Communications Co. (2016).

- In most cases, write a summary lead. This type of lead summarizes the essential news elements for the reader. Depending on the story, you may also use other types of leads.
- In most cases, use the inverted pyramid story structure. Here, the writer arranges the story elements in descending order of importance.
- Provide a clear nut graf. This is a paragraph that tells readers in a nutshell what the story is about and why it is news.
- Use short sentences, but vary sentence length and structure.
- Place attributions for quotations at the end of sentences.
- Place key details high up in the story, because the first four paragraphs of online news stories are the most frequently read.
- Place video, audio, and social media screen captures in stories with short captions.
   They do not need to be referred to in the story itself.

As noted in <u>Chapter 4</u>, today's journalists write multiplatform stories for the converged

media. In a 2014 Poynter Institute study addressing core journalism skills, 46 percent of journalists responding said that it was important to be able to edit video. Another 53 percent said it was important to shoot and edit photographs, and 38 percent said it was important to record and edit audio. Chapter 6 covers writing video and audio news content. You will find material on blog writing in Chapter 10.

## Writing the Hard News Story

Recall that in <u>Chapter 4</u> we discussed how to use the Professional Strategy Triangle, including the *six situational news values* and the *5 Ws and H topic points* to generate story ideas and report the news. We also learned how media professionals conduct research and run interviews. Now, after gathering all that information and doing some hard thinking, it's finally time to sit down and write the hard news story.

### The News Lead

All hard news stories begin with a news lead. This is a sentence written to briefly explain the essential facts of the story so the reader can easily grasp them. Ask seasoned journalists, and they will tell you that the lead is the most important part of any news story. Like the first blocks laid in a concrete foundation, the lead provides the groundwork on which the remainder of the story must firmly rest. The lead establishes the context for the rest of your story and sets the tone for it. The body of the news story must logically flow from this opening and make sense based upon it. That's why even experienced journalists find the lead to be one of the most difficult elements of the story to write. As always, accuracy and objectivity are imperative.

## Writing the summary lead

Reporters usually begin hard news stories with a summary lead that states the central point of the story and encapsulates the key facts in an easy-to-understand fashion for the reader. They build their summary lead from the two sets of points first introduced in <a href="#">Chapter 4</a>:

The six situational news values

- 1. Impact
- 2. Proximity
- 3. Timeliness
- 4. Conflict
- 5. Prominence
- 6. Oddity or novelty

### The 5 Ws and H topic points

- 1. Who
- 2. What
- 3. When
- 4. Where
- 5. Why
- 6. How

These points form the building blocks of the lead and the remainder of the news story. Once you have finished your background research and reporting, think carefully about which of the above news elements are essential to your *audience* in this *situation*. You will not be able to stress all of them in your lead. It is up to you, your editor, and your news sense to determine which ones are most significant, to select which to report first, and to decide how to sequence the remaining facts and details.

Consider the following summary lead. Which of the six situational news values and five topic points does it emphasize?

The Leon County coroner confirmed Saturday that the body found in Waldo is Willard Andrew Beers.

In writing this lead, the reporter decided that *proximity* and *timeliness* were the key situational news values. Drawing upon the 5 Ws and H topic points, this lead begins with the *what*, proceeds to the *when* and *where*, and then concludes with the *who* point.



According to the Professional Strategy Triangle, your situation and audience also help determine which elements to stress in the news lead. Think about the community in which your readers live. Would Beers's death be major news in a big city as opposed to a small, close-knit community? Is Beers a private citizen or a well-known public figure? Turning to the news audience, Beers's death will obviously affect his family, friends, and community members. They will first want to know what happened, when and where it happened, how it happened, and who was involved.

After writing a summary lead, the reporter would fill in additional facts and details in the second and third paragraphs of the story:

A jogger found Beers' body at around 9 a.m. Thursday in a wooded area of Heartwood Park in the 800 block of Clymer Avenue in Waldo. Beers, 48, was reported missing on Tuesday, Sept. 15, when he left his home for a walk.

The Leon County Sheriff's Office said that Beers' .38 caliber revolver was also missing when he left his home. An autopsy Friday determined that Beers died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound. The sheriff's office continues to investigate the death.

## Lead writing guidelines

When writing news leads, always observe the following:

1. *Use subject-verb-object sentence structure*. Recall that we covered this principle in Chapter 3. Do not confuse readers with a long qualifying clause, as shown in this example:

#### Incorrect:

In the most significant judicial election involving a contested state judiciary since 1844, three Democratic candidates won seats on the Supreme Court of Virginia Tuesday.

#### Correct:

Three Democratic candidates won seats on the Supreme Court of Virginia Tuesday.

2. *Lead with the news*. Get straight to your point. Do not begin your news lead with the attribution:

#### Incorrect:

According to the Queen Anne Police Department, two weeks after Jared Hall Jr. disappeared from his South Hills home, a hiker found him alive yesterday at the entrance to Rocky Grove State Park.

### Correct:

Two weeks after Jared Hall Jr. disappeared from his South Hills home, a hiker found him alive yesterday at the entrance to Rocky Grove State Park, according to the Queen Anne Police Department.

3. *Use strong, active verbs.* These capture the color and action of a news event, and paint a picture in the reader's mind. In general, try to avoid using forms of the *to be* verb phrase.

### Passive:

A new property expansion plan has been developed by architects for the Cleary Creek Mall in Midvale.

### Active:

Architects for the Cleary Creek Mall in Midvale have developed a new expansion plan for the property.

4. *Remain objective.* As the reporter, your job is to gather the facts and convey the news to your readers in straight-ahead fashion. You are not supposed to provide your own opinion, advocate, or provide commentary in the lead:

### Opinionated:

The DeValdi building in the downtown art district won't be empty for long, thanks to a new Italian restaurant that will soon be moving in for everyone to enjoy.

### Objective:

The DeValdi building in the downtown art district won't be empty for long because a new Italian restaurant will soon be opening there.

As you try your hand at writing leads, do not become frustrated if it takes considerable time to get them right. Experiment with different approaches, distilling the words until you have arrived at precisely what you need to say. Do not be afraid to just put the words down on your computer screen and start working with them. You may be tempted to write the first thing that comes into your head or to abandon the task when it gets difficult. Resist the urge to quit and stick with it until you have fashioned a lead that does the job.

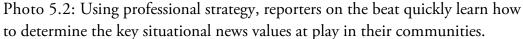
#### Craft Essential: Analyzing Summary Leads

Review the following examples of summary leads and identify the most important of the 5 Ws and H topic points used in them. What makes these the best choices for the lead?

- 1. Visitors at the Adrianna Hess Wetland Park in University Place yesterday were surprised to see Robert Redford taking a stroll along the nature trail.
  - Answer: Since Robert Redford is a celebrity and noted environmentalist, this is a who-centered lead. However, also notice that the where point is nearly as important. After all, what would this movie star be doing at such a remote location? Readers also want to know when the news occurred. If Redford was in the local area yesterday, it is definitely news.
- 2. U.S. motorists began paying an average of 10 cents less per gallon at the pump this weekend, thanks to increased oil supplies created by a boost in domestic oil production.
  - Answer: Here, the reporter emphasizes the what topic point in conveying the fact that gas prices have decreased 10 cents per gallon for motorists. At the same time, he or she also addresses the who, where, when, and especially the why points.
- 3. Maintenance crews near Olympic National Park are using a newly developed cleaning rake pulled behind tractors to pick up trash at La Push beaches this summer.
  - Answer: While including other key topic points, this lead focuses on the how component of the story by explaining how the beach cleaning rake works.

## Combining Strategies to Write a News Lead on Deadline

In the following scenario, let's examine how you might use the situational news values and the 5 Ws and H topic points to report on a news story and write a summary lead for it on deadline.





Scenario: You are a general-assignment reporter working for a small daily newspaper in a rural media market in central Kentucky. One evening, the police scanner interrupts your routine. A multi-vehicle accident has occurred on Interstate 65, about seven miles outside of your town. Your editor sends you to the scene to cover the story. You grab your cell phone and reporter's notebook, jump into the car, and head out to the accident scene.

Pulling up at the accident scene, you take a look around. You speak with the Kentucky State Patrol's public information officer, along with two other motorists and a tow truck driver. You interview these people and gather the following information:

### Immediate facts

- The accident occurred near mile marker 98 in the northbound lane of Interstate 65.
- Seven cars, one motorcycle, and a semitruck collided.
- The accident occurred on Friday, June 24, at around 7:20 p.m.
- The lead car in a group of nine vehicles spun out on the wet roadway. The car behind it appeared to have been following too closely and struck the side of the lead car.
- The semitruck, following third in line, jack-knifed sideways, and the remaining vehicles piled up behind it.
- Two people have been pronounced dead at the scene. Four others are being taken to the local hospital. Two are in critical condition.
- This section of Interstate 65 has been under construction since March. The accident occurred near a lane shift that Department of Transportation officials recently cited as unsafe.
- Traffic is now backed up for six miles and is being rerouted at Exit 91.

## Background information

• Checking weather reports, you note that the National Weather Service reported an intense thunderstorm with golf ball—size hail at around 7:10 p.m. in the vicinity of the accident. A rare microburst occurred, with wind speeds as high as 60 miles per hour near the accident scene.

With your reporting and interviewing complete, you return to your office to write this story. It's time to put the situational news values and the 5 Ws and H topic points to work as you begin your news lead.

### Additional facts and the situational news values

Impact. Two people were killed and several others injured. The traffic accident has snarled traffic for at least six miles leading up to the accident scene. The semitruck spilled its load of merchandise when the trailer broke open. The contents were spread across the highway shoulder and into the field of a local farmer. No local residents were involved in the accident.

*Proximity.* The accident occurred seven miles from town, in the same county where the majority of your readers live.

*Timeliness.* The accident occurred the evening before the next morning's edition of the paper will be printed. However, you can write the story tonight and post it immediately on your newspaper's website.

*Conflict.* As a force of nature, the sudden thunderstorm may have contributed to this accident.

*Prominence.* According to the information you have so far, no public figures or celebrities were involved in the accident.

Oddity or novelty. The National Weather Service reported this thunderstorm as a rare

microburst, unlike what they have previously seen in this region of the state. Based on the news values at work in this story, you determine that impact, proximity, timeliness, and oddity are the most significant elements to stress in your lead.

## The 5 Ws and H topic points

*Who:* This relates to the motorists involved in the accident, especially those killed or injured.

What: A major highway accident occurred.

When: June 24 at approximately 7:20 p.m.

Where: The accident occurred near mile marker 98 in the northbound lane of Interstate 65.

Why: The vehicles involved in the accident were entering a dangerous area of the construction zone. According to witnesses, the second vehicle was closely following the first one. The sudden thunderstorm may have also contributed to this accident. How: You are still attempting to determine this. However, based on your interviewing, you know that the second vehicle was following too closely and struck the side of the first vehicle. The semitruck then jack-knifed sideways, causing the chain reaction.

## Writing this story's news lead

Now you are ready to begin writing your news lead. Of course, it will be impossible to stress every potential news element in the lead. Instead, you must pick and choose those that are most significant to your situation and audience. Here is one possibility:

A sudden thunderstorm may have contributed to a fatal nine-vehicle accident Friday evening in a construction zone on Interstate 65 North near Wyattville.

This news lead stresses the situational news values of impact, proximity, and timeliness. It also addresses the what, where, when, and why topic points.

Photo 5.3: Using professional strategy, reporters on the beat quickly learn how to figure out the five Ws and H topic points in their stories.



#### Hard News Story Structure

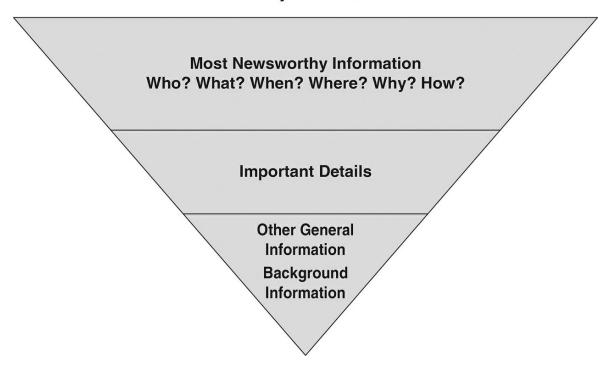
As with lead writing, organizing your news story is a strategic choice. You can use the Professional Strategy Triangle to help arrange your facts and quotes in a logical order as dictated by your situation and audience.

Are you writing a hard news story containing information that a time-pressed reader needs to know now and will likely be reading from a mobile device? Or, are you writing a laid-back feature story that your readers might enjoy sitting down and reading at their leisure? The answer makes a big difference. A well-structured story quickly gives readers the information they need and enables them to easily move through the story.

The inverted pyramid structure (Figure 5.2) is a simple one that serves readers well. Here, the reporter arranges the story elements in descending order of importance. In the lead, he or she conveys the most newsworthy facts—those that readers must know even if they do not finish the rest of the story. The second and third paragraphs continue with the next-most important set of facts—those that elaborate upon information contained in the lead. Key details, contrasting viewpoints, and quotes from sources may be introduced here as well. In similar fashion, later paragraphs trail off into secondary details or related topics. An inverted pyramid story that runs too long can easily be trimmed from the bottom without sacrificing any essential facts. In online publications, lengthy front-page stories can run in their entirety, but the inverted pyramid structure enables editors to provide links to the rest of the story for readers who care to finish it. Hard news stories using the inverted pyramid structure do not end with conclusions. Instead, they simply trail off to less significant facts and details. The story's conclusion is already contained in its lead.

Figure 5.2 The Inverted Pyramid

#### **Story Structure**



In addition, the inverted pyramid structure provides you with a mental strategy to sift through your facts and prioritize them from most to least important. You will use this story structure throughout your media writing career.

## Writing the body of the hard news story

Consider this 500-word hard news story by John Myers of the *Duluth News Tribune* in Duluth, Minnesota. This piece is written according to the inverted pyramid diagram in Figure 5.2 above. Here, Myers demonstrates that the inverted pyramid structure does not have to be dull and dry. It can be used to tell a compelling story packed with drama and emotion.

Lakeside home rocked by fire, explosions; no one injured, damage estimated at \$100K

Summary lead: Fire and explosions severely damaged a Lakeside home late Monday morning, but both occupants escaped without injury.

This lead emphasizes the what, where, and when topic points. The next paragraph begins to address the why and the how topic points:

Paragraph 2: The cause of the fire was not immediately clear, but much of the damage to the single-story brick home at 810 Rockview Court appeared to be centered in the attached garage, where gaping holes exposed a charred interior.

As the story continues, notice how the following paragraphs provide second- and third-level

details to fill in the story's main points. Myers considers his situation and audience, anticipating the questions readers will ask next:

Paragraph 3: Duluth firefighters were on the scene within minutes and quickly had the fire knocked down.

Paragraph 4: The home suffered smoke, heat and water damage, but firefighters on the scene said the fireproof wall between the home and garage prevented worse damage to the house itself.

Paragraph 5: The fire, first reported just after 11 a.m., quickly spread to a Ford Explorer SUV parked in the driveway, destroying it. The fire also blew out windows in the house next door where heat from the flames appeared to bubble paint and melt tires on a boat trailer.

Next, Myers brings his story alive with quotes and key observations from sources close to the story:

Paragraph 6: "We heard one loud explosion, then two smaller ones. It was really loud. Then we looked out and saw the fireball," said Nancy Gregg, who lives four houses away, and called 911 immediately.

Paragraph 7: Her husband, Paul Gregg, rushed to the scene but said flames were too extensive to enter the house.

Paragraph 8: "The dispatcher told us that everyone was out, and that's a good thing because I would have never got inside to help anyone. There was just too much flame," he said.

Paragraph 9: An 11-year-old girl and her nanny were in the house when they heard odd noises coming from the doorbell.

Paragraph 10: "I was on the couch watching TV and the doorbell started making a buzzing sound. We got out of there fast," said Kaylin Ebinger, the nanny.

Paragraph 11: The home is owned by Tobbi Stager and his wife, Paige, who both were away at work at the time of the incident.

Paragraph 12: "I have no idea what could have caused this. The explosions were probably propane and gasoline in the garage. But I can't imagine that's where it started," Stager said after arriving on the scene about 15 minutes after the fire started. Paragraph 13: Damage was initially estimated at \$100,000, according to the Duluth Fire Department. The cause of the fire is being investigated by the Duluth Fire Department Fire Marshal's Office.

Myers then makes a transition to a significant human interest story element—the family pet:

Paragraph 14: The family dog, Teddy, ran away from the scene during the commotion of the fire.

Paragraph 15: "I went back in to get him and got him out of the house, but he jumped out of my arms and ran away," Ebinger said.

Paragraph 16: The small Shih Tzu-Bichon Frise mix was found later by some

children, safe and sound, hiding in a neighbor's bushes.

Paragraph 17: Firefighters recovered computers and photographs from the fire quickly, but Stager said he was more worried about the dog's well-being than the home or its contents.

Myers finishes this story on a satisfying note with a concluding quote from someone most affected by the fire:

Paragraph 18: "It's insured. No one was hurt. We'll make it," Stager said. "This is a good excuse to spend the rest of the summer at the cabin."

Source: Myers, John and Lubbers, Rick. Forum Communications Co. (2016).

The War Room
The War Room

# Writing the Highway Traffic Accident Story Using the Inverted Pyramid

Recall the highway traffic accident scenario introduced earlier in this chapter. Working from those facts, write a summary lead and a 350- to 400-word inverted pyramid story. Do not look at the finished example below until you have drafted your story. Prepare to share it with the class.

### Finished example:

A sudden thunderstorm contributed to a fatal nine-vehicle accident Friday evening in a construction zone on Interstate 65 North near Wyattville.

The pileup, which occurred around 7:15 p.m. near mile marker 98, snarled traffic for at least six miles and more than eight hours. Rita Dockerly, 53, of Lexington and James Weckerly, 74, of Martin, Tennessee, were pronounced dead at the scene. Four other motorists were taken to Wyattville Regional Hospital and treated for injuries, with two in critical condition, according to Marcy Timmerman of the Kentucky State Patrol.

The accident occurred in a one-lane construction zone near mile marker 98 on Interstate 65 North. Since March, Kentucky Department of Transportation officials have reported three accidents on this section of highway.

According to the National Weather Service, a sudden thunderstorm known as a microburst unleashed golf ball-size hail and winds up to 60 mph at around 7:10 p.m. near the scene of the accident. The hail created slippery conditions, which Timmerman said contributed to the accident.

"In all my years of driving, I have never seen a storm come up so fast," said Fred Gonzales, a motorist who narrowly missed hitting the car in front of him. "I hit the brakes and skidded just like it was wintertime. I'm just glad I was going slower and keeping some distance between me and the other cars."

Timmerman said that the first car in the pileup, driven by 34-year-old Nicholas James of Paducah, slowed down suddenly as it entered a sharp curve in the construction zone and began to slide sideways. The second car, driven by 19-year-old Tiffany Bradford of Wyattville, struck the rear of the James vehicle. Bradford was cited for following too closely and driving too fast for weather conditions. "From eyewitness accounts, we have concluded that when the storm hit, Bradford didn't allow enough room between her vehicle and the one in front of her," said Timmerman.

According to Timmerman, the initial collision caused a semitruck, driven by 54-year-old Lee Nguyen of New York, to slow down suddenly and begin to skid. Several other cars behind Nguyen struck the side of the trailer and crashed into one another. The last vehicle in the accident was a motorcycle driven by David Heileman, 43, of Coon Rapids, Iowa. After grazing the right rear panel of the vehicle in front of him, he coasted to the shoulder and was uninjured.

According to the Kentucky State Patrol, the investigation is ongoing.

## Using Quotations

Journalists use quotations, or quotes, to connect statements of fact and opinion to their sources. Quotes lend balance to news stories with contrasting viewpoints from sources and enable readers to make judgments about their credibility. Quotes take readers inside the story, allowing them to view the news through the eyes of the people who are making it.

As a reporter in the field, you'll notice that sources will speak to you in ways that may be colorful, witty, or emotional. They will use words and turns of phrase that you cannot improve upon with your own words. Quotes reveal much about a source's character. From a writing perspective, quotes provide a necessary counterpoint to your own narrative. They break up your text and create an agreeable rhythm, adding new voices to your story. In general, if you have good source quotes to use, you should run them early and often.

In the interview, asking good questions and encouraging sources to elaborate or provide examples or anecdotes yields rich material for quotes. Be sure to double-check your quotes for accuracy and completeness. You may need to reconfirm them with your sources. In most cases, you will use one of the following types of quotes:

#### Direct Quotes

Use direct quotes when your source makes a statement that is significant, controversial, or colorful. A direct quote encompasses the source's entire statement exactly as he or she said it, enclosed in quote marks, and attributed to the source. Consider this example:

"Because of the unstable soils, we had to abandon this building site," said Tim McMillan, lead engineer for the hospital construction project. "Since then, we have retained several local realtors to help us look for new sites. This will be a very exhaustive process."

Do not use direct quotes simply because you have them. Make sure they are of good quality, that they advance your story, and that they do not merely repeat facts you have already stated. If a quotation runs more than three sentences long, consider paraphrasing it or breaking it into smaller quotes placed in different parts of the story.

## Indirect Quotes

The indirect quote is a paraphrase of a direct quote. Perhaps the source did not state his or her ideas effectively, made other remarks that were unclear or irrelevant, or gave information that was important but routine. Indirect quotes allow you to rephrase what your source said in a clearer, more concise fashion. Suppose that you are covering a story on the medical marijuana legalization debate in your state. You record this quote from a participant at a rally:

#### Original:

"Yeah, I've been bipolar for years, but the marijuana is so important . . . I would have never gotten off the pills I was taking before," said Marilee Phipps, a 43-year-old Aldeen resident.

#### Paraphrased:

Marilee Phipps, a 43-year-old Aldeen resident, suffers from bipolar disorder. She said she would have never have been able to quit taking pills for her condition if not for medical marijuana.

## Partial Quotes

Reporters may try to piece together a partial quote that is weak or confusing on their own. However, the result is often no better. Consider this example:

Michael Keacher, a ranger at Rainbow Lake State Park, said that his staff had been "grappling" with numerous incidents of "reckless vandalism" on park property in recent weeks. Keacher said that if things do not quiet down soon, he would be "forced to take drastic measures."

Besides making for choppy writing, partial quotes used this way can lead the reader to think the quoted phrases are somehow unusual or ironic when they are not. It is almost always better to simply paraphrase what your source said and run it as an indirect quote.

### Can Quotes Be Changed?

In the interviewing and writing process, you may encounter sources who do not state their ideas effectively or make statements that are not appropriate for your news story. You may be tempted to delete a few words or rephrase your source's statement to clean it up a bit. While journalists debate the advisability of this practice, the safest route is to either use your source's words exactly or, if you cannot do so, paraphrase their statements.

The Associated Press concurs. "Never alter quotations even to correct minor grammatical errors or word usage," admonishes the *AP Stylebook*. "Casual minor tongue slips may be removed by using ellipses but even that should be done with extreme caution." The AP adds, "If there is a question about a quote, either don't use it or ask the speaker to clarify."

Altering a quote even slightly can change its meaning and create inaccuracies in your story. It can also compromise the reputation of your source and you as a reporter. Play it safe and steer by the AP's advice.

### Handling Attribution

Attribution tells readers who the sources of your information are and enables them to judge the credibility of your story based on your sources' identities. Proper attribution boosts reader confidence in your news story and avoids creating the perception that statements in it are based on your personal opinions.

Here are some general guidelines for handling attribution:

- 1. Always provide attribution for
  - a. direct and indirect quotes.
  - b. statements of opinion.
  - c. statements about controversial issues.
  - d. facts that are not well established.
- 2. Attribute information to people, documents, or publications. Do not attribute information to places or organizations.

Incorrect:

The Budget Office said today that the state's deficit is projected to increase 12 percent in the upcoming year.

#### Correct:

Budget Office director Nancy Wilkins said today that the state's deficit is projected to increase 12 percent in the upcoming year.

3. Attribute information as early as possible in the quote. In general, place the attribution at the beginning or ending of the first sentence. Do not make the reader guess at who is speaking.

#### Incorrect:

"Last year was a tough one for the American people, and we all understand that. At the same time, let's remember that failures of the past don't dictate what is possible in the future. I'm confident that working together, members of Congress can set us back on track with a budget that works for all of us," the president said.

#### Correct:

"Last year was a rough one for the American people, and we all understand that," the president said. "At the same time, let's remember that failures of the past don't dictate what is possible in the future. I'm confident that working together, members of Congress can set us back on track with a budget that works for all of us."

- 4. Attribute often enough so that readers can tie the information to the correct sources. Save readers from guessing who is saying what.
- 5. Identify sources properly. Full identification enables readers to understand who your sources are and what they bring to your story.
  - a. Identify most sources by name, age, and address.
  - b. Identify public and private officials by name and job title.
  - c. On second and subsequent references, use last name only.
- 6. Use *said* as the verb of attribution. You may be tempted to add variety to your writing by using such verbs as *stated*, *commented*, *replied*, *warned*, *noted*, or *suggested*. However, each of these verbs implies something more than *said* and so may not be appropriate for your story. *Said* is the best choice because it is impartial and accurate.

#### Incorrect:

"Due to the ongoing theater renovations, our regular show schedule may not continue throughout the season," warned manager Meredith Rousch.

#### Correct:

"Due to the ongoing theater renovations, our regular show schedule may not continue throughout the season," said manager Meredith Rousch.

Pro Strategy Connection

## Want to Boost Your News Writing Skills? Check Out These Tips From an Editor

Are you eager to improve your news writing skills? Kelly Boldan, editor of the *West Central Tribune* in Willmar, Minnesota, offers some simple advice:

- 1. Get off your butt and write, write, write. Thanks to blogs and other online platforms, it's never been easier to find an audience and write for it. Blog about politics, current books and movies, or anything else that interests you. "Get involved with student media on your campus," Boldan says. "Whenever I look at a résumé, if that student has not worked for the student paper, it concerns me. When you go home for the summer, crank out a few news stories for your hometown newspaper. You've got to get the experience somewhere, doing something."
- 2. Read and emulate the work of professional journalists who are doing the best work in the field. "Then, try to find your own voice by writing about topics that interest you most," Boldan adds. "Whether it's social justice, sports, or the environment, learn about it and write about it. Your voice will come out."
- 3. Proofread on paper. These days, nearly everyone below age thirty has grown up reading everything on screens. Boldan says this weakens our ability to proofread and edit our work. "A good reporter always prints out the story and reads it aloud from paper. You see things differently than you would on a screen."
- 4. Accept that another set of eyes on your work will always pick up something you failed to notice. It can be difficult to get used to having your work edited. "My early editors were especially tough on me, and I'm glad for it now," Boldan says. "Just remember, when that story is edited and published, it's not the editor's byline on that story—it's yours. And in the end, the story is better for it. At the same time, a good editor does not edit the reporter's voice out of the story. I have always worked to leave it there."
- 5. Get out of the library or classroom and do something outside your normal range of experience. "Watch. Observe," Boldan concludes. "There is so much you can pick up by interviewing someone in person that you would never get through the phone or email."

#### Writing the Feature Story

In contrast to the hard news story, the feature story deals with "soft news," exploring the people, places, events, and things that surround us. Feature stories focus on human interest topics including entertainment, ironic situations, personalities, animals, cultural events, and others.

Features differ from hard news stories in that they may not always rely upon the six situational news values. They are compelling even though most do not directly affect the lives of audience members. Instead, they tell of people and situations that illustrate the realities of life in our communities and the world. Unlike hard news stories, features can be "evergreen" and may not have to be as timely as hard news stories.

Features play a valuable role in the daily news lineup because they humanize the news, providing entertainment and a temporary escape from routine. They also enable you as a writer to move your storytelling skills in a new direction. Here, you can write alternate styles of leads, build your narrative around new story structures, and write in a more leisurely and descriptive style that would not be possible using only hard news writing approaches. You may also draw upon techniques used by fiction writers including plot, dialogue, characterization, description, anecdotes, and sensory details.

Photo 5.4: Feature stories focus on human interest topics ranging from community events to unusual occupations and play a valuable role in the daily news lineup.



At the same time, note that feature stories are still *journalistic* in nature. They are not works of fiction, personal essays, editorials, or opinion pieces. You must still remain objective, report only the facts, quote your sources accurately, verify all information, and follow all the journalistic guidelines presented in this text. In other words, news feature writers are still journalists at heart.

## Feature Story Categories

Feature story categories can range widely. Here are a few of the more common types that readers find universally appealing. Notice how all of them emphasize human interest:

- the historical or commemorative feature
- the personality profile
- the explanatory feature
- the how-to-do-it feature
- the participatory feature
- the travel or adventure feature
- the hobby feature
- the odd occupation feature
- the first-person feature
- the medical feature
- the business feature

## Looking for Feature Story Topics

There are no dull subjects. There are only dull writers."

—H. L. Mencken, Journalist

All the reporting basics we've discussed—including the Professional Strategy Triangle in Chapter 4 and the use of curiosity and observation—apply to generating ideas for feature stories.



To review, the *active thinking process* at the center of the triangle tells us to:

- 1. consider situation and audience together.
- 2. creatively envision the final story.
- 3. actively learn.
- 4. refocus thinking.
- 5. write.

Good feature writers are curious about what they see and hear, and want to know more. They dig for unexplored issues, angles, or people under the surface of routine events. Suppose you notice that hardly anyone seems to be attending weekend entertainment events hosted by your college or university. Is the entertainment irrelevant or poorly advertised? Are students working long hours outside class to support themselves? Perhaps they are staying home to party in their dorm rooms or apartments. If this is the case, could your campus have a substance abuse problem? Think about what is *really* going on underneath your observation.

For inspiration, you may also wish to return to the six situational news values covered earlier in this chapter. Which potential feature stories might affect your readers the most? Which ones take place near them? Which involve prominent individuals or are highly unusual? Consider this example: Ray Lambrecht, a retired car dealer from Pierce, Nebraska, recently decided to auction off his collection of 507 vintage Chevrolet automobiles. Lambrecht had been collecting the Chevrolets for the past five decades, stashing them year after year in a warehouse or on his farm when they didn't sell. The auction drew more than ten thousand car lovers from as far away as Norway and Brazil and fetched more than a half-million dollars within the first few hours.

Think about how many of the situational news values would figure prominently in a

feature story about this car auction. Certainly, *oddity* or *novelty* ranks highly. After all, how often does one find more than five hundred unused vintage cars stashed away for more than fifty years? If you were writing this feature story for a vintage car publication, then impact and timeliness would also act as key news values. Finally, think of how many other exciting feature stories you might be able to spin off this main news story using your curiosity and observational skills.

Here are some tips for finding ideas that will generate feature stories:

- Go someplace you normally wouldn't go and walk around the area. Clear your mind, open your eyes and ears, and observe what is going on around you. What are people doing? What are they talking about?
- Talk to friends and also to people you don't know. Ask them what interests them.
- Find out how people in your readership area spend their time or money.
- Look for spinoffs based on hard news stories in local or national publications. Which stories are unusual or surprising? Which ones describe significant trends or issues?
- Study polls and statistics that relate to your readership.
- Read billboards to learn about popular products, services, and ideas.

## Writing the Feature Lead

Like the summary lead, the feature lead must grab the reader, set the tone and pace for the story, and move the reader into the narrative. Here are several categories of feature leads to consider:

The delayed lead. A delayed lead postpones identifying the person, place, or event addressed in the story. After a few paragraphs, the story includes a nut graf to summarize its main point for the reader.

#### Example:

Tim Bussen was unhappy to find his garbage cans knocked over and garbage strewn all over the yard every Tuesday morning after he put them out for pick-up the night before. Securing them with nylon ties didn't work. Neither did chaining them to a tree in the front yard. Frustrated, Bussen decided he was going to catch the offending critter. For the next two weeks, he set out traps. He found them tripped each morning, but with nothing in them. Next, Bussen borrowed a neighbor's dog cage, rigged it with a fresh pork chop and a spring door, staked it into the ground, and anticipated what he would do with the opossum or raccoon he was going to see the next morning.

#### Nut graf:

But Bussen didn't find a raccoon or opossum in his homemade trap. Instead, he found a cat—a very big cat. Bussen had trapped a mountain lion, the first one caught in Pennsylvania since 1910.

*The descriptive lead.* This type of lead describes a person, a setting, or a situation with verbs, adjectives, and adverbs to paint a picture in the reader's mind.

#### Example:

High-pitched shrieks fill the air. Collective energy overflows as the young crowd works itself up in anticipation of the big concert. Two months ago no one really knew about him. Then, an album release, social media buzz, and in eight weeks, he's the rapper du jour. No, he wasn't famous when the social committee at Grand Point University booked his concert. But now he is, and local teens are ecstatic. He's Wiz Khalifa, and every teenager within 50 miles seems to be gathered outside of Carper Auditorium trying to get a seat for the show.

The ironic lead. Ironic leads build on twists of fate in which seemingly normal situations play out in an unexpected way.

Example:

The old man was a fixture in the neighborhood. He told everyone he was a retired engineer and general handyman. He enjoyed fixing kids' toys and neighbors' sewing machines. He repaired garden tools and even rebuilt washing machines. Last Thursday, as the FBI took Wilhelm Heinnen away, his neighbors learned that he used to build Nazi machines of mass murder at Auschwitz concentration camp during World War II.

The direct-address lead. The direct-address lead reaches out to readers and speaks to them using the second-person (you) voice. It can be conversational in tone and grab reader attention.

#### Example:

It happens every summer. You're taking your family for a drive along Mississippi Drive in Itasca State Forest. Suddenly you come upon three local kids riding their bikes down the middle of the road. Not being used to auto traffic, they are ignoring you and skirting dangerously close to your front fender. You fear that honking your horn will scare them.

The quotation lead. Although not often used, direct quote leads can quickly introduce the reader to a main story character. A good quotation lead can set the stage for the rest of the story and often occurs in the context of other factors central to the story's theme.

#### Example:

"I like being the mother bird, I guess," says Johnsonville cockatiel breeder Chris Billett, commenting on her brood of 90 cockatiels and eight children. "They imprint on me as babies, and I hand-feed them with a syringe until they're old enough to crack their own seed—the baby birds, that is."

Notice that the writer has chosen one of the best quotes from her interview notes—one that is colorful and summarizes the story subject's personality or a key story theme. Before using a quotation lead, ask yourself how it will serve your audience.

The question lead. Another uncommon type of lead, the question lead can grab readers' attention with a query that relates to them.

#### Example:

How can you create your own landscape design without first seeing how someone else did the job? That's the question landscape architect Lillian James would like someone to answer.

A question lead should not pose a simple yes-or-no question. For example, if your lead read, "Are you afraid of heights?" your reader might simply answer "no" and click over to another story. Many editors do not allow question leads on the grounds that news stories are supposed to answer questions, not ask them. Occasionally, this type of lead may be appropriate. Use a question lead only when the rest of your story can quickly supply the answer.

## Organizing the Feature Story

Once you have generated a feature story idea and worked with your editor to narrow it down to a manageable focus, it's time to conduct research and run interviews as you would for a hard news story. Then, after refocusing your thinking, and perhaps the story angle, begin organizing and writing your story. As always, carefully consider your situation and what your audience needs.

Figure 5.3 The Pyramid Structure



Feature writers use a variety of different narrative structures for their stories, including the pyramid structure (Figure 5.3). This is the conceptual opposite of the inverted pyramid. Here, the writer creates a delayed lead to build suspense through foreshadowing, and then writes a nut graf to summarize the gist of the story. The writer then continues with the rest of the story in chronological fashion and finishes with a climax or creative twist at the end.

## Other Feature Story Structures

Feature stories do not necessarily adhere to any one structure. The only limit is your creativity and what works best for your audience. Beyond the pyramid structure shown above, you can draw upon other structures, including the following:

- 1. *Problem–solution.* The problem–solution structure lays out a problem and then provides the solution, showing examples of the problem and anecdotes.
- 2. *Repetitive*. The repetitive structure introduces an idea or concept and then repeats it to make the point.
- 3. *Catalog*. The catalog structure classifies and explains people, places, or events in a thought-provoking manner. This structure works especially well for travel features.

## Writing the Body of the Feature Story

As you begin writing the body of your feature, decide how you want to pull back the curtain and introduce your characters. Do you want to surprise the reader somewhere in the story? How will you introduce conflicts and resolve them? Decide where you will create transitions and how the story will conclude. Think again about your readers and what they might want to know first, next, and last. As you write, work to create an agreeable rhythm in the story by weaving your character's quotes around your own narrative. Above all, your feature story must read coherently and make sense to the average reader.

For inspiration, recall the people you interviewed and places you visited for your feature story. If you were listening carefully during the interviews, you probably noticed a certain story plot emerging as they described events in their lives. You may have noticed subplots emerging as well. Work to build your story around those plots you observed. Vividly describe colorful details, scenes, and anecdotes. You can also emphasize the personalities and mannerisms of your characters to enliven your story.

Be specific. Don't just tell your readers; show them and paint a picture in their minds. For example, a vivid description from a feature story on a Christmas festival might read as follows:

Entering the fairgrounds was like stepping back almost 150 years into a scene from a Charles Dickens book. More than 100 old-fashioned storefronts wound through the grounds, elaborately decorated with crafts, toys, ornaments, and other gifts. Horse-drawn carriages rolled slowly through the crowds, passing roving entertainers dressed in period costumes. Christmas carols rang through the air.

Conclude your feature story on a satisfying note—perhaps with a quote, anecdote, or key phrase repeated from earlier in the story. Feature writers sometimes use the circle technique, in which the story begins and ends with the same idea. Other times, they may choose a surprise ending, which works especially well with chronological stories. The main idea is to make the story's ending as satisfying as its beginning.

#### Summary

- 1. Discuss the components of a multiplatform story. The summary lead and inverted pyramid work well in multiplatform stories. Introductions should be brief, and clear nut grafs are essential. Video, audio, and social media screen captures can be placed in stories with short captions.
- 2. Write a hard news story using a summary lead and inverted pyramid structure. The summary lead is built upon the six situational news values and the 5 Ws and H topic points. The inverted pyramid structure places story elements in descending order of importance.
- 3. Quote sources effectively using direct quotes, indirect quotes, and partial quotes. Direct quotes encompass the source's entire statement exactly as he or she said it, enclosed in quotation marks. Indirect quotes are paraphrased statements from the source. Partial quotes of a single word or phrase are enclosed in quotation marks.
- 4. Write feature stories using various lead styles and story structures. Feature lead styles include the delayed lead, the descriptive lead, the ironic lead, the direct-address lead, and others. Story structures include the pyramid, problem–solution, repetitive, and catalog.

## Key Terms

multiplatform story 142 summary lead 143 inverted pyramid 143 nut graf 143 hard news story 144 news lead 144 direct quote 157 indirect quote 158 partial quote 158 attribution 159 feature story 162 feature lead 165 pyramid structure 169

## Discussion Questions

- 1. Why are multiplatform stories gaining in popularity? Will there come a time when all news will be presented online in multiplatform format? Why or why not?
- 2. How does the quality of reporting and interviewing that you do for a news story affect the quality of the final written product?
- 3. Recall the six situational news values discussed in this chapter. How do audiences drive decisions about which news values should be stressed in your news story?
- 4. Discuss the major guidelines for writing summary leads.
- 5. What are the advantages of the inverted pyramid story structure for readers? For journalists and their editors? Conversely, what are its disadvantages?
- 6. Describe the three different types of quotations and guidelines for their use.
- 7. What is a feature story, and how does it differ from a hard news story?
- 8. Discuss some of the techniques you can use to generate ideas for a feature story.
- 9. Explain the importance of curiosity and strong observational skills in generating and writing a feature story.

#### Chapter Exercises

- Locate a hard news story on a subject of interest to you and redesign it as a multiplatform story. Include
  your ideas for visuals, audio and video links, social media links, and links to other stories. You can sketch
  out your ideas on paper or use any computer-based design program. Once you have finished, share your
  piece with the class and explain how the added elements help your readers to understand and use the
  news in this story.
- 2. Locate a hard news story on a current issue in your local newspaper and analyze it according to the Professional Strategy Triangle.
  - a. Start with the situation and decide what makes it news in your area. Which news values apply?
  - b. Continue with audience. Consider what people in your area may think about the issue, including positive and negative opinions. What do they need to know about this story and why?
  - c. Combine your situation and audience considerations to critique the story. Determine the most important set of facts, the next-most important set of facts, and facts that could be left out of the story.
  - d. Write up your findings in a 250-word analysis.
- 3. Working with a classmate, go online and locate a news article of your choice. The article must come from a professional news organization. Next, apply what you have learned in this chapter to determine the six situational news values and the 5 Ws and H topic points in your news story.
  - Note and discuss your conclusions. Prepare to share your findings with the class. Be sure to mention what, if anything, you would have done differently with any of the above news elements to make this a more effective story.
- 4. Working from a set of facts provided by your instructor, draft three possible summary leads for a news story. Use the Professional Strategy Triangle, the six situational news values, and the 5 Ws and H topic points to identify the most significant facts. Briefly explain how you used these elements to write the story lead.
- 5. Write a 500-word hard news story on a campus event of your choice.
  - a. Start by using the Professional Strategy Triangle to determine your news situation and news
  - b. Attend the event and cover the story. Conduct interviews with at least two sources and take careful notes. Refer back to Chapter 4 as necessary.
  - c. Write your story using a summary lead and the inverted pyramid structure according to the 5 Ws and H topic points.
  - d. Quote sources according to the principles presented in this chapter.
  - e. Proofread and edit your paper carefully. Revise as necessary.

Option: Report on and write this piece as a multiplatform story. At the news event, take photos and record audio and video. Edit these items as needed. Submit the complete story package to your instructor or upload it to the class website.

- 6. Write a 500-word hard news story on an issue that has created controversy or debate in your community.
  - a. Start by using the Professional Strategy Triangle to determine your news situation and news audience.
  - b. If the story involves meetings or hearings, attend them and cover the story. Conduct interviews with at least two sources and take careful notes. Refer back to <a href="#">Chapter 4</a> as necessary.
  - c. Write your story using a summary lead and the inverted pyramid structure according to the 5 Ws and H topic points.
  - d. Quote sources according to the principles presented in this chapter.
  - e. Proofread and edit your paper carefully. Revise as necessary.

Option: Report on and write this piece as a multiplatform story. Take photos and record audio and video. Edit these items as needed. Submit the complete story package to your instructor or upload it to the class website

- 7. Locate a feature story on a subject that interests you and try to identify its structure. Identify and mark the feature lead, and as appropriate, foreshadowing, nut graf, chronological storytelling, and climax.
- 8. Write a summary lead and a 250-word inverted pyramid news story based on the following scenario. You will need to read through the facts and quotes, reorder them as necessary, and decide which ones to stress in the lead. Do not simply string the facts together. Work from the information provided, but do not use the exact wording in writing your story. It is your job to rewrite the information so that it reads better than the facts provided below.

Scenario: The Fremont County Sheriff's Department is investigating a report of a dog being attacked by a bear.

- There have been several reports of bear sightings in the area.
- A dog suffered moderate to severe wounds and scratches.
- The dog was attacked the evening of Friday, February 19.
- The dog was attacked in the 100 block of Cheswold Lane in Mifflintown.
- The dog's owner is Monica Heinen of 343 Stonehenge Court.
- The veterinarian treating the dog reported the injuries to authorities on Monday.
- The dog is a three-year-old German shepherd named Wilhelm.
- The dog will recover but is now missing his right ear flap and half his tail had to be amputated. A tendon in his right front leg was severed. Wilhelm will limp for the rest of his life.

According to the sheriff's department report, injuries to the dog are characteristic of a bear attack. Claw marks on the dog's body clearly came from adult bear claws.

You call Mary Wyse, the wildlife biologist for Fremont County, and record this quote:

"Without a witness, we can't say exactly what happened to the dog. To be cautious, we are reminding residents to monitor pets and keep them on their property."

Next, you interview Tom Heisman, the manager of public works for Fremont County. He tells you that 1

- there are no previous records of dogs being injured by bears in your county.
- officials are putting up cameras in wooded areas near where the dog was attacked.

You record this quote from Heisman:

"We want to remind residents that bears come looking for food in neighborhoods. If you see a bear, keep a safe, respectful distance. Also, keep trash in animal-proof containers."

9. Write a 400-word feature story about a relative who has led an interesting life or has an unusual occupation or hobby. Start by preparing a list of open-ended and closed-ended questions. Next, interview this person face-to-face or by phone, as described in <a href="#">Chapter 4</a>. Write a brief personality profile about your relative using the feature writing techniques described in this chapter.

#### Additional Resources

News University: <a href="https://www.newsu.org">https://www.newsu.org</a>
The Poynter Institute: <a href="http://www.poynter.org">http://www.poynter.org</a>

Purdue University Online Writing Lab (OWL), Journalism and Journalistic Writing:

https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/735/01/

Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ): https://www.spj.org

Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) Journalists' Toolbox: www.journaliststoolbox.org/

# Chapter 6 Electronic News Writing: Radio and Television

## Chapter Outline

**Learning Objectives** Frontline Media Writing Profile: Jasmine Monroe, General Assignment Reporter, WFMJ-TV 21 News The Electronic Media Professions What Do Broadcast Journalists Do? The Professional Strategy Triangle for Broadcast News Broadcast News Writing: Seven Story Types Radio News Formats TV and Radio News Audience Visualizing Your Broadcast News Story With the Professional Strategy Triangle Writing the Broadcast News Story: Four Essential Style Elements Writing for the Ear The Broadcast Delayed Lead Conversational Story Structure Craft Essential: Using Conversational Story Structure Actualities and Sound Bites: Sound on Tape Formatting the SOT Radio Story Radio Reader Stories Radio News Packages Writing the Radio News Package Lead-In The War Room: Writing an SOT Radio Story Television News Copy The Basic Two-Column TV News Script The Television VO Story The Television VO/SOT Story Promotional and Housekeeping Copy The News Teaser Tosses Outros **Summary** Key Terms **Discussion Questions** Chapter Exercises Additional Resources

"The hardest thing about writing is the ability to communicate in the most concise yet complete way possible. In a digital age where attention spans are dropping, it is essential to choose your words wisely. My creativity and energy

levels are inspired by the urge to be different. Be as unique, interesting and attention-grabbing as possible in your writing."

—Joan Sanders, University of Mississippi

## Learning Objectives

- 1. Describe the broadcast news industry.
- 2. List the duties of a broadcast news professional.
- 3. Apply the Professional Strategy Triangle to writing a broadcast news story.
- 4. Discuss the role of actualities and sound bites in broadcast news stories.
- 5. List television news-copy style conventions.
- 6. Describe the types of radio promotional and housekeeping copy.

Frontline Media Writing Profile

Jasmine Monroe, General Assignment Reporter

WFMJ-TV 21 News, Youngstown, Ohio



Sure, Jasmine Monroe is a television news reporter. But social media is a bigger part of her job than she ever imagined.

"These days, using Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram isn't just something that's nice to do," says Monroe,

twenty-four. "It's actually one of our job requirements. We aren't just competing for television ratings, but for social media ratings. My Facebook followers may not be important to our Nielsen ratings, but they are very important to my managers."

Monroe is a Pittsburgh native who earned her bachelor's in communication from Clarion University in 2014. Following graduation, she landed her first career position at WFMJ-TV 21 News, an NBC affiliate in Youngstown, Ohio, as the live "Out and About" reporter for the weekday and weekend morning shows, roaming the four-county region on her daily beat.

Every day on the beat is a new adventure, and deadlines loom constantly. Monroe reports to the WFMJ studios at 4 a.m. each workday. "No two days are the same," she says. "Today, I was live in a restaurant, in court, and at a fire scene. Or I might get a call for an accident up on I-680. Yesterday, I was live at a 4-D ultrasound clinic that recently opened. I was actually able to see the face of a four-month-old fetus!"

Once Monroe finishes her live segments, she might have twenty minutes to write the rest of the story. She pulls out her iPhone and knocks out most of it on the way back to the WFMJ studios. She says it's hard to do her best writing on the go, in a noisy, distracting environment. She's learned to simply tune out everything else as she writes.

Typically, Monroe writes at least one news package every day. She found that broadcast writing style differs from much of what she learned in her high school and college English classes. "At first, I was surprised at how brief and punchy you have to be," she says. "I was constantly editing my work to cut down its length. I had to learn how to adapt my writing style for the television audience."

Television is a highly visual medium, so Monroe tries to think of descriptive words that will help her audience picture the news as the story runs. "Tomorrow, I will be live at a monster truck show," she says. "So in advance, I try to think of adjectives like, *big*, *dirt*, or *screaming* to describe what the event might be like."

And she never forgets her social media audiences either. Recently, she launched a new Facebook campaign titled "Monroe Can Go." Here, Monroe profiles new businesses trying to gain a foothold in the local marketplace. Although it's not televised, the campaign bolsters WFMJ's image as a positive community player, and improves the station's social media ratings. "Monroe Can Go" has now attracted 4,000 followers and 20,000 followers on the "WFMJ Today" page.

Across all media channels, careful writing and editing is key, according to Monroe. "No matter what channel you are using, your English skills need to be running at 150 percent," she concludes. "At the TV station, closed captioning means that viewers will see all of the words and punctuation marks I write. You really do have to spell words correctly and punctuate properly. Pay attention to your writing and you will go far in your media career."

#### The Electronic Media Professions

Thirty years ago there were no online media competing for audiences, no media such as YouTube, Netflix, Vimeo, and others. Broadcasters wrote news and promotional copy for radio or television stations. Some writing opportunities existed with local cable companies and public broadcasting, but that was about it. Today, many audience members get traditional television entertainment and news shows not from broadcast channels, but from online sources. Many of these online sources are actually owned and operated by the same companies that ran TV and radio stations thirty years ago, and still do. The big difference today is that when you write for these employers, your work will probably be reshaped to fit many digital media instead of just one.

Suppose you are working for a local radio station in a medium-sized market, such as Fort Wayne, Indiana. The station is likely run by a company that owns other radio stations in your market area. Perhaps the local television station and a local website that provides news and entertainment content partners with a local newspaper. You are sent out to cover a high school basketball game and write a short story as well as provide audio and video to be used in both radio and television sports coverage. You are expected to get comments from players and coaches, and to write content that can be used by web producers and your sister stations.

You write a fifteen-second radio news story and provide a sound bite that is edited down to five seconds and broadcast the next morning. At the same time, you are asked to edit your footage into a video of game highlights that is played on a link on your radio station's website, as local basketball attracts viewers and listeners. You must also rewrite your radio story as a short voice-over video for the 11 p.m. television news broadcast. Finally, you write a teaser for the TV news program and provide a three-second video highlight for it. While you are working on your sports coverage you tweet game updates and post pictures and details on a station Facebook page. You did all this in a matter of two and a half hours on a Friday evening. High school basketball is part of your beat. You know the teams, coaches, and players, and you can plan the next important game to cover next Friday night, when you will repeat the process.

Photo 6.2: The work of a journalist is often fast paced, with constant demands to meet deadlines and to be the first reporter to publish a story on a trending topic. Because news can happen at any time of day, journalists need to be ready at a moment's notice.



Writing for broadcast and digital media today is fast paced, with multiple deadlines and constant updates. You will write for many media platforms; very likely, you will write for more than one at the same time. You must become comfortable writing radio, television, and applicable digital media copy and moving seamlessly between formats as your employer's outlets dictate. On top of all this, if you are working in radio and television as a reporter (such as Jasmine Monroe, the subject of this chapter's Frontline Media Writing Profile), you will be expected to maintain a strong social media presence of your own.

Broadcast and print writing are converging in digital media. We see this development clearly in online editions of newspapers and on websites for radio and television stations. Have a look at the latest online edition of *The Washington Post*. You will see print style writing, picture galleries, and audio/video intermixed and linked to the front page. Meanwhile, new social media writing tasks are evolving in the news industry. Websites connect traditional newspaper, radio, and television news formats, and social media bring news consumers into direct contact with the journalists covering the stories. Given these rapid changes in the news media environment, let's briefly review the traditional roles of radio and television journalism to get a perspective on how they mix with twenty-first-century news media.

First, what do we mean by *broadcasting*? Broadcasting uses the electronic spectrum, the *airwaves*, to disseminate its signal to the audience. It is regulated differently from cable signals, which travel over wires and from satellite signals bounced from commercial

satellites placed in orbit. Broadcast stations are licensed by the Federal Communications Commission to broadcast their programming in the public interest and must renew their licenses every eight years. Cable and satellite channels do not have licensing requirements.

Radio broadcasting developed in the 1920s and grew to its present form in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Television broadcasting developed after World War II and became the dominant medium in the United States through the 1990s. Most television stations were connected together by networks, which provided news and entertainment programming for the stations affiliated with them. From the 1950s to the early 2000s, broadcast television served as the primary source of news for most US adults, followed by radio news and newspapers. Two types of television news were offered to audiences: local news produced by television stations themselves and network news provided to television stations from television networks such as CBS, NBC, and ABC. Television news anchors, including Walter Cronkite, Chet Huntley, David Brinkley, Tom Brokaw, and Peter Jennings, were well known and highly trusted network news sources.

Radio news has remained largely dependent on local reporting, although national radio news providers still feed audio and scripted national and international news to radio stations. Local broadcast television news is still a big business. Local television stations earn much of their revenue by selling advertising during their local news programming. In the early twenty-first century, the audience for national television network news has shifted to cable news channels such as MSNBC, Fox News, and CNN. Today, that trend has slowed because of the impact of online news media. Twentieth-century broadcast network news journalists took pride in presenting unbiased coverage of news events. Cable news channels today, however, mix editorial and political viewpoints and have successfully attracted audiences who enjoy this somewhat biased approach to presenting news.

Much of the broadcast industry consists of radio and television stations that are group owned—that is, a single owner controls many stations. Companies are allowed to own as many radio stations across the country as they desire, with limits only on the number they can own per market. Similarly, companies can buy up many television stations, but only one per market except in the largest markets. Nationwide, a company cannot own television stations whose combined audience is more than 39 percent of the national population. If you are employed at a station owned in a group with other stations, you may find yourself writing copy that will be used throughout the group.

The popular view of a broadcast journalist is of a glamorous, highly paid, local celebrity who works part-time hours and relies on a large staff to obtain and produce video and write stories. This stereotype is a myth. Local broadcast television news reporters work long hours and are responsible for writing and editing their own material. They operate under tight deadlines and must demonstrate popularity in viewer ratings and social media feedback. Pay varies by market size, but it is safe to say that small and medium-sized markets do not produce high-paying jobs for most television journalists. Similarly, radio journalists work

long hours and do much of their own production work. Many radio news writers also write promotional and advertising copy for their station as well as for sister stations. Television and radio news jobs are fast paced and offer exciting, stimulating work. Writers come into contact with many people and must use communication skills effectively to interview sources and manage their schedules. They must write accurately, precisely, and concisely. Deadlines rule the media business.

For broadcast journalists, social media writing has become a central part of the everyday work routine. They must encourage followers on social media, perhaps tweeting during the day about stories they work on and events they observe. Journalists may post regular status updates on their Facebook pages and provide followers with behind-the-scenes pictures of them and their crew collecting information for the day's news on Instagram and Pinterest. News directors require this activity because it brings more audience members to the afternoon, evening, and night-time news shows. Social media has become another pipeline for ratings, and this has placed a new writing responsibility on the broadcast journalist.

According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), in 2014 about 54,400 reporters, correspondents, and broadcast news analysts worked in settings including television stations, cable channels, radio stations, and other information-related services. The median annual pay for 2015 was \$37,720. The electronic media industry stands at an exciting crossroads, with many potential opportunities on the horizon.

#### What Do Broadcast Journalists Do?

As a broadcast journalist, you'll cover breaking news and events occurring locally, nationally, and internationally. Your work will appear on television, radio, websites, and social media. Broadcast journalists working in major media markets or for large news organizations often specialize in particular topics such as technology, sports, or medicine. Many others find employment as general assignment reporters in smaller media markets and cover a wider range of news subjects.

There is no typical day in broadcast journalism. Expect to spend significant time in the field conducting interviews and investigating stories. You may spend little or no time in the office, instead working on location and filing stories remotely. Your hours may be long, and your work schedule must be flexible in order to follow breaking news. As an anchor, you will report the news and introduce stories from your reporting staff. If you cover international news, you will probably live and work in other countries. Many veteran broadcast reporters say they enjoy the fast-paced nature of the work, with the constant buzz of deadline pressure and the thrill of being the first reporter to break a major news story.

#### The Professional Strategy Triangle for Broadcast News

Most broadcast journalists use a set of writing strategies that become second nature over time. As we have seen in <a href="Chapter 2">Chapter 2</a> when discussing the Professional Strategy Triangle, all writing strategy can boil down to three important elements: situation, audience, and message. Broadcast journalists can call upon a set of formats for different types of situations involving specific audiences. Understanding the appropriate format to use for a particular story is key to drafting an effective news report.

#### Broadcast News Situations: Seven Story Types

Local television and radio news departments cover stories in seven different ways, as shown in Figure 6.1. Let's focus first on television news situations. Basic television news stories are read by a news anchor while a picture or graphic is displayed over the anchor's shoulder. These stories are called readers. If they cut to video with background sounds, readers become a second, more sophisticated type of story called sound on tape or SOT ("tape" refers to videotape, the common recording medium of the late twentieth century).

Figure 6.1 The Seven Electronic News Story Types

- 1. Readers
- 2. Sound On Tape (SOT)
- 3. Voice Over (VO)
- 4. Voice Over/Sound On Tape (VO/SOT)
- 5. News Package
- 6. Reporter On The Scene (ROS)
- 7. Live Interview Story

Most television news stories are a third type, in which the news anchor reads copy while video clips show images of the story. This is referred to as a voice-over story, or VO. A fourth type works like a VO but adds sound to the video. This is known as a voice-over/sound on tape, or VO/SOT. A VO/SOT often has the news anchor read an introduction to the story and then airs brief commentary from participants in the story, with transitions read by the news anchor. VO/SOTs are constructed and written by news reporters who gather the interview clips and footage from the scene.

The fifth type of television news story is referred to as a news package. A package is a comprehensive television news story recorded and edited by a news reporter, who will also write an introduction for the news anchor called the package lead-in. Packages are often used to cover the biggest news of the day and are usually the longest of the stories presented in a newscast. News packages that cover news as it is occurring—called breaking news—will often transition to a live-in-the-field introduction from a reporter and conclude with live comments from the reporter. The live introduction and conclusion are known as a

donut in broadcast news.

Breaking news is critical in the TV news business. Television stations compete intensely for advertising revenue, and high ratings for news programs provide a major asset in this competition. The highest-rated television news programs will bring in the most advertising revenue, and often those programs are perceived by the audience to be the most active and on the scene with the most up-to-date news.

Reporters on the scene cover developing stories that are meaningful to audiences, wherever they may be. That's why the sixth type of television news story is referred to as ROS or reporter on the scene. The reporter writes the lead-in and, at times, questions for the news anchor to ask the reporter to enhance the story.

The last type of hard television news story is known as a live interview story. This may feature a live interview conducted by an anchor or a reporter with a guest in the studio or on the scene of a breaking story. Interviews are often conducted with people who can provide meaningful perspectives on a breaking story, such as firefighters, police officers, and officials such as mayors and councilpersons. At times, interviews are presented along with a package story to provide context and updates for stories that are developing during a newscast.

Later in this chapter we will show you how to write in the broadcast journalism style. We will focus on reader, SOT, VO, and VO/SOT story formats to get you started with broadcast news writing.

#### Radio News Formats

Radio news stories parallel their television equivalents, placing the emphasis on sound. A radio VO/SOT will thus be likely to have a newscaster read copy over the sound of crowds gathering, music playing, or cars racing, for example. Typical radio stations that program music use simple radio news formats (readers, VO, VO/SOT), but all-news radio will use the radio equivalents of each of the seven television news story types covered above. National Public Radio news shows such as *All Things Considered* provide good examples of these.

#### TV and Radio News Audiences

Local television stations strive to provide news that appeals to the largest number of people in their local audience. The situational news values of impact, proximity, timeliness, conflict, prominence, and oddity/novelty (discussed in <a href="Chapter 4">Chapter 4</a>) help us understand how the audience sees the story we are covering. Put yourself in the place of a typical viewer or listener, consider his or her day-to-day activities, and focus on the news values of your story for your audience. A fire that closes an important cross-town highway in your city will have impact beyond the neighborhood where it occurs, for instance. Many people in your audience may be inconvenienced in their drive home from work, so you should therefore emphasize impact as a major news value that will drive coverage of this event.

# Visualizing Your Broadcast News Story With the Professional Strategy Triangle

Radio and television journalists work quickly. They begin working on their stories in their heads as they gather the facts along with the sound and video they think will help tell the story. They start by asking themselves a series of simple questions that bring together the elements of the Professional Strategy Triangle (see Figure 6.2): "What is the main element of news in this story?" "Exactly what will my audience want to know about this?" "Which of the seven story message types will work well for this story?" After applying this active thinking process daily for even a short while, broadcast reporters find the answers quickly and almost automatically.

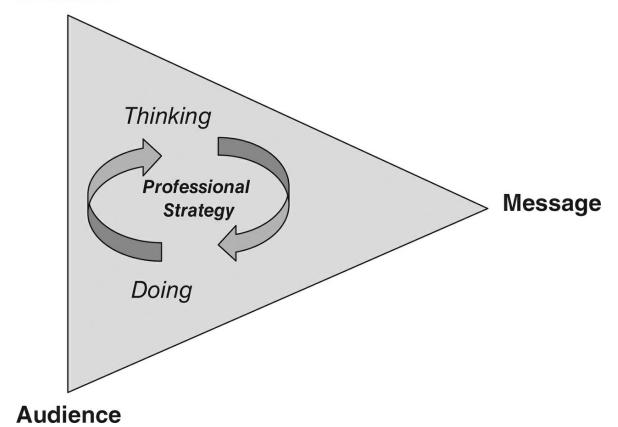


Here is an example of how the active strategy of creatively envisioning the story works for broadcast journalists. Jim, a television news reporter, is sent to cover a fashion show at a mall. Arriving, Jim finds animal rights protesters staging a sit-in at the event. Many women who came to see the show engage in angry confrontations with the protesters, who are disrupting the event, saying that animals were killed to create coats and sweaters used in the fashion show. Jim thinks quickly and realizes that many local people shop at the mall, so what happens there will greatly interest the local audience. Conflict is the major situational news element in this story. It focuses on *what* (protesters and locals arguing at mall fashion show) and *who* (protesters and local shoppers).

Because the confrontations end soon after the event, Jim reasons that the story can be presented as a VO/SOT with the anchor introducing the story, some video of the protestors, quick comments from a protester about their cause, a response from a local shopper who was upset with the protest, and a conclusion read by the anchor. Jim essentially visualizes the story form as he collects interviews and video on the scene, then jots down a rough draft.

Figure 6.2 The Professional Strategy Triangle

### Situation



300

## Writing the Broadcast News Story: Four Essential Style Elements

Writing copy for broadcast differs significantly from writing for print media. Listeners and viewers aren't reading words, so they can't go back and reread sections they may not have understood the first time through. Therefore, when you write for television and radio news, you must use simple language that is easy for the audience to understand the first time they hear it.

Traditionally, broadcast news writing was referred to as writing for the ear. To make your copy easy to understand, use simple sentences that are clear and brief. Cut out unfamiliar words and use the active voice. Finally, make sure your copy flows in a conversational manner. Unlike traditional newspaper copy's inverted pyramid form, broadcast news copy begins with a listener-friendly lead and then flows in narrative form. We begin our discussion of broadcast news writing by describing four important style elements: short sentences, active voice, clarity and brevity, and limited use of adjectives and adverbs.

#### Writing for the Ear

What does it mean to write for the ear? Essentially, writing for the ear means writing simple, direct sentences that are easily understood the first time someone hears them. Here are the elements that help us produce simple and direct copy:

1. Short sentences. Sentences with a single subject, verb, and object are easy to understand when they are heard. These are simple sentences:

A carpenter discovered a Burmese python in his toolbox this morning. The Cubs beat the Pirates 7 to 4 in 13 innings.

Altoona Mayor Julie Costanzo wants to repair playground equipment in city parks.

2. Active voice. Only rarely should you write a passive sentence (see <u>Chapter 3</u> for the difference between active and passive voice). To recap, here is an illustration of the difference between active and passive sentences:

Active: The Cubs beat the Pirates 7 to 4 in 13 innings.

Notice the subject (*the Cubs*) comes first in the sentence. The verb (*beat*) comes right after the subject. The object (the *Pirates*) is last.

Passive: The Pirates were beaten by the Cubs 7 to 4 in 13 innings.

In the second instance, the object of the sentence (*the Pirates*) comes first. The verb (*beat*) is modified with a form of *to be* (*were*). The subject of the sentence (*the Cubs*) comes after the verb phrase.

If your audience is made up of Pittsburgh Pirates fans, however, why wouldn't you want to use the passive version above? Passive sentences are harder to understand when you hear them; your brain has to turn the subject and object around to make them clear. Notice also that the passive form of the sentence is longer and takes longer to make the point. Every word counts in broadcast news. So if your listeners are Pittsburgh Pirates fans, simply make the Pirates the subject of the sentence and change the verb:

The Pirates lost to the Cubs 7 to 4 in 13 innings.

3. Clarity and brevity. You achieve clarity when you use the simple everyday language of your listeners in your stories. Similarly, you economize word use by choosing direct verbs and simple adjectives. Here are things to do to make your broadcast news copy clear and brief:

Eliminate jargon you don't need. Here is an example:

(*Jargonized, wordy*): Military officials said today that the F-35 fighter jet lacked proper aerodynamic center pitch adjustment to dive and turn effectively at Mach 2 speeds.

(Dejargonized, simplified): Military officials today discussed handling problems

with the design of the F-35 fighter jet.

Most of us don't need to understand aerodynamic center pitch adjustment. All we really need to know is that the jet has handling problems.

Use only the adjectives and adverbs that are necessary to your story. Broadcast news writers should economize on the use of adverbs and adjectives. Here is a sentence with too many of each followed by a simplified version that is short and to the point:

(Adjectiveladverb-heavy): Police said the burglars obviously pried open the door with extremely forceful techniques only professionally trained criminals would use.

(Simplified): Police said the burglars used professional methods to open the door.

#### Figure 6.3 Electronic News Conversational Tone

- 1. Short sentences are best.
- 2. Use the active voice.
- 3. Clarity and brevity are required.
- 4. Use only necessary adjectives and adverbs.

#### The Broadcast Delayed Lead

At times, your audience is just barely listening to your newscast as it airs. How do you prepare them to hear important facts? In this case, you should write a delayed lead that delays the important elements of your news lead until the second sentence in the story. Your first sentence simply alerts your audience to the subject you are going to introduce. Here is an example of a delayed lead:

We want to bring you some important news about road work taking place today in University Place. Workers will close Sixty-Seventh Avenue between Nineteenth Street and Bridgeport Way to fix a broken water main. Crews will close the roadway at eleven this morning and reopen it around six this evening. Police advise motorists to use Chambers Creek Road during the repair.

The more important the story is to your audience, the more important it is to write a delayed lead. Never assume that your audience is carefully listening to every word your newscaster is saying. Good broadcast news writing helps the audience prepare for facts that will be coming to them in the story.

#### Conversational Story Structure

By now, you realize that broadcast news scripts differ significantly from print media copy. First, sentences run short. Second, the broadcast news lead delays important facts until the second sentence, whereas print media leads tend to place most of the important facts in the first lead sentence.

Broadcast news copy differs in one more way: it usually follows a *conversational* narrative, as noted in Figure 6.3. Think about how you would tell a friend a story in a conversation. First, you prepare your friend to hear what is going on, then you summarize the essential point you want him or her to know, as in the delayed lead. Your friend asks for details, and you provide them in the order your friend might ask for them. Here is an example:

You: I have an important update about road construction on Sixty-Seventh Avenue. (where)

Friend: Really? What is it?

You: Workers are closing Sixty-Seventh Avenue to fix a water main. (what)

Friend: When?

You: They're going to start at eleven this morning and finish around six this evening. (when)

Friend: How do I get around it going through town?

You: The police suggest using Chambers Creek Road during the repair. (how)

By anticipating how a friend would want to know this information, you have organized the story by the 5 Ws and H topic points, four of which are shown in italics above. You have effectively answered audience questions about street repairs in order of importance. You can see the value of using these topic points, as they help you construct your story.

As you think through how a friend would ask for details about a developing story you are using an active strategy. This active strategy effectively uses the Professional Strategy Triangle to anticipate the needs of your audience and develop the broadcast news copy (message) in a way that best fits your newscast (situation). This traditional active strategy of thinking about a conversation with an audience member carries even more relevance in today's social media world. In your broadcast career, you will probably post Twitter updates to developing stories, as well as Facebook status updates and Instagram pictures. Audience members will likely post comments that include questions you may need to answer.

Craft Essential: Using Conversational Story Structure

Pick a current print media story that focuses on straight news coverage of an emergency situation in your local area. It could be a traffic accident, a house fire, a chemical spill, or something else that required an emergency crew to arrive on the scene and render assistance to people. Read the story a few times until you are confident you can tell the story to someone else without missing important details. Take note of how the story emphasizes the 5 Ws and H, and which of these are found in the story lead.

Now work with a classmate and have a conversation about the story. Start by providing a general statement about what occurred without divulging any details. Then, have your classmate ask you for story details. Take note of questions your classmate asks, and their order. Continue the conversation until you have answered five questions. Examine the questions. In what order are the 5 Ws and H found in the questions?

Follow the pattern of your classmate's questions and write a short radio reader story. How does your radio story compare with the original print media story?

#### Actualities and Sound Bites: Sound on Tape

Let's work through a second illustration to lay out the structure of a story. This time, let's write it as a radio news story, where we will collect recordings of interviews we conducted with people on the scene. Audio clips are referred to as actualities in radio or sound bites in television news. To get started, think of all the questions you might ask if you were speaking with a friend about this news event:

Friend: Did you hear that someone drowned in the Clarion River near Cook Forest State Park? (What, Where)

You: No, who was it?

Friend: A canoeist from Ohio. He was fifty-four years old, and his name was James Haverford. (Who)

You: When did it happen?

Friend: Yesterday morning.

You: How did it happen?

Friend: The guy went canoeing down the Clarion River, starting at Clarington and flipped his canoe at the section near the Clarion River Lodge. Medics on the scene said it appeared that he hit his head on a rock and drowned while unconscious underwater.

You: Wow . . . did anybody see it happen?

Friend: I spoke with one person who said she saw his canoe flip. She was about an eighth of a mile away, bicycling on the river road. She said she noticed that the canoe remained overturned, and she grew concerned and used her cell phone to call for help. Other people arrived in cars at the scene and were bringing the man out of the water when she got there. (What, Detail)

You: Was the victim with anyone else?

Friend: According to witnesses, Haverford was canoeing by himself. (Who, Detail)

You: How long did it take for the emergency vehicles to arrive on the scene?

Friend: According to people there, the ambulance and a fire truck were on the scene very quickly, about 15 minutes or so. (What, Detail)

You: Was the canoeist still living when he was brought out of the water?

Friend: People on the scene said the paramedics worked hard to revive him. The paramedics told me that the man was not breathing when they found him on the shore of the river. People who brought him out of the water tried to resuscitate the man, but they said it didn't work. (What, Detail)

This story would refer to people who were interviewed about the event because there is no more powerful and credible way to tell a story than from the perspective of the people who witnessed it. Interviews give the audience the perspective of someone who was on the scene of the story. This drowning story would make an excellent SOT radio story, as detailed below.

Now imagine you recorded the following narrative from your interview with Cassandra McMillan, one of the people who says she saw the drowning victim on the Clarion River bank:

You: Please tell me what you saw when you came upon the place on the river where the drowning victim was found.

Cassandra I was riding my bike with my husband along the river road when

McMillan: I noticed a canoe turned over into the water. It was about an eighth of a mile up the river from where I was. We stopped our bikes to get a better look, and we became concerned when we noticed the canoe kept coming down the river upside down and we couldn't see who was in it. We rode our bikes down to the place where the canoe overturned and there were two pickup trucks stopped there and when we got there two guys were in the water bringing the canoe guy out. One of the guys started to do mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, but he said the man wouldn't start breathing. An ambulance arrived a few minutes later, and they tried to resuscitate the man. The people there said he wasn't breathing when they packed him off in the ambulance.

As the reporter on the scene, you would interview other people, including anyone who would have been able to verify the man was not breathing when removed from the water. You would call local ambulance authorities and find out which hospital the canoeist was taken to, and then follow up with a call to that hospital. Verifying the details from medical authorities, you could then edit the interview into a useful actuality and use it in your story. You might send a tweet to your station's followers telling them you are working on the story. You might tweet again, letting them know you have obtained an interview and that medical authorities have verified that the man was pronounced dead at the scene. You then verify his name and address.

Next, let's look at how we might edit the actuality. Our first consideration is economy of time. We know we have only forty-five to fifty-five seconds in our newscast for this story. The 5 Ws and H topic points stack up like this: Most important, the *what* (a man drowned while canoeing), followed by the *where* (at our local state park, Cook Forest), and the *who* 

(James Haverford, a fifty-four-year-old vacationer from Canfield, Ohio). We search for a quick, relevant audio clip in our actuality that highlights all three of these topic points:

"I was riding my bike with my husband along the river road (refers to the *where*) when I noticed a canoe turned over in the water (refers to the *what*) . . . and became concerned when I noticed the canoe kept coming down the river upside down. When I got there, two guys were in the water bringing the canoe guy out (refers to the *when*). One of them started to do mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, but he said the man wasn't breathing" (refers to the *who* and the *what*).

This short actuality gets right to the heart of the story. You time the actuality and see that it comes out at fifteen seconds.

#### Formatting the SOT Radio Story

Once you write your radio story, it will be read by the newscaster, with the SOT actuality placed on an SD card (a small memory card used for computers and cameras) and played by the newscaster with a touch of a button as he or she reads the story. You will also produce the sound bite and prepare it to play with instructions on the audio file name. The copy must be formatted with formal style conventions for radio news. Each station will prefer its own variation on copy format, but here is a set of standard conventions for radio news copy:

- Print copy on paper. Use one side only.
- Start each story on a new piece of paper.
- Use an easy-to-see font (Courier is standard) in 12-point size: Here is a sample.
- Set left and right margins so the text fits in a 6½-inch column. This will mean each line of copy times out to approximately 5 seconds as you read it.
- Create a heading—known as the *slug*—at the top that includes the story name. Include the newscast, your name, the date, and the time of the story.
- Indicate page numbers with the current page, a slash, then the total pages, such as 1/3 (page 1 of 3).
- Spell difficult-to-pronounce names phonetically in parentheses following the name. Write any emphasized syllables in ALL CAPs.
- Double-space copy.
- Justify all copy flush left.

Now that you are clear on style conventions, it's time to write this story. Your job is to lead with the *what* topic point, but you have to write a delayed lead that will prepare your audience to hear the news that a man drowned while canoeing on the Clarion River just outside of Cook Forest State Park. Your audience may not be listening carefully at the start of your story, so you should begin with a general summary about the tragedy on the Clarion River and follow up with the details in the second sentence, like this:

Tragedy on the Clarion River this morning. An Ohio man drowned after his canoe overturned near the Clarion River Lodge just outside of Cook Forest State Park.

With just these two sentences, your story is already about ten seconds long. But you have covered the important topic points—the *who*, *what*, *where*, and *when*. Now that you've written the lead, you're ready to finish the story. Insert your actuality into the script with a tag that labels the SD card (SD1) and the number of the clip on the card (clp2). Identify the person's voice (MCMILLAN), note how long it runs, and identify the last few words

she says as an outcue for the newscaster (OUT:). Your finished copy looks like this:

Clarion River Drowning 1/1

11:00 AM NEWS

Jim Craft

07/24/16 [RUNS :55]

Tragedy on the Clarion River this morning. An Ohio man drowned after his canoe overturned near the Clarion River Lodge just outside of Cook Forest State Park.

Vacationer Cassandra McMillan [Mick-MIL-lan] said she saw a canoe turned over in the water:

SD1-clp2 MCMILLAN . . . RUNS:15 OUT: THE MAN WAS NOT BREATHING.

James Haverford, 54, of Canfield, Ohio, was pronounced dead at the scene. Officials believe that Haverford suffered a concussion when his canoe flipped, hitting his head on a rock while under water. Attempts by paramedics to resuscitate him failed.

#### Radio Reader Stories

Actualities are highly desirable in radio stories and you should use them as much as possible. Even if you cannot be on the scene, you can record sound bites from telephone interviews that can effectively enliven your story with the words of witnesses and participants. However, sound bites may not be available for many stories, especially breaking news. Reader stories are written the same way as SOTs, but without the actualities in the copy. The drowning story as a simple radio reader story would look like this:

Clarion River Drowning 1/1
11:00 AM NEWS

Jim Craft
07/24/16 [RUNS:40]

Tragedy on the Clarion River this morning. An Ohio man drowned after his canoe overturned near the Clarion River Lodge just outside of Cook Forest State Park.

James Haverford, 54, of Canfield, Ohio, was pronounced dead at the scene. Officials believe that Haverford suffered a concussion when his canoe flipped, hitting his head on a rock while under water. Attempts by paramedics to resuscitate him failed.

Reader stories use the same delayed leads as SOTs and focus on the same conversational organization, active voice, and sentences that are brief and concise. The copy is shorter and references to the perceptions of eyewitnesses are generalized ("Witnesses on the scene said . . ."). One benefit of reader stories is that they are easier to edit for time. If it turned out that you needed ten seconds for another story in this newscast, you could easily cut the last two sentences from the canoe story and summarize that information simply as:

Officials say Haverford suffered a head injury when his canoe flipped.

Photo 6.3: The key to using sound bites and actualities is maintaining the story flow while giving the audience the sense of "being there"—the best bites involve a personal account, witness account, or expert opinion.



#### Radio News Packages

All news radio stations use reporters who file stories for newscasts. That is, they write and record their stories for airplay during a long-format radio news program hosted by newscasters. Recall that this type of story is called a news package. The news reporter's job is to write and record the news package and write the introduction copy for the newscaster, called the lead-in. Let's look at the format for radio reports by adapting the story above as a radio news package. First, here is how your copy would appear as a news package:

Clarion River Drowning 1/1

11:00 AM NEWS

Jim Craft

07/24/16 [RUNS:55]

CRAFT: Tragedy on the Clarion River this morning. An Ohio man drowned after his canoe overturned near the Clarion River Lodge just outside of Cook Forest State Park.

Vacationer Cassandra McMillan [Mick-MIL-lan] said she saw a canoe turned over in the water: [:15]

MCMILLAN . . . RUNS:15 OUT: THE MAN WAS NOT BREATHING.

CRAFT: James Haverford, 54, of Canfield, Ohio, was pronounced dead at the scene. Officials believe that Haverford suffered a concussion when his canoe flipped. Attempts by paramedics to resuscitate him failed. In Cook Forest State Park, I'm Jim Craft for WCUC News. [:17]

Notice the differences in the copy treatment above. The reporter's outcue takes up four extra seconds, so you had to edit out the phrase about the man hitting his head under water. The newscaster needs to see the complete timing of this story, as well as how long each part runs, so each part carries a time tag. And each part of the story includes a label indicating who is speaking.

#### Writing the Radio News Package Lead-In

Radio news package lead-in copy works like an extended delayed lead for the story. Your goal is to help the news anchor prepare the audience to hear the report by previewing a bit of what will follow, without revealing too many details. Reporters often refer to details that impact audience members most by emphasizing those details in the lead to pique their curiosity. We can accomplish that with our current story by placing audience members at the scene:

Cook Forest State Park is a popular vacation spot in the region, but sadness struck at the river today.

You also need to write a sentence that transitions to the recorded report, called the story incue. In-cues usually contain the reporter's name and the location from which the reporter filed the story, in bold below:

Cook Forest State Park is a popular vacation spot in the region, but sadness struck at the river today. Jim Craft was on the scene with this report.

The format for lead-in copy follows the same conventions as radio story copy, except that you label it "Lead-In" at the top. Remember, the story copy and the lead-in copy run on two separate pages. Specify the last sentence of the report on the lead-in script as a story out-cue, which shows the news anchors the last few words of the recorded story so he or she can be ready to read the next story. Here is how our lead-in copy will look for our drowning story:

LEAD-IN

Clarion River Drowning 1/1

11:00 AM NEWS

Jim Craft

07/24/16 [RUNS:55]

Cook Forest State Park is a popular canoeing spot in the region, but sadness struck at the river today. Jim Craft was on the scene with this report.

(Body of story goes here).

Outcue: . . . I'm Jim Craft for WCUC News.

The War Room

Writing an SOT Radio Story

#### The Scenario:

A traffic accident has occurred this morning five miles from town on state Route 67. You are working in the radio station newsroom, preparing copy for the noon newscast and top-of-the-hour updates. You can't leave your desk, so you connect by phone to a newspaper reporter who works for the same company that owns your station. The reporter recites a set of facts for you and asks you to help her verify them. You call the state police office and they confirm most of the details related to the location of the accident and the vehicles involved. The reporter on the scene verifies the identities of the people involved and a statement from an eyewitness.

Here is a rundown of the facts:

- The accident involved three vehicles, a 2014 Dodge Challenger, a 2000 Dodge Caravan, and a 2011 Chevrolet Silverado pick-up truck.
- One person died in the accident; five were injured.
- The accident occurred at 10:19 a.m. at the intersection of state Route 67 and County Line Road. It occurred when the driver of the Dodge Challenger ran a red light at a high rate of speed.
- The driver, Robert Masters, born Aug. 2, 1991, died at the scene of massive internal injuries. Masters hit the front end of a vehicle driven by Sally Johnson, who was proceeding into the intersection in her Dodge Caravan when Masters ran the red light.
- The Caravan was clipped in the front corner as Masters swerved to avoid impact. The Johnson vehicle spun around and hit a vehicle entering the intersection from the opposite direction, a 2011 Chevrolet Silverado driven by Myron Smord.
- Johnson had three children in the car with her, Timothy Johnson, 7; Janey Johnson, 10; and Baxter Johnson, 12.
- The Johnsons and Smord were taken to Heritage Hospital where they all are listed in serious condition with non-life-threatening injuries.
- When Masters swerved to avoid hitting the Johnson vehicle, his Challenger left the roadway and was airborne before crashing in an empty parking lot and wrapping around a light pole. Unofficial estimates say the Masters vehicle was operating in excess of 70 mph as it struck the Johnson vehicle.

Thanks to help from your reporter friend, you are able to record some comments from Bill Tromblay, a county emergency worker who was at the scene:

It appears the Masters vehicle may have been doing 75 miles per hour going into the intersection. I can't understand why someone would do something so stupid. There is absolutely no reason for it. It actually hit a ditch on the other side of 67 and flew over an eight-foot-high fence around the International Harvester parking lot. It didn't even touch the fence but landed smack-dab into a concrete light pole. The whole front end of the car looks like a letter "U" wrapped around the pole. The driver died instantly.

- 1. As a class, divide into three- or four-member teams. Each team should write the story as a thirty-second radio news story that includes a ten-second actuality. Format the copy as a standard radio script using the sample copy in this chapter as a model.
- 2. After twenty-five minutes, come together as a class and read your radio stories aloud. Note the similarities and differences in the stories.
- 3. In a discussion led by your instructor, explain to the class your choice for the lead, and for the actuality you included. Explain the details you put in the story and why you left some out.

#### Television News Copy

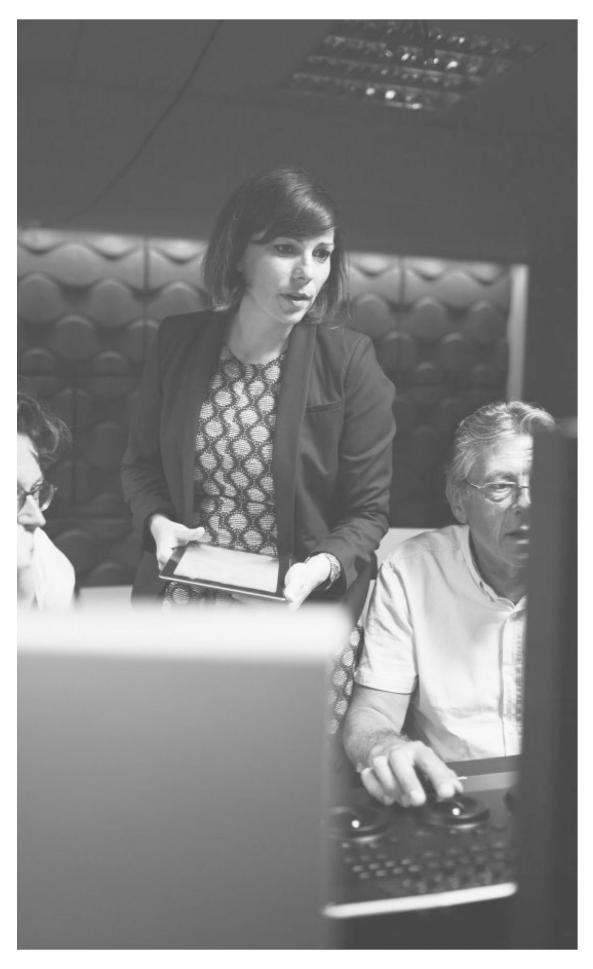
Writing for television news is referred to as "writing for visuals" because of the need to let the visual elements demonstrate what is happening in the story. The task proceeds in much the same way as writing for sound. Just as in radio, the television news writer prioritizes brevity and conciseness. Many stories run less than forty-five seconds long. The writer uses the active voice and writes in a conversational style. In television, however, the goal is to use descriptive language that sets up the visuals and gives viewers the most important information about what they are watching.

#### The Basic Two-Column TV News Script

Television news uses the two-column TV news script to show the news director what video to play synchronized with the copy of the story. This section focuses on the voice-over television news story (VO) and the voice-over/sound-on-tape television news story (VO/SOT). Other types of television stories such as television news packages use the same script features, but they tend to run longer with multiple voice-overs and contain advanced scripting and formatting features beyond the scope of this introductory text.

Television copy is double-spaced like radio copy, with relatively large fonts used for readability, as with radio copy. However, television uses ALL CAPS, because this was easiest to read on the teleprompter systems used by television news anchors in the 1960s. Using a teleprompter allowed the newscaster to read copy while looking directly at his or her audience. This represented an important step up from reading copy from a sheet of paper at a desk. Even though modern teleprompter systems are much improved, the all-caps format of television news remains in use.

Photo 6.4: Broadcast copy must be as simple as possible. Remember, viewers aren't reading what you're writing, they're hearing it.



#### The Television VO Story

The television VO (voice-over) story is set up to be read by the television news anchor with a cut to video that will play as part of the story is being read. Often, some natural sound from the video (crowd noise, traffic noise, wind noise) will be mixed up at the start of the clip, meaning the volume is loud enough to be heard. The sound is then mixed under or turned down in volume as the video plays and the newscaster continues to read the story. The VO story is most often used by local news stations for spot news stories. Stations hire news photographers/videographers who cover parts of the station's service area and receive instructions from the news editor to shoot video of events such as traffic accidents, fires, concerts, government meetings, cultural events, and local sports. At times, the videographer collects story details. Other times, the reporter will show up before or after the news event to gather facts for a story. Often, reporters will record story details over the phone and use the video provided by station photographers to construct a VO story.

Let's construct an example VO story using our Clarion River drowning radio story. Imagine that you have collected the facts on the scene and a videographer for your station arrived after you left to cover another story. The videographer shot some useful footage of vacationers canoeing on the river, and people on the shore where the drowned man was pulled from the water. You would work with the videographer to edit the footage and create a video that begins with brief shots of canoeists on the section of the river traveled by the drowned man, and ends with people milling around the spot where the body was recovered. Here is how the story might look:

Clarion River Drowning
5 O'clock NEWS
Jim Craft
07/24/16

on cam	(Emily)
:00 take dvr-1	TRAGEDY ON THE CLARION RIVER THIS MORNING. AN OHIO MAN DROWNED AFTER HIS CANOE OVERTURNED NEAR THE CLARION RIVER LODGE JUST OUTSIDE OF COOK FOREST STATE PARK.
snd	

under	JAMES HAVERFORD, 54, OF CANFIELD, OHIO, WAS
(VO)	PRONOUNCED DEAD AT THE SCENE. OFFICIALS BELIEVE
	HAVERFORD SUFFERED A CONCUSSION WHEN HIS CANOE
:25	FLIPPED. ATTEMPTS BY PARAMEDICS TO RESUSCITATE HIM
dvr-1	FAILED.
out	

In this example, Emily is the newscaster reading the story. The video footage is cued up from the station's video player labeled "dvr-1" by the station. We indicate to start the footage at time zero, labeled ":00" on the copy. The next line indicates natural sound on the footage that will start with some volume, and then it will be mixed down as the footage moves to shots of canoeists and the landing area for the canoes. The left-hand column ends with a countdown of the video, indicating that the video ends at forty-five seconds to the count on the station's dvr-1.

#### The Television VO/SOT Story

The television VO/SOT story format adds sound to the video that plays in the story. Often, the sound here is an interview clip or some other sound bite that provides an essential element for the story. Let's demonstrate the television VO/SOT story format using the Clarion River drowning scenario. Here, we can reenvision the interview material collected for the radio SOT version as a video clip with sound in the current story. Take the same simulated video edited for the VO story above, and add a video clip of your interviewee Cassandra McMillan to the end of the video clip. Here is how the story could appear:

Clarion River Drowning

5 O'clock NEWS

Jim Craft

07/24/16

on cam	(Emily)
:00 take	TRAGEDY ON THE CLARION RIVER THIS MORNING. AN OHIO MAN DROWNED AFTER HIS CANOE OVERTURNED
dvr-1	NEAR THE CLARION RIVER LODGE JUST OUTSIDE OF
snd under (VO)	COOK FOREST STATE PARK.
	(VO)
:25 dvr-1	JAMES HAVERFORD, 54, OF CANFIELD, OHIO, WAS
cont. vid	PRONOUNCED DEAD AT THE SCENE. OFFICIALS BELIEVE
and snd	HAVERFORD SUFFERED A CONCUSSION WHEN HIS
full (SOT)	CANOE FLIPPED. ATTEMPTS BY PARAMEDICS TO
	RESUSCITATE HIM FAILED.
:26 Super:	
Cassandra	(SOT)
McMillan -	".1
Pittsburgh	outcue: "the man was not breathing."
Resident	(Emily)
:40 dvr-1	COOK FOREST OFFICIALS SAY THAT CANOE TRIPS ON

out	THE CLARION RIVER ARE USUALLY SAFE. THE LAST SUCH
	DROWNING INCIDENT ON THE RIVER OCCURRED IN
on cam	1968.

Notice that the new direction cues on the left-hand side of the script. First, you indicate to the director that sound will begin approximately twenty-five seconds into the video clip. This is to remind the director to have the sound up "full" (at full volume) on the air so that it can be heard. You indicate that sound is coming with the direction cue "SOT" and mark both sides of the script accordingly. The direction cue "Super" means the director will see electronic lettering of the interviewee's name, Cassandra McMillan, appear on the bottom of this portion of the video as she talks about the drowning. At forty seconds, the video clip ends with the outcue "the man was not breathing," the last line from McMillan's interview sound bite. Then, you return to Emily on camera reading the conclusion of the story.

# Promotional and Housekeeping Copy

Broadcast news writers are responsible for completing entire newscasts, including elements other than the actual story. We discuss these bits of promotional and housekeeping copy next.

#### The News Teaser

The news teaser is a short promotion designed to create audience curiosity for an upcoming newscast or news story. They are usually just one or two seconds long and include only a few details. You never want to give away the payoff—the most important details of the story—in a news teaser. If your audience already knows what your story will tell them, why should they listen to or watch your newscast and story?

Teasers usually run just two sentences long. The first sentence gives the audience a story highlight; the second tells the audience when they can tune in to see or hear your story. Here is a simple example for the drowning story:

A tragedy for vacationers near Cook Forest State Park today. That story is coming up on News at 5:30.

Wordplays, or using multiple meanings of a word, work effectively as teaser lines. However, they can be hard to come up with and should be considered only when you have time to check them out with your news editor. If your audience can't find a context for your wordplay, it could backfire on you. The drowning story would not be appropriate for wordplay, given the seriousness of the subject. However, imagine that a famous person such as Paul McCartney took a canoe trip down the Clarion River. For this lighter story, the subject is so famous that a wordplay focused on the name of his former band, The Beatles, will be instantly recognized by almost all viewers or listeners:

Insects weren't the only kind of Beatle in Cook Forest State Park today . . . we'll have that story after this.

#### Tosses

Tosses are transitions in the news script that move from one news reader (usually a news anchor) to another. The simplest toss uses the name of the other news anchor at the end of a story. This is called a one-word name toss:

The last canoeist to drown on the river was in 1968. Jim . . .

A toss to the story is a bit longer than a simple name toss. This type of toss often uses the same sort of highlight copy used by a teaser to transition to a donut package story, with a cut to a reporter live on the scene. Here is a story toss for the above example:

Well, it seems bugs weren't the only kind of Beatle in Cook Forest State Park today. Jim Craft has this surprising celebrity story . . . Jim?

#### Outros

Broadcast newscasts always need effective endings. Outros (pronounced OW-troes) help accomplish this. Outros are usually short sentences that conclude a newscast by referring to important highlights. Famous news anchors of the past used iconic phrases to end their newscasts. Walter Cronkite, for instance, ended his CBS Evening News broadcast each night with, "And that's the way it is," followed by the date. An outro that is used repeatedly is called a sign-off. These are rarely used today because they are considered old-fashioned, but other outros are important parts of local and network television newscasts. Here is an example of an outro that could conclude a newscast with our Paul McCartney canoe trip story:

That wraps up a busy day in the Clarington region. For Emily Jones and the News 15 staff, I'm Jim Craft, wishing you a good evening.

#### Summary

- 1. Describe the broadcast news industry. Radio news became an important source of news for audiences in the 1930s and grew in popularity during World War II. Broadcast television journalists developed local and national network news formats by the early 1960s, focusing on objectivity and trustworthy coverage of international, national, and local news. Cable news programs began in the 1980s, and today often mix editorial and news content to attract loyal audiences.
- 2. List the duties of a broadcast news professional. Broadcast journalists use reporting and technical skills to construct news stories. They also use social media to popularize their broadcasts and developing stories. In addition, they write promotional copy for their news programs. In smaller markets, broadcast journalists double as advertising copy writers for their radio and television stations.
- 3. Apply the Professional Strategy Triangle to writing a broadcast news story. Every broadcast news journalist must consider the situational elements that make the story newsworthy. Audience is another essential concern. The 5 Ws and H topic points help you find the important elements in a story for the lead and subsequent story structure, or message.
- 4. Discuss the role of actualities in broadcast news stories. Actualities place the audience at the scene of the story, which is something that electronic news does best. Actualities enliven stories, allowing audiences to hear and see the story from the perspectives of people on the scene.
- 5. List television news-copy style conventions. Type each story on a separate page; use a two-column format to synchronize video with written copy. Use Courier 12-point double-spaced font, 6½ inches across a page. Include a story title called the slug, the name of the news show, the story author, time of the copy, and the story date.
- 6. Describe the types of radio promotional and housekeeping copy. Radio news promotional copy often uses key elements of a developing news story to create audience curiosity about the day's news and encourage audience members to tune in or stay tuned in for the full story.

# Key Terms

local news 181 network news 181 cable news 181 readers 183 sound on tape (SOT) 183 voice-over (VO) 184 voice-over, sound on tape (VO/SOT) 184 news package 184 package lead-in 184 breaking news 184 donut 184 reporter on the scene (ROS) 184 live interview story 184 writing for the ear 187 delayed lead 189 actualities 191 sound bites 191 lead-in 197 story in-cue 198 story out-cue 199 news teaser 205 tosses 206 outros 206

# Discussion Questions

- 1. Explain in your own words the difference between the inverted pyramid story structure used in traditional print media stories and the conversational story structure used for broadcast news stories.
- 2. Discuss the reasons why reader stories are not as desirable to audiences as stories that use actualities and sound bites.
- 3. Explain the difference between a VO/SOT story and a news package story. Do this for both radio and television story formats.
- 4. Imagine you have a new job as a television reporter at a station in your hometown market. How would you use Facebook, Twitter, or other social media channels to draw attention to your television news reporting?
- 5. What differences do you see be-tween the news presented on your hometown TV stations and the news presented on CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC? List at least three differences in the stories that are covered, the types of story formats used, and the length of story coverage between local and cable news.

#### Chapter Exercises

- 1. Rewrite the following passive-voice sentences in the active voice:
  - a. The baseball was hit by the first baseman.
  - b. The terms were found to be unreasonable by the council member.
  - c. Complaints about the roads were made to the mayor by unhappy drivers.
  - d. Accidents are often caused by dirty windshields.
  - e. Brain injuries are often a problem for retired football players.
- 2. Remove jargon and apply the principles of brevity and conciseness to make the following sentences work for broadcast news copy:
  - a. Social scientists engage behaviorism when working with operant conditioning in college classrooms.
  - b. The 2007 Ford Mustang needed new front tie rod ends to enable it to safely turn at greater than a 30-degree radius.
  - c. The airport noise study revealed a correlation between high decibel levels and progressive hearing loss for local senior citizens.
  - d. A deep suspicion of outsiders and an unhappy misunderstanding resulted in an accidental shooting at the forest hunting lodge facility this weekend.
  - e. In a triple play that came after a Texas leaguer was hit to short right field, the right fielder made the play, made a toss to the second baseman who tagged the runner from first, and then nailed a throw to the catcher, who tagged out the runner advancing home from third.
- 3. Find a news story on the website of your local newspaper and rewrite it as a radio reader story. Use a delayed lead, brief and concise sentences, active voice, and a conversational story structure. Make the story run forty-five seconds long. Format your copy using the radio copy conventions found on page 196.
- 4. Imagine that you were able to interview people on the scene from the story you worked with in Exercise 3 above. Using quotes from that story, or likely quotes you could simulate, reconstruct it as an SOT radio story. Format your copy using the copy conventions on page 194.
- 5. Convert your story from Exercise 4 into a radio news package. Write the package story script and the package lead-in on two separate pages using the copy conventions on pages 187–190 and the example on page 197.

#### Additional Resources

About.com, "How to Write Broadcast News Stories"

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Schultz, Bradley. Broadcast News Producing. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005.

Tuggle, C. A., Forrest Carr, and Suzanne Huffman. *Broadcast News Handbook: Writing, Reporting, and Producing.* Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2001.

# Chapter 7 Copyediting

# Chapter Outline

**Learning Objectives** Frontline Media Writing Profile: Emily Goldstein, Copy Editor, The Dallas Morning News Copy Editors: The Critical Link Overview of the Copyediting Profession Job Duties Desirable Personal Qualities Copyediting in News and Public Relations Settings <u>Newspapers</u> <u>Magazines</u> **Broadcast Outlets Public Relations** Copyediting in the Digital Environment Copyediting Techniques The Three-Stage Copyediting Process Using the Three-Stage Copyediting Process on a Campus News Story News Leads News Story Facts Problems With the Lead Problems With the Second Paragraph Story Structure **Checking Facts** The War Room: Test Your Fact-Checking Skills **Managing Quotations Editing Story Length** Writing Headlines Craft Essential: Using the Professional Strategy Triangle to Write Headlines Copyediting Online Stories Pro Strategy Connection: Copy Editors: The Missing Link in the Online Newsroom? **Summary** Key Terms **Discussion Questions** Chapter Exercises Additional Resources

"The hardest part is knowing that no matter how well you write, some editor will change it, or someone in the public won't like it. With time, you learn to have faith in your own abilities. I've been published in *The Berkshire Eagle* and *The* 

Huffington Post, and I'm an editor on my school's paper. Who knows where I'll go next?!"

—Mitchell Chapman, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts

# Learning Objectives

- 1. Describe the copyediting profession, including the role and function of the copy editor.
- 2. Explain the process of copyediting in news and public relations settings.
- 3. Discuss the challenges of copyediting in the digital environment.
- 4. Demonstrate techniques used by copy editors for print and online pieces.

Frontline Media Writing Profile	
Emily Goldstein, Copy Editor	
The Dallas Morning News, Dallas, Texas	



To Emily Goldstein, ensuring that final copy includes proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation is a crucial element of copyediting, but in reality, the job includes much more.

"One of the misconceptions people have about copyediting is that it's all about grammar, spelling, and punctuation," she says. "Of course, these are very important, but it's not just about whether a comma should be in a sentence. The biggest thing is that as a copy editor, you are the last line of editing defense in terms of accuracy and sensitivity."

Goldstein has worked for *The Dallas Morning News* since 2007, when she earned her bachelor's degree in convergence journalism from the University of Missouri. Goldstein got her start as assistant editor for *neighborsgo*, a weekly publication. In addition to picking up copyediting skills, she learned how to design and lay out news pages, a typical task for copy editors at smaller publications. Goldstein was then hired as the iPad editor on the newspaper's digital team. Here, she decided which stories belonged on the front page for iPad app subscribers and reformatted those stories for mobile devices.

"I had a great boss who wanted me to learn other things," Goldstein recalls. "The editors noted that I was really good at catching mistakes and looking out for details, so they let me take some shifts on the copy desk." Goldstein has worked as a copy editor at the newspaper since 2013. She is currently pursuing her master's degree in journalism at the University of North Texas.

To underscore the importance of copy editors, Goldstein recalls a story she once edited on mental illness in the Spanish-speaking community. Checking the caption for the accompanying photo, she noticed that the subject was a teenager, not the forty-year-old woman featured in the story. Somehow, the copy desk had the wrong photo. Luckily, Goldstein caught the error.

Checking photo captions is just one of the many editing duties Goldstein performs each week on behalf of *The Dallas Morning News* and its readers. "Copy editors protect the newspaper from mistakes finding their way into print," Goldstein says. "For readers, we try to make sure that the story is written in the clearest and simplest way, and that what they're seeing is accurate and fair."

At times, the reporter and originating editor can be so close to a story they miss obvious errors. For example, Goldstein once edited a major story on city government. The problem was the reporter did not mention the city's name anywhere in the story. Once Goldstein inserted that fact and reviewed the story again, it was good to go.

Considering what she loves about her work as a copy editor, Goldstein says, "My favorite part is that I get to learn so many new things every day. Writing headlines and editing stories and pictures is very interesting to me. I also love seeing the inner workings of the newsroom."

## Copy Editors: The Critical Link

The process of researching and writing a news or feature story or a public relations piece is complex and demands your strongest mental effort. Yet the draft is not complete until it has been skillfully copyedited and prepared for publication. Copy editors, regardless of their job title or work setting, are the lifeblood of media organizations. They form the bridge between writers and readers. They represent their publication to readers and serve as its guardians of accuracy and credibility. Copy editors defend the language, ensuring the use of correct grammar and word usage. Good copyediting makes the difference between a mediocre publication and an excellent one.

In the twenty-first century, the copy editor goes by a number of new titles. A professional working in today's digital multimedia environment may be referred to as an informational designer, a database producer, a web content manager, or another job title. In public relations or other organizational settings, he or she may simply be called an editor or publication manager. In many ways, *copy editor* describes a job function as much as a professional title. In other words, you will often edit the work of others as you advance in your career as a media professional. Hang onto that thought as you read this chapter. We describe many copyediting roles and techniques here in terms of professional job titles and traditional work settings. However, you can and should use all these roles and techniques to proofread and edit your own work and the work of others, regardless of your job title or work settings.

Readers might enjoy the way a story flows and appreciate its easy readability without knowing that the copy editor tidied up its punctuation, added active verbs, or perhaps rearranged sections of it. The copy editor's job picks up where the writer's work ends and, when done well, is often invisible. But copy editors can be certain their work is widely read and is among the most influential in the media world. For example, copy editors are expert headline writers. They produce the news "crawls" that run along the bottom of your television screen each night. Copy editors in any job setting must be masters of all the writing principles we have covered in this text.

# Overview of the Copyediting Profession

From the earliest days of newspapers, publishers have needed experts to review stories before publication, check facts, write headlines, and at times, to crop photos and lay out news pages. But copy editors do so much more than this. Dr. Karen B. Dunlap, a journalist and former president of The Poynter Institute, a journalism education organization, underscores the role of copy editors at news organizations. She writes,

Copy editors matter. They bring news elements together to make the whole more than the individual parts. They think about news packages, news pages, and overall content and credibility. They guide readers through a news page with the skillful use of headlines, designs, photographs, and illustrations. They ease readers through stories with careful editing to complement the work of writers and assigning editors. Copy editors enjoy enough distance from the news reporting process to serve as readers before stories leave the newsroom. And yet they are close enough to the process to influence the journalism.<sup>1</sup>

Photo 7.2: Copy editors review stories, check facts, write headlines, and often crop photos and lay out news pages. Copy editors serve a critical role in the newsroom by acting as liaisons between reporters and readers.



Copy editors are first-rate content curators for their publications. They sort through vast amounts of information and present it to readers in a meaningful and organized way. Copy editors also act as liaisons between their reporters and the news audience, balancing readers' need for accurate, clear, concise stories with reporters' desire to express themselves in a distinctive style and voice through their writing. They may question or challenge facts in a story, suggest a different emphasis, or advocate for a story package that better serves the readers. At the same time, a good copy editor never changes a story simply for the sake of changing it. Certain styles of news writing—feature stories and in-depth analyses, for example—enable the reporter to write in a more individualized style. Here, the copy editor must make a professional judgment call, taking care not to edit the writer's voice out of the story. The ultimate goal is to serve time-pressed readers with stories that are useful and easy to understand.

Copy editors are relatively few in number. If you are looking to advance into management at your media organization, the copy desk provides an excellent pathway to the upper

ranks, giving you the opportunity to learn about all aspects of print and online content production. Many copyediting positions tend to be concentrated in major media markets such as Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, or New York. However, technology now enables you to work from virtually anywhere, including your home. As a copy editor, you are likely to earn a higher salary and enjoy a more stable career than most reporters or writers.

#### Job Duties

As a copy editor in any job setting, expect to work under tight deadlines and perform a wide variety of duties. These include

- checking copy and correcting errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, style, and usage;
- recasting leads, sentences, and paragraphs to make them more clear, lively, or concise;
- rearranging or rewriting sections of stories to improve flow and readability;
- conducting research, confirming sources, and verifying facts, dates, or statistics;
- using news judgment to determine emphasis and placement of stories;
- flagging potential legal issues related to libel, invasion of privacy, copyright, or trademarks;
- writing headlines and photo/illustration captions;
- selecting and sizing photographs or other artwork; and
- designing and laying out newspaper, magazine, or web pages.

Scanning the above list, it is evident that many copy editors have worked as journalists and have news reporting experience. They bear heavy responsibility for the accuracy and quality of their writers' work. Their eyes are usually the last to see a piece before it is printed or run online. Copy editors form the last line of defense against poor writing and legal problems that can result from it. They also protect their employer's reputation for accuracy, thoroughness, and responsibility.

### Desirable Personal Qualities

Considering the above job duties and the mentally demanding nature of the job, you must work to develop the following personal and professional qualities as a copy editor:

Expert writing skills. To edit the work of others, you must be able to write at least as well as (and preferably better than) they do. You must be an expert in all facets of grammar, spelling, punctuation, and style. At the same time, you must be skilled enough to make necessary edits without altering the writer's voice, style, or ideas. Neither the writer nor the reader should be able to detect the work of a good copy editor, but the story will be much improved after his or her work.

*Intelligence.* Being intelligent means bringing a broad background to every story on which you work. What is the significance of this story? Does it make sense as a whole? An intelligent copy editor will instinctively know.

Objectivity. As the liaison between the writer and the reader, the copy editor faces an extra obligation to remain completely objective, even though he or she may know and work with the people who produced the story. The copy editor must be able to stand back from the written piece, place it in a broader context, and view it with a distanced eye.

Solid judgment. It will largely be up to you to decide whether a certain story is ethical, sufficiently supported by research and reporting, and on solid legal ground with respect to libel, privacy, copyright, and trademarks. If the reporter or writer needs to do more work on the story, you will need to send it back to him or her for revision. An orientation to detail. Is the material free of all types of errors? Does it conform to the media organization's style guide? A detail-oriented editor will work hard to be sure the written piece is as perfect as possible.

A questioning mind. If the story raises questions in your mind as you read it, it will probably raise questions in the mind of the reader as well. A solid copy editor brings a healthy skepticism to any story. He or she always asks, "What questions will the reader have, and are they answered here?"

An audience orientation. A good copy editor knows the publication's audience, including readers' wants, needs, likes, and dislikes. He or she knows the personality of the publication and how it is likely to be viewed among that audience. That knowledge is put to use in selecting stories, photos, and graphics; writing headlines; and as required, designing print and web pages.

*Big-picture vision.* As a copy editor, you need to be able to step back from a single story and view it in the context of other stories or visual elements running alongside it on the same page or within the same edition. How do they all connect for the reader? Now take that idea a step further. How can this story run as part of a larger story package to give the reader added meaning and convenience? This kind of thinking requires you be part reporter, part photographer, part graphic artist, and

part layout editor.

*Interpersonal skills*. Writing and editing on deadline is a stressful process. Tensions are bound to arise. Feelings can be hurt if the copy editor does not exercise care and diplomacy. Always work to guide and encourage your writers in their work. At the same time, your professional judgment as a copy editor is not negotiable.

If you are interested in copyediting as a career path, start building experience now by getting involved with your school's media organizations and seeking relevant internships. At many smaller publications, including your college newspaper, your editor is likely to place you in charge of assembling an entire page or section of the publication. Here, you would assign and edit stories and photographs (both local and from news services), produce informational graphics, lay out pages, write headlines, and assemble story packages. Media organizations aren't the only place to pick up copyediting experience. Corporations, nonprofits, hospitals, universities, and many other types of organizations generate publications that need to be edited, so don't limit your thinking. Take every available opportunity to gain work experience in whatever form it comes. And of course, it helps to be flexible in terms of where you are willing to work.

Copyediting in News and Public Relations Settings

#### Newspapers

Because of the 24/7 news cycle that predominates in today's digital news environment, deadlines are continuous and fast paced. Editors have little time for reflection. They may have only minutes to copyedit, check facts, write a headline, and post the story on the newspaper's website.

Copy editors expect reporters and news writers to submit their stories by deadline without fail, unless they are notified of delays in advance. At this stage, copy editors also expect the news writer's story to be accurate, to read reasonably well, and to be mostly free of errors in grammar, spelling, or punctuation. That means writers must compose, proofread, and edit their work carefully before they pass it on to the copyediting desk. Often, stories will contain facts and quotes that the copy editor cannot easily double-check. In the composing stage, the writer will have established a context for the material and chosen to emphasize certain elements over others. All this requires professional news judgment and writing skills on the front end, because these elements cannot be easily fixed by the copy editor later. Using news judgment is the process of selecting and grading news to determine whether it should be used, where, and in part or in full.

If news writers expect their stories to resemble the final versions that are posted on the news organization's website, they must do a solid job of proofreading and editing their own work. They must turn in relatively clean copy that does not require extensive editing by the copy editor. Journalists who follow these instructions will gain reputations as good writers and earn the trust of their copy editors. In turn, copy editors will be more prone to edit their work with a lighter touch. On the other hand, writers who turn in poorly edited stories quickly earn a reputation at the copy desk for sloppy work. Editors know they must look harder for errors and are therefore more likely to heavily edit their stories.

### Magazines

Many of the copyediting processes and guidelines that operate at newspapers also apply in magazine settings. In most cases, copy editors work closely alongside writers through the editing process. While matters such as content, grammar, style, or punctuation are probably not up for negotiation, writers may be able to argue for their own ideas with respect to the voice, tone, or overall approach to their article. Most magazines employ fact checkers as members of their editorial staffs. These assistants carefully double-check all facts in the article, including quotes, sources, job titles, phone numbers, website and email addresses, and the like. If something does not check out, they will contact the writer.

The best way for a journalist to land top assignments is to earn a reputation as a professional-grade writer. That means carefully researching, writing, proofreading, and editing one's own work. It also means submitting articles that are well organized and complete. Copy editors will appreciate this and reward careful writers with their trust over the long term. This advice is especially important for anyone who wants to work as a freelance magazine writer or interest an editor in considering a piece for publication. Remember that writers compete alongside dozens of other skilled professionals vying for a limited number of story opportunities. Clean copy will elevate them above other less skilled writers. However, sloppy copy is an instant red flag and will mark the writer as an amateur. With care, this situation can easily be avoided.

#### **Broadcast Outlets**

Copyediting in the broadcast news environment moves faster and is less formal than in newspaper or magazine settings. The process varies based on the size and complexity of the media operation and its market. In larger markets, reporters often provide the story details to writers or assistant producers, who write the story and turn it over to the show's producer for final copyediting.

Like newspaper and magazine writers, news reporters in broadcast settings bear most of the responsibility for ensuring that their story is accurate, clear, and well structured for the television news audience. The news anchor or producer is not able to cover the story, interview sources, or assemble the copy based on their personal observations. That part is up to the broadcast news writer.

#### Public Relations

In public relations settings, PR professionals are often responsible for writing and editing their own work, and the work of others for social media posts, news releases, newsletters, brochures, websites, magazines, and other types of messages and publications. Many of the copy editor's job duties and desirable personal qualities noted above also apply to the public relations practitioner.

You may work as a public relations staffer for a large organization such as a corporation or university. Here, anything you write will probably undergo multiple edits from several sets of eyes. But remember that most of these reviewers will be bosses, managers, or clients who are not trained editors. They will probably not be scrutinizing your writing with the same level of precision that you would apply to it. Instead, they are more likely to catch content-related items.

Alternately, you may work for a small organization or agency in which only you and perhaps someone else will proofread and edit your messages before they are sent out to the media or other key publics in print or online. In either scenario, most of the final responsibility for proofing and editing rests on your shoulders. Your eyes will often be the last to see a news release before it is emailed to media members or an annual report before it is printed. You must learn how to proofread and edit your own work. This is a challenging task that requires considerable practice.

## Copyediting in the Digital Environment

In the digital news environment, trying to do a professional job of copyediting might be compared to herding cats. News organizations today operate under tremendous pressure to produce stories quickly and post them online immediately in order to break the story first. Many outlets have opted for a digital-first strategy, in which stories are posted without any editing beyond the reporter's own work. That kind of pressure can work against sound copyediting principles.

"I worry that copyediting is not valued for web stories as much as it should be," says Emily Goldstein, the copy editor with *The Dallas Morning News* featured in this chapter's Frontline Media Writing Profile. "Editors may think that because the story is online, they can fix it later if there's a problem. But things can go viral online. In many ways, I think it is more dangerous to put something online without copyediting than it is [to do so] in print."

Many reporters write blogs, which are not usually copyedited. Goldstein recalls an instance in which a reporter's blog about a parking garage collapse in Dallas turned into a news story. "It was breaking news and the story needed to go up quickly," she recalls. "In that case, the reporter wrote the headline and the story without a copy editor seeing them." Both contained incorrect information.

To add another wrinkle, readers track stories through URLs, and those story links are often posted on Facebook and Twitter. If a copy editor updates a story and reposts it, the reader is not likely to find it again. Goldstein says she is continually challenged to update evolving stories in a way that is transparent and easy for readers to understand. "I haven't seen a great strategy for that yet," she notes. "It doesn't work to just add an updated version of the story. Usually, it has to be reworked."

Web platforms change continuously, and media organizations are taking various approaches to meeting the challenge of online copyediting. But despite the emphasis on visual, multimedia elements, remember that the web remains a text-based medium at heart. All of the copyediting rules and guidelines found in this chapter apply to web-based publications. Also consider the Professional Strategy Triangle and the ways in which the *situation* (an online, interactive medium, nonlinear reading experience with competing news and advertising elements) and *audience* (time-pressed readers using mobile devices) influence the ways in which the final *message* must be edited. We discuss these factors later in the chapter.



# Copyediting Techniques

Copyediting requires heavy mental lifting. It is never an easy job, even for seasoned professionals. But you will begin to see a much improved final story emerge from the rough diamond of a writer's copy as you focus your thinking and put your decisions into action. Let us now explore how copy editors correct leads and story structures, check facts, manage quotes, cut stories to length, and write headlines.

# The Three-Stage Copyediting Process

It is impossible to copyedit a piece of writing in one step. Professionals always proof a piece at least three times, looking for different things each time. Whether you work at a newspaper, magazine, radio station, public relations agency, or some other media setting, use the three-stage copyediting process to edit your own work or the work of others. Here's how it's done:

Stage 1: Get the big picture. The copy editor analyzes the news lead, organization, and overall content of the story, judging their appropriateness and effectiveness. The editor makes few changes at this stage. Here, he or she also exercises news judgment to ensure that the writer has correctly emphasized one or more of the 5 Ws and H (who, what, when, where, why, and how) topic points and one or more of the six situational news values first discussed in <a href="Chapter 4">Chapter 4</a>.

- a. Impact. How does this story touch readers' lives? Does it affect the way they eat, breathe, work, or play? What is the "give-a-damn" factor?
- b. Proximity. How close to the audience did the event, situation, or issue occur? This news value is closely tied to impact. In many cases, close proximity to a news event will dictate its impact on audiences.
- c. Timeliness. When did the news occur—now, this morning, or tonight? How current is the story? Readers and viewers want the latest information, not yesterday's news.
- d. Conflict. Conflict may exist between people, institutions, or the forces of nature. Throughout history, people have been interested in conflicts both large and small.
- e. Prominence. Major public figures or celebrities in news stories confer prominence. Often, readers will follow a story with very little impact, proximity, or timeliness simply because the story's characters are prominent or famous.
- f. Oddity or novelty. How unusual or strange is the news event, situation, or issue? The more unusual it is, the more likely it will be of interest to your news audience.

Stage 2: Scrutinize and edit. Now the copy editor gives the story a much closer read, correcting any errors in grammar, spelling, style, or punctuation. He or she will review the lead and story structure, recasting or rearranging sentences and paragraphs as necessary to make them clearer or more concise. Such edits will also improve the organization and overall flow of the story.

The copy editor double-checks facts and confirms sources at this stage. If late-breaking news occurs, he or she may update the story and accompanying photos or graphics to include new developments. During this step, the copy editor will also check stories for any items that could trigger a lawsuit related to libel, invasion of privacy, copyright, or trademark issues.

Photo 7.3: Every news story needs a thorough copyediting job, and copy editors confer with reporters on a regular basis.



Stage 3: Do a final reread. The copy editor carefully reads the story a third time to ensure that all errors and outstanding issues have been resolved. The final piece must be accurate, clear, concise, and well organized for readers. An editor who encounters serious problems in any of the above areas will need to consult the writer. The two may work together to remedy these issues. Or, the editor may remand the story back to the writer for further work.

# Using the Three-Stage Copyediting Process on a Campus News Story

Suppose that you are the copy editor for your campus newspaper. You have assigned one of your reporters to cover a campus food drive sponsored by a campus leadership organization. The reporter returns with the 275-word story and suggested headline shown below. It's time to put the three-stage copyediting process to work on this story.

#### Foodstuff is back in Westover

Foodstuff returned for its second year here at Westover College, but there was no sophomore slump to be found. According to David McMaster, who helped coordinate the event, this year's iteration "far exceeded both last year and the expectations of all who were involved this year."

Foodstuff is a campus-driven food drive designed, organized and operated by SLICE, Student Leadership Institute for Community Engagement, with any and all collections going to the Kenyon Chamber of Commerce's "Full Pantry" event.

The Foodstuff campaign promoted by SLICE collects over one thousand food items for the surrounding communities in need. Full Pantry is an annual countywide food drive typically held during the community's annual FallFest, and it benefits all 13 Wyndham County Food Banks. All donations collected throughout the event are then gathered at the local Millwork Mall before being distributed to the surrounding food banks.

From 9/27 through 10/1, 1,151 nonperishable food items were collected from various campus organizations and groups, with considerably large donations coming from the Westover Chapter of the Kappa Delta sorority and the Westover Fighting Knights football team.

According to Westover student Zacheriah Wilson, who planned the event, this volume of donations was a "significant increase from last year, where we were only able to collect 418 items. These donations accounted for roughly twenty percent of the 5,987 items collected in total throughout the FallFest event."

On the meaningful contribution of the campus organizations involved, Master said, "We have a group of students here at Westover who really truly care about their community and the well-being of others, and this event clearly illustrates that."

Stage 1: Get the big picture. You start by reading through the story, focusing on its news lead, organization, and content. Most of the news elements appear to be in order. But you can see the lead needs some work:

- Recalling the 5 Ws and H topic points, you note that the lead does not clearly specify the "when" and the "where" elements.
- The lead does not sufficiently stress the *impact* news value. A food drive positively affects many people in the community, but that is missing here.
- It appears that the writer tried to make a witty reference to the "sophomore slump," but it just doesn't make sense in this context.
- Finally, the lead integrates a quote from a source, a practice best avoided in news writing.

Stage 2: Scrutinize and edit. You know you need to recast the lead for this story. In addition, you note

- some errors in grammar, punctuation, and AP style in the body of the story.
- several sentences that you need to punch up with more active verbs or rewrite to make them more concise.
- a few partial quotes, which you need to rewrite as full quotes.
- a suggested headline that lacks an action verb and a time element.

On the second read, you detect a possible fact error in the name spelling of student David MacMaster. This requires you to check the student directory to confirm his name spelling. You also confirm the name spelling for Zacheriah Wilson. While in fact-check mode, you consult the Student Activities Calendar and discover that the Food Pantry event actually ran September 28 to October 2, which is incorrectly reported in this story.

You get to work on editing the story. After fifteen minutes or so, you come up with this rewrite:

Foodstuff returns to Westover for a second year

Last Thursday, the Foodstuff program concluded its best year yet at Westover College, where students collected 1,151 nonperishable food items for Kenyon County's needlest residents.

Students gathered at Millwork Mall to box up hundreds of cans and bags of nonperishable food. Westover student David MacMaster helped coordinate the Foodstuff program. "This year's iteration far exceeded both last year and the expectations of all who were involved this year," he said.

Foodstuff is a campus-sponsored food drive designed, organized and operated by

SLICE, Student Leadership Institute for Community Engagement. All food donations support the Kenyon Chamber of Commerce's annual Full Pantry event, an annual county-wide food drive held during Kenyon's FallFest. Food donations benefit the 13 food banks operating in Wyndham County. All donations collected at the event are gathered at Millwork Mall to be distributed to the food banks.

Each year, Westover students collect more than 1,000 food items for surrounding communities in need. From Sept. 28 through Oct. 2, various campus organizations and groups collected the food items, with the largest donations coming from the Westover Chapter of the Kappa Delta sorority and the Westover Fighting Knights football team.

Westover student Zacheriah Wilson helped plan this year's Foodstuff event. "This volume of donations was a significant increase from last year, where we were only able to collect 418 items," he said. "These donations accounted for roughly 20 percent of the 5,987 items collected in total throughout the FallFest event."

MacMaster said he was impressed with the contributions from the campus organizations involved with Foodstuff. "We have a group of students here at Westover who really truly care about their community and the well-being of others and this event clearly illustrates that," he said.

Stage 3: Do a final reread. You carefully review the story once more to make sure that all errors, questions, and outstanding issues have been resolved. You ask yourself, "What questions will my readers ask, and did I answer those questions here?" You see that you have, so this story is good to go.

Although the above scenario places you in the role of copy editor, remember that you will also use the three-stage copyediting process on your own written pieces. Given the importance of self-editing, as discussed in this chapter, you should work to develop this skill set.

#### News Leads

Always edit news leads focusing on the Situation and Audience corners of the Professional Strategy Triangle. Consider the type of piece you are editing and the type of lead that will best serve your audience. For example, if you are editing a feature story or a more creative piece, a feature-style lead as described in <a href="Chapter 5">Chapter 5</a> makes the best choice. If you are working on a hard news story or more of a serious, straight-ahead piece, you may instead opt for a summary news lead that draws upon some mix of the 5 Ws and H, along with the six situational news values noted above. With luck, your writer has already figured this out and made an appropriate choice selecting the lead. But you will often need to intervene and make adjustments.

If, after considering situation and audience, you decide a summary lead is best, it's time to begin thinking about the *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why*, and *how* news elements, and which of these should be stressed in the news lead. Here, you will need to use the six situational news values to help you arrive at the best decision. Remember that as a rule, summary leads contain only one sentence and run between twenty-five and thirty-five words long. That means you will probably be able to stress only a few of the most important news elements.

Consider the following example:

## News story facts

- 1. The Maclendon Police Department plans to run "saturation" patrols this St. Patrick's Day (Thursday, March 17) to locate possible drunk drivers.
- 2. Police officials say the idea is to increase the safety of Maclendon residents celebrating St. Patrick's Day.
- 3. The department made the announcement last Wednesday on its Facebook page, stating, "The idea is to make roads safe for pedestrians and other drivers during St. Patrick's Day festivities. If you see a vehicle that you think is being driven by a drunk driver, dial 911 immediately."
- 4. The week before St. Patrick's Day, Maclendon police set up a DUI checkpoint on Murray Avenue to screen for intoxicated drivers.
- 5. A saturation patrol involves concentrating officers in specific areas of the city to patrol the streets. This is different from a checkpoint, which stops drivers who reach a designated checkpoint.

The first step here is to figure out which of the 5 Ws and H topic points are most important to stress in the news lead. Reviewing your list of the six situational news values, you quickly determine that *impact*, *proximity*, and *timeliness* are the main situational news values driving this story. That makes facts 1 through 3 the most important to stress with

the *who*, *what*, *where*, and *when* news elements. The *why* element is also key, but the reason for the patrols (to catch drunk drivers and increase safety) is already obvious. *How* the police department made its announcement may be noteworthy, considering that they used a social media channel.

The reporter has submitted a story with the following lead:

Maclendon police will be conducting DUI saturation patrols in the city on Thursday, March 17, the department announced Wednesday on Facebook.

You determine that this lead is well written and works for the story.

Next, let's work on a news lead that needs some editing. This one is similar to what you might find as a copy editor at your student newspaper.

An hour-long Student Senate meeting hosted by President Scott Flory on Monday night at 7:30 p.m. saw another Worthington University Recognized Student Organization approved, continuing the constant trend of this semester.

#### Problems with the lead

- The writer does not clearly tell the reader who was involved. Considering the situational news values of impact and proximity, readers need more clarity here. What is the name of the new Recognized Student Organization?
- The lead makes you wonder about the "constant trend of this semester." What does this phrase mean?
- The lead contains superfluous information, including the time of the meeting and the name of the president.
- The lead contains a personification problem. A Student Senate meeting cannot "see" something. Only a person or another living thing can do that.

The second paragraph of the story reads,

The National Society of Leadership and Success was recognized as the newest addition to the Worthington RSO family. The vote was unanimous.

#### Problems with the second paragraph

• This paragraph contains the name of the Recognized Student Organization, which

- belongs up in the lead.
- The sentences are written in the passive voice ("was recognized" and "was unanimous"). You will need to recast the sentence in the active voice.
- The *AP Stylebook* dictates that writers use acronyms (such as RSO) only for a few highly recognizable organizations. Otherwise, spell out the organization completely or refer to it as something else. In this case, *RSO* is probably acceptable on second reference, as we can assume that campus readers will know the acronym.

With the above issues in mind, you decide to consolidate the original lead and second paragraph into a new and tighter lead:

At the Student Senate meeting Monday night, Worthington University student senators unanimously approved the National Society of Leadership and Success as its newest Recognized Student Organization.

#### Story Structure

In copyediting a story's structure, you must make sure that the writer carefully considered readers in the Audience corner of the Professional Strategy Triangle. To get started, ask yourself the following questions:

- 1. Who exactly are my readers, and what questions are they likely to have?
- 2. Would this story make sense to the reader?
- 3. Does this story structure take readers along one step at a time, or does it "leapfrog" ahead of them, creating confusion?
- 4. Do all the facts appear to be in place or is something missing?
- 5. Are the facts accurate? Do the names and numbers in the story check out?
- 6. Are there any redundancies that need to be eliminated?
- 7. Is the overall tone and approach of this story appropriate for my readership?

As we learned in <u>Chapter 5</u>, many news stories are written using the *inverted pyramid* story structure. Here, the writer places the most important information up top and then composes the rest of the story by placing facts in descending order of importance. This structure serves readers well by providing them with the key facts up front in case they do not finish the story. It also helps copy editors because they can trim the story from the bottom up without sacrificing any of the most important material.

Story structures vary according to your publication type and work setting. Whatever the agreed-upon story structure is, the copy editor will need to make sure it is being followed, and that it makes sense to the reader. Let's take a look at a story that is structured well according to the inverted pyramid:

who, what, where, and when questions.  Career prospects could soon improve for many workers in the Three Lakes region thanks to a new WorkFirst training program now under way at the important information appears here. It also answers	when questions.  Paragraph 2: The secondary, but still important information appears here. It also answers the how question and elaborates upon facts provided in the lead.	workers in the Three Lakes region thanks to a new WorkFirst training program now under way at the Samuelson Career Center.  The center is now helping workers build employment
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Paragraph 3: Here, the first direct quotation is used. Skilled writers introduce their sources early in the story and quote them often. This quote does not restate what has already been said. Instead, it provides new information from a credible source.

\* \* \* \*

Paragraph 4: This paragraph considers the readers and their likely questions, providing more of the what element with an explanation of what workers can do once they complete the program. It also makes an effective time transition from present to future.

Paragraph 5: A good news story always includes at least two sources, with quotes wherever possible. Here, note how Wright's quote breaks up the narrative and humanizes the story with her own anecdote. This quote is just about right in terms of length.

\* \* \* \*

Paragraph 6: Sticking to the inverted pyramid structure, this moves into background information on the WorkFirst program. It Transitions Project. In this 12-week program, students learn job search and interviewing techniques, boost their math and computer skills, and research and visit area employers. For qualified applicants, financial aid, internships, and job placement are available.

\* \* \* \*

"These workers can't afford to stay in school for several years to retrain," said Don Lemmons, director of the Career Transitions Project. "They need job training fast, so we give them new skills they can use right now."

\* \* \* \*

After finishing this program, students can move into other WorkFirst training programs and train to become computer network technicians, entrepreneurs, human services workers, or office specialists. In addition, students also may pursue one of the Samuelson Career Center's existing 14 vocational programs, ranging from culinary arts to automotive technology.

Vivianne Wright, a 42-year-old single mother from DeHaven, lost her job as a cannery worker in Flatwater three years ago. Since May, she has been using the Career Transitions Project to boost her computer and job search skills. Next, she plans to retrain to be a human services worker. "When I lost my job at the cannery, I thought it was really over for me," she said. "But that's all changed. When I finish WorkFirst training, I should be able to move into a human services career with a salary that will support me and my daughter."

\* \* \* \*

WorkFirst training at the Samuelson Career Center is

also provides readers with more of the "who" element as it explains who qualifies for the program. Interested readers are likely to want to know this information.	center in 2015. Displaced workers who qualify under the 2015 Worker Retraining Act will be given priority. These are people who have been terminated or have
* * * * *  Paragraph 7: Here, the writer anticipates that interested readers, or someone they know, may want more information on the program. Always provide the reader with a	received a notice of termination from employment, and who are eligible for or have exhausted their unemployment benefits within the past 24 months.  ***  For information about WorkFirst training or the Career Transitions Project, call 1-888-634-9957 or
way to learn more or take action after reading the story.	visit the program online at www.workfirstnh.org.

This story will need little copyediting. After double-checking the facts and carefully reading through the story once more, you could write a suggested headline and perhaps a photo or infographic caption. You could then post the story on your media organization's website or lay it out on a news page.

#### Checking Facts

Copy editors are meticulous fact checkers. Although the reporter and assigning editor are supposed to double-check all the facts before sending the story to you, as copy editor you bear final responsibility for fact checking. This means making sure the story contains no errors or discrepancies, and that the facts are correct and complete. The task requires you to be part reference librarian, part mathematician, and part skeptic. You will need research skills, the ability to check numbers with a calculator, and the patience to double-check addresses, dates, phone numbers, website URLs, and email addresses.

In a newsroom setting, it is impossible to check all the facts in every story you edit. This is especially true in the digital newsroom, where updated stories are being posted continuously. Therefore, you will need to develop a keen sense for which facts should routinely be checked, such as name spellings, locations, and dates. Facts essential to your story must be thoroughly checked, even if it requires you to hold the story until a later date.

Consider the above story on WorkFirst, and the facts you would need to check as copy editor:

- 1. Is WorkFirst one word or two? Uppercase or lowercase?
- 2. Is Samuelson Career Center spelled correctly?
- 3. Is Career Transitions Project the correct program title?
- 4. Does the program actually run 12 weeks long?
- 5. Are the names of the sources, Don Lemmons and Vivianne Wright, spelled correctly?
- 6. Is Wright actually 42 years old?
- 7. What year did the legislature fund the WorkFirst training program?
- 8. Are the 2015 Worker Retraining Act and its terms referenced correctly?
- 9. Do the phone number and website check out? Call the phone number and go to the website address.

Most of the above facts could be easily verified through some quick online research. Other more complex questions or missing information would require you to check with the reporter or assigning editor. Remember, your eyes will be the last to see this story before it is posted online or printed in a publication. You will need to stay sharp, regardless of how you feel that day.

The War Room

### Test Your Fact-Checking Skills

As we have learned in this chapter, copy editors are astute fact checkers and resourceful researchers. They know where to go to verify facts in the news stories submitted by reporters.

Using print or online resources, locate answers to the following fact-checking questions. For each item, write out your answer in complete sentences and cite your source.

- 1. How many colleges and universities are located in your state? Which ones are public and which are private?
- 2. What is the annual enrollment at your college or university? Are enrollments increasing or decreasing as a trend?
- 3. What is the percentage of residents in your county who have earned high school diplomas? Bachelor's degrees? Graduate degrees? How does this rate compare to the national average?
- 4. What is the median age and income of residents living in your county? How have those figures changed from ten years ago?
- 5. What was the crime rate in your county last year? How does this rate compare to the state average?
- 6. How many sex offenders live within your city limits? How does this rate compare to the national average?
- 7. How retirement friendly is your state compared to the others? Investigate factors such as climate, real estate, recreation, medical care, and income taxes.

#### Managing Quotations

Quotations are among the most crucial components of a news story. They can humanize an issue, add credibility through use of human sources, and bring facts to life. People's published statements also become a matter of record that can remain in the public sphere for many years. Usually, they have only one chance to correctly say what they need to say, so the reporter and copy editor must get it right the first time. Quotes must be recorded, written, and edited carefully to ensure that they are accurate, attributed to the right people, and placed in the proper context within the overall story. This is especially important because incorrect or misleading quotes can lead to libel suits for news organizations, a legal issue we discuss at length in <a href="Chapter 8">Chapter 8</a>.

Chapters 4 and 5 contain a complete discussion on how to record, write, and punctuate quotes. The copy editor must make sure that the writer has observed all these conventions when he or she submits the story. To recap, follow these guidelines in editing quotes:

- Run full quotes wherever possible. As a rule, avoid partial quotes and fragmentary quotes. If the speaker has not clearly expressed his or her ideas or did not speak in a concise manner, it is usually better to paraphrase.
- *Use the proper verb of attribution.* As boring as it may sound, *said* is the safest verb of attribution.
- *Punctuate correctly.* For a guide on punctuating quotes, refer to Chapter 5.
- *Correct direct quotes sparingly, if at all.* Even minor changes, such as adding an extra word or removing a comma can change the meaning of the quote.
- Watch length. In general, limit the length of source quotes to two or three sentences. In rare cases, you may need to extend the quote to another paragraph. Lengthy quotes in large blocks become tiresome for the reader. At that point, it is often best to paraphrase the rest of the quote if the information is necessary to the story.
- Do not tell the reader that a question was asked and that someone replied to it. Many beginning news writers commit this error. Example:

#### Incorrect:

When asked about her love for growing organic vegetables, extension agent Leona Martin replied, "It's something I've done since I was knee high. I guess it just gets in your blood."

Readers do not care that a question was asked and that the source replied to it. They can assume this. Instead, just give the quote.

#### Correct:

Discussing her love for growing organic vegetables, extension agent Leona Martin said, "It's something I've done since I was knee high. I guess it just gets in your blood."

#### Editing Story Length

Whether you are editing a newspaper page, a magazine section, or a public relations newsletter, you will often design your pages in advance and specify "news holes" or allotted space for the stories. If a story comes in too long for that space, you will have to cut it. Or perhaps the story will need to be shortened to better serve the reader. Editors are responding to readers' evolving preferences by running fewer long stories and more short ones. Whenever you must shorten a story, take care not to eliminate any facts, quotes, or descriptions that could raise questions for your readers or mislead them in any way. You can reduce the length of a story in one or more of the following ways:

Cut the story. Cutting means removing entire paragraphs or sections of the story. If the story is written in the inverted pyramid style, it is designed to be cut from the bottom, so the task may be relatively simple. But you will still need to methodically review the entire story, taking care to preserve the essential facts, details, and general outline. In addition, you must maintain the story's overall tone or flavor. Once you have cut the story to its specified length, always review it with your "reader" hat on to make sure it still works. If not, you may need to return the story to the writer for more work.

*Trim the story.* When trimming, the idea is to trim down the writing to make it more concise and vigorous. Eliminate unnecessary words and redundant phrases. Punch up wordy sentences with stronger verbs and more direct constructions. Make sure that every word is pulling its weight. A copy editor who is adept at trimming can transform a verbose, flabby piece into one that is powerful and well focused. Here are three ways:

- 1. Turn a verb phrase (make a decision) into a verb (decide).
- 2. Reduce a relative clause ("who is a lawyer for the city" vs. "a lawyer for the city")
- 3. Focus on outcomes rather than process ("searched" vs. "executed a search warrant").

Boil the story. When boiling, you edit a news story containing multiple angles by taking out one of those angles and "boiling" the story down to the remaining ones. Could a photograph or graphic do a better job of presenting the angle you are forced to cut? If so, this may be a viable option. However, this approach takes time and may require you to confer with the rest of the design and layout team. If you are facing a tight deadline, it may not work well.

#### Writing Headlines

Once you have edited your story according to the above procedures, you are ready to write the headline. Well-written headlines grab attention, quickly convey the main idea of a news story, and entice the reader to take a closer look. At the same time, they are fair, balanced, and tasteful. In the online news environment, headlines take on added importance by serving as news links and verbal guideposts that readers scan for relevant content. From a visual standpoint, headlines form a major design element in print and online publications, and contribute to their personality through the use of various sizes and fonts. Skilled headline writing is both an art and a craft. Becoming good at it takes time, practice, and a thorough understanding of the story.

If you are interested in attracting readers to your news website, remember that search engine optimization makes it even more necessary to write strong headlines. Search engine optimization, or SEO, is the process of boosting your website's visibility in a search engine's unpaid or "natural" results. Headlines that are precise, specific, and tightly connected with the story's content will generate more website hits and drive reader traffic to your stories from searches on search engine providers such as Google or Yahoo.

When writing headlines, work according to these guidelines:

- 1. *First, read the story carefully.* You cannot proceed with writing the headline until you firmly grasp the entire story.
- 2. *Base the headline on the story's main idea*. Look for this in the story's introduction or lead.
- 3. Write accurately. Carefully check the story facts before writing the headline. Even if your headline is not the wittiest one on the page, if it is accurate, you have done your job.
- 4. Be clear and concrete. Avoid double meanings and ambiguous statements.
- 5. *Do not repeat sentences found in the story's lead.* Instead recast the idea into your own headline.
- 6. Use the present tense when referring to what happened in the past or present. For future events, use the infinitive form of the verb—to play, to leave, not will play, will leave.
- 7. Favor active voice over passive voice. Use strong action verbs. As a rule, avoid passive voice. Writing in the active voice will significantly strengthen your headline.

  Passive: Record fundraiser completed by students

Active: Students complete record fundraiser

8. Avoid "label" headlines. Label headlines have no verbs.

Label headline: New music therapy club at Penn State Headline with action verb: Students start music therapy club at Penn State 9. *Avoid using articles.* The parts of speech called articles are *a*, *an*, and *the*. They take up space and do not tell the reader anything.

*Incorrect:* University officials work to finalize the budget in a tough year *Correct:* University officials work to finalize budget in tough year

- 10. Avoid using and as a conjunction. Like articles, and in headlines wastes space. Use a comma instead.
- 11. *Punctuate correctly.* As a general rule, punctuate headlines as you would sentences in the story. However, do not place a period at the end of a headline.

Craft Essential: Using the Professional Strategy Triangle to Write Headlines

Of all the duties a copy editor performs on an average shift, headline writing is among the most creatively challenging. A well-crafted headline serves as the initial reader "hook" and reflects what the story is really trying to say. It must be brief, accurate, and fit within the design guidelines specified in the page layout.

When Emily Goldstein, copy editor with *The Dallas Morning News*, writes headlines, she first considers her situation and audience in the Professional Strategy Triangle. "I start by thinking about what kind of story this is, and what would be an appropriate type of headline for it," she says. "Some are hard news stories and require a more straightforward headline. But if it is more of a feature-oriented story, I love to look up idioms (phrases or sayings) to find more creative ways to tell the story in a small space."

Goldstein once wrote a headline for a story about drivers protesting Uber, an online service that connects drivers to passengers through apps. The final headline read, "Missed app-ortunities? Uber drivers protest lower rates."

"Those are the kind of headlines that can win awards," Goldstein notes. "But I learned early in my career that you can't just throw an idiom out there. You have to think about its meaning, whether it applies to the situation, and its connotations for the audience."

- 1. How can the situation component of the Professional Strategy Triangle dictate the tone or mood of a headline?
- 2. How can the audience component of the Professional Strategy Triangle influence the way you write a headline?
- 3. Go to The Dallas Morning News website at <u>www.dallasnews.com</u>. Locate examples of hard news and feature stories. Explain how situation and audience likely guided the copy editor's thinking in writing the story headlines.

### Copyediting Online Stories

Astute copy editors ask themselves how they can package stories that will enable readers to take in the most meaningful information and grasp key points without reading long blocks of text. They envision the number of competing elements likely to be on the reader's screen. Finally, they look for ways to break longer stories into shorter interactive packages.

Knowing the unique situational and audience factors at work in the online environment, you should edit online copy so that readers can skim or scan the story, read it quickly, and easily link to other content.

Let's review each one of these principles:

Enable skimming or scanning. Studies confirm that online readers do not tend to read much online text in any depth. There is just too much of it out there competing for their attention. In addition, the online reading experience is nonlinear and interactive, tempting readers to quickly click away to a more captivating link. Consider breaking major stories into bullet points, timelines, quick takeaways, top tips, or other formats that readers can easily skim or scan.

Photo 7.4: Online copy must be edited so that readers can skim or scan the story, read it quickly, and easily link to other content.



Also try using these techniques:

- Add subheads within the story.
- Create hypertext links in the text.
- Stick to one idea per paragraph.
- Break out main ideas into lists.
- Write clear and concise headlines.
- Use brief story summaries as bridges between the headline and main story.
- Break out key story passages or quotes and set them apart from the main story.

Facilitate a quick read. Since the web is still driven primarily by text, online readers expect and appreciate stories trimmed to their essence and writing that is accurate, compelling, and to the point. Time-honored journalistic writing conventions such as brevity and the inverted pyramid translate well to the online environment, where readers are more likely than ever to say, "Just the facts, please!"

Encourage linking. The ability to link story components gives reporters, writers, and editors the chance to be better verbal and visual storytellers than ever before. Stories that run too long for one page can be shortened and linked to additional pages offering sidebars, fact sheets, interviews, or infographics. Journalists can link readers to banks of photos, video footage, and audio they gathered in their reporting. Editors can add further links to story archives, outside organizations, and a nearly unlimited number of additional resources related to the original story.

In today's digital media setting, you as the editor must picture your stories as nonlinear packages of information that readers can explore in whatever fashion they choose. Ask, "What might my reader be most interested in, and where would they like (or need) to go next?"

Pro Strategy Connection			

# Copy Editors: The Missing Link in the Online Newsroom?

At a recent convention of the American Copy Editors Society (ACES), copy editors discussed their emerging roles in the shift to online news delivery. Here's what they concluded:

"Delivering news online doesn't diminish the need for copy editors; it increases it. So long as text remains a key ingredient in the presentation of news, copy editors will continue to serve a vital role in ensuring the accuracy and accessibility of content, many conference-goers expressed. And because the web in many cases increases the volume and variety of text produced, the need for sharp editing is all the more essential.

"Change in the industry is inevitable, but copy editors must find a strong, unified voice if they are to shape this transformation. I sensed no consensus about where journalism will stand in five or 10 years, but most agreed that the industry is changing and will continue to evolve into the foreseeable future. Many expressed certainty that copy editors can affect these changes, but only if they find a common voice in how the values and skills unique to their craft are applied to new models of producing journalism, models informed largely by the characteristics of the web. "Many core skills are relevant, if not vital, in the digital age, but some new skills must be acquired. There was a strong sense that most of the well-worn skills at the core of a copy editor's toolset apply as much online as in print. Fact checking, critical thinking and other skills will continue their important roles in the editing process. Equally apparent, though, was the feeling that the web will necessitate some new insights. The marks of a good headline, for example, differ significantly between print and online, with the latter often requiring headlines that work with little or no additional context.

"Copy editors have much at stake as variations of the 'continuous news desk' continue to emerge. Perhaps most significant to changes in copy editors' day-to-day workflow is the emergence of the 24-hour news cycle, spurred by online delivery. Many conversations at ACES reflected on how evolutions of the traditional news cycle will affect copy editors' hours, interactions with reporters and other staffers and even their core workflows. Since a standard model for producing journalism in a print/online hybrid world has not yet surfaced, exploring this area was of keen interest to many attendees."

#### As a class,

- 1. Divide into two groups and debate the writer's statement: "Delivering news online doesn't diminish the need for copy editors; it increases it."
- 2. Make your best case on either side of this issue. How does the delivery of news online increase the need for copy editors? Conversely, how might it decrease the need for copy editors?

Source: The Poynter Institute (2016).

#### Summary

- 1. Describe the copyediting profession, including the role and function of the copy editor. Copy editors form the bridge between writers and readers; they represent their publication to readers, and serve as its guardians of accuracy and credibility. Copy editors defend the language, ensuring correct grammar and word usage.
- 2. Explain the process of copyediting in news and public relations settings. In both settings, the copyediting process includes checking copy and correcting errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, style, and usage. It also can require recasting leads, sentences, and paragraphs to make them more clear, lively, or concise. The copyediting process also entails conducting research, confirming sources, and verifying facts.
- 3. Discuss the challenges of copyediting in the digital environment. News organizations today operate under tremendous pressure to produce stories quickly and post them online immediately in order to break the story first. Web platforms change continuously, and media organizations are taking various approaches to meeting the challenge of online copyediting.
- 4. Demonstrate techniques used by copy editors for print and online pieces. Copy editors use a three-stage copyediting process. The steps are getting the "big picture" with an overall story review, scrutinizing and closely editing the story, and carefully rereading the story one last time, checking for any remaining problems.

## Key Terms

copy editors 214
news judgment 219
digital-first strategy 221
three-stage copyediting process 222
fact checking 233
cutting 237
trimming 237
boiling 237
headline 237
skimming 240
linking 241

#### Discussion Questions

- 1. Do you agree with the statement that a news organization is only as strong as its copyediting staff? Why or why not?
- 2. In addition to checking for grammar, spelling, style, or punctuation problems, what other important functions do copy editors perform?
- 3. Discuss the desirable personal qualities of copy editors. What makes copy editors different from writers?
- 4. Explain the value of being able to copyedit your own work and the work of others in a public relations career.
- 5. As a news editor facing a tight deadline on a breaking news story, would you opt to post the story online first to "scoop" the competition, or would you copyedit the story more carefully and perhaps get scooped? Justify your reasoning.
- 6. In the digital news environment, do you believe that copy editors are more or less important? Explain.
- 7. Describe the three-step copyediting process. Why isn't it good enough to copyedit a piece of writing in just one step?
- 8. Discuss the role of the Professional Strategy Triangle in copyediting. How do *situation* and *audience* influence the way the final message is edited?
- 9. Discuss several techniques for writing effective headlines.
- 10. How do online audiences differ from print audiences? Which editing techniques can be used to optimize the reader's online reading experience?

#### Chapter Exercises

- 1. Interview a newsroom copy editor or someone who does extensive copyediting in his or her journalism or public relations position. Assemble a list of questions such as the following:
  - a. How did this person become a copy editor or assume the duties of a copy editor?
  - b. What types of editing duties does this person perform in a typical week?
  - c. In this person's view, what is the importance of copyediting?
  - d. What does he or she enjoy most about this position? What is most challenging?

Note: You must interview this professional either in person or by phone. Email is not acceptable for this assignment.

From your interview notes, write a 350-word paper describing your interview subject's career and job duties. Include at least two major references to material in this chapter. Be prepared to discuss the high points of your paper with the class.

- 2. Volunteer to copyedit a brochure, newsletter, or another printed or online document for a campus club, church group, or volunteer organization. Apply the principles you have learned in this chapter to create the best-possible finished product. Bring the rough copy and the finished copy to class for discussion. What were the most difficult aspects of editing this piece? What was most rewarding about the process?
- 3. Select a piece of your own writing. It could be a story from your media writing class or a piece you've done for your campus newspaper. Edit the piece according to the three-stage copyediting process described in this chapter. Once you are finished, print out the new version of your story and place it alongside the original. How has your editing improved the story?
- 4. Select a story from your campus newspaper and work through it according to the three-stage copyediting process. Once you are finished, print out the new version of your story and place it alongside the original. How has your editing improved the story?
- 5. Go online to a news website of your choice. Locate a blog maintained by a reporter or staff writer.
  - a. Copy the text of the blog into a Word document and copyedit it according to the principles you have learned in this chapter.
  - b. Check closely for errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, and style.
  - c. Edit the structure of the blog post to ensure that it makes sense to readers.
  - d. Once you have finished, print out the new version of the blog post and place it alongside the original. How has your editing improved the piece?
- 6. Locate a news story from a newspaper or news website of your choice. Using your knowledge of the 5 Ws and H topic points, apply the six situational news values to rewrite the lead in a more effective fashion. This will require you to read the entire news story. Create two different versions of the lead. Discuss which one you prefer with your classmates and instructor and be prepared to explain why.
- 7. Locate a print news story and reenvision it as an online story. Use the Professional Strategy Triangle to consider how situation and audience will require you to reconfigure the story for readers on the web. Using the story text, sketch out a visual map indicating how the story would look as an online story package. Include your ideas for links to additional facts, photos, visual elements, and outside sources. Consider how you would
  - a. enable skimming or scanning,
  - b. facilitate a quick read, and
  - c. encourage linking.

#### Additional Resources

American Copy Editors Society (ACES): http://www.copydesk.org

American Society of News Editors (ASNE): <a href="http://www.asne.org">http://www.asne.org</a>
Editor & Publisher magazine: <a href="http://www.editorandpublisher.com">http://www.editorandpublisher.com</a>

The Poynter Institute: <a href="http://www.poynter.org">http://www.poynter.org</a>

Purdue University Online Writing Lab (OWL): https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/

The Slot: <a href="http://www.theslot.com">http://www.theslot.com</a>

## Chapter 8 Media Law and Ethics

## Chapter Outline

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Frontline Media Writing Profile: Kameel Stanley, Reporter, KWMU–St. Louis
<u>Public Radio</u>
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Freedom of the Press: Censorship Runs Counter to the First Amendment
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<u>Discussion Questions</u> <u>Chapter Exercises</u> <u>Additional Resources</u>

"You should read something that inspires you before you sit down to write. For me, that is often Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* or the top of Wright Thompson's Michael Jordan profile. I think it's important to know what great work is before you attempt to write something great of your own."

—Cody Stavenhagen, Oklahoma State University

### Learning Objectives

- 1. List the five First Amendment freedoms.
- 2. Identify the six elements of libel law.
- 3. List the four different types of invasion of privacy torts.
- 4. Distinguish the six rights granted by copyright.
- 5. Describe your rights of access to information.
- 6. Discuss ethical considerations for media professionals.
- 7. Explain four approaches to ethical decision-making.

Frontline Media Writing Profile

Kameel Stanley, Reporter

KWMU-St. Louis Public Radio, St. Louis, Missouri

Believe it or not, Kameel Stanley recalls her media law class at Central Michigan University as one of her favorites.



"That course has been so valuable to me," she recalls. "As a reporter, I've come up against so many issues related to access to information, particularly in terms of public records. In today's environment, there are so many forces trying to keep journalists out. Every year, states are trying to strip those rights away and make it harder and harder to be a journalist."

Stanley is a reporter with KWMU–St. Louis Public Radio. She also co-produces a podcast called *We Live Here*, which covers race, class, power, and poverty in the St. Louis region. From 2009 to 2015, Stanley worked as a reporter with the *Tampa Bay Times*, covering public affairs, police, and metro beats. There, she investigated racial disparities in policing and reported on racial tensions in city government.

According to Stanley, being a journalist means constantly pushing back against government, elected officials, and politicians trying to prevent the media from gaining access to information. "Officials often make arbitrary decisions about these issues, but the public has a right to know," Stanley says. "That's what we stake our profession on. You could show up at a crime scene and an officer may tell you that you can't have something or you can't do something, but since I know the law, I can come back and say, 'Yes, I can.'"

Such obstructionism is usually related to the official's role in the news situation. The official may feel empowered to block you from gaining access to the information you need to write your story. "What will you do when you are covering a city meeting on your first job, and an official says you can't be there?" Stanley asks. "You have to know your state's open-meeting law."

At the *Tampa Bay Times* in 2013, Stanley participated in an investigative series on Goodwill Industries in southwest Florida. Goodwill was running Florida's largest inmate work-release facility and had been criticized for its lax security policies, which led to several high-profile inmate escapes. Stanley knew that Goodwill was a private nonprofit contracted by the State of Florida, and therefore its personnel records were open to the public under the state's open records law.

"Goodwill Industries fought us tooth and nail," she recalls. "We eventually got those records and were able to see information that became part of our story. The records revealed Goodwill's strategy to gain government contracts to run work-release facilities across the state."

Eventually, the State of Florida cancelled Goodwill's contract. For her work on the story series, Stanley earned a first-place Florida Bar Media Award in 2014.

"So much of what we do in journalism involves reporting on issues and scandals," Stanley concludes. "Some people may know about these stories, but they do not get addressed until the media reports on them."

#### Media Law and Ethics Work Together

Media professionals beginning their first career positions are often surprised to hear about legal actions in their new work environments. Legal controversies such as libel or privacy suits can cost the organization considerable time and money to resolve, and the people at the centers of these disputes, if they have made mistakes, can lose their jobs.

Media law refers to areas of law that protect the rights of media organizations and the individuals who work in them. The First Amendment specifically guarantees freedom of the press and freedom of speech along with three other fundamental rights. These freedoms bring responsibilities. Media professionals also must be aware of intellectual property law to understand what they may use from other sources, as well as who actually owns the content they wish to use, and for how long. They need to understand when and how they might be violating the privacy rights of others when they collect information for media projects. Similarly, when reporting negative information about people, journalists must know when they might wrongfully damage someone's reputation through what they print, an offense known as libel. Finally, understanding the legal access to government-held documents is important for journalists.

Media ethics are guidelines that you, your employer, and your audiences use to make decisions about what is right or wrong in the situations and issues you encounter on a daily basis. Although law and ethics are clearly related, they are not the same thing. Law is built upon a clearly defined, highly structured set of rules and regulations that have been woven into society over time. Ethics, by contrast, are based upon the unique values of societies, organizations, and individuals. They are thus highly subjective and may be situational. Finally, while the process of lawmaking and law enforcement tends to be very public in nature, ethics are a highly personal and often private matter that individuals ponder on their own. Throughout your media career, you are likely to find ethical decisions to be more difficult to make than legal decisions.

As we will learn in this chapter, you can put the Professional Strategy Triangle to work to help make sense of legal and ethical matters and to decide upon the best course of action when faced with everyday problems in your newsroom, agency, or boardroom. Media practitioners employ professional strategy when sorting out legal and ethical issues that come with producing and writing media content. These problems are complex, but they can be well managed if you are armed with solid approaches for tackling them.

#### The Fundamental Freedoms of the First Amendment

The law in the United States is built in five ways. Common law and law of equity are legal principles that developed over many years of legal cases and traditions. The United States adopted the Common Law of Great Britain as colonies and kept these legal traditions after the Revolutionary War. Statutes are laws passed by legislatures, at either the state or the federal level. Administrative law consists of rules and regulations set up by federal government agencies like the Federal Communications Commission. The United States Constitution is the highest law in the land. The supreme law resides in the United States Constitution, and each of the fifty states also has a constitution.

The final way that law is built in the United States is through case law. Legal cases are heard in trial courts, and sometimes the decisions are appealed in appellate courts. Each state has a court system set up with trial courts, a midlevel court of appeals, then a state supreme court. The federal government has the same type of court system, and the US Supreme Court is the highest court in the land. Appellate courts take cases that allow them to clarify legal principles; the decisions of the appellate judges carry the weight of law and become important legal concepts often named after the cases for which they are written.

The First Amendment to the US Constitution was drafted by James Madison and passed into law on December 15, 1791, along with the nine other amendments in the Bill of Rights. Its language is simple:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

This short phrase guarantees five distinct areas of freedom: (1) freedom of religion, (2) freedom of speech, (3) freedom of the press, (4) the right to assemble peaceably, and (5) the right to petition the government.

Media professionals enjoy all five rights of the First Amendment. Two of the rights, freedom of speech and of the press, directly affect journalists in their everyday activities, such as collecting information and publishing the information in their stories. Our focus is on these, but that doesn't mean the other three rights aren't important to media professionals. Journalists report on events, and many events take place when groups of people make news by exercising their right to assemble peaceably. Similarly, freedom of religion is a concern for media professionals, as is the right of petitioning the government. Fundamentally, all these rights are about the freedom to think as we please and to

communicate our thoughts—essential liberties for journalists.

A striking characteristic of the First Amendment is the phrase "Congress shall make no law." Does this phrase give us an absolute freedom to say anything we want in any context? This has been an issue of many debates and legal opinions about the necessary balances and limits on the freedom of speech and the press. During the twentieth century, many important legal precedents were set establishing balances and boundaries for the rights of the First Amendment.

#### Freedom of Speech: Balances and Limitations

Freedom of speech, or the right to communicate one's opinions and ideas without fear of government retaliation or censorship, is a foundational principle that all media professionals must understand. Would you allow someone to freely yell "fire!" in a crowded theater when there was no fire? Surely, many people would be hurt in the mad rush to leave the theater, and you would want to prevent that. This was the allegory that Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes used in his 1919 decision in the Schenk case to argue that some limits must be placed on freedom of speech to protect the safety of society. Charles Schenk was arrested for handing out leaflets that opposed the draft and the war to men who were responding to their draft notices in 1917, as the nation was entering World War I. Justice Holmes argued that the safety of US citizens during war time was more important than the individual's right to protest the war in a way that could harm the smooth operation of the draft. At the same time, censorship was to be allowed only when there was a "clear and present" danger to society from the expression in question.

There were plenty of circumstances from the 1920s to the 1970s that put this free speech-balancing principle to legal tests. The Great Depression created widespread unemployment and hardship and considerable social unrest. World War II and the Korean conflict fostered suspicion of those who expressed dissent. The growth of communism in the Soviet Union created a "Red Scare" that resulted in federal and state laws seeking to limit expression of communist philosophy (the Smith Act was the federal law). Protests against the Vietnam War created a backdrop of dissent in the 1960s and 1970s. Social and civil unrest were also connected to gains made by African Americans in the 1950s and 1960s in the civil rights movement.

When is it legal to limit an individual's right to speak out, with the aim to protect people and the community from the consequences of what a speaker says? Today, the basic legal rule comes from a 1969 case called *Brandenburg v. Ohio*. This case began when Clarence Brandenburg was charged with advocating violence during a speech at a Ku Klux Klan rally, in violation of an Ohio law. Brandenburg was convicted and sentenced to one to ten years in prison and a \$1,000 fine. His case was appealed to the US Supreme Court, where it was reversed.

The Supreme Court overturned Brandenburg's conviction and said the government cannot punish the *abstract* advocating of force; the danger of violence must be imminent to make it legal to suppress speech. This is the current rule of law when balancing the rights of protesters to speak against the concerns for the safety of the community. Abstract advocating of force happens when a speaker mentions such an act as a theoretical event without a direct connection to the situation at hand. Only when speakers advocate violent acts that would occur right there and then can they be censored.

## Freedom of the Press: Censorship Runs Counter to the First Amendment

Freedom of the press refers to freedom of communication and expression through various electronic media and published materials. US legal tradition has clearly rejected outright government censorship of the press, even in cases decided in the colonies before the Revolutionary War. Censorship refers to the suppression of free speech, public communication, or other information that may be considered objectionable, harmful, sensitive, politically incorrect, or inconvenient. One famous case in the New York Colony began in 1733 when John Peter Zenger was arrested for printing a news pamphlet that showed the royal governor of New York in a negative light. Zenger was accused of seditious libel; that is, criticizing the government without permission. At the time, all that the jury was supposed to consider was whether Zenger had printed the publication with the allegations that criticized the royal governor. Zenger's lawyer, Andrew Hamilton, told the jury that real liberty meant Zenger should not be convicted of seditious libel if what he published were true. The jury of colonists found Zenger not guilty and established the idea, sixty years before the First Amendment, that the press should be free to serve in a watchdog role over the government.

The courts have agreed that the First Amendment right of freedom of the press is focused on preventing censorship, called prior restraint in legal terms. Prior restraint essentially means stopping something from being published before it reaches the public. In this sense, published means "disseminated" using any kind of media, whether print, broadcasting, wireless, or Internet based. The foundational legal principle here strongly supports resisting government attempts to impose any sort of prior restraint based on the content of what would be published. The 1931 case Near v. Minnesota established the idea that government must not pass laws allowing it to evaluate, judge, and then prevent the publication of particular types of content unless it can clearly show the content would seriously harm important government interests. Besides obscenity and child pornography, five other areas in which the courts have said the government has a "serious interest" are obstruction of military recruitment; publication of troop locations, numbers, and movements in times of war; incitements to violence; forcible overthrow of government; and fighting words likely to promote imminent violence.\frac{1}{2}

How might citizens need to be protected from published content? One area of concern is obscenity. The courts have decided in a set of cases that some types of pornography do not have the protection of the First Amendment and have labeled this content as obscene (*Miller v. California*). Furthermore, the courts determined (*New York v. Ferber*) that child pornography has no First Amendment protection and that those who create, distribute, and collect child pornography can be prosecuted under criminal law.

#### Libel: Damage to Reputation Through False Content

Imagine that you show up for class one morning and your classmates start asking you about your night in jail. You ask what they're talking about, and they tell you they read about your "incident" in the local newspaper. You pick up a copy and read a story identifying you by name and address as the person arrested for being in a drug-induced haze and smashing storefront windows on Main Street. You call the newspaper, and after investigating, the editor apologizes, saying the person who committed the crime has a name similar to yours and a different address, and that the newspaper made a mistake. The next day, it publishes a correction. However, many people do not see the correction and think you are the one who committed the crime. To make matters worse, you find co-workers at your job treating you poorly.

Photo 8.2: Carelessness in reporting causes libel suits—it is easy to slip and make a mistake that will cost your employer thousands of dollars and possibly ruin your career. Because each state's laws differ, media writers need to be familiar with the nuances of libel law where they work.



This is a clear case of libel, which is a published false statement that is damaging to a person's reputation. The newspaper can be held responsible for the damage its mistake has done to your reputation and your ability to earn money. You can hire a lawyer and sue the newspaper and win damages, even though the newspaper published a retraction and gave

you a formal apology. You would have a clear chance of winning such a suit.

Now turn this illustration around and imagine that you are not the subject of the story, but the reporter who wrote it. Your job would certainly be in jeopardy because you did not adequately check your facts. Most cases like this are settled out of court, with the media organization paying legal expenses and damages, and the writer suffering career damage. Too often, all could have been avoided with careful attention to detail and fact checking.

A libel suit is a civil suit, in which one citizen initiates a legal action against another citizen or organization. The plaintiff is the person who brings a case against another in a court of law. In a libel case, the plaintiff claims that his or her reputation has been damaged by what another person or media organization published. The defendant refers to the individual, company, or institution sued or accused in a court of law. In libel cases, the media organization is usually the defendant. In some cases, the writer and editor are also named as defendants.

The plaintiff has the burden of proof in a libel suit. This means he or she must prove six elements to win the case. First, the plaintiff must prove the content published in the message was *defamatory*, or damaging the good reputation of someone. This means it contained elements that audience members would associate with negative aspects of a person's reputation. Defamatory content can involve the use of obvious words that describe criminals and deviants, such as *rapist*, *crack-whore*, *terrorist*, *deadbeat*, or *adulterer*. Sometimes, however, words can portray a highly negative image of a person *implicitly* and *indirectly* by connecting to situations that place people in undesirable places and contexts. For instance, imagine a blog that congratulates a young woman on the birth of her twins even though she was poor and had to rely on a new program for unwed mothers, when in reality the woman was never pregnant and has maintained a solid career and income.

The second libel element a plaintiff must prove is *falsity*, that is, that the content is false. Does every element of the content need to be false for a plaintiff to win? The courts have ruled that the message must only be *substantially false* to be regarded as defamatory. This means the important elements that convey the central meaning of the communication contain falsity. For instance, consider the following message: *John J. Brunner, of 3456 W. Center Street, was arrested this morning for driving under the influence.* Actually, police arrested a man named John L. Brunner, who lived at a different address. The important element of this story was the "who," which was wrong, and even though police did arrest a man in the morning who was driving under the influence, the reporter who wrote this story was careless in checking facts and named the wrong man. This makes this message *substantially false* because it focuses on a vital key element that is *untrue*.

The example above also illustrates the third element of libel, *identification*. This means that audiences can identify the plaintiff as the person about whom the story falsely conveyed defamatory content. The plaintiff must prove that people thought the message was about

him or her. In some cases, plaintiffs prove identification even when no name is given in the story if a description, job title, or even a nickname is enough to make audience members think of the plaintiff after seeing, hearing, or reading the story.

Publication is the fourth element of libel, meaning that the statement has been disseminated to an audience through one or more mass media, whether one at a time or all at once. Social media and blogs are considered to be media along with newspapers, cable and broadcast television, and magazines. Notice that the legal responsibility for a defamatory statement does not end with the originator of the message. Anyone who publishes a libelous statement is responsible for it, even if they have attributed the statement to its original source. In other words, if a statement is libelous and you pass it on in your story, you can still be held responsible for libel, even if you report that someone else made the statement first. Social media writers need to be especially vigilant to make sure they don't pass on potentially libelous statements.

Fault, the fifth element of libel, is perhaps the most complicated. Fault here refers to "blame," and it focuses on the way the libelous statement was created and disseminated. Was it created through failure to use reasonable care, resulting in damage or injury to another? This is known as negligence. Or was it created with reckless disregard of whether it was false or not? If so, this is known as actual malice.

Over the years, a number of important cases have come to define the ways different types of plaintiffs must prove fault. The landmark 1964 case *New York Times Co. v. Sullivan* found that the *New York Times* was not responsible for a mistake it published in an advertisement that indirectly labeled an Alabama police commissioner, L. B. Sullivan, as an enemy of civil rights. The court said Sullivan was a public figure, and as such, he had to prove the *New York Times* tried on purpose to damage his reputation (in other words, with actual malice), not just that the paper made a mistake by failing to check the advertisement's copy.

The court reasoned that making media responsible for negligent errors in stories about public or famous people, whom they have to cover all the time, would have a "chilling effect" on the media. Journalists would become so cautious about making potential errors that they would fail to cover important stories about public and famous people, and soon the public would lose media coverage of them. Since the Sullivan case, public and famous people have had to prove a different standard of fault when they are plaintiffs in a libel suit. They must prove actual malice, whereas ordinary people—called private plaintiffs by the courts—must only prove negligence. Private plaintiffs also have the option of proving actual malice if that is a possibility.

The actual malice standard has evolved as well. The courts found that one form of actual malice is failing to check the integrity of a developing story, ignoring important details that show a story could be false (*Curtis Publishing Company v. Butts*). Another court case determined that writers who condense facts and details to change the meaning of essential

elements of a story create a "known falsity," another form of actual malice (*Goldwater v. Ginzburg*). A third important clarification of the actual malice standard came from the *Associated Press v. Walker* case, which ruled that time pressure to meet deadlines would make a media organization's failure to check facts negligence, but not actual malice. <u>Figure 8.1</u> summarizes the major elements of libel.

Figure 8.1 Elements of Libel

# Defamatory Message

- Falsity
- 3. Identification
- Publication
- 5. Fault
- 6. Harm

The last element a libel plaintiff must prove is *harm*, or the injury suffered. Lost wages, lost business opportunities, and instances of public harassment are directly observable types of harm that come from a damaged reputation. Plaintiffs can also demonstrate intangible harm such as personal humiliation, anxiety, social isolation, and other forms of mental anguish.

Libel plaintiffs seek to collect *actual damages* as a remedy for the demonstrated harm. Damages are awarded in the form of money and are assessed based on a jury's evaluation of the type and extent of harm the plaintiff suffered. If the defendant is found to have acted maliciously out of spite, a jury may further punish him or her by adding *punitive damages* on top of the actual damages.

#### Libel Defenses

Defendants have some legal tools to defend themselves from libel suits. The most effective is to demonstrate that the communication in question was the truth. Since the burden of proof is on the plaintiff to show that the communication was substantially false, a defendant can argue that the plaintiff's case is built around a minor inaccuracy in the facts of the story, but that the gist of the message was essentially true.

A second libel defense is the reporter's privilege to report what is written in the public record or what public officials have said within the context of the performance of their official duties. This is the *fair report privilege* and derives from public officials' *absolute privilege*. For instance, if a congresswoman, while speaking on the floor of Congress during a session, says something defamatory about a person, she has absolute privilege and can't be sued for libel. A reporter can quote her and be shielded from a libel suit as long as she or he reports what the government official said under absolute privilege. If the congresswoman utters defamatory comments while off duty, she does not have absolute privilege, and a reporter who prints the off-duty comments does not have qualified privilege.

A third libel defense is *fair comment and criticism*. This is a common law privilege that protects critics from libel suits brought by persons who place their work or artistry into the public sphere, such as artists, writers, clergy, entertainers, teachers, chefs, and musicians. The message in question must be presented as an opinion supported by facts, in a place that is normally associated with opinion messages (such as the opinion page of a newspaper).

A fourth notable libel defense is called *neutral reportage*. Some jurisdictions recognize that the First Amendment protects many kinds of expression, even expression that is false. In these cases, some accusations one person makes against another are protected even if they are false, because the news value of the accusation is important to the public. This defense is strictly limited, and the US Supreme Court has not recognized it. Individual state and regional federal courts have differing views of neutral reportage.

Internet service providers and website operators have some protection against libel suits because of the Communications Decency Act (CDA) of 1996. When defamatory content is posted on a website, and not created by the website operator or the Internet service provider, both may receive immunity under this law. This applies to situations in which blog sites or other social media such as Facebook, YouTube, or Twitter collect usergenerated content. If such content is defamatory, the CDA may protect the operators if they had no interaction with or editorial control over the content.

Media professionals who handle their jobs with due care will go far in avoiding libel controversies. Even if a story is routine and it's tiresome to check facts, always verify all the information you receive from sources. Even people with no real case may threaten libel

suits. For this reason, many media organizations carry libel insurance if they can afford it. Thorough reporting and careful writing may still produce a libel controversy. Media organizations usually stand behind employees who face such legal actions.

#### Privacy Law

Imagine that you are talking to your friend Marcy, who reveals some embarrassing gossip about a classmate named Matt. It seems that Matt's roommate found a doctor's note describing his psychological problems and detailing treatment options. Marcy suggests that it would be fun to tease Matt by telling the story during her campus radio show later that afternoon. Even though you advise against it, Marcy reveals the mental health gossip on her show. Marcy doesn't use Matt's name, but many listeners make the connection to him, and he is highly embarrassed and humiliated. Many fellow students are unhappy with the station, calling in to say that Marcy's revelations were in poor taste. She is removed from her radio show, and Matt contemplates calling a lawyer.

As we will see below, Matt may have a strong invasion of privacy case against Marcy and the campus radio station. Invasion of privacy is a set of torts—that is, wrongful acts or infringements of rights leading to civil legal liability. These occur when information is unlawfully gathered or the media disseminates information that violates the individual privacy of people.

Invasion of privacy consists of four separate torts:

- 1. Intrusion upon seclusion or solitude, or into private affairs
- 2. Public disclosure of embarrassing private facts
- 3. Publicity that places a person in a false light in the public eye
- 4. Appropriation of name or likeness

#### Intrusion

Intrusion upon seclusion or solitude, or into private affairs occurs when a writer gathers information by breaking a person's solitude, such as entering private property without authorization or private spaces where people have a reasonable expectation of privacy. Intrusion privacy torts occur only when a plaintiff can argue that he or she should reasonably expect privacy. When, for example, members of the media enter a private home, office, hotel room, hospital room, theater dressing room, or vacation site without authorization to take pictures, video, or audio, or to examine private documents or records intrusion has occurred. Conversely, intrusion does not occur in public places such as sidewalks, public parks, stores, shopping malls, restaurants, sports arenas, and campus classrooms.

When a plaintiff files an intrusion suit, the courts will seek to determine whether media intentionally entered a place of solitude or intentionally sought out private documents or records. In addition, a plaintiff must prove that the intrusive conduct was highly offensive to a reasonable person. What would be considered highly offensive? A lie to gain entry to a private residence is one example. Another is the use of hidden cameras or microphones.

Photo 8.3: While the First Amendment generally protects the publication of truthful facts in the public interest, the law also respects certain parts of people's lives from intrusion. Publishing a person's health or illness information may be enough to violate the reasonable expectation of privacy of a non-newsworthy person.



## Public Disclosure of Embarrassing Private Facts

Public disclosure of embarrassing private facts means disseminating embarrassing information about a person when the information is not newsworthy. This is the type of invasion of privacy tort Marcy committed in the hypothetical illustration above. Media professionals may find themselves in situations in which they must consider the impact that unwanted publicity could bring to their story subjects. An important consideration here is newsworthiness or the audience's need to know the information. Trouble comes when gossip columnists write stories about people who are not well known. For instance, is it newsworthy that a respected manager at a corporation put himself through college as a male escort thirty years ago?

The courts have consistently ruled that all individuals are entitled to a private life; that is, the ability to keep private any offensive or embarrassing information about themselves and family members. Note that the accuracy or truth of the information is not a defense; it is the fact that the information is true that creates the tort. Only the disclosure of truly private facts is an invasion of privacy tort. If the person has already disclosed the facts in the past, media can use them again later, even if the person changes his or her mind and now wants to keep the information out of the public eye.

### False Light

Publicity that places a person in a false light in the public eye is similar to libel except that instead of damaging a reputation, the information offends and embarrasses the plaintiff. Consider that many times authors use real people in their lives as the basis for fictional characters. J. K. Rowling used her science teacher, John Nettleship, as the inspiration for the sinister character Severus Snape, a portrayal that Nettleship found amusing. However, some characterizations are not so flattering. In the 1950s, a family was held hostage by three escaped convicts, then released unharmed. Author Joseph Hayes wrote a fictionalized account of the incident called *The Desperate Hours*, later made into a Broadway play, in which the family was victimized by torture and violence. *Life* magazine published an article about the play that characterized the story as a reenactment and staged photography for the article in the former family home where the hostage situation occurred. The family sued Time Inc., *Life*'s parent company, for false light invasion of privacy.

In many cases, misplaced and poorly written headlines cause false light problems for media organizations. Imagine a situation in which your campus newspaper runs a picture of your favorite professor accepting an award for teaching excellence. Near the picture is the unrelated headline, "Burglar Arrested on Campus." Obviously, this could cause real problems for the professor and the campus newspaper if audience members associate the headline with the person in the picture.

#### Appropriation

Appropriation of a person's name or likeness refers to the commercial use—for the purpose of making money—of someone's name or likeness without his or her consent. Three important legal concepts are connected with the appropriation of someone's name or likeness for commercial use without consent. First, commercial use is defined as exploitation directly for trade or self-enrichment purposes, for example, the use of a person's image in an advertisement. However, a person's name or image is not considered to be exploited when it appears in a news story. Exactly what constitutes a *name or likeness* is the second consideration of appropriation invasion of privacy. Audience members must clearly connect the use of name or likeness in the message with the plaintiff for the person to win an appropriation suit. This connection may occur through many different types of personal identifiers, including the sound of someone's voice, a distinctive personal characteristic or a popular nickname.

The exact nature of consent is the last legal concern in appropriation. *Consent* is legal permission, which can only be given by adults. A parent or legal guardian must provide consent for children under eighteen. The best way to document consent is with a written form, which contains an accurate statement of the intended use of the piece, the date, the name and signature of the person giving consent, and his or her address. Most media organizations require consent forms from participants in news interviews, commercials, and other content.

## Copyright and the Law of Intellectual Property

Copyright law is based on a straightforward concept. A copyright gives exclusive rights to make copies of creative works to those who create them, or those who hired someone else to create a work for them. However, the reasons copyright law was instituted during the Enlightenment Era of the eighteenth century are more complex.

By giving authors the sole right to profit from disseminating their ideas, Europeans of the post-Renaissance era found that newly published intellectual and philosophical works significantly changed the way they thought about the world around them. Works of philosophy, political science, humanities, literature, and science increased in number as authors found they could make a living writing books about their ideas. Today, copyright allows for an economy in which media profit from creating, distributing, and displaying messages that are the exclusive property of their creators or those who hired them.

The Internet age has created new difficulties for copyright holders. Because it is so easy for consumers to make high-quality copies of digital media such as music and video, copyright holders have seen a drastic downturn in the profits they make from creating original content. New methods of delivering copyrighted content to consumers have evolved to compensate (for instance, iTunes, YouTube, Vimeo, Netflix), achieving varying levels of success in getting consumers to pay for content rather than simply making illegal downloads. Copyright holders have become very careful to do everything they can do to protect the profitability of the content they own.

#### Original Works

Only original works can be copyrighted. A work must be genuinely created by, or for, the first copyright holder. Copyrights are property rights, meaning they can be bought and sold, so the current holder of a copyright may not be the originator of the content. This is why copyright is referred to as intellectual property.

Only the form and style of expression or artistic creation can be copyrighted. Ideas, facts, short phrases, and titles cannot be copyrighted. Thus, the dates on a calendar or names or addresses in a phone book cannot be copyrighted. The art on the cover of a phone book or calendar can be copyrighted, however. The facts and ideas in content can't be copyrighted; only the *original expression* of those facts and ideas can be protected.

Content must be fixed in a tangible medium in order to be copyrighted. This essentially means it must be recorded, written down, or archived in some way. A song must be recorded (in music notation or on a mechanical recording) and the lyrics must be written down for the musician to hold copyright of the song. To copyright a novel, the writer must type it and save it on a computer or write it down on paper.

### The Six Rights Granted by Copyright

Every copyright holder possesses six distinct rights that give him or her control over how the content can be used by media. These include the rights to

- 1. reproduce (make copies of) the work,
- 2. create derivative works based on the work (to alter, adapt, or build on the work),
- 3. distribute copies of the work,
- 4. publicly display the work,
- 5. perform the work, and
- 6. publicly perform the work from a recording.

The right to reproduce the work is the most recognizable of the above rights, and the one that is violated most. Making copies of songs that are downloaded from online file sharing services is the most common copyright infringement (that is, the action of limiting or undermining something) worldwide. The recording industry refers to it as *piracy*. Industry representatives estimate that consumers illegally copy between \$7 billion and \$20 billion of recorded music a year and pay for only 34 percent of music they consume.

Derivative works are new works that adapt portions of the original in new ways. This includes taking the story in a novel and creating a movie adaptation, making a video game adaptation of a comic book, or using characters in a TV show for a movie.

### Copyright Duration

Copyright protection ends after a specified period of time, at which point the work enters the *public domain*, meaning others can copy it freely without paying royalties to a copyright holder. The law says that for original works (not works created for hire) created on or after January 1, 1978, copyright extends for the life of the originator plus seventy years. Protection of works for hire extends for ninety-five years after publication or for 120 years after creation, whichever is shorter. If a work was published before 1978 and was still protected by copyright on January 1 of that year, it is covered by copyright for ninety-five years after its original copyright date. This means that everything published before 1923 is in the public domain. Works published between 1923 and 1978 may still have copyright protection. If you want to use something published during these years, you should consider them protected until, through research, you find out otherwise.

## Fair Use and Copyright Infringement

The law gives us some leeway to make limited use of copyrighted materials without permission. Fair use permits small portions of copyrighted works to be used for research and critical analysis; a parody may also qualify as fair use. To judge whether a use is fair, the law applies four standards:

- 1. The purpose and character of the use. If the use transforms the original into a new work, it is a fair use. Examples include parodies of works, such as the songs Weird Al Yankovic creates that mock original hits. The courts have ruled that such parodies are so different from the originals in form and style that they do not hurt sales of the originals.
- 2. The nature of the copyrighted work. A nonfiction work that is important for research can be quoted and be subject to deep examination by researchers, and portions copied from such a work are usually allowed by law. Works of fiction, however, may have more protection, because they are not necessarily important for research.
- 3. The amount and substantiality of the portion taken. The law examines how much of the work is utilized as a potential fair use, but this is not all that matters here. For instance, it would certainly not be a fair use to copy the first twenty seconds of the famous Beyoncé song, "Hold Up." The characteristic introduction and the voice of Beyoncé in the song's opening are quite distinctive and form the heart of the entire song.
- 4. The effect of the use on the potential market. The law examines whether a use causes the original work to lose sales. If it does, it is not a fair use.

Media professionals must pay careful attention when using the work of others. While incidental copyright violations often result in a simple "cease-and-desist" letter written to a media organization, they can still be embarrassing for your employer.

### Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the use of someone else's words or ideas without properly attributing them to the original author. It is an act of fraud in which you allow your audience to believe another person's words or ideas are yours. Even if you did not intend to plagiarize, you can be held accountable for plagiarism if you fail to adequately attribute sources. Review the information on proper attribution in <a href="Chapter 4">Chapter 4</a> and you can see that it is critical to clearly identify your sources. Through history, a number of journalists have been caught plagiarizing. In 2012, television commentator and columnist Fareed Zakaria was suspended by CNN and *Time* magazine when he admitted that he plagiarized passages from an April 2012 article from the *New Yorker* magazine. At times, plagiarized content is very similar to the original work and that can bring added charges of copyright violation and legal actions. This happens when the violator makes only superficial changes to the words and sentences of the original work.

Media professionals new on the job are often unsure about how to avoid plagiarism problems. Experienced writers start with this advice: "If you are unsure, always cite your source." Another piece of advice is to always use your own words when writing a story. This is called *paraphrasing*. To be sure you are avoiding plagiarism, follow both these pieces of advice. Write your story with effective paraphrasing *and* accurately attribute your sources.

Photo 8.4: There have been a number of high-profile cases in recent years of plagiarism by reporters. So what's one of the easiest ways to avoid it? Give credit where credit is due.



Paraphrasing means more than simply replacing a couple of words of the original work. To paraphrase correctly, you must create new sentences from scratch. Select your own words while you report the original idea and present your attribution right up front.

Let's look at an example of effective paraphrasing and attribution. Radio news announcers often use local newspapers as story source material. To write a story based on a copyrighted newspaper article, the radio news writer must do two things. First, he or she must be careful to attribute the newspaper as the source of the story. Second, he or she must write new sentences that fit the radio news format. Newspaper copy sounds awkward if read directly on the air (see <a href="Chapter 6">Chapter 6</a> for details on writing a radio news story). Consider the following simulated newspaper story lead:

City council member G. Edward Likowski was arrested for public drunkenness and disturbing the peace early this morning in the 300 block of Chester Street in Barnes City. According to police, Likowski threw a brick at a display window of a Rite Aid drugstore around 3 a.m. while yelling, "Just say no to drugs!"

An ineffective, plagiarized story would use the same sentence structure and fail to attribute the story to the newspaper. Here is an example of poorly written, plagiarized radio news copy: G. Edward Likowski, a city council member, was arrested for disturbing the peace and public drunkenness in Barnes City early this morning. Likowski allegedly broke a display window of the Barnes City Rite Aid drugstore at 3 a.m. while yelling, "Just say no to drugs!"

It is easy to see how the plagiarized story above is only superficially rewritten. It uses the same words and sentence structure of the original story. It does not identify the source of the information. Because the story uses the same form and style of the newspaper story, it probably also infringes upon the newspaper's copyright.

To create effective radio news copy, you must write new sentences and attribute the newspaper as the source. Here is a correctly written story:

Police arrested a Smithtown city council member last night. As reported in this morning's edition of the *Smithtown Recorder*, Barnes City police took G. Edward Likowski (Lie—COW—ski) into custody at three a.m. this morning in the 300 block of Chester Street. Likowski faces charges of public drunkenness and disturbing the peace for allegedly smashing a window of the Barnes City Rite Aid drugstore.

Note the attribution in the second sentence above. Also notice how each sentence is new, with some different verb phrases (*took into custody, faces charges, smashing a window*,) that freshen the copy. In the second radio news story, the writer does not infringe upon copyright or plagiarize the original newspaper story.

Remember, the best way to avoid charges of plagiarism is to write completely new copy and attribute all information to sources. Both of these things are important. Putting an idea in your own words may help you avoid copyright issues, but if you fail to properly cite your source, you are still plagiarizing. Every time you use an idea expressed by another author, you must always attribute it to the source.

# Access to Government Information and Government Meetings

In order to report on the functions of federal, state, and local government, journalists need to examine public documents including police reports, government research reports, and many others. Similarly, journalists need to attend public meetings such as town councils and school board meetings. Federal and state *access laws* have made access to these documents and meetings a right of all citizens—one that is especially valuable to media professionals.

The federal law that grants the right to examine some federal documents is the Freedom of Information Act, or FOIA for short. It allows access to documents housed in the executive branch of the federal government, including federal agencies such as the Federal Communications Commission, the Federal Trade Commission, and the US Securities and Exchange Commission, but excludes offices within the Executive Office of the President. The law also excludes the legislative branch (Congress) and the judicial branch (Federal Courts) from examination.

Across the categories of documents that citizens can access, FOIA maintains nine exemptions:

- 1. Classified national defense or foreign policy information
- 2. Documents related solely to the internal personnel rules and practices of an agency
- 3. Documents specifically exempted from disclosure by statute
- 4. Documents which would reveal trade secrets
- 5. Documents which are inter-agency or intra-agency memorandum or letters
- 6. Personnel, medical, and similar files, the disclosure of which would constitute invasion of personal privacy
- 7. Records or information compiled for law enforcement purposes
- 8. Reports prepared by, on behalf of, or for the use of agencies that regulate financial institutions
- 9. Documents that would reveal oil well data

The federal open meetings law is similar to FOIA and is called the Government in the Sunshine Act. Passed in 1976, it grants access to government meetings held by executive branch agencies. Congress and the courts are excluded from coverage. These federal agencies must make public notice of all meetings at least one week in advance in the *Federal Register* (the government's daily newspaper) and include the date, time, location, and topic. A set of exemptions that are similar to the FOIA exemptions allows agencies to close some meetings or portions of meetings to the public.

All fifty states have enacted their own versions of open records and open meetings laws.

The state laws cover state and local government agencies, including school boards, employment agencies, and state regulatory agencies. Always obtain a copy of these state laws when you begin a story. This information should be available in your employer's newsroom.

#### Ethics in the Media

Ethical issues are among the most critical challenges facing media organizations today. Many of them have adopted new codes of ethics and stepped up their vigilance in the face of high-profile scandals. For example, in 2015, NBC News chief anchor and managing editor Brian Williams was forced to recant his story that he'd been on a helicopter that drew fire during the Iraq War in 2003. Williams lost his anchor position at NBC and was suspended for six months without pay.

Ethical dilemmas surround us. In many sectors of society, institutions send us mixed signals about what is right and wrong. Ethical transgressions in political or corporate circles sometimes even appear to be normal or routine. In the media, an increased need for efficiency, driven by the quest for greater profits, has forced many editors and news staffs to depend upon the easiest and fastest methods of news gathering. Critics charge that some media organizations have grown lazy in reporting and writing the news.

Solid personal values and strong ethics must lie at the heart of all you do each day as a media professional. Think for a moment about the simple act of communication. Because we use it to influence and motivate others, ethical issues are bound to arise in any setting. The mere act of communication carries the potential for ethical problems. Working as a media professional implies a high level of public trust and brings with it a higher set of ethical standards than we might encounter in other occupations or in everyday life. Our work affects countless people beyond our immediate circles, out in our communities and across the world. As a media professional, you must develop a strong personal and professional sense of ethical and socially responsible behavior. You must always be in tune with the ethical standards of your organization and your community.

Pro Strategy Connection

## Kameel Stanley's Principles for Ethical Reporting

Kameel Stanley, the subject of this chapter's Frontline Media Writing Profile, is a reporter and podcast producer with St. Louis Public Radio. She spends much of her time out in communities and neighborhoods talking with the people behind her stories. Here are some ethics principles she's developed along the way:

- 1. Be sensitive. "In my job, I talk to people about many sensitive things, such as speaking with parents about how their child is getting suspended from school. If the story is extremely sensitive, I'll ask myself, 'Is it wrong to use only a first name?' Maybe not."
- 2. Explain it to sources. "When I am out there talking to real people, I need to make sure they understand the ramifications behind a story in the media. I want them to understand they are talking to me, what that means, and who could read the story."
- 3. Online is forever. "If I am asking someone to talk to me about how they or their children have been discriminated against, for example, I have to be very careful. What happens in five years if someone runs a Google search on that person and finds them in my story?"
- 4. No surprises. "When I am doing an investigative story, I'm not out there to play 'gotcha' with my sources. At the *Tampa Bay Times*, I worked on a story about how police were ticketing more black bicyclists. We gave the police department weeks to respond. We didn't just surprise them with a 'gotcha' story."

## As a class,

Listen to Stanley's podcasts on St. Louis Public Radio at <a href="http://news.stlpublicradio.org">http://news.stlpublicradio.org</a>. In the Search window, enter We Live Here.

What kinds of journalistic ethical dilemmas can you identify in the stories you find? How might you address them based on the approaches outlined in this chapter?

#### Law and Ethics: What's the Difference?

Media professionals often lament the fact that ethical decisions are harder to make than legal ones. Over the course of your own career, you will probably come to agree with this perspective. For example, as a legal matter, it is relatively easy to determine whether a news source was libeled in a story or whether a company's copyright was violated. However, it is probably much harder to decide whether your advertising agency can ethically work with a cosmetics company that tests its products on animals. What about the ethics of working with an anonymous news source whose life could be in danger if you reveal his or her identity? Such matters can quickly grow murky.

It is critical that you know the elements of media law outlined in this chapter. But also understand that the creation and enforcement of laws is supposed to be informed and driven by sound ethical principles that have been tested throughout history around the world. At the same time, let us not confuse law and ethics:

- The law tells us what we *must* do.
- Ethics tell us what we *should* do.

The legal right to do something does not equal permission from your co-workers or news audiences to do it. It is possible to act in a perfectly legal manner yet be highly unethical. Conversely, someone can break the law yet act in a way that is completely ethical to people and organizations he or she cares about. When faced with any situation, always ask yourself, "What are the legal issues here? What are the ethical issues? How do they differ, and how does one side inform the other?"

Beyond these complexities, you must grapple with the fact that you will make some of your most important ethical decisions alone, late at night, when nobody else is watching. For instance, if you make up a source and write a quote for them in a news story because it's late and you are up against a deadline, who is going to know? Or, let's say that as a public relations professional, you share some inside client information with a competitor in hopes of landing that person at your agency. It's a secret, so it's OK, isn't it? Actually, no, it isn't. In either of these cases, you must first ask yourself whether your actions are right or wrong, regardless of who knows about them.

## Truth and Accuracy

In its code of ethics (see Figure 8.2), the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) admonishes us to "Seek the truth and report it." We can enhance this ethical precept by adding, "Seek the truth and make sure it's the truth." A commitment to truth and accuracy are the ultimate ethical obligations for anyone working in journalism, public relations, or advertising. Above all, the cardinal rule in the media professions is to never lie. In a professional media organization, truth must be regarded as the default position, from both legal and moral standpoints.

Figure 8.2 The Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) Code of Ethics **Seek truth and report it.** 

Minimize harm.

Act independently.

## Be accountable and transparent.

NOTE: View the full SPJ Code of Ethics at http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp.

What, then, is journalistic truth? According to professional standards, it contains at least three components:

- 1. Accuracy. As noted above, seek the truth and make sure it's the truth. Check and double-check the facts. Regardless of deadline pressures, you must get the facts straight.
- 2. *Context*. As a writer, you must establish context carefully and give readers all the facts they need to know to fully understand your story.
- 3. *Balance*. Explain all sides of your story. Research all angles and interview everyone you can. Include a range of viewpoints and quotes in your story. Balance is all about being fair to all parties in your story.

#### Objectivity

When you work as a journalist, your audiences expect you to be as objective as possible in your reporting and writing. That means going into your stories with as little personal bias as possible, and keeping your mind open to all sides of the story as you conduct research, interview sources, and write your final piece. Readers, listeners, and viewers are relying upon your objectivity to help them develop opinions on critical everyday issues and to make important life decisions.

At its heart, objectivity means an absence of bias on the part of the media professional. You might wonder, "Can any of us ever be truly objective toward anything? Is it possible for anyone to remain completely unbiased on any issue?" Probably not. As human beings, we all tend to view the world through our own subjective lenses. Media professionals recognize this inclination and try to combat their biases systematically in the reporting process, as discussed in <a href="Chapter 4">Chapter 4</a>. Going into their stories, they know they will uncover different accounts of reality in the research and interviewing process. The media professional then judges those accounts to be either adequate or inadequate based on facts and reason and not on his or her personal perspective.

## Special Considerations for Public Relations and Advertising

Truth, accuracy, and fairness are just as important in public relations and advertising as they are in journalism. In public relations, providing inaccurate information to the media could diminish your agency's credibility, a key component of media relations. In advertising, producing a commercial containing inaccurate information could lead to accusations of a false product claim, which is a legal offense.

Professionals working in public relations and advertising share similar ethical concerns because both disciplines rely on persuasive communication. The work you do in these professions has the potential to manipulate your audiences if you are not careful. We must always respect the people who are the targets of our persuasive efforts and ask ourselves how we would feel on the receiving end of that persuasive communication.

Over the last decade, public relations has been a leading industry in using social media as a communication tool. This calls upon us to exercise social responsibility more carefully than ever in cyberspace. Always refer to the PRSA Member Code of Ethics (see Figure 8.3). Here is an easy rule to remember regarding ethical issues in social media: If it was unethical before, it will be unethical now. Technologies come and go, but respect is still the same regardless of the medium. Be vigilant in upholding your ethical standards in everything you write or send out to the world.

Figure 8.3 The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) Member Code of Ethics Statement of Professional Values

# Advocacy

Honesty

**Expertise** 

Independence

Loyalty

## **Fairness**

Note: View the full PRSA Member Code of Ethics at http://www.prsa.org/AboutPRSA/Ethics/.

Think about the advertising industry for a moment. Do you believe it is in the business of selling dreams or selling things? For your client or employer, it's all about selling things, which is fair enough. But as a media professional, you must take care to present your products and services in an accurate manner. Do not create false needs or expectations in the minds of your consumers based upon the pictures you paint in their minds. It may seem fun and creative to fudge the facts, dice a few words, or manipulate images to create a picture that is not quite true. However, this is unethical.

The verbal and visual images you produce must be based upon the way the product or service actually performs, not just upon illusions that you conjure up. It is a manipulative act to create advertising messages that exploit the audience's emotions and circumvent their

rational thought process. Referring back to the Professional Strategy Triangle, always assess your *situation*, respect your *audience*, and make sure they fully understand the content of your *message*. The American Advertising Federation, a leading organization for advertising professionals, has published its own code of ethics, which reinforces these principles (<u>Figure 8.4</u>).

## The Credibility Connection

Consider the idea that truth, accuracy, and objectivity are closely tied to *credibility*—both your own as an individual and your employer's as a media organization. Your readers, viewers, clients, and community members are counting on you to do the right thing. When you and your employer perform in an ethical manner, you both earn professional credibility. However, that credibility is damaged when, for example, the news media publishes inaccurate stories, advertisers peddle false claims, or public relations practitioners deceive their publics with misleading publicity stunts.

Figure 8.4 American Advertising Federation Principles and Practices for Advertising Ethics

#### Truth

Advertising shall tell the truth, and shall reveal significant facts, the omission of which would mislead the public.

#### Substantiation

Advertising claims shall be substantiated by evidence in possession of the advertiser and advertising agency, prior to making such claims.

#### Comparisons

Advertising shall refrain from making false, misleading, or unsubstantiated statements or claims about a competitor or his/her products or services.

#### **Bait Advertising**

Advertising shall not offer products or services for sale unless such offer constitutes a bona fide effort to sell the advertising products or services and is not a device to switch consumers to other goods or services, usually higher priced.

#### **Guarantees and Warranties**

Advertising of guarantees and warranties shall be explicit, with sufficient information to apprise consumers of their principal terms and limitations or, when space or time restrictions preclude such disclosures, the advertisement should clearly reveal where the full text of the guarantee or warranty can be examined before purchase.

#### **Price Claims**

Advertising shall avoid price claims that are false or misleading, or saving claims that do not offer provable savings.

#### **Testimonials**

Advertising containing testimonials shall be limited to those of competent witnesses who are reflecting a real and honest opinion or experience.

#### Taste And Decency

Advertising shall be free of statements, illustrations or implications that are offensive to good taste or public decency.

Note: To view the full AAF principles and ethics document, go online at http://www.aaf.org/institute-advertising-ethics.

Once a media organization loses its reputation for accuracy, thoroughness, and responsibility, its credibility dries up quickly. Its audience will turn elsewhere for more accurate and reliable information. Advertisers will soon follow, and before long, the organization will be losing money. Never forget that the media is a business. Profits are earned based upon credibility and lost without it. Credibility is an invaluable commodity and we must carefully maintain it in order to protect our reputation. Think about it for a moment: If we as communicators don't have credibility, what *do* we have?

# Putting the Professional Strategy Triangle to Work in Legal and Ethical Situations

As a media professional, you can always turn to the Professional Strategy Triangle for guidance when dealing with a legal or ethical dilemma. For example, always consider your legal *situation* first. As a news editor pondering the ethics of a controversial story in your community or a public relations practitioner facing a thorny issue, you'll think hard about your *audience*, and what is ethically right to do according to their views. Being mindful of your situation and audience will help you to make the right legal and ethical decisions every time as you decide how to approach any reporting or writing assignment, and to draft the correct *message*.



The War Room

## Solving Ethical Dilemmas

## Scenario 1: A Media Relations Opportunity

You are the director of public relations for Urban Chic, a major fashion retailer based in San Francisco. Your neighbor happens to be the business editor for the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Your job duties include pitching stories to the media, and you have wanted to build a strong relationship with this editor for several months. Urban Chic provides you with a generous expense account, along with access to tickets on the fifty-yard line for the San Francisco 49ers. You check in with your legal counsel for the company, asking whether it is OK to take the business editor to the football game and then out for dinner and drinks at a nearby upscale restaurant. Your legal counsel tells you to go ahead. She says this arrangement is perfectly legal. Plus, the company could really use a positive business feature story. How do you proceed?

## Scenario 2: A Competitor Advantage

You are the assistant director of communications for Microsoft in Seattle, Washington. The office has a job opening for an investor relations position, and you are conducting interviews for it. A candidate with an impressive résumé from Apple arrives at your office for the interview. The conversation is going nicely. Then, the candidate pulls from her briefcase a copy of a confidential public relations plan that Apple has been developing for its investors next year. She offers to share its contents. You glance at the cover of the plan book and notice that it is marked "Confidential." What do you do?

## Scenario 3: An Environmental Greenwash?

You are an account executive with the Simpson-Brown Agency in Minneapolis. Clow Incorporated, a major downtown real estate developer, has hired your firm to develop a sales kit and media relations campaign to build interest in Pinegrove West, a new condominium community the company is developing on the former site of a paint and solvent company that operated from 1895 to 1987. Ronald Clow, the company president, explains to you that the property was tainted with carcinogenic waste that seeped into the ground for several decades. He says the site has been cleaned up and remediated to meet EPA standards. Clow says that under no circumstances are you allowed to mention this fact—in your sales kit, in media interviews, or anywhere else. How do you respond to the client's demands?

As a class, divide into three- or four-member agency teams. Each team chooses one of the above scenarios. In teams,

- discuss the major ethical implications of your scenario. What are the big issues at play in this case?
- consult the PRSA Code of Ethics described in this chapter. Go online and review it carefully. Select the code provisions that apply best to your scenario. Include any other relevant points from this chapter.
- based on your findings, report to the class how you would handle your scenario. What makes this course of action the best one for everyone concerned? Your instructor will be able to provide you with specific guidance on each scenario.

## Other Approaches to Ethical Decision-Making

Next, let's take a look at some other approaches to ethical decision-making that should help you in any situation you may encounter in journalism, public relations, or advertising.

#### The Golden Rule

Stated in various ways across the centuries, the Golden Rule advises us to "do unto others as you would have done to you." For example, how would you feel as the family of a wounded soldier when the local television station calls? Would you be comfortable in purchasing a new car based on the appeals set forth in a television commercial you wrote? In general, how would you feel as the party on the other end of these situations?

#### The Golden Mean

First envisioned by the Greek philosopher Aristotle, the Golden Mean teaches us there is a desirable middle route between the two extremes of excess and deficiency. Imagine that you are a journalist assigned to write a story on a young girl's drowning at a local lake. The story requires interviewing grieving family members, which will be a painful experience for all of you. Using the Golden Mean, you would rightly go ahead with the interviews and the story, tragic as it is. After all, the drowning is news, and running the story might prevent future drownings in the area. At the same time, you would proceed as an empathetic human being. You would wait a respectful period of time before contacting the family. When you did reach them, you would respectfully ask for the interview and, assuming they agreed to it, conduct the interview in a kind and sensitive manner.

#### Utilitarianism

British philosopher John Stuart Mill advocated utilitarianism, choosing the ethical pathway that creates the greatest good (utility) for the greatest number of people. In an ethical dilemma, always ask yourself, "Whom does my action help? Whom does it hurt?" Consider yourself in the role of a junior-level public relations practitioner with a large school district. The local media is investigating reports of a high school track coach who allegedly is sexually harassing young athletes. Former students interviewed on local television news say that the harassment has gone on for at least ten years. The coach is a well-respected teacher, and administrators are leaning hard on you to cover up the story. If you agree to the cover-up, you are helping the coach and the school district, but you are hurting many students whose claims will be invalidated. What if you do not agree to help cover up the harassment story? Here, you are hurting the coach and the school district, but helping so many more students from the past and present, and preventing students in the future from becoming victims. You are also helping your community to become a healthier, more functional place to live.

#### Macro Issue and Micro Issue

Always consider the macro issue and micro issue at play in any situation. The macro issue is the overriding or big-picture issue at work in your story or situation. The micro issue(s) are often significant ones, but they are less important than the macro issue. For instance, suppose that you work at a leading advertising agency. You discover that your manager has been planning to leave the agency and take several of its key accounts with him to his new job at a competing agency. In the advertising industry, this practice is viewed as highly unethical. The macro issues at work here are that your manager is acting unethically, and that many employees at your agency may lose their jobs due to the lost accounts and revenue that goes with them. The micro issues are that if you report your manager to the agency owners, he will be fired. Also, you may face personal fallout or lose your own job for reporting his misconduct. In this difficult situation, you would have to force yourself to think clearly about the macro issue and how you would solve it. You would have to avoid getting caught up in the smaller issues and lose sight of the larger ones at play in this case.

When considering any of the approaches above, remember that you don't have to stick to just one of them. Many people and organizations shift between approaches based on the situation. The key is *thinking in advance* about what's ahead and how you plan to respond to it.

Craft Essential: Ethical Guidelines You Can Apply to Any Situation

- Actions speak louder than words. What you and your organization do is much more important than what you say about it.
- What's legal may not be ethical. Always make sure you're on the right side of the line in either situation.
- What is right and wrong according to your publics may have little to do with laws and regulations. For them, it's all about personal ethics and perceptions.
- For audiences, perceptions are reality. If you make decisions that run counter to your audience's beliefs, you will encounter credibility problems. It can take years to rebuild lost credibility.

## Summary

- 1. List the five First Amendment freedoms. They are: (1) freedom of religion, (2) freedom of speech, (3) freedom of the press, (4) the right to peaceably assemble, and (5) the right to petition the government.
- 2. Identify the six elements of libel law. In order to prove libel has occurred, the plaintiff must prove (1) the defendant used defamatory content in the message, (2) the content of the message was false, (3) the audience identified the plaintiff in the message, (4) the message was published and disseminated to an audience, (5) the defendant was at fault and thus was to blame for the message, and (6) the plaintiff suffered harm to her or his reputation.
- 3. List the four different types of invasion of privacy torts. (1) Intrusion upon seclusion or solitude, or into private affairs, (2) public disclosure of embarrassing private facts, (3) publicity which places a person in a false light in the public eye, and (4) appropriation of name or likeness.
- 4. Distinguish the six rights granted by copyright. (1) The right to reproduce (make copies) of the work, (2) the right to create derivative works based on the work (to alter, adapt, or build on the work), (3) the right to distribute the work, (4) the right to publicly display the work, (5) the right to publicly perform the work live, and (6) the right to publicly perform the work from a recording.
- 5. Describe your rights of access to information. The federal Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) provides access to government records for agencies housed in the executive branch of the federal government. The federal Government in the Sunshine Act of 1976 provides access to meetings held by government agencies housed in the federal executive branch. Each of these rights of access can be limited by legal exceptions. All fifty states have passed versions of these laws that apply to state and local government entities.
- 6. Discuss ethical considerations for media professionals. The ultimate ethical obligation of a media professional is to be accurate and reflect the truth. This is achieved through careful reporting and consideration of all the people who might be affected by your work. Media professionals also strive to be objective, which means they limit their personal bias and seek to report all sides of a story.
- 7. Explain four approaches to ethical decision-making. They are (1) the Golden Rule, (2) the Golden Mean, (3) utilitarianism, and (4) the macro issue and micro issue.

# Key Terms

media law 251 media ethics 251 common law 252 law of equity 252 statutes 252 administrative law 252 United States Constitution 252 case law 252 trial courts 252 court of appeals 252 the First Amendment 252 freedom of speech 253 freedom of the press 254 censorship 254 prior restraint 255 obscenity 255 libel 256 plaintiff 256 defendant 257 negligence 258 actual malice 258 torts 261 intrusion 261 public disclosure of embarrassing private facts 262 false light 263 appropriation 263 copyright 264 intellectual property 265 infringement 265 fair use 266 plagiarism 267 Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 270 Government in the Sunshine Act 270 objectivity 275 the Golden Rule 280 the Golden Mean 280 utilitarianism 280 macro issue and micro issue 281

# Discussion Questions

- 1. Do you believe that the language of the First Amendment means that courts should give absolute freedom of speech to all individuals? Why or why not? Explain your reasoning.
- 2. Courts have set limits on the freedom of the press. Discuss those limits and explain your reasons for supporting or disagreeing with them.
- 3. Do you believe that public figures should have to prove a higher standard of fault in a libel case, as the US Supreme Court ruled in *New York Times Co. v. Sullivan*? Review the reasons the court set this higher standard for public figures and discuss their impact on the media.
- 4. Which one of the four invasion of privacy torts do you believe to be the most hurtful to a plaintiff? For example, is being embarrassed by a media article worse than having reporters enter your property to take pictures? Why or why not?
- 5. Which benefits does copyright protection bring to our society? Should these benefits be outweighed by people's desire to obtain music and video content for free through illegal downloads? What might happen if authors of books, music, video, and games could not earn a profit from the content they create?
- 6. Think about this Ralph Waldo Emerson quotation about ethics: "An organization is the lengthened shadow of a man." Apply Emerson's idea to the work of media professionals and corporate leaders. What does the quotation say about the impact of managers on the organizations they run? Similarly, what does it say about journalists and other media professionals who produce content for audiences every day?
- 7. Discuss the special ethical considerations that are inherent in persuasive writing. Which ethical responsibilities do public relations practitioners and advertising professionals carry that differ from those in journalism?

# Chapter Exercises

- 1. Use your library research database and find a current media article that focuses on a First Amendment issue surrounding freedom of the press. In a five-minute classroom presentation, summarize the issue and explain the current legal status of any case connected with the issue.
- 2. Write a 350-word essay explaining the six elements of libel that a plaintiff must prove in order to win a libel case.
- 3. Of the four invasion of privacy torts, which one is most likely to be problematic for journalists? In a 300-word essay, list and discuss the reasons that support your point of view.
- 4. Explain each of the six rights granted by copyright. Which one is violated when someone "rips" music from a CD borrowed from a friend?
- 5. Contrast utilitarianism with the Golden Mean ethical perspective. Explain what each can do to provide ethical guidance to a television news reporter.

#### Additional Resources

American Advertising Federation: http://www.adfed.org

The Freedom Forum First Amendment Center: http://www.newseuminstitute.org/freedom-forum/

The Poynter Institute: <a href="http://www.poynter.org">http://www.poynter.org</a>

Public Relations Society of America (PRSA): <a href="http://www.prsa.org">http://www.prsa.org</a> Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ): <a href="http://www.spj.org">http://www.spj.org</a>

# SECTION III Digital Settings

# Chapter 9 Writing for Social Media

# Chapter Outline

**Learning Objectives** Frontline Media Writing Profile: Jason Carlton, Social Media Manager, Intermountain Medical Center It's Both Personal and Professional The Media Industry and Social Media Planning Social Media Campaigns Social Media Objectives Social Media Campaign Audience Analysis The Social Media Campaign Audit Industry Social Media Analysis The Social Media Content Plan Formatting the Social Media Content Plan Social Media Content Plan: Classic Glass Photography The War Room: Setting a Content Calendar Testing, Evaluating, and Adjusting Your Social Media Campaign Plan Social Media Copywriting Style Strategy for Social Media Personality in Social Media Copy Craft Essential: Write a Social Media Style Guide for Your Campus Newspaper Key Style Elements for Social Media Copy **Brevity** Conversational Tone Active Voice Action Verbs Social Media Copywriting: Length Matters Short-Form Social Media Copywriting Problem-Solution Formulas Pro Strategy Connection: Write a Series of Tweets About a School Sports Event Middle-Form Social Media Writing **Summary Key Terms Discussion Questions** Chapter Exercises Additional Resources

"Writing should not be a daunting task—it's natural! Being a strong writer has helped me advance in my schooling because I don't allow myself to get stressed out over writing assignments like many of my classmates. To plug into my best

creative and energy levels I like to think about my project for a couple of days. This allows my ideas to marinate and makes the writing process much more natural."

—Catie Beatty, Texas Christian University

# Learning Objectives

- 1. Describe the work done by social media coordinators and social media specialists.
- 2. List the elements of a social media campaign.
- 3. Discuss key style elements for social media copy.
- 4. Explain the difference between short-form, middle-form, and long-form social media copy.

Frontline Media Writing Profile
Jason Carlton, Social Media Manager
Intermountain Medical Center, Murray, Utah



Regardless of the medium or message, Jason Carlton is a multimedia writer and producer all day long. As social media manager with Intermountain Medical Center in Murray, Utah, Carlton writes tweets, Facebook and Google+ updates, blogs, video scripts, newsletter articles, news releases, and media statements for the patients, staff, and community members the hospital serves.

Intermountain Medical Center is a Level I trauma center. Whether Carlton is creating a blog post about superbugs and antibiotics, drafting a newsletter piece to promote employee wellness, or scripting a video on newborn health, his writing affects the lives and health of countless people who rely on the hospital every day.

"Intermountain Healthcare's whole mission is helping people to live the healthiest lives possible, and I get to play a role in that," says Carlton, thirty-five. "I have worked with people at death's door who are now living healthy lives again. I have been in the operating room to see pulmonary valve replacements, liver transplants, and other revolutionary procedures. It is a real thrill to tell those stories of the lives changed

through medical technology."

Carlton has achieved career success through networking, honing his writing skills, and persevering through setbacks. Earning his bachelor's degree in communication at Weber State University in 2004, he job-hunted for a year and completed a second internship to find his first job with Vanguard Media Group in Salt Lake City. In 2009, Carlton landed a position with Primary Children's Medical Center, and in 2012, started with Intermountain Medical Center.

"My position with Intermountain Healthcare is pretty unique," Carlton notes. "My primary responsibility is social media, but I also work closely with journalists and serve as a spokesperson for five of the hospitals in the system, which gives me the opportunity to blend these two positions through my writing."

In 2009, Carlton earned his master's degree in communication from the University of Utah, and his Accreditation in Public Relations (APR) from the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) in 2010.

Like all media professionals, Carlton utilizes professional strategy. He carefully assesses his situation and audience before writing his message. For a recent news release on antibiotics and superbugs, Carlton began by running Google searches on the subject and discovering what news organizations were writing. He checked Intermountain's social media logs to see whether any related blog posts had been written.

"I had to write this piece on Friday for a Monday deadline," Carlton recalls. "I was familiar with antibiotic misuse and how it creates superbugs, but the challenge was to determine my audience and what they needed to know about the issue. Was it parents, news media, or doctors? Why should they care? What information did they need?"

Carlton advises aspiring media professionals to practice their craft diligently. "Find opportunities to do your own writing through our own news releases, your own blog posts, or volunteer opportunities," he concludes. "You'll be surprised at how quickly you improve."

### It's Both Personal and Professional

Do you consider yourself to be a skilled social media writer? Perhaps you write daily on Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, or Google+. Social media now account for the highest usage of any type of Internet site. Over 2 billion Internet users accessed social networks by April 2016, and by all indications, these figures are much higher today as the use of mobile devices for social media access continues to grow.

What do we mean by social media? We can broadly define social media as a set of digital tools that allow for the creation and sharing of messages in a way that builds collaboration and/or relationships. People use social media because it provides them with a sense of community and brings them attention among their friends and family. A *channel* refers to the delivery system for a communication medium. There are many different social media channels, such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, Pinterest, Yelp, and Foursquare, to name just a few. Each uses unique features to deliver messages.

# The Media Industry and Social Media

Social media has become an integral part of daily work in the media industry. Journalists use it as a reporting and promotional tool, and news organizations front their operations with social media accounts. Public relations practitioners specialize in creating social media campaigns using a variety of social media channels to deliver their messages. Advertising professionals create and place ads in social media to effectively reach target audiences. All of these industries are hiring *social media coordinators* (sometimes called social media managers) and *social media specialists* whose job is to design campaigns and specific messages tailored to particular social media channels. Today, social media campaigns are important parts of overall media strategies in journalism, public relations, and advertising.

What does a social media coordinator do? He or she leads a team of media writers and producers who together develop social media campaigns for public relations or advertising clients. A social media campaign is a media strategy that uses more than one social media channel, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest, to promote and build audience attention for an organization's brand.

# Planning Social Media Campaigns

Professionals organize and execute their social media writing within well-planned social media campaigns. These campaigns are proposed and planned by the social media coordinator with a team of social media specialists. Thus, the first important job for social media writers is to construct a social media campaign plan and then to sell it to clients or the decision-makers in their organization. Once their plan has been accepted, the social media writers and producers begin their work writing and constructing the messages they will place on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and the other selected social media channels. We begin our coverage of social media writing by showing you how to write an effective social media campaign plan.

Social media campaign plans include everything you do with social media channels to achieve specified objectives for your client. Effective social media plans are based upon the Professional Strategy Triangle, first discussed in Chapter 2. The plan must include complete explanations of the situation, including the client's objectives and the social media channels that will be used for the campaign. It must also address audience, including an analysis of the audience demographics, psychographics, and lifestyle segments. Finally, the campaign must specify the types of social media messages to be used, along with their placement and frequency. Social media coordinators have developed various outlines for these plans. Here is a six-part structure for effective campaign plans developed by Evan LePage at Hootsuite:<sup>3</sup>

- 1. Construct social media objectives for the client.
- 2. Conduct an audience analysis.
- 3. Perform a social media audit and adjust client's social media accounts.
- 4. Analyze social media content in the client's industry, and detail effective message designs.
- 5. Create a social media content plan that includes a *content calendar*. A content calendar specifies when content will appear in social media channels used in the plan.
- 6. Test social media messages, evaluate audience reaction, and adjust the plan if necessary.

Steps 1 through 4 above identify any problems or issues with your client's or organization's current social media use. Steps 5 and 6 describe solutions with a plan that shows the client exactly what to do with social media to strategically distribute effective content to its target audience.

# Social Media Objectives

The first step in constructing a draft of your plan is to write social media objectives for your client. Social media objectives are short statements that explain exactly what you want to achieve with specific messages placed in particular social media channels. These statements reflect the needs of your client, part of an overall public relations or advertising media strategy developed for your client. Businesses can use the "SMART" system to create effective objectives. The acronym stands for

Specific Measurable Attainable Relevant Time-bound

*Specific* means that each objective refers directly to tangible things, with no ambiguity. It names a particular social media channel, describes the exact message content, and details how frequently the messages will be posted.

To illustrate a social media plan in this chapter, we will use a hypothetical client named Classic Glass Photography. Let's use the following as a description of the business:

Since 1985, Classic Glass has helped commerce, industry, and government organizations document various Pennsylvania landscapes with digital and classic photography techniques. Located in a restored hotel building in Lucinda, Pennsylvania, the company also sends photographers to serve clients in eastern Ohio, southern New York, and northern West Virginia. Expert at aerial photography, Classic Glass also reaches a niche audience with releases of photographic prints featuring well-known landmarks and beautiful scenery. Its clients include realtors, town and city tourist bureaus, state park offices, conservancy and environmental groups, and natural resource companies.

Here is an example of one objective for this client:

Classic Glass Photography will post daily Facebook updates, including locations of shoots and sample photos. It will gain ten likes and five comments a week, with one client interest inquiry received each week, by December 15, 2018.

We have underlined the details of this objective that makes it *specific*—the particular

channel (Facebook), the frequency of the posts (daily), and the content for the message (locations of shoots and sample messages). Because of the need to be specific, always write a separate objective for each social media channel in your campaign plan.

A *measurable* objective is one whose results you can count or quantify. Notice that the sample objective uses *likes* and *comments* as audience feedback measures in the underlined sentence below:

Classic Glass Photography will post daily Facebook updates, including locations of shoots and sample photos. We will gain ten likes and five comments a week, with one client interest inquiry received each week, by December 15, 2018.

Media professionals refer to measurable audience feedback as metrics. Social media metrics include simple indicators such as the number of comments or likes a post receives, as well as the number of reposts made by audience members.

A goal that's *attainable* is feasible and takes into account the current situation for your client. Two important considerations apply to make objectives attainable. The first is the staff your client will work with in creating messages. Your objectives must consider the time it will take for your writing and production staff to produce social media messages as you specify the frequency of social media posts. Second, you need to be realistic about audience reactions to your planned social media messages. A client in a niche business, such as landscape photography, simply won't generate high levels of audience interest as would a popular restaurant or nightclub. To gauge appropriate metrics goals, try examining other social media sites in the client's industry.

Photo 9.2: SMART is a best practice framework for setting goals. Set SMART goals to clarify your ideas, refocus your energy, and use your time and resources productively.

# Goal Setting



Specific
Measurable
Attainable
Relevant
Time-bound

Objectives prove to be *relevant* when they specify results that fit the client's needs. Relevance is determined by the types of content you plan to post and the type of social media channel you choose for the post. Does your client need to use video to convey its message to an audience? If so, YouTube would serve as one social media channel relevant to your client's needs. Does your client need to post text-based content that seeks to persuade an audience of a particular point of view? In that case, a set of weekly blog posts may be appropriate.

You accomplish *time-bound* objectives when you insert a "done by this date" phrase into your objective, as noted in this example:

Classic Glass Photography will create one Twitter post a day for each weekday, adding one new follower each week, by December 15, 2018.

Be sure to date your objectives, because it provides a measurable indicator of whether or not you have reached the objective.

Social media objectives form a key component of the social media plan. Not only do they specify exactly what you plan to do with social media messages, they give you a valuable means to measure your success. Here is an example of a list of objectives for the first part of a social media campaign plan for our simulated business, Classic Glass Photography:

Social Media Objectives

Discussions with the owners of Classic Glass Photography have led to the creation of seven objectives for our social media campaign:

- Classic Glass Photography will post daily Facebook updates, including locations of shoots and sample photos. We will gain ten likes and five comments a week, with one client interest inquiry received each week, by December 15, 2018.
- Classic Glass Photography will post daily Google+ updates, including locations of shoots and sample photos. We will gain seven likes and three comments a week, with one client interest inquiry received every two weeks, by December 15, 2018.
- Classic Glass Photography will tweet once a day on Twitter, adding three new followers a week by December 15, 2018.
- Classic Glass Photography will post at least three new short photo essays (4 to 6 photos) a week with Instagram. These photo essays will attract at least five comments a week.
- Classic Glass Photography will post three sets of photos on Pinterest each week, and will generate ten new pins a week by December 15, 2018.
- Classic Glass Photography will gain three new clients each month through Facebook inquiries by December 15, 2018.
- Classic Glass Photography will gain two new clients each quarter through Google+ inquiries by December 15, 2018.

# Social Media Campaign Audience Analysis

Throughout this text, we have repeatedly referred to the importance of understanding your audience when writing for media. In the social media campaign audience analysis, the second step in the process, you must carefully specify the types of people in your desired audience. For our purposes in this chapter, a *target audience* refers to an audience made up of specific types of people who are most likely to buy your client's product or service (advertising), or the particular people with whom your client wants to initiate or maintain a beneficial relationship (public relations).

How do you specify a target audience? You can use three main categories to analyze it: demographics, psychographics, and lifestyle segments. Demographics refer to descriptive characteristics about the types of people you wish to target for your audience. They include characteristics such as age, income, the geographic area where people live, education level, and gender. Psychographics chart the attitudes, values, and beliefs held by the people in the target audience. *Attitudes* are opinions about current issues important to the people in the target audience. *Beliefs* focus on deeper faith or acceptance of philosophical or religious concepts. *Values* refer to ethical or moral principles that guide people in making decisions. Lifestyle segments are a subset of psychographics that focus on characteristics such as hobbies, outdoor/indoor activities, vacation preferences, sports participation, and aesthetic preferences (choices in art, popular music, movies, television, and other media).

Photo 9.3: Knowing your audience is key for crafting the most effective, meaningful, and memorable content for your readers.



The target audience analysis carefully explains each of the three characteristics. Start with a brief introduction explaining what an audience analysis accomplishes for the social media campaign. Next, a bulleted list that contains each element of the audience analysis works well for this section of your plan. Use the audience characteristics as bullet points, followed by the descriptions of the target audience for each bulleted characteristic. Here is an example for our simulated business, Classic Glass Photography:

#### Target Audience Analysis

Classic Glass Photography's social media presence currently focuses on photo enthusiasts. There is a need to specify the audience that includes decision-makers in the industry that purchase Classic Glass Photography photo documentary services. We have targeted that audience in the analysis below:

#### Demographics

- Age: People between the ages of eighteen and seventy will be attracted to our social media content. Most of our audience will consist of people between the ages of twenty-five and sixty; people of these ages tend to be most interested in photography and landscapes.
- Income: People who earn \$50,000 per year and above will have the most interest in our social media content. These are the people associated with organizations that

- would be interested in our services. This could include members of environmental organizations, private natural resources companies, and state natural resources agencies. In addition, these people would be willing to spend money purchasing our photographic prints.
- Geographic area: Our target audience resides in western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio, where we serve clients. We will focus on the woods, farmland, Appalachian mountain scenery, rivers, lakes, streams, hills, flatlands, wetlands, cityscapes, towns, and classic architecture in this geographic region.
- Education: People with college degrees will form the bulk of those interested in our services, including those with advanced professional and academic degrees and those in managerial positions in the organizations that purchase our services.
- Gender: Our audience will contain roughly equal numbers of men and women because both exhibit equal appreciation of and interest in landscape and event photography, and hold managerial positions in companies that hire our services.

#### Psychographics

- Beliefs: Our audience will be made up of people who regard preservation of natural resources as an important priority in society. Many belong to organizations that work to preserve natural resources.
- Attitudes: Our audience will consist of successful professionals and business people
  who support the role of business in the preservation of the environment and use of
  natural resources. This includes environmentalists and logging, mining, and drilling
  professionals.
- Values: Our audience will demonstrate that they value our environment and the judicious use of natural resources.

#### Lifestyle Segments

- Outdoor activity enthusiasts: Many people in our audience will be hikers, campers, canoeists, anglers, trail bikers, and other outdoor sports enthusiasts. These people spend money on outdoor equipment and maintain healthy lifestyles that enable them to participate in rigorous outdoor activities. They would see the value of buying photographs and photographic albums of their favorite outdoor landscapes.
- Photography enthusiasts: People who take pictures and follow photography as a hobby will make up a significant portion of our audience. Our use of classic photography equipment creates an opportunity to attract photography enthusiasts who would be interested in our photographic processes and the way we use classic equipment to achieve high-quality landscape photos.

# The Social Media Campaign Audit

As the third step, the social media campaign audit provides a review of the current social media activity of your client before you implement a campaign. It aims to identify the accounts currently used by your client and then to perform modifications to make the most effective use of social media channels. The task here is to create a single, unified social media presence for your client.

Start with a paragraph summarizing what you found when examining your client's current social media accounts. Then, set up a bulleted list of the social media channels used by your client with information about when they were set up and the way your client currently uses them, if applicable. The second part of the audit includes your recommended action steps to adjust the social media accounts to create a unified social media presence for your client. The recommendations in this section revolve around the need to eliminate duplications in accounts and use particular social media channels that will accomplish your campaign plan's objectives. Here is an example report section for a social media audit for our Classic Glass Photography client:

#### Social Media Audit

Our analysis of the current social media accounts used by Classic Glass Photography revealed some duplication in the use of Twitter. Two people at Classic Glass Photography were writing social media messages without coordinating their efforts. The team was also failing to utilize a number of key social media channels that could be exploited to our advantage. Our recommendation is to eliminate duplication and bring all channels under the direction of our social media service team. We also recommend the creation of a Google+ account with a business page.

#### Current Social Media Usage

- Facebook: Classic Glass Photography Facebook page created on 10/08/16 by owner Scott Kuehn.
- Twitter:
  - @ClassicGlassPhotography Twitter account created on 10/12/16 by owner Scott Kuehn.
  - @Classic\_Glass\_Photo2 Twitter account created on 4/13/16 by company photographer Daniel Berg.
- Instagram: Classic Glass Photography Instagram account created on 5/13/16 by owner Scott Kuehn.

- Pinterest: Classic Glass Photography Pinterest account created on 7/1/16 by company photographer Daniel Berg.
- WordPress Blog: Classic Glass Photography WordPress account created on 6/12/16 by owner Scott Kuehn.
- Flickr Image Gallery: Classic Glass Photography Flickr account created on 2/14/17 by company photographer Daniel Berg.

#### Recommended Action Steps

- Remove Twitter account @Classic\_Glass\_Photo2.
- Transfer Pinterest account to client social media service team.
- Transfer Flickr account to client social media service team.
- Create a Google+ account to utilize Google+ Communities and Hangouts.

# Industry Social Media Analysis

The fourth step in the social media campaign plan features an analysis of the social media activity of similar businesses in the client's industry. Start with a brief introductory paragraph summarizing how your client compares to others in their industry who use social media. Bullet points work well to convey the information about how competitors and similar businesses use various social media channels. Your goal here is to survey social media use in your client's industry to discover *best practices*. Once you find examples, you can gain inspiration from successful use of social media by others in your client's industry. Adapt the successful models from others to use in your client's social media campaign plan.

The industry social media analysis section of your plan includes two sections. First, list a set of industry practitioners that have a social media presence and briefly outline the social media channels that they use. Second, highlight instances of effective social media use by these others in the client's industry. Here is an example of the industry social media analysis section of a campaign plan for Classic Glass Photography:

#### Industry Social Media Analysis

Classic Glass Photography is one of only a few landscape photography businesses that caters to private sector and government clients. Many other landscape photography businesses focus on landscape art and drive sales of their aesthetic products through online vendors and their own websites. Despite this difference, Classic Glass Photography can use effective social media practices to attract customers to its products. These practices also attract members of the private sector/government/environmental audience. Here is a brief analysis of effective social media use by three other landscape photography businesses.

#### Landscape Photography Social Media Examples

- Charlie Waite Photography
  - Charlie Waite uses Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, and a WordPress blog site as social media channels.
  - Based in England, this business posts pictures from current shoots and writes an informational blog centered on taking artistic landscape photos.
  - This business is focused on artistic landscape photography.
  - Mr. Waite is also a photography instructor and posts information for his students.
- Mark Gray Fine Art Photography
  - This business uses Facebook, Twitter, Google+, and an Instagram channel.

- Mark Gray is based in Australia and posts pictures from current shoots.
- This business is focused on artistic landscape photography. It sells Mr. Gray's photos to the public from a commercial website.
- Elizabeth Carmel, Fine Art Photographer
  - This business uses Facebook, Twitter, and a YouTube channel.
  - Ms. Carmel is based in Georgia and focuses attention on her two walk-in galleries.
  - This business is focused on artistic landscape photography. Social media channels direct traffic to Ms. Carmel's website, which also promotes her two photo galleries.

#### Effective Social Media Practices by Landscape Photographers

#### Original Content Posts

- Charlie Waite posts a weekly Facebook feature that discusses a recent picture
  he shot. This short Facebook piece (about 60 words) links to a companion blog
  on his WordPress site that expands upon the Facebook feature. Waite's weekly
  Facebook feature generates many likes and positive comments.
- Mark Gray engages Instagram followers almost daily with new landscape pictures he takes on photo shoots. These pictures receive many positive comments.
- Elizabeth Carmel engages her Facebook followers with "how-to" photography features that appear approximately every two weeks. These digital photography features run about 250 words long and include pictures of equipment and short discussions about how a current picture was created using a certain piece of equipment.
- Mark Gray makes effective use of Google+ Hangouts for photography fans and photographers. He posts current pictures with commentary, along with digital editing tips to retouch digital photos.

#### • Effective Reposted Content

- Charlie Waite Photography reposts photography contest information from around the world and encourages fans to participate.
- Mark Gray Fine Art Photography reposts information about Nikon photography equipment. Mr. Gray will include short comments about the usefulness of the equipment.
- All three photographers repost news about equipment, tips for photographers, and photos from other photographers that they find interesting.

#### The Social Media Content Plan

The fifth step in the social media campaign plan specifies the content you will post on your client's social media channels. Here, you also specify the frequency of the posts along with a content calendar that shows times during the week you will create each post. The content plan and calendar are essential elements of your social media campaign because they provide instructions for your social media writing and production team. These instructions need to be specific and focus on the content in your client's social media campaign objectives.

Begin this section with a careful review of the results you obtained in your analysis of effective social media practices in your client's industry. Don't be afraid to copy some ideas from others in the industry. Doing what works to attract audience attention is your prime goal, and you must make sure that your client maintains its brand voice in the mix of others in the industry.

The content plan includes three types of content (see Figure 9.1). The first type is original content updates. Written and produced by your team, these consist of short update messages. Such updates regularly appear on social media channels such as Facebook, Google+, Twitter, and Instagram. Writers usually construct original updates with a visual element and no more than two sentences (Facebook and Google+ updates can be slightly longer, perhaps a paragraph). The second type of social media content is original feature content. Its length will depend on the social media channel you use. Facebook and Google+ features can include one or more pictures or video plus copy that runs 100 to 250 words. Blog features may run considerably longer in word count; they also include pictures or video. Feature content will likely provide the source of most of your social media promotions.

The third type of content is called curated content. Here, your team finds and distributes material from other sources, curating it like a collector. Curated content refers to reposts. It can be planned or unplanned. Planned reposts work effectively for content that is available on a scheduled basis, such as music releases or sports updates. Unplanned reposts occur when your social media team encounters an important issue in the news that should receive attention from your audience (for instance, a regulatory change that allows gas drilling in state forests).

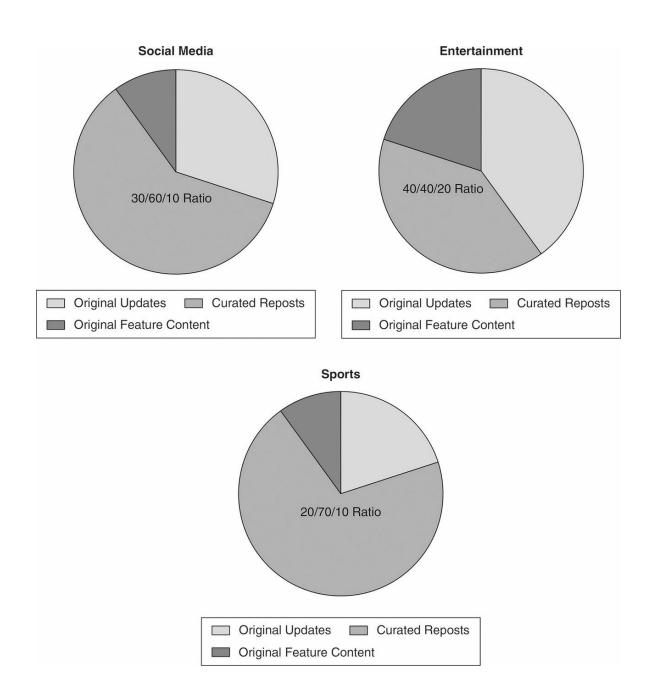
Your social media content plan must also establish a content ratio for your social media channels. A content ratio specifies how much of the total number of posts each of the three different types of content will make up. What percentage of your content will be original update posts, what percentage will be reposts, and what percentage will be original feature posts? Social media professionals usually begin with a default ratio they call *the golden* 

content ratio.  $^4$  This model specifies 30 percent original updates, 60 percent curated reposts, and 10 percent original feature promotional content. It is also referred to as the 30/60/10 ratio (Figure 9.2). Social media coordinators use many other types of ratios, depending on their business. Entertainment businesses, such as restaurants or night clubs often increase the amount of original content (both original updates and original features), and decrease the amount of curated content. In contrast to the golden content ratio, they might run 40 percent original updates, 40 percent curated content, and 20 percent original feature content for a 40/40/20 ratio. Sports-oriented businesses, such as teams, fantasy sports, leagues, or famous players often move in the opposite direction with a heavy reliance on sports news and updates, using a ratio such as 20/70/10.

Figure 9.1 The Three Types of Social Media Content

- Original Content Updates
- Original Content Features
- Curated Content

Figure 9.2 The Golden Content Ratio



# Formatting the Social Media Content Plan

The social media content plan consists of five sections:

Section 1: Presents your chosen content ratio and your reasons for adopting the ratio you chose.

*Section 2:* Describes your original content updates. Here, you should include a discussion of the topics that your updates will cover as well as the social media channels you will use to deliver them.

Section 3: Provides a detailed explanation of the curated content you plan to repost on a weekly basis. Explain exactly what the curated content will be, as well as how frequently you choose to repost it. You also need to provide reasons why you choose to repost it.

Section 4: Focuses on feature content. Carefully explain the promotional content that you will plan as weekly features on your client's social media channels.

Section 5: Provides the content calendar, usually constructed on a spreadsheet. A number of content calendar spreadsheet templates can be downloaded for free online. We also provide one on this textbook website for you to use.

Begin Section 1 of the content plan with an introduction that explains the types of social media content to be included. If your client is not well versed in this area, he or she will need to learn what you mean by original, curated, and feature content. Once you have introduced the idea of a content ratio, discuss the ratio you suggest for your client's social media channels, and then explain your reasoning. Here is an example of the first section of a content plan for our simulated client, Classic Glass Photography:

# Social Media Content Plan: Classic Glass Photography

To determine the weekly mix of content, we have established a content ratio for Classic Glass Photography.

A content ratio of 30/60/10 will begin our campaign. Of all the content we post each week (100 percent), 30 percent will consist of original updates we will produce, 60 percent will consist of reposts we curate from other sources, and 10 percent will consist of two weekly features we will post on Facebook and the Classic Glass Photography blog site. With 30 percent of our content consisting of short updates on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, we maintain consistent connections with our audience all through the week, emphasized by our reposts of curated content on these same channels. This curated content will keep our brand in the eye of our audience as we find interesting items to share about landscape photography and the environment. Our two features, *Classic Cameras on Landscapes* and *Beautiful Black-and-White Classic Landscapes* will make up the last 10 percent of our weekly posts. A shortened version of each feature will appear on Facebook: the first on Mondays, the second on Thursdays. Each Facebook post will include a link to the Classic Glass Photography blog site, where a longer version of the feature will appear.

Section 2 of the content plan provides an explanation of the original content updates your plan specifies for your client's campaign. Write this section with bullet points that focus on each of the social media channels. Under each channel, carefully explain the types of content you will provide. Here is an example:

Original Content Updates for Classic Glass Photography

#### Facebook

Two original content updates will be posted each week on Classic Glass Photography's Facebook page. These updates will be posted on Monday and Thursday. Current Classic Glass Photography photo shoots will be the topic of these updates, which will share sample photos and comments from our photographers in the field.

#### • Twitter

Twitter updates will duplicate the Facebook updates, posted simultaneously on Classic Glass Photography's Twitter account on Monday and Thursday.

#### Instagram

Two original updates will be posted each week on Classic Glass Photography's Instagram account. These updates will appear on Tuesdays and Fridays. Instagram posts will use a select photo from the week's landscape shoots that highlight a particular photography characteristic of interest to photographers.

#### Google+

Copies of the Facebook updates will also be posted to the communities section of the Classic Glass Photography Google+ business page on the same days they appear on Facebook.

#### Pinterest

Photos used throughout the week on our other social media channels will be posted on Pinterest Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.

Section 3 of your content plan will look much like Section 2, except that here you specify curated content that you plan to repost throughout the week. As in Section 2, explain the sources of your planned reposts and the channels you will use for your reposts. Here is an example:

#### Curated Updates

#### Facebook

Five curated content updates will be posted each week on Classic Glass Photography's Facebook page. These reposts will appear once each day of the work week, Monday through Friday. Reposts will include content from other landscape photography businesses, including Charlie Waite Photography and Mark Gray Fine Art Photography. Also included will be updates from camera equipment manufacturers, photography contests, and conservation updates from groups such as the Izaak Walton League and the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy.

#### Google+

The same curated content posted on Facebook will also be posted on the company's Google+ business page.

#### • Twitter

Twitter reposts will duplicate the Facebook reposts, posted simultaneously on Classic Glass Photography's Twitter account Monday through Thursday.

#### • Unplanned reposts

We will look for important photography and conservation news events. As they occur, we will repost breaking news items on the Classic Glass Photography Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Section 4 of your content plan specifies feature content. This refers to original content that runs longer than simple updates. It can run up to 400 words or so on Facebook and much longer on a blog. Features form your promotional content where your client engages the audience with copy and pictures that showcase their products, services, or promotions. Most features are written as short articles with plenty of visual content including video and photographs. Some are "how-to" articles promoting the client's products. Other features include testimonials from people who have purchased the client's products or services. We will focus on writing social media features later in this chapter. Here is an example of Section 4 of the content plan:

#### Original Features

#### Facebook

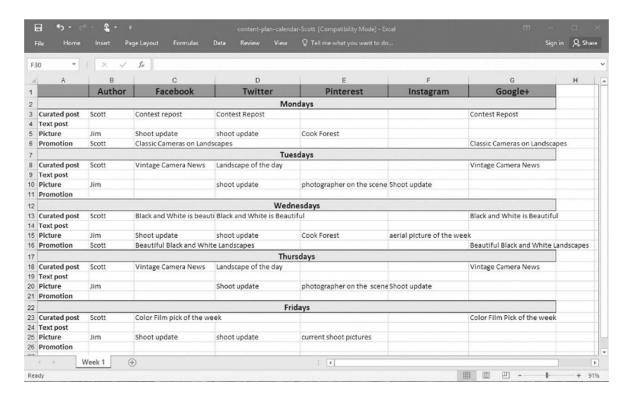
Our two features, Classic Cameras on Landscapes and Beautiful Black-and-White Classic Landscapes are short articles that will promote Classic Glass Photography pictures. Classic Cameras on Landscapes will appear on Mondays, showcasing a set of Classic Glass Photography photos and compelling stories behind the photo shoots. Beautiful Black-and-White Classic Landscapes will appear on Thursdays and will demonstrate the compelling aesthetic of black-and-white landscape photography using photos from the Classic Glass Photography archive. Each feature will run approximately 150 words, with five to seven photos. Video demonstrations can also be included.

#### • Blog

Each of the two features, *Classic Cameras on Landscapes* and *Beautiful Black-and-White Classic Landscapes* will be posted on the Classic Glass Photography blog site. The blog versions of these features will run about four times the length of their Facebook versions, perhaps with more photos. The Facebook versions will provide a link to the longer blog versions.

Section 5, the content calendar, concludes your content plan. This is usually a spreadsheet file that lists each of the social media channels as columns and the days of the week as rows. Here, you fill out the grid with cells that indicate the posts and reposts you plan for each social media channel for each day of the week. When the calendar is complete, you can see at a glance exactly what you need to post or repost on a weekly basis. If you have a team producing the client's social media, you can assign each post to particular team members and indicate it on the calendar.

Figure 9.3 Social Media Content Calendar



Be sure to construct your calendar so that you distribute your social media posts evenly across the week. Do not allow holes in your calendar or days of the week where your social media activity slows. Evenly distributed content provides your closest followers with a sense of rhythm in the posts. They can come to expect and enjoy the content you post on a regular basis. Figure 9.3 shows an example of a social media content calendar.

The War Room

# Setting a Content Calendar

Imagine that you are a content specialist on the Classic Glass Photography social media team. Your job is to set up a content calendar that will

- represent a content ratio of 30/60/10;
- use the social media channels Facebook, Google+, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest to their full potential to reach the landscape photography audience; and
- evenly distribute the content flow across the entire week.
- 1. As a class, divide into three- or four-member social media production teams and set up your content calendars.
- 2. Once your team has completed its calendar, present it to the class.
- 3. The class will then discuss different approaches presented by each team.
- 4. What is the optimal distribution of social media content by channel to reach Classic Glass Photography's audience?

# Testing, Evaluating, and Adjusting Your Social Media Campaign Plan

The final step of the social media campaign plan tests whether the elements of your plan effectively attracted the target audience. It establishes a trial period and examines social media metrics such as comments, likes, and reposts to evaluate how well you are reaching your intended audience and how positively your audience reacts to the content you post and repost. Once you analyze audience reaction, you can modify your plan to better attract them. You can access a complete example of the simulated Classic Glass Photography Social Media Campaign Plan on the textbook website.

# Social Media Copywriting

Social media copywriting shares many similarities with electronic media writing, found in Chapter 6, and web copywriting, discussed in Chapter 10. Space for copy is minimal and audience attention span is short, which means you must economize word use. Use a conversational tone and active voice and limit the use of extraneous adjectives and adverbs. Most of these style conventions are addressed in Chapter 3. However, social media writing differs from other forms of media writing in one major way: since you address your audience members individually, your work is viewed as having its own personality. Social media writers must be aware of the personal style they convey in their copy and use it to strategic advantage in attracting their target audiences.

## Style Strategy for Social Media

We begin our discussion of social media writing with style strategies common to all types of social media, whether community channels such as Facebook or Google+, microblogs such as Twitter, or blog sites such as WordPress. Social media audiences expect to read messages that directly address them in a friendly, inviting way. At the same time, social media professionals recognize that some brands need to sound warm and friendly, for instance, while others might sound bold and edgy, or understated and sincere.

In 2010, Matthew Latkiewicz of mashable.com introduced the idea that companies needed to use writing style characteristics to create a social media *persona* (an identity or character) for their brand. Once that persona is created, writers should use it for all copy to build consistency across social media channels. Companies began to specify the particular writing style characteristics they wanted their writers to emphasize to be true to the persona they selected. These sets of instructions became codified into various social media style guides that companies would create for the brands they represented on social media channels. Today, the style guide is one of the first things you will encounter when you become a social media specialist for an established brand. If you are working for a company that does not have a social media style guide, you will need to create one. We show you how to do that later in this chapter.

## Personality in Social Media Copy

What personality factors should you consider for your social media copy persona? Social media expert Peg Fitzpatrick suggests you use your audience analysis to construct a composite "ideal customer" in order to visualize the type of person your client wants to cultivate in the social media audience. As you begin to think about this person in your audience, you can also think about how he or she would like to engage with your copy. You can ask, "With what type of personality would this ideal customer like to engage on my social media channels?" and "What personal characteristics would this ideal customer expect in my copy?"

When you are clear about the persona you believe the audience will enjoy engaging with, you can begin to list the writing style elements that fit the persona. This becomes your social media voice to your audience. Social media expert Stephanie Schwab says that four copywriting elements represent your social media brand voice: character/persona, tone, language, and purpose (Figure 9.4). Our job is to take characteristics from these four elements to construct the social media voice that our audience would most appreciate.

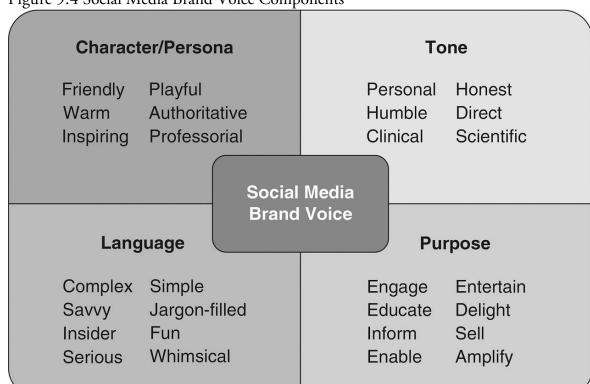


Figure 9.4 Social Media Brand Voice Components

Source: Stephanie Schwab, 2011.

To illustrate how this might work, let's develop a social media voice for Classic Glass Photography. We can envision two different types of people who could be customers for this landscape photography business. First, private sector and governmental customers purchase photos and related services. Second, customers buy photos from Classic Glass Photography's website. Let's focus on the first type of customer for this illustration. What type of person pays attention to our social media and hires our client to take pictures of landscapes? Imagine a male government employee who is about forty-five years old, is well educated, concerned about environmental issues, enjoys hiking and canoeing, and earns a moderate salary. How would such a person like to be addressed on social media? We believe it would be a *friendly* character/persona that uses a *personal* tone, with language that is *savvy* but *simple*, with a purpose to *engage* and *inform*.

Once we have chosen characteristics for our social media voice, it's time to adopt writing style elements that represent each of these characteristics. Let's pick up our Classic Glass Photography illustration again and define the writing style characteristics that go with *friendly*, *personal*, *savvy*, *simple*, *engage*, and *inform*. How do you express *friendliness* when you write? You might try,

```
"Hey there!"
"Hello!"
"How's it going?"
```

You can also indicate that you care about what the audience thinks in your messages:

```
"Hope you like this."

"What do you think of this?"

"Enjoy this."
```

A personal style seeks a direct connection with audience members. You can accomplish this by using the second-person voice to connect to audience members. You might write,

```
"You are always welcome here!"
"I know you'll find this interesting."
"I hope you return soon."
```

You can also adopt a personal style by using informal words and phrases in your copy:

```
"Wow, that's great!"

"All right! I see it clearly now."

"I hope you're good with that."
```

*Savvy* language demonstrates knowledge of an area of expertise; in our example, that means knowledge of photography. To demonstrate that you are photo-savvy, communicate in the way that photographers do to other photographers:

"Open the lens one stop."

*Simple* language is short and direct. Use no flowery words here; stick to the everyday language people speak. To *engage* the audience means to speak directly to them in a straightforward manner:

```
"Hey, have you seen the new Nikon camera yet?"
"Going to the forest? Take your boots . . . it's wet!"
```

Finally, to *inform* our audience means to provide facts and critical opinion in our posts. For example,

"The new Canon EOS 5DS has a 50.6 megapixel full-frame CMOS sensor, one of the best cameras you can buy. Priced at over \$3,200, it is also probably out of our league!"

As you can see from the above illustrations, it is not hard to choose writing elements that represent characteristics we choose for our social media voice. Once we have selected those characteristics, we can bring them together in a social media style guide. Such a guide provides a handy collection of the writing characteristics we desire and standardizes the social media voice for anyone on the team who will write copy for our client. You can construct a style guide organized by the four copywriting elements of the social media voice with bulleted instructions and examples. Here is an illustration of a social media style guide for our simulated business, Classic Glass Photography:

Social Media Style Guide: Classic Glass Photography

#### Persona: Friendly

- Write with greetings:
  - Use words such as *hi*, *hello*, or *hey there*.
  - Don't use questions such as "What's up?" "What's happening?" or "How are you?"
- Show that you care:
  - Ask what they think: "Hope you . . ." or "How do you feel about . . ."
  - Don't get too informal. Examples to avoid are "Did you dig on that?" or "Does this ring your bell?"

Tone: Personal

<sup>&</sup>quot;Set the shutter speed slower so you can get greater depth of field by closing the lens."

<sup>&</sup>quot;Use a faster film to account for low light."

- Use the second person *you* in your copy.
- Use informal, everyday language.
- Don't use expletives, curses, or cleaned-up swear words like *frickin thing* or *crap*.

#### Language: Savvy, Simple

- Use the language of photography carefully and accurately.
- Do not use non-photography jargon.
- Keep your word choice simple; use everyday words.
- Keep sentences short.

#### Purpose: Engage, Inform

- Write sentences or questions directly to the audience, such as "Did you see the beautiful snowfall in the forest this morning?"
- Ask audience members rhetorical questions like "How many times has this happened to you?"
- Report new information directly: "We saw a giant bald eagle in Cuyahoga National Park yesterday."
- Report relevant nature and photography facts in copy: "Many new wildflowers on the river banks this spring!"
- Use keywords in updates and feature copy. For example:
  - vintage, classic, panorama, horizon, harmonious, peaceful, escape, solitude, pleasing, sunny, woods, streams, babbling brook, soar, captivate, impress.

#### Craft Essential: Write a Social Media Style Guide for Your Campus Newspaper

Team up with one or two classmates to write a brief social media style guide for all social media content that would be developed for your campus newspaper. Include Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and other relevant channels.

- 1. Use the sample style guide on page 315 as a model for your style guide.
- 2. Discuss the nature of the audience for your newspaper and consider the social media voice you believe you should use for your campus newspaper.
- 3. Follow the process for selecting appropriate language for your social media personality as shown on pages 313—315.
- 4. Draft a brief style guide according to your instructor's guidance.
- 5. Reconvene as a class to present and compare your social media style guides.
- 6. As a class, discuss the creative strengths and limitations of each style guide. After hearing your classmates' feedback, what might you do differently next time?

# Key Style Elements for Social Media Copy

Whether you are posting Twitter updates, comments with Instagram pictures, or Facebook articles, write your copy according to four simple rules:

- 1. Be brief and concise.
- 2. Use a conversational tone.
- 3. Use the active voice.
- 4. Use action verbs; limit adjectives and adverbs.

#### Brevity

Brevity is a virtue in all social media copy. As we discussed in <u>Chapter 3</u>, being brief means that your sentences are short and you choose the right words to express what you mean.

When you express a thought such as "Cassie caught the ball" in a simple sentence, do you notice how easily you can visualize it in your mind? That's precisely the goal for social media. By writing sentences simply, you encourage the audience to tune into your message because it is easy for them to visualize. The moment your sentences get crowded with too many facts and descriptions, the harder it is to visualize the meaning. For example, instead of using the above sentence, "Cassie caught the ball," consider this one:

Cassie Hardy, of 3457 West Fanning Avenue, put the Wilson A3000 ball glove on her left hand, then suddenly looked up, reached out, and closed the glove around the brand new Spalding baseball that had been hit by Terry Wincoop of 2345 East Main Street.

While all this information might be interesting to baseball fans, it seems to take forever to find out what is happening in this sentence. Social media audiences will stop reading and move to the next item in front of them. Part of the problem for this sentence is that it just takes too long to visualize in your mind's eye.

To make brevity work in your social media writing, simply think what your audience wants to know. Give them just that and nothing more. Repeat this process step-by-step for each point you want to make. Ask yourself, "Does my audience really want to know all this?"

#### Conversational Tone

Let's dispel one notion right here: achieving a conversational tone does not mean writing as you would speak. Sentences written in a conversational tone borrow some characteristics from verbal speech, but they do not exactly mirror the spoken word.

Conversational tone works for social media copy when you adopt three "talk" characteristics and use them in your writing:

- 1. Use common words and avoid jargon.
- 2. Use contractions at times.
- 3. Address the reader directly.

Be especially careful to use proper grammar. Although many other people let grammar rules slide in their personal social media use, as a representative of an organization or brand, you need to always put proper grammar on display. For example, here is a paragraph in which the writer uses proper grammar and displays the three elements of a conversational tone:

"Don't worry—watch Saturday Night Live whenever you want! Just download our free app. It will find all your favorite comedy shows, old or new."

Now compare that last sentence to these two, which use jargon and too many modifiers. They also lack conversational tone:

"Consumers who wish to find classic and current comedy programs can install an Android application that will employ the latest search algorithms with proven successful results. This application is open-source and it does not cost the user to obtain a software license."

When writing copy, think of conversational tone as limiting your words to those your audience members would use in everyday conversations.

#### Active Voice

As discussed in Chapter 3, you achieve the *active voice* when you use *subject-verb-object* sentence order. You might be thinking, "What's wrong with the passive voice?" Plenty, as far as social media writing is concerned. First, the passive voice sounds boring. This occurs partly because the sentence is too wordy, and also because the subject is letting something happen to it instead of taking action itself. Second, the passive voice reverses the way people normally think about a situation. In an active sentence, we can easily visualize the agent (subject) taking action (verb) on the object. But passive sentences force us to think harder for a moment to figure out the subject and what is actually going on in the sentence. Therefore, they encourage readers to tune out and abandon your message in favor of others that are more straightforward.

#### Action Verbs

Adjectives modify the meaning of nouns. They offer more description, illustration, or definition to understand a noun. For example, let's look at a poorly chosen adjective: "The aggressive Cubs beat the Mets." Does aggressive tell us anything specific about how the Cubs won the game? Adverbs do the same job for verbs that adjectives do for nouns. "The Cubs aggressively beat the Mets." Aggressively also fails to give us much information about the Cubs. Did they steal a lot of bases? Hit a lot of home runs?

Adjectives and adverbs don't work well for social media copy. First, they add words when we are trying hard to write copy as brief as possible. Second, they take time to visualize, again making it slightly harder for the audience to understand the sentence. Instead of using an adjective or adverb as a modifier, why not use a verb that better describes the action in the sentence? Sports verbs are often quite picturesque, and we could choose many to help the audience quickly visualize what happened in the game:

The Cubs clobbered the Mets.

The Cubs *terrorized* the Mets.

The Cubs destroyed the Mets.

*Beat, defeated,* and *lost* are verbs that can be applied generically. They seem to need modifiers to make them specific. But action verbs such as *clobbered, terrorized,* or *destroyed* need no modifiers. They almost tell the story themselves.

## Social Media Copywriting: Length Matters

Length matters. In fact, social media copywriters distinguish between types of copy using length as a measure. The short updates that are common to Twitter, Facebook, Google+, and Instagram are called short-form social media copy. This copy fits within the 140-character limit imposed by Twitter for tweets. Long-form social media copy occupies the other end of the length scale, usually running 700 to 2,000 words. You will find long-form copy on blog pages (see <a href="Chapter 10">Chapter 10</a>) and in company articles often published on organizational websites. Long-form social media writing is gaining popularity with social media specialists, as recent social media statistics show that long-form content gains the most reposts and shares from users. Current social media strategies employ web links in Twitter and Facebook updates to attract followers to long-form content on websites. These strategies can move followers to article-length blogs and promotional pieces that sell products and services.

Middle-form social media copy occupies a niche between the two extremes of short-form and long-form copy. Posted on community channels such as Facebook and Google+, middle-form copy runs 100 to 250 words long. It uses largely the same organizational pattern as short-form content, but it packs a bit more detail into the copy. Middle-form copy is becoming more popular because it can be easily read on portable devices and fits well with picture and video media. Like short-form content, middle-form content often packs links that move readers to long-form content for more details. Recent studies show middle-form content is shared more than short-form content, almost as much as long-form content. We concentrate on short-form and middle-form content in this chapter.

## Short-Form Social Media Copywriting

Microblogs, with their limit of 140 characters, have created a new means of online expression. Here you must write succinctly. It is a challenge to pack all you want to say in a single tweet or Facebook update. Users respond to this limit by compacting sentences to the smallest possible size and still convey the intended meaning. At times, sentences become so abbreviated that articles (*the*, *a*, *an*) and pronouns (*you*, *he*, *her*) are left out. Adjectives are a luxury, and when they are used, they are often used in lists that modify the previous sentence.

Twitter's 140-character limit wasn't the only way the microblog has influenced social media copywriting. The pound sign, called a hashtag when used in Twitter copy, transforms a word into a topic. Click on a word with a hashtag, such as #nationalparks, and it opens search results showing tweets and other social media that contain that hashtag word. This makes it easy to offer your tweet for reposts. Thus, when you write "#nationalparks" in your tweet and other people also search for it, your tweet will show up in the results. Hashtags help make your posts come up in searches of "trending" topics when you use popular hashtags in your tweets. But use them sparingly. Between one and three per post is most effective. Apply hashtags to topics, places, and things in your posts, but never hashtag the name of your brand. People usually won't click your brand name to search it, and even if they do, someone may say something disparaging about your brand, and you certainly don't want that to pop up in a web search.

Figure 9.5 Twitter Post With a Picture

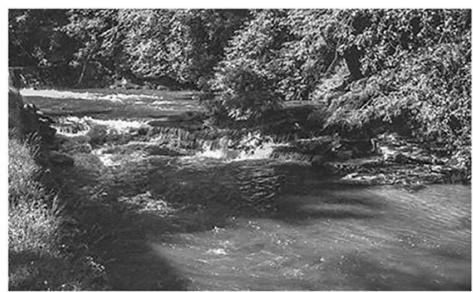


Figure 9.6 Twitter Post With a Picture



#### Scott Kuehn @ClassicGlassPho · 7m

Wish you were here? Cook Forest always pleases! Come and see...



4:05 PM - 19 Oct 2015 · Details



Often, pictures accompany microblog copy. Indeed, Guy Kawasaki and Peg Fitzpatrick write that you should always include pictures and links with your short-form copy. <sup>10</sup> Updates with pictures can be short, with comments directed at the visual (see Figures 9.5 and 9.6). These updates can be simultaneously posted on social networks such as Facebook and Google+, and this type of writing works the same way for short-form social network updates.

While you strive to be brief, always follow the rules of grammar. Use correct punctuation and remain vigilant with your spelling. Make your updates lively but keep the copy in good taste.

#### Problem-Solution Formulas

A problem–solution structure starts with a problem, and then offers readers a way to solve it. This structure works well for short-form tweets and Facebook and Google+ updates. Here are six of the most popular problem–solution copywriting formulas with examples:

Before–After–Bridge: Here you illustrate a problem, describe life without the problem, then give the reader a way to "go there."



Problem–Agitate–Solve: One of the most popular formulas, and very much like before–after; but instead of describing life without the problem, you describe life if the problem persists, then present a solution:



Features-Advantages-Benefits: A well-known strategy for selling, "FAB" works well for short-form social media writing:



Attention—Interest—Desire—Action: A classic sales formula used for many years in advertising copy. Get audience attention, show them fresh, interesting information, demonstrate the benefits of your "solution," and ask for a response:



Star–Story–Solution: The "star" can be anything: your brand, your audience, a location. The story is a positive visualization for the audience; the solution is the positive outcome of the story.



Star-Chain-Hook: Your brand, product, or service, then a chain of facts, reasons, benefits, finished with action.



**Scott Kuehn** @ClassicGlassPho · now Eagles soaring over #Clarion\_River, impress your spouse, captivate your kids. Get here this weekend: cookforest.org

6 t3 \$ \* ···

Pro Strategy Connection

# Write a Series of Tweets About a School Sports Event

Jason Carlton, social media manager for Intermountain Medical Center in Murray, Utah (see Frontline Media Writing Profile at the beginning of this chapter), writes short-form, middle-form, and long-form social media copy to accompany his press releases. Carlton often begins with a long-form article, which may appear as blog copy and in press releases. He then supports the long-form copy with short-form tweets. "We might develop ten or more tweets from that one main piece," he says.

Like Carlton, reporters spend much of their time sending tweets to accompany their articles. For this exercise, pick up the most recent copy of your campus newspaper and select a story from the sports section.

- 1. Team up with another classmate. Examine the facts about the sports event presented in the story.
- Review the four social media style elements (brevity, conversational tone, active voice, action verbs, and limited adjectives and adverbs) from this chapter to make sure that your tweets conform to social media style conventions.
- 3. Working with your partner, write a series of tweets reporting each important fact about the sports event. Limit your tweets to a single fact each.
- 4. Submit your work to your instructor.

## Middle-Form Social Media Writing

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, short-form copy and middle-form copy prevail on social networks. Often, writers post updates simultaneously on microblogs and social networks. Therefore, the style applications we covered for Twitter updates are relevant for this material if it is posted on Facebook and Google+.

Middle-form copy runs slightly longer than short-form copy. Here, writers create paragraph-length articles to provide more information than a simple update. Longer copy is appropriate for promotional feature content, which often describes products and services offered by a company. The writer also creates links to company websites and blogs, where people can find more information if they are considering a purchase. Facebook and Google+ features are usually designed with pictures, video, or graphic content. Writers produce this media in a smaller format to maximize their effectiveness when displayed on portable devices.

Note that the same copywriting formulas we saw with short-form content work perfectly well with middle-form content. However, when you are using middle-form copy, write a newspaper style summary lead (see <a href="Chapter 5">Chapter 5</a>) for your first sentence. Readers scan Facebook copy quickly, so you want to make sure the most important elements run up top. This is called *frontloading* the copy (<a href="Figure 9.7">Figure 9.7</a>).

Figure 9.7 Middle-Form Facebook Article



Scott's Classic Glass Landscape Photography added 2 new photos.

6 mins · Edited · @

Destroy drudgery with a short trip 50 miles north of Pittsburgh. Beautiful Fall foliage waits for you now in Cook Forest. Experience the flaming reds of maples, brilliant golds from oaks, hickories shine bright yellows, and sycamores dazzle in orange. Can't think of anything better on a fall weekend!

Travel safe and easy to this little 600-acre heaven on the Clarion river. Grab route 28 north out of Pittsburgh, stay on it around Brookville. Continue north into the woods... hey this is a straight shot!

Nice weather this weekend... take a canoe ride, and maybe you'll see one of the bald eagles. Come, check it out: cookforest.org



#### Summary

- 1. Describe the work done by social media coordinators and social media specialists. Social media coordinators and specialists work in teams to develop plans for social media campaigns, and they present their plans for approval. Once campaign plans are approved, social media coordinators and specialists write and produce their client's social media content that they place on social media channels.
- 2. List the elements of a social media campaign. (1) Create social media objectives, (2) conduct a social media audit, (3) conduct an audience analysis, (4) analyze the social media messages of the client's industry leaders and competitors, (5) create a content plan and an editorial calendar, and (6) test, evaluate, and adjust the social media campaign.
- 3. Discuss key style elements for social media copy. Brevity means that social media copy is characterized by short, simple sentences. Conversational tone means that writers use words that the audience typically uses. Active voice refers to using the subject-verb-object sentence structure. Social media copy stresses action verbs and limits the use of adjectives and adverbs.
- 4. Explain the difference between short-form, middle-form, and long-form social media copy. Short-form social media copy consists of updates that do not exceed 140 characters, typically used with channels such as Facebook or Twitter. Middle-form copy can vary in length from 100 to 250 words and is typically posted on social network channels such as Facebook and Google+. Long-form copy typically runs 700 to 2,000 words and is used primarily for blog entries and websites.

# Key Terms

social media 291 social media channels 291 social media campaign 292 social media campaign plan 292 social media objectives 293 metrics 294 demographics 297 psychographics 297 lifestyle segments 297 social media campaign audit 299 industry social media analysis 301 original content updates 303 original feature content 303 curated content 304 content ratio 304 social media content plan 305 content calendar 309 social media voice 313 social media style guide 315 short-form social media copy 320 long-form social media copy 320 middle-form social media copy 320 hashtag 321

## Discussion Questions

- 1. Which of the social media channels do you find to be the most interactive? Which are the least interactive? Offer reasons to support your points of view.
- 2. Which social media channel or channels have you stopped using over the last couple of years? Explain why you no longer find them to be useful.
- 3. Why do social media professionals invest so much effort in planning social media campaigns? Why is it ineffective to simply write copy for clients without any planning?
- 4. What would be the optimal mix of social media channels to bring attention to your campus newspaper and the stories it publishes each week? Explain your reasoning.
- 5. What is your favorite type of social media *personality*? How do you recognize it when you read tweets and Facebook updates? What language usage makes this social media personality work effectively for you?
- 6. Which of the four key style elements for social media copy are the most important to social media, in your opinion? Explain why you believe this to be so. Which is the least important? Why?
- 7. Why is short-form copy most prevalent on social media channels? What are the possible disadvantages of using long-form copy?
- 8. Which of the short-form problem—solution formulas strikes you as the most effective for writing tweets? Why?

# Chapter Exercises

- 1. Pick your favorite social media channel and conduct some research on it. Write a 250-word essay summarizing how the channel got started and how popular it is with audiences today. Be sure to include the following information: startup date, originator or first CEO, current owner, and how many users it serves today.
- 2. Draft a 200-word audience analysis of the social media audience for one of your favorite brands. Be sure to include all the demographics, psychographics, and lifestyle segments that are relevant for the audience you have chosen.
- 3. Pick a campus group to which you currently belong. Prepare a brief content plan containing three original updates and three original features for social media channels that are used by your group.
- 4. Prepare a content calendar for the social media content you specified in Exercise 3 above.
- 5. Review the six different types of short-form problem–solution copywriting formulas found on pages 323–324. Imagine that you are writing to recruit members for a community volunteer group or church to which you belong. Write six tweets following each of the six formulas that might convince potential members to attend an informational meeting for the group.

#### Additional Resources

Social Media Association: http://socialmediaassoc.com/join-sma/

# Chapter 10 Web Copywriting

# Chapter Outline

Additional Resources

**Learning Objectives** Frontline Media Writing Profile: Jean Thompson, Marketing Manager, Accenture The Omnipresent World Wide Web A Brief History of the World Wide Web Professional Website Development Web Copywriting Two Types of Web Copy: Middle Form and Long Form Middle-Form Web Copy: Arrangement Putting Structures to Work on Web Pages Spacely-Cogswell Components #1 Spacely-Cogswell Components #2 Spacely-Cogswell Components #3 Spacely-Cogswell Components #4 Middle-Form Web Copy: Style Attracting the Glancing Eve The War Room: Writing Your Web Biography Long-Form Web Copy: Blogs Professional Blogs Structuring Blog Content: The Headline Creating a Residual Message Professional Blog Headline Formula Writing a Headline for a Photo Blog Blog Headline Keywords and Promises **Blog Content** Craft Essential: Write a Blog About the Best Ways to Write Blogs Sample Blog Post: 3 Proven Ways to Scan Large-Format Negatives to Create Sensational Digital Images **Summary Key Terms Discussion Questions Chapter Exercises** 

"Writing under pressure is extremely challenging because the stress blocks out creativity. Give yourself plenty of time to work on it, because it is likely you will randomly have a great idea to include in the story later after thinking about it subconsciously. Listening to music is another great way to wind down and inspire yourself to write."

—Jennica Asbury, University of Oregon

# Learning Objectives

- 1. Explain why businesses put so much effort into creating and maintaining websites.
- 2. Discuss arrangement and structure in middle-form web copy.
- 3. Discuss style in middle-form web copy.
- 4. Describe structure and headline decisions to make in blogging.

Frontline Media Writing Profile

Jean Thompson, Marketing Manager

Accenture, Washington, DC



For Jean Thompson, being well rounded is the key to success as a copy writer and marketing manager. Thompson earned her communication degree from James Madison University in 2008, with a concentration in public relations. As part of her degree work, she completed a sport marketing cognate, picking up courses in marketing and sports management. These courses inspired her to add a valuable business perspective to her communication skills. "I found my first jobs with small boutique PR/Advertising agencies where I had to multitask many projects," she says. "I had to write bylines and press releases, design,

use the Adobe Creative Suite to produce finished copy, and do sales marketing tasks. I dabbled in everything, including email marketing, updating and managing websites, working with a team of writers, and doing events planning. My cognate helped me grasp the big picture of the businesses we worked for."

This valuable experience with small agencies led Thompson to opportunities with larger firms. "The first large firm I worked for introduced me to content creation projects with brand professionals," she says. "We concentrated on what was being said about a brand and looked for the best ways to say it in web copy and social media. We worked to make sure the tone of the brand message was correct according to the marketing plan."

Today, Thompson works as a marketing manager for Accenture, a global professional services company in Washington, DC. She oversees a team of writers who produce print, video, web, and social media copy to help her company generate awareness, differentiate, and sell its services to clients worldwide.

The most important skill Thompson looks for in her writers is the ability to translate technical information into a compelling story. "Storytelling is so important!" she says. "Writers who can set the stage with a brief challenge overview and emphasize the impact and outcomes delivered are most valuable. These writers do more than just push messages out; they are invested in their client's success; they become a real business partner. These writers can simplify all the complex issues into an easy-to-understand story about the real world impact that organizations can make—moving beyond traditional solution overviews."

Thompson says that beginning media professionals often have to make a choice. "Right from the start, you need to decide if you are going to be a generalist or a specialist," she says. "Generalists are valuable for their adaptability. But the demand for specialists continues to grow, especially those who are knowledgeable about S.T.E.M. (science, technology, engineering, and math) and other technical fields. Cybersecurity is also a very hot specialization for writers."

Most of Thompson's team of writers work as contractors, whom she hires on a project basis. She notes that the more well-rounded you can be as a writer, the better. To prepare for this type of work, Jean stresses that writers should read everything they can. "Writers need to be adaptable because companies have many different needs," she concludes. "Read widely so you know about a lot of different subjects. In college, don't just take easy courses or courses in only a couple of subjects. Choose your electives wisely and include some in economics, marketing, and technical subjects."

## The Omnipresent World Wide Web

It is not an overstatement to say that the World Wide Web is omnipresent in our lives. We use it to find information nearly every day, from the location of restaurants or hotels in distant cities to the purchase of everyday items such as clothing or music. The web also provides endless educational opportunities. We take for granted how easily the web provides information at our fingertips. It's hard to imagine a world without the online catalogue of information and entertainment we call the web.

Because the web is so central to our lives, businesses and organizations put considerable effort into creating an effective web presence. A company website provides consumers with critical information about products and services, as well as information for employees and investors. Nonprofit organizations also need websites that efficiently deliver information to employees, volunteers, potential donors, the press, and the public. While the graphics on web pages are important to attract an audience, well-written text lies at the core of an effective website. Visitors must be able to find information at a glance or they will quickly lose interest and abandon the site for a different page. This chapter will provide you with the competencies you need to write effective copy for web pages.

## A Brief History of the World Wide Web

The term World Wide Web was coined by Tim Berners-Lee to name the information system he created when he matched hypertext documents to the Internet in 1989. Hypertext refers to a string of text with electronic links that take a user instantly to other text. It runs virtually everything on the web. Berners-Lee worked for CERN, the European Particle Physics Laboratory in Geneva, Switzerland, and needed to design a system to connect scientific works by topic. It wasn't until 1991 that the first web servers outside CERN were set up. The next big development came two years later when researcher Marc Andreessen created the first modern web browser, called Mosaic, in 1993. Andreessen started a new company and renamed his browser Netscape in 1994. That same year Berners-Lee set up the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), which meets yearly to review and modify the engineering standards behind the World Wide Web.

Once modern web browsers began to be loaded on PC and Mac computers, the web quickly became an omnipresent communication medium. Companies found they could reach a growing number of online consumers, and by the late 1990s most businesses and nonprofit organizations had built websites. By the early 2000s, the web had become more accessible to those who wanted to publish web pages. Developers designed new protocols into web browsers that improved users' ability to post content on web pages and have content delivered to them. These new functions were referred to as Web 2.0, or the second stage of development of the World Wide Web. It was characterized by a change from static web pages to dynamic or user-generated content and the growth of social media.

Facebook was developed to take advantage of the two-way communication features of Web 2.0, and it helped chart the course for the development of social media. The web content management system (WCMS), which emerged in the early 2000s, enabled users to publish web pages without having programming skills. WordPress became popular as a site where users could host their own blogs. Today, web servers around the world rely upon WordPress software. It continues to be a popular platform for website development.

## Professional Website Development

Websites are crucial to any organization's marketing or promotional activities. They provide consumers with text, audio, and video messages encouraging them to purchase products and services, or to learn more about anything they wish. Web catalogs and purchase checkout systems aid in billions of dollars of daily online transactions around the globe. Web-based customer support centers keep consumers happy with the products and services they purchase. The web has become a vital, central part of the world economy and the marketplace of ideas.

As with other media professionals, web copy writers are part of a team that produces messages for audiences. They work alongside members of the web production team, which includes photographers, graphic artists, and information technology specialists. In larger corporate settings, web copy writers are members of a large web production team. In smaller operations, they might also be responsible for posting pictures and graphics. With the widespread use of web content management systems such as WordPress, Joomla, and Drupal, web copy writers can post text on websites without specialized web publishing software. Thanks to these web content management systems, beginners can gain experience publishing web pages without knowing any html code, which is the underlying computer language of web pages. However, if you are considering a career as a web copy writer, you will need to learn advanced web publishing applications. To develop and fine-tune sophisticated web pages, professionals need a working knowledge of html code as well as style sheets, xml code, and graphics/picture editing. In this chapter, we focus on web page copywriting, which is the text that appears on web pages.

Photo 10.2: Site planning and storyboarding forces a web developer to think through how individual pages, sections, and elements of content are going to relate to each other—these visual elements affect how readers interact with the words on the page.



## Web Copywriting

What makes for compelling web copy? It's the recognition that people don't read every word on the page. This should come as no surprise to you, since you have probably been using websites for most of your life. People glance at web pages to find key terms that interest them, then examine the copy around the terms to quickly find the information or links they are seeking. Thus, all of the important features of web copy focus on helping users find information at a glance. If users don't find what they want in a matter of seconds, they are off to another site. Web pages must be written to make important topics easy to see right away. Key information must stand out on the page.

Effective websites are well planned. They correctly divide up the content so that users can easily find each page with just the right amount of information on them. The copy on each page makes effective use of the page landscape; that is, it fills the screen in a way that makes it easy for the visitor to find information at a glance. Scrolling should be minimized on most pages (long-form content is an exception; we discuss this later in the chapter). Writers also make use of white space on web pages by making sure their text does not cover the entire page landscape. White space refers to the open space on a page with no content on it. Bulleted lists usually work well to provide open spaces on pages, making keywords easy to see at a glance.

# Two Types of Web Copy: Middle Form and Long Form

In general, there are two types of web copy. First, middle-form web copy provides information to users looking for a specific topic. These pieces run fairly short, usually fewer than 400 words, and contain many links to other similar pages in a carefully laid out design. The standard web page relies upon middle-form web copy, which is also discussed in <a href="Chapter 9">Chapter 9</a>. Middle-form writing provides quick answers to people looking for information. Second, long-form web copy is used in article-length pieces such as blogs, web features, and opinion pieces. We begin our discussion of web copywriting by covering arrangement and style for middle-form web copy. The last part of this chapter will examine long-form web copy, which is most often used for blogging.

## Middle-Form Web Copy: Arrangement

Arrangement refers to the order of the elements of a piece of writing. When we apply this principle to websites, arrangement means the way material is distributed on the pages so they will be linked effectively and follow a logical pattern appropriate to the topic. Begin the copywriting process by planning the arrangement of the website pages, according to the way you choose to organize your website topic.

The *structure topic points* presented in <u>Chapter 11</u> provide useful arrangement schemes. Here's a preview of the seven structures and the way they can apply to arranging web copy:

- 1. Time: explain things in chronological order, step by step. Each step in the process (or each event in chronological order) occupies a separate page on the site. Websites that show cooking recipes, or how-to instructions for nearly any task, rely on this structure.
- 2. Space: show how the parts come together to form a whole. Each part of the content occupies a separate page on the site. Websites that discuss places or destinations are arranged with space structure. Similarly, websites that show diagrams about how things are put together use this type of structure.
- 3. Classification: put things in categories to show how they are distinctive. Each category of material or information occupies a separate page on the site. Classification is the most popular structure. Websites use it to display different types of products or services to consumers, such as a fashion retailer that sells clothing, shoes, jewelry, or cosmetics. Each product occupies its own section of the website.
- 4. Analogy: compares the differences between any two items. One page lists the elements of each item you are comparing, while another page lists the similarities between them. Websites that introduce new products or services such as phones or other mobile devices use this structure. They show the audience how the new and improved product or service is better than the old version.
- 5. Contrast: highlights the differences between any two items. One page lists the elements of each item you are contrasting, while another page lists the points of difference between them. Consumer reporting websites that evaluate lists of products and services to help consumers purchase the right one rely upon this type of structure.
- 6. Relationship: show how things are linked together. Set up a page for each item, then a page for each of the ways the items are linked together. Genealogy websites use this type of structure.
- 7. Problem–solution: describe a problem, and then provide a course of action to solve it. Devote a set of pages to the problem and a set of pages to solutions. Political action websites use this type of structure.

In professional website design, the entire team works on developing the overall structure of the website. Most large commercial websites use more than one of the above structures. Often, the overall structure will divide the site into major sections, each of which then carries its own substructure. For instance, a commercial site will often use *category* structure to organize the information consumers seek, such as *Products*, *Company Information*, *Employment Opportunities*, *Product Support*, and *Contact Us*. The *Products* part of the site would then be divided first by the types of products offered (categories). Under each type, different pages would be devoted to each product (categories again). Part of the *Products* portion of the site could be devoted to contrasting the features of the products so consumers could make a good choice of product (contrast). *Product Support* could be divided into categories to start (types of product). Then, each category could present a list of possible problems with the product, with links to potential solutions (problem–solution structure). Figure 10.1 summarizes these structures.

Figure 10.1 Website Structures

Time Contrast

Space Relationship

Classification Problem-Solution

Analogy

# Putting Structures to Work on Web Pages

As a web copy writer, you must carefully consider how to arrange your copy because text can easily overwhelm your page landscape. If your copy is growing too long for the page, usually more than 500 words, consider distributing it over more than a single page. Examine your text and identify its main points. Isolate each important keyword, and consider whether the keywords can be divided over separate pages.

If you make more than two main points on a page that runs over 500 words and the visitor must scroll up and down the page to find important information, it is time to consider breaking the text into separate pages. There are a few exceptions to this rule. For example, it may be important to show users lengthy material on the same page. Pages with discussion comments will often grow long, as will pages that list frequently asked questions (FAQ) or results of searches. Consumers are usually happy to scroll through these types of information lists. Consider this example of raw copy for a website:

# Sprockets and Cogs for Bicycles

Spacely-Cogswell sprockets and cogs are made of the finest materials. Each is manufactured in our Tucson or Franklin Park facilities with our well-known focus on precision. You can't find a better sprocket or cog for your bike anywhere in the world. Each comes with a lifetime guarantee.

We have been making sprockets and cogs since 1948. It is likely that you grew up riding a bike with a Spacely sprocket and a Cogswell cog. Since our merger in 1981, we have revolutionized the way these bike components are made. In 1984, we introduced our first polymer model sprocket, the Jetson Wizbang. The Wizbang II, introduced in 1987, was found on bikes that won major bike competitions worldwide, including the Tour de France.

We have always had an eye on quality and value for our sprockets and cogs. Our stainless-steel sprockets are the highest-selling models in the world. You can't find a better value than a quality Spacely Sprocket or Cogswell Cog.

# Sprockets

Our sprockets range from affordable, durable steel models to ultra-lightweight carbon-reinforced polymer racing models for professional cyclists. Our sprockets can be found on more bicycles made in America than any other brand.

- Steel Cruiser Sprocket—our lowest priced, but most durable model. Built to take a beating and still shine! Made of high-tensile stainless steel, this sprocket is available in 36-, 38-, 40-, 42-, 44-, 46-, and 48-tooth models, 1/8-inch thick.
- Steel 5- and 10-speed replacement model—Have an old 10-speed bike that needs a new sprocket? This is a direct replacement that fits old Schwinn, Sears, Murray, Columbia, and other 5- and 10-speed bikes from the '60s, '70s, and '80s. Available in 42-, 46-, and 48-tooth sizes.
- Mountain-climber alloy sprocket—works tough for classic mountain bikes. Made of a steel alloy that is light but strong! Good for hardworking off-road and hybrid bikes. Available in 42-, 44-, 46-, and 48-tooth sizes, 1/8-inch thick.
- Road Scrambler polymer model—for professional road racers who need strength and low weight in a sprocket package. Available in 46-, 48-, and 50-tooth models.

# Cogs

Our cogs keep your wheels spinning with precision and spring action. We have steel models to fit all budgets, and professional graphite lightweight models to propel the serious cyclist to victory. Our cogs are made in our Franklin Park facility with the legendary Cogswell quality assurance that makes our cogs the biggest sellers worldwide.

- Steel Cruiser Cog—our economy-priced model. This is the cog that propelled thousands of classic bikes in the '50s, '60s, and '70s. A perfect replacement for a worn cog on a classic bike.
- Sturmey-Archer Classic 3-Speed Cog—Got a classic 3-speed bike that won't stay in gear? This is the cog that will get you spinning again. Made of high-quality steel.
- Classic 10-Speed Cog—For 10-speed bikes of the '60s and '70s, this is the original steel cog found on most Schwinn, Sears, Murray, Columbia, and other 5- and 10-speed bikes of the era.
- Modern Mountain Cog—Need power and strength in your shift pattern? No problem. This cog can get you up any hill with serious attitude.
- Road Runner Cog—Light, fast, strong, and smooth, this advanced polymer cog is designed to propel you across the finish line in record time.

It's clear that the sprockets and cogs copy needs to be trimmed. It runs about 570 words, fills at least two computer screens completely with text, and forces the user to scroll to find information. An analysis of the main points of the page shows an introduction that explains the background of the products, then two bulleted lists of two types of products, essentially category structure. So let's use categories to distribute the content over three pages. The first has the introductory content, with links to one page with Sprockets and another page with Cogs:

# Sprockets and Cogs for Bicycles

Spacely-Cogswell sprockets and cogs are made of the finest materials. Each is manufactured in our Tucson or Franklin Park facilities with our well-known focus on precision. You can't find a better sprocket or cog for your bike anywhere in the world. Each comes with a lifetime guarantee.

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Spacely Sprockets Cogswell Cogs

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- Mountain-climber alloy Sprocket—works tough for classic mountain bikes. Made of a steel alloy that is light but strong! Good for hardworking off-road and hybrid bikes. Available in 42-, 44-, 46-, and 48-tooth sizes, 1/8-inch thick.
- Road Scrambler polymer model—for professional road racers who need strength and low weight in a sprocket package. Available in 46-, 48-, and 50-tooth models.

Back to Bike Parts

# Cogs

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- Classic 10-Speed Cog—For 10-speed bikes of the '60s and '70s, this is the original steel cog found on most Schwinn, Sears, Murray, Columbia, and other 5- and 10-speed bikes of the era.
- Modern Mountain Cog—Need power and strength in your shift pattern? No problem. This cog can get you up any hill with serious attitude.
- Road Runner Cog—Light, fast, strong, and smooth, this advanced polymer cog is designed to propel you across the finish line in record time.

Back to Bike Parts

In this new division of content, users can more easily scan the pages for the key terms they seek. With about 200 words per page, they no longer have to scroll to find what they need. After two clicks they can find the right sprocket for any bike, and they can do it very quickly because the text is easy to scan for keywords about part type (sprocket or cog) and bike type (cruiser, 10-speed, mountain bike, road bike). Splitting sprockets from cogs means visitors don't have to spend time scanning through text about the product they don't want and can quickly select the product type they do want. Structuring thus makes it easy for you to effectively deliver page content for quick scanning. Notice how 200 words per page seems like a good fit for the glancing eye. This is a good standard baseline for middle-form web page copy.

# Middle-Form Web Copy: Style

Web copy style is fine-tuned for "glancing eyes." Writing for glancing eyes obeys the same principles of writing for social media covered in <a href="Chapter 9">Chapter 9</a>, with two exceptions. First, while many company websites work to make their copy presentable on smartphones too, web page copy is still largely designed for computer screens. That's why web pages use white space extensively. Social media apps condense content into small areas of the screen and limit white space. In other words, web page writing uses a different landscape area on a screen.

Second, web page copy relies upon bulleted lists much more than social media copy. On web pages, bulleted lists use white space efficiently and make it easy for glancing eyes to search for keywords. But on the social media landscape, they would look cluttered.

Web pages and social media sites begin with the same set of four style rules first introduced in Chapters 3 and 9:

- 1. Be brief and concise.
- 2. Use a conversational tone.
- 3. Use active voice.
- 4. Use action verbs; limit adjectives and adverbs.

# Attracting the Glancing Eye

Website readers are impatient. They rarely read all the copy on a page, even if it is a short page. They look for words that are relevant to them and to their search for information. Here are three style strategies to catch a site visitor's glance and focus it on your information:

## 1. Use the second-person you.

As we have seen throughout this text, the second person can be used because it makes the audience feel as though they are in a conversation with you. When you were a high-school student, your English instructors may have taught you to avoid the second-person voice in your writing. If you experienced this instruction, do not apply it to media writing. The second person "you" and possessive form "your" are highly effective tools that speak directly to your audience. These words stand out in a sentence so that glancing eyes linger on them:

Black flies bite you, and it hurts.

Pyramid guitar strings make your guitar ring like a bell.

You can learn bossa nova strum patterns in three steps.

Each of the three sentences above feels like the author is speaking directly to the reader. This connection effectively keeps the reader on the web page reading copy.

# 2. Write with the voice of the visitor, answer in the voice of the host.

This is another important strategy that locks the glance of the roving web page reader. Write a sentence that employs the point of view of the reader, then answer it in the writer's voice. This statement/response conversation pattern answers a concern from the audience:

Not another broken guitar string! This happens too much, doesn't it? Right in the middle of a solo, you bend the string, and it pops. Who isn't tired of this? Try Pyramid strings.

This strategy actually simulates a conversation between the reader and the website. If the topic is compelling, it can provide a strong hook:

There's nothing to do in this town on a Saturday night . . . Not true! Take your

date to Bigsby's on Harbor Street. Good music, good food, good service.

Notice how brief the conversation can be, yet the copy writer addresses a direct concern from the audience with a solution that seems tailor-made for the website visitor, even though the visitor did not really bring up the question.

# 3. Imply the second person with the imperative form.

You can also speak directly to the audience by writing active sentences that directly address them. This is called an *imperative sentence*:

- Rock the boat! Be bold! Join the university debate team.
- Four million people get cancer every year. Don't be one of them! Stop smoking and watch your intake of processed meats.
- Exercise at least once every three days. Raise your heart rate with moderate activity.

Imperative sentences can seem a bit bossy, so you have to be judicious with them. Notice that it works well when you are in a position to give instructions. If your audience doesn't want or need instruction from you, rethink use of the imperative sentence and switch directly to the second person:

- Want to be more assertive? You can learn to be bold on the debate team.
- You will live longer if you stop smoking and watch your intake of processed meats.
- Exercise that raises your heart rate is good for you.

As you see above, the imperative stands out best when delivered in short, simple sentences. If you bury it in long sentences, your readers' glancing eyes will probably miss it.

The War Room

# Writing Your Web Biography

Imagine that you are a website copy writer for a student or community organization to which you belong. Your job is to set up a web bio for yourself. Write one that

- is divided into four pages, one of which is a home page. Choose the structure for each of the other pages according to the ones presented in this chapter.
- is up to date and lists all relevant professional experience, hobbies, athletic activities, and personal accomplishments.
- conforms to all the web style elements discussed on pages 342–345.

Present your bio to the class. Once your class has finished presenting the bios, discuss the various ways students have used the structure topic points in their pages.

# Long-Form Web Copy: Blogs

One of the earliest traditions associated with the World Wide Web began when website owners started to write regular opinion pieces. These web logs, as they were first called, focused on political topics, pop culture criticism, hobbies, and other personal interest topics. In 1999, web users shortened the name and began to call them blogs. Bloggers used them to write about everyday topics in fashion, cooking, music, theater, and politics, for example. Some blogs evolved into full-fledged professional publications, such as the Huffington Post and the Drudge Report. Free blog websites such as wordpress.com became widely available in the early 2000s, enabling thousands of amateur and professional writers to post their opinions for the world to view.

# Professional Blogs

Organizations began to use websites for commercial purposes in the mid-1990s. In the early 2000s, web developers began to use commercial blogs to deliver regular feature content by company experts about the use of their products and services, as well as topics associated with them. Such blogs attracted large audiences, especially in consumer electronics. Companies discovered they could play an important role in attracting consumers, helping them to make buying decisions, and providing them with follow-up support. After the development of social media, spurred by Facebook in the early 2000s, blogs became a central part of company social media plans and remain a valuable tool for disseminating company and marketing information.

The content that drives consumers to buy is known as the call to action or CTA. The most common types of CTA are small graphics at the bottom of the blog that contain links to sales pages. See Figure 10.2 for an example. Calls to action ask blog readers to do something, such as open another web page, or even produce a tweet sending the blog link to followers. The "click to tweet" function selects a phrase from the blog and posts it on the reader's Twitter account. A free service on the web, clicktotweet.com, allows users to create a link to automatically tweet a phrase from a blog. Figure 10.3 shows an example of how blogs use this feature.

Free Guide: 14 SEO Myths to
Leave Behind in 2016

Separate fact from fiction and stop wasting
your time on SEO strategies that don't work.

Get My Free Guide

Figure 10.2 Bottom of the Post Smart CTA Graphic

Source: Adapted from hubspot.com, 2014.

Figure 10.3 CTA in Blog Content

# Classic Glass Photography Tweet this:

A day in the woods is timeless when you bring your camera.



# Structuring Blog Content: The Headline

Blogs must begin with a compelling headline. On average, eight out of ten people will read headline copy, but only two out of ten will read what follows.<sup>2</sup> Users are attracted by headlines that promise something they value, which makes the headline a vital attentiongetter. This is why professional bloggers start with a headline that will determine the structure of the blog copy.

The Professional Strategy Triangle reminds us to consider our audience. After all, audience-centered content is the basic reason for a blog. What is the single most important point you want readers to take away from what they read? This is referred to as the residual message, a brainstorming statement that specifies exactly what you want your audience to think, believe, feel, or do as a result of reading your blog. The headline must both reflect the residual message and grab reader attention. This is not easy to accomplish. Research shows that many readers do not read entire headlines. Instead, they tend to absorb the first three words and then the last three. However, before you draft the headline, you need a clear residual message. Let's take a look at how to create one.



# Creating a Residual Message

Always begin thinking about your residual message by completing the statement, "I want my audience to . . ." and then filling in what you want them to think, believe, feel, or do. For example,

- I want my audience to understand that large-format cameras provide excellent negatives for digital film scanning.
- I want my audience to believe that [our company] can repair broken camera equipment.
- I want my audience to buy a Spacely Sprocket.
- I want my audience to understand the five advantages of studless snow tires in winter driving.
- I want my audience to be aware of defective cogs.
- I want my audience to check their car's oil every three weeks.
- I want my audience to understand the seven steps of changing guitar strings.
- I want my audience to estimate the value of their old record albums.

Here are three steps to make sure that your residual message will focus audience attention on your topic:

- 1. Concentrate only on the *one thing* you want your audience to take with them as a result of reading your blog.
- 2. Use the right verb to explain what you want from the audience. Recall from above that blog writers want their audiences to think, believe, feel, or do something. Examples of these verbs might include *to know*, *to value*, *to purchase*, *to consider*, *to contribute*, or *to use*.
- 3. Write the residual message in *declarative* form. Do not phrase it as a question. Do not provide a topic list. Instead, declare what you want the audience to take away after reading your blog. The residual message must be stated as a complete thought in a complete sentence.

Once you are certain you have nailed down your residual message, you can draft your blog headline.

# Professional Blog Headline Formula

Blog copy writers have tracked the types of headlines that attract the most comments and reposts on social media. Many of these copy writers have shared their formulas in posts about effective blogging. Here is one common blog headline formula:

Number or trigger word + adjective + keyword + promise<sup>4</sup>

Let's look at how this works in practice. Start with the first element of the blog headline formula: the *number* or *trigger word*. This stops the audience from scanning by and grabs their attention to make them pause, read the word, and focus on the meaning as it relates to them. Figure 10.4 contains a list of effective headline trigger words.

Figure 10.4 Blog Headline Trigger Words

secret	increase
tell us	create
take	discover
free	announcing
you	instantly
now	new
because	improve
introducing	trust
inspires	immediately
help	profit
promote	learn
guarantee	ultimate

Figure 10.5 Blog Headline Adjectives

sensational	endorsed
remarkable	guaranteed
amazing	no-risk
revolutionary	official
startling	proven
magic	secure
easy	tested
authentic	powerful
best-selling	best
certified	exclusive
protected	extraordinary

Always choose a trigger that advances your residual message. If your residual message addresses something new and different, words such as *introducing*, *create*, *discover*, *announcing*, *new*, or *learn* might work well. If your messages address a benefit for the audience, try words like *inspire*, *increase*, *improve*, *profit*, *ultimate*, or *guarantee*. For example, the residual message from earlier in this chapter, *I want my audience to understand that large-format cameras provide excellent negatives for digital film scanning*, is focused on something new and different. Your headline for this residual message could start with *discover* or *learn*. The same idea works for the residual message, *I want my audience to understand the seven steps of changing guitar strings*.

The next part of the blog headline formula relates to the adjective or the "boasting" word

that promotes your content and makes your audience think about how the trigger word is important to them. <u>Figure 10.5</u> contains a list of the blog headline adjectives that professionals regard as among the best for headlines and subheads.<sup>5</sup>

Choose the adjective that best fits your residual message and topic. Boasting about your blog may seem difficult. You might ask yourself, "How is this thing I am writing about remarkable or extraordinary?" Remember, your goal is to write content that will be shared and promote your company or organization. If you've thought of a new way to think about a topic that will help people, then perhaps it really is remarkable or extraordinary. If experts agree that your topic is important, and that it shows documented effectiveness and results, then it certainly could be regarded as official, proven, tested, authentic, or certified. Since the goal is to attract attention to your blog content, you can boast about it with adjectives and let the reader decide whether the boast is appropriate as they read the content. Readers will accept a bit of over-the-top boasting provided that they gain some benefit from reading your blog.

# Writing a headline for a photography blog

Suppose that we are writing a photography blog for an audience of photographers who want to take high-quality pictures they can sell to clients. Let's start by finding trigger words for a residual message that we can develop into a headline. Our residual message is *I* want my audience to know that large-format cameras provide excellent negatives for digital film scanning. Here, we will choose the trigger word discover. Looking ahead, we know there are three film-scanning techniques that we will be writing about in our blog. Starting with the trigger word discover, let's add the term "3 ways" to help us break down our content and make the topic interesting for our audience:

Discover 3 Ways that large-format cameras provide excellent negatives for digital film scanning.

Here, we're filling in the headline with parts of the residual message until we finish it. This is a good start, and now we need an appropriate adjective. Since we are not talking about anything new, we can focus on how these techniques are proven to work.

Now, let's add the adjective *proven* to our headline:

Discover 3 Proven Ways . . .

Our headline is off to an excellent start.

# Blog Headline Keywords and Promises

We need keywords and a promise to finish our blog headline. First, let's select keywords. Proper keyword selection is critical because keywords are searchable. Choose wisely, and anyone searching for your topic should be able to find your blog through search engine results from Google, Yahoo, Bing, and others. For our residual message, the keyword set begins with

- large-format photography
- camera
- negative

However, we are also working with the idea that film negatives need to be translated to digital format with scanning, so we will add

- scan
- large-format negatives

#### Discover 3 Proven Ways to Scan Large-Format Negatives

Our headline is developing well.

Next, we discuss the promise in the blog headline. What will readers gain from reading your blog? What new thing will they learn to improve their lives? What will they be able to do that they didn't think of doing before? This component must directly relate to core audience needs and motivations that are directly connected to your topic. Recall that our audience is composed of photographers who want to take high-quality pictures that they can sell to clients. Photographers who use film enjoy the artistry connected with it: taking pictures on film and developing the film. Here, we are promising a way for film photographers to scan large-format negatives into *high-quality digital images*.

Let's start with the promise as a verb in the middle of the headline: *Discover 3 Proven Ways to Scan Large-Format Negatives*. This is another good start, but it doesn't say much about what the audience will gain from the scanning techniques you discuss in your blog.

The headline promise must center on a positive audience outcome. What benefits will the audience experience as a result of using these digital scanning techniques? Brainstorming possible answers, we can come up with these benefits:

- 1. Photographers will impress clients with high-quality digital pictures.
- 2. Photographers will work quickly, saving time.
- 3. Photographers will make the best possible use of their equipment.

The first point above clearly provides a motivation that we can use in our headline. Photographers want to impress their clients and attract more clients with great pictures. Our blog promises techniques that will help them deliver excellent, impressive pictures. Going back to our list of adjectives, we can think of several that relate to creating something impressive: *sensational, remarkable, amazing, startling, magic, extraordinary.* We decide that our promise is "*sensational digital images.*" We add it to our blog headline:

# Discover 3 Proven Ways to Scan Large-format Negatives to Create Sensational Digital Images

Our headline is progressing nicely, but we notice that it runs a bit long. What can we do to shorten it? Notice that our trigger phrase starts with both a word and a number. Do we really need the trigger word *discover* to start our headline? We have the option, according to the formula, of using either a trigger word or a number. Selecting the number, our blog headline would look like this:

# 3 Proven Ways to Scan Large-Format Negatives to Create Sensational Digital Images

Notice that *discover* is implied in our headline, as we are offering three ways to scan negatives that the audience may not already know. Therefore, it seems to be a good idea to leave out *discover* and start with a number.

# Blog Content

Now that we have finished our blog headline, we can generate our blog content. Blogs usually run between 300 and 1,200 words. Length is often determined by the topic. Long blogs are associated with topics that seek to inform, as they often provide detail necessary for the understanding of the topic. Persuasive blogs often run shorter, containing appeals that are simple to understand.

As an effective strategy for developing blog content, try simulating a conversation with an audience member interested in your topic. Start with a set of broad questions you think an interested audience member might ask you about your topic. As you answer the questions, keep track of the flow of the material. This can provide the underlying structure for your blog. Here is an example using our illustration headline *3 Proven Ways to Scan Large-Format Negatives to Create Sensational Digital Images*:

Q: What are the three proven ways?

A: Dry negative scans, wet negative scans, and contact print scans.

Q: What are large-format negatives?

A: Film negatives that are 4 inches by 3 inches wide, or 3 inches by 2½ inches wide; they are produced by large-format cameras that used to be popular "press" cameras, as well as standard portrait and landscape photography cameras used in the 1930s through the 1960s. Many famous pictures by well-known photographers like Ansel Adams were taken with large-format cameras.

Q: What makes scans of large negatives sensational?

A: A high-resolution scan of a large negative actually provides a higher resolution image than what is currently possible with even the most expensive digital cameras. This is because the negative scan is larger than any camera image sensor. This means that large-format negative scans can provide more detail, and therefore can be enlarged further than digital camera pictures.

Q: Why should I consider using digital scans of large-format negatives?

A: If you are a photographer who takes film pictures, and has a large-format camera available for use, you can use it to make money. Many clients today are in search of photographers that can take pictures that look classic and old fashioned. This is especially true in wedding photography; many upscale clients would like some pictures with a classic look, especially group shots and portraits. If you are currently taking large-format pictures and developing prints, you can find affordable scanners that will convert your negatives to

high-quality digital images, which can be sold for a substantial profit.

Answering the four questions above, we can see that we have begun to develop meaningful blog content for our audience of photographers. Now we are ready to select the order of our content. First, we need an effective introductory paragraph that focuses on why a photographer would want to know about these scanning techniques. Actually, the last of the four conversation questions gets right at it: Photographers can make money creating digital scans of old-fashioned, classic images taken on large-format cameras. Those who don't use negative scanners could take advantage of a money-making opportunity. The introductory paragraph is important to hook our audience into reading the rest of our blog. After reading the headline, the reader must see how we are going to fulfill our promise of delivering the content he or she wants to know. Here is an example of how we might accomplish this:

Craft Essential: Write a Blog About the Best Ways to Write Blogs

Team up with one or two classmates to form a web copywriting team. Write a 500-word blog about the best ways to write blogs.

## The Process

- 1. Begin by discussing the topic with your team, reviewing the material presented in this chapter. Discuss the area of blog writing on which you would like to concentrate. As necessary, conduct additional research.
- 2. Together, phrase a residual message. After checking in with your instructor, write a headline for your blog.
- 3. Construct a question-and-answer conversation session to build the content.
- 4. Write your blog using the model presented on pages 345–354.
- 5. Reconvene as a class to present and compare your blogs.
- 6. Discuss the creative strengths and limitations of each blog.
- 7. After hearing your classmates' feedback, what might you do differently next time?

Sample Blog Post: 3 Proven Ways to Scan Large-Format Negatives to Create Sensational Digital Images



Have you discovered the lucrative "classic wedding photo" market for your photography business? There's a growing demand for classic large-format pictures. Yes, the film is available, and if you've done shoots with your Graflex Crown Graphic camera, you know about all the buzz. It is likely that when your clients ask for digital images, you simply toss a print on a scanner and that is that. But what if you could spend less time with your enlarger and increase customer satisfaction? With the right negative scanning techniques, you can!

# Use a Negative Scanner

Negative scanners are a bargain today. You can buy one for under \$800 and produce excellent high-quality scans of your negatives. Click here to check out Laura Brown's excellent reviews of negative scanners on the market today.

Scanning the negative gives you more control over the digital image than a scan of a photo print. It also saves you darkroom time.

But, the biggest advantage of large-format negative scans is that they provide awesome high-resolution scans.

Large-format negative scans can beat the best digital camera image sensor resolution out there.

If this interests you and possibly someone else, then click here to tweet these scanning tips:

# 3 Ways to Get Killer Large-Format Negative Scans

#### 1. Dry scan

This is the default method of scanning that comes stock with most negative scanners. It works well and can produce an excellent result. However, you must work in a dust-free environment. Dust can create problems, as tiny particles will show up very clearly on your scans. If you don't want to spend extra time scrubbing dust particles in Photoshop, check out wet scans.

#### 2. Wet scan

You can purchase a wet scanning kit, either from the scanner manufacturer or another vendor. Although this costs more money and wet scanning is a more involved process, it effectively mitigates most problems with dust, and produces the most clearly focused scans possible. It is the best scanning method to achieve high-quality digital images from your large-format negatives.

#### 3. Contact print scan

Don't have a negative scanner that can handle a 4-inch by 3-inch negative? Then try this. Although this is not technically a negative scan, it provides a very good result. Simply produce a contact print of your negative in your darkroom. Scan your high-quality 4-inch by 3-inch contact print into your scanner.

# Sensational Images Are Scans Away!

Scan in your negatives at 6400 or 9600 dpi resolution. Yes, the images will be quite large on your computer, so you'd better have some extra storage space handy! Once you see the images, you will be impressed. You can zoom in and get amazing resolution and a high level of detail. Printing on a production laser printer produces excellent results. The images shine on display boards. Your clients will be equally impressed.

Let us know how your scans come out—post some links to your pictures, and keep on shooting!



In the above example, notice how the introductory paragraph provides brief bits of advice, and that the writer saves the details for the call to action (CTA) at the bottom of the page. This blog contains three CTAs:

- 1. A link to another article
- 2. A click to tweet CTA
- 3. A graphic box link to a page selling tips

The example above also effectively demonstrates the use of subheads. These divide the content into sections that can be quickly accessed by glancing eyes. Users seek this subdivision because they rarely read all the text on a blog, or they don't read it in the order presented. This post effectively uses white space along with a numbered list to break up content and provide a background contrast that helps glancing eyes zoom in on areas of interest. Importantly, the picture at the top of the blog provides the reader with an image of a large-format camera, and the picture makes the text next to it appear to be shorter, easier to read, and more inviting to headline readers.

Whether you are writing for a website or a blog, remember that planning is the key to great web copy. Plan the structure of your website to break up large blocks of copy. Glancing eyes need white space to quickly find important words and phrases. Plan residual messages for blogs so that you can identify effective headlines that bring readers to your content. Plan for strong call to action (CTA) links in your blog copy to activate your audience. For all types of web copy, solid planning will lead to your professional success.

### Summary

- Explain why businesses put so much effort into creating and maintaining
  websites. The World Wide Web is omnipresent in people's lives. Consumers find
  information, as well as search for and buy products and services using websites.
  Organizations reach many of their customers through websites. Web page copy must
  be effective to maximize audience exposure, boost consumer satisfaction, and drive
  sales.
- 2. Discuss arrangement and structure in middle-form web copy. Arrangement refers to the order of content in your web copy. Structure is the pattern you use to arrange your content. There are seven structures: time, space, classification, analogy, contrast, relationship, and problem—solution. Writers can use one or more of the seven structures to plan the particular content for each web page on a site.
- 3. Discuss style in middle-form web copy. Style refers to word choice, sentence structure, tone, and voice. Writers use seven style strategies for web page copy. These include brevity and conciseness, conversational tone, active voice, action verbs, the second-person voice, the visitor's voice, and the imperative sentence form.
- 4. Describe structure and headline decisions to make in blogging. Blogging should always begin with creating the residual message of the blog. Residual messages are the focused points of information the writer wants to leave in the mind of the reader. First, concentrate on the one thing you want your audience to take away with them as a result of reading your blog. Second, use the right verb to explain what you want from the audience. Third, write the residual message in declarative form and as a complete thought in a complete sentence. Once you have written your residual message, you can create your blog headline. Professional bloggers rely on headline formulas proven to effectively attract audiences. One successful headline formula is number or trigger word + adjective + keyword + promise.

# Key Terms

World Wide Web 333
hypertext 333
Web 2.0 334
web content management system (WCMS) 334
page landscape 335
white space 335
middle-form web copy 336
long-form web copy 336
arrangement 336
blogs 345
call to action (CTA) 346
residual message 347

# Discussion Questions

- 1. Is the World Wide Web really what the name says it is? Is it truly worldwide? Is it truly a web? Explain your reasoning either way.
- 2. What makes your favorite web page so appealing to you? Is it the images, the layout, or the copy? Or, is it a combination of all these characteristics?
- 3. How much white space do you think should be on a "typical" web page—20 percent, 30 percent? More or less? Explain your reasoning.
- 4. Do you read many blog entries? If so, what kinds? Try to recall the things that catch your eye in a blog headline. Alternately, what types of blogs might you read if they were available?
- 5. If you were a paid blogger, what types of topics might you blog about? What kinds of headlines would you write, and what types of words would you use in the headlines? Explain your reasoning.

## Chapter Exercises

- 1. Find a long web page. Working with a classmate, determine the structure that matches the content on the web page. Divide the content of the web page, following the model presented on pages 355–356. Mock up your web pages with links back to the original page.
- 2. Using the same web page as you did for Exercise 1, edit the copy on each of the new short web pages you have made. Use the seven style criteria explained on pages 336–337. Count the numbers of words you were able to cut from the copy.
- 3. Find three blogs from topics you searched on one of the Internet search engines. Examine the blog headlines and read the copy to determine the central theme the writers wanted audience members to take with them after reading the blogs. Write a residual message for each of the blogs.
- 4. Take the residual messages you prepared for Exercise 3. Write a new, original headline for each of these residual messages. Use the blog headline formula presented on page 349. How do your blog headlines compare to the original ones? Which do you like better? Why?
- 5. Take one of the recast headlines you created for Exercise 4. Rewrite the blog using your headline as a guide to organize your copy. Use details from the original copy, but try to do a total rewrite using your own words. How did your new headline change the way you presented the facts in your copy? What makes your copy better than the original?

#### Additional Resources

Ciotti, Gregory. "The 5 Most Persuasive Words in the English Language." December 6, 2012. <a href="http://www.copyblogger.com/persuasive-copywriting-words/">http://www.copyblogger.com/persuasive-copywriting-words/</a>.

Redish, Janice (Ginny). Letting Go of the Words (2nd ed.). Waltham, MA: Morgan Kaufmann, 2012.

# Section IV Persuasive Settings

# Chapter 11 Basic Persuasive Writing

# Chapter Outline

**Learning Objectives** Frontline Media Writing Profile: Kevin O'Connell, Senior Vice President of Marketing, Eat'n Park Hospitality Group, Inc. Persuasion: A Timeless Skill **Key Persuasion Theories** Aristotle and the Art of Persuasion Semiotics and the Meaning of Words Social Judgment Theory Craft Essential: Using Persuasion Theories as Heuristics Persuasion, Ethics, and Professionalism Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) American Advertising Federation (AAF) International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) Pro Strategy Connection: Kevin O'Connell's Persuasion Imperatives Using the FAJA Points for Persuasion Example 1: Using Judgment for Public Relations Writing Example 2: Using Action for Advertising Writing Putting Persuasion Topic Points to Work Time Space Classification **Analogy** Contrast Relationship Problem-Solution Craft Essential: Using the Professional Strategy Triangle to Create a Unique Brand Voice Moving Audiences to Action With Motive Appeals The War Room: Using the Fifteen Motive Appeals to Promote Canned Foods **Summary** Key Terms **Discussion Questions** Chapter Exercises Additional Resources

"Writing with a substance that creates a worthwhile piece is always the hardest. But remembering to stay in tune with your audience, the 'ah-ha' moment of what to write for a piece will come. If my heart is racing to write a piece, any location and situation will do. Otherwise, coffee, music, and comfortable setting maximize my creativeness."

—Codi Miller, West Texas A&M University

# Learning Objectives

- 1. Explain how key persuasion theories can address one's audience and situation.
- 2. Explain the relationship between persuasion, ethics, and professionalism.
- 3. Identify which of the FAJA (Fact, Analysis, Judgment, and Action) Points are most effective in writing persuasive messages.
- 4. Describe how the Structure Topic Points can be used to create persuasive messages.
- 5. Describe how the fifteen Motive Appeal Topic Points can be used to create persuasive messages.

Frontline Media Writing Profile				
Kevin O'Connell, Senior Vice President of Marketing				
Eat'n Park Hospitality Group, Inc., Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania				



If Kevin O'Connell could give one piece of practical advice to aspiring media professionals, he would tell them, "Audience always comes first!"

O'Connell has been working hard at figuring out audiences for Eat'n Park Hospitality Group, Inc. since 2001, when he joined the business. Today, he serves as senior vice president of marketing for the company, which operates restaurants and foodservice operations across the mid-Atlantic, including Eat'n Park, Six Penn Kitchen, The Porch at Schenley, Hello Bistro, Smileycookie.com, Delicious Raw, and Parkhurst Dining.

According to O'Connell, each of the seven company brands speaks to a distinct audience and requires a unique brand "voice." "You must be able to put yourself into the audience's shoes," he says. "What are their passions, needs, and desires? What do they want to know? Why should they care? This kind of thinking takes practice."

O'Connell earned his bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of Notre Dame. As a

manager with Anderson Business Consulting in the mid-1990s, he helped implement the first customer loyalty program in the mall industry. Today, O'Connell leads a staff of several dozen marketers at Eat'n Park Hospitality Group, Inc. His department provides full-service marketing to the company, from public relations and project management to graphic design, digital, and business-to-business (B2B) support.

At meetings, team members spend considerable time discussing the specific meanings of words and the tones, attitudes, and emotions they convey. "Today, so much of our communication is done electronically," O'Connell notes. "People can't see one another, so the words have to do the work."

O'Connell says he typically devotes the first part of his morning to thinking about major initiatives and issues facing the business. His writing tasks often focus on explaining his insights or selling concepts to internal audiences such as employees and executives. When he reviews his team's writing, O'Connell puts on his "customer hat," and suggests edits to his staff's promotional pieces, artwork, or news releases from the audience's perspective.

"If I didn't actually write a piece, it's often easier to see the audience's perspective on the message," he explains. "But if you can take this perspective with your own work, it definitely helps make the communication more compelling. You've got to physically put your mind in another place first. For example, if I am viewing promotional collateral in a restaurant, I'll walk out of the place, and then walk back in as the customer."

Even after nearly two decades with Eat'n Park Hospitality Group, O'Connell says he still gets a rush every time he uncovers a new consumer insight. "It's really exciting when you have a hypothesis about what will motivate one of your audiences," he said. "You test that through an offer or a new product or a specific communication, and they respond. When that works, it is so much fun!"

#### Persuasion: A Timeless Skill

The art of persuasion is thousands of years old. It is all around us in the media, from television commercials and Facebook postings to news releases from environmental organizations and news coverage of political candidates. Professional persuaders combine ancient and modern techniques to sell products, services, and ideas. Today, persuasive writing is used extensively in public relations, advertising, marketing, strategic communication, and related fields. Graduates in these professions can look forward to bright career prospects as society becomes an ever-larger marketplace of ideas.

As an aspiring media professional, you should understand basic ideas about the persuasive power of messages from the theoretical works of humanists and social scientists. Theories can help you to see the world clearly and, at the same time, generate important ideas to accomplish media writing tasks.

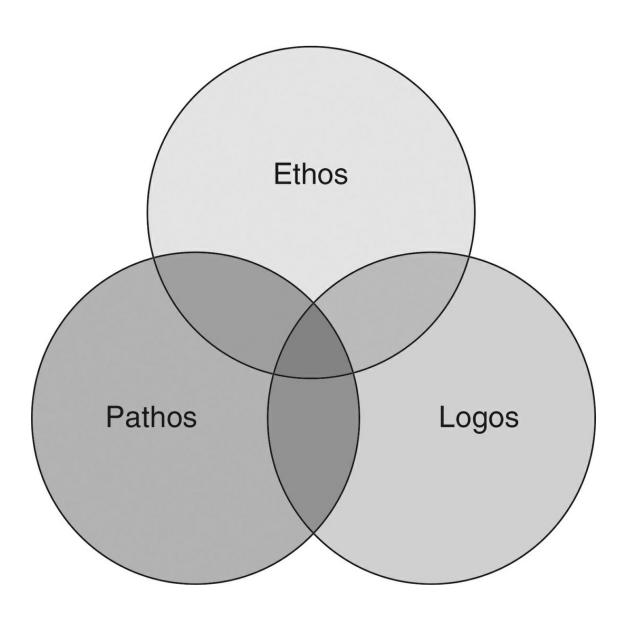
# Key Persuasion Theories

#### Aristotle and the Art of Persuasion

The Greek philosopher Aristotle is remembered today for his system of understanding persuasion, which was traditionally called *rhetoric*. According to Aristotle, rhetoric was an art in which a persuader used some or all of three types of message strategies or *artistic proofs*. The three artistic proofs are ethos, logos, and pathos, which are illustrated in <u>Figure 11.1</u>. Ethos is based upon the use of a person's credibility (either that of the communicator or another person) to persuade. Logos refers to the arrangement of language that makes it persuasive, which we call argument. Pathos is the emotional appeal in the message.

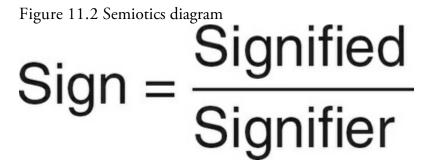
Aristotle's art of rhetoric shows us that messages can influence audience members in three broad ways, and that the art of persuasion resides in the creative, artistic selection of the supporting material for each of the aspects of the message. This means that at times you will need to highlight the credibility of your sources (ethos). Most of the time, you also need to think about how you create an argument (logos), and you will need to consider the types of emotional appeals you will use in your message (pathos). An advertisement uses all these types of persuasion. Go to the website of your favorite restaurant, and you will likely find its latest television commercial. It will show you the food looking delicious, which appeals to your need to satisfy hunger but also your need to be stimulated by great aesthetics (art) in the messages you watch. The copy written for the commercial probably offers reasons why you should visit the restaurant chain soon.

Figure 11.1 Ethos, Logos, Pathos Diagram



### Semiotics and the Meaning of Words

As a media professional, you must understand the meanings behind the words you use. Words are powerful and can be used and abused in many ways. Words should be used as precise tools to convey your desired meanings. Always think of your audience first, and be on guard for words that may label, stereotype, or otherwise treat anyone in an unethical manner. Semiotics present a useful heuristic, or tool, to help us chart the meanings of words and determine their potential impact on audience members. Based upon the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, semiotics focuses on how people understand each other through the passing of "signs" in communication. Semiotic signs are units of meaning composed of two elements: the *signifier* and the *signified*. The signifier is the form of the communication (a spoken word, written word, a nonverbal gesture, for example.). The signified is the concept, the meaning associated with the word. Figure 11.2 details this relationship.



Here is an example of how you can use semiotics to help build messages. Suppose you are a public relations director at your local United Way chapter. Your manager asks you to draft a speech she will be delivering to the Rotary Club next week. The topic of the speech centers upon proposed new services for community members who are living with disabilities. How do you refer to the people who are mentioned in this speech? Do you refer to them as "handicapped people," "the disabled," or "people with disabilities?" Drawing upon semiotics, you would correctly reason that the concept you want to express (which is respectful, thoughtful consideration for people who are living with physical limitations) is best accomplished with the signifier "people with disabilities."

Some semiotics signs carry intensive meanings that define our culture. These words and symbols gain added significance and meaning through their repeated use by groups and media. For instance, if you were growing up in the 1960s, when people held up their first two fingers in a V formation, you would recognize it as the peace sign. However, twenty-five years earlier during World War II, the same gesture meant "V for Victory," made popular by Winston Churchill in Great Britain. This is an example of a sign that has become a cultural code. In your writing, you can use many cultural code signs to evoke

deep meanings about our society and the way we live. As another example, consider the National Rifle Association (NRA). What sorts of signs do these words conjure up for you? Depending upon where you stand, the NRA could signify freedom, the enjoyment of hunting, or the right to self-defense. On the other hand, you may think of handgun violence, corporate power, or right-wing extremism. Regardless of your views on the role of firearms, the NRA is likely to raise strong feelings on all sides of the issue.

Semiotics helps you to anticipate possible audience reactions to words, images, and concepts you intend to present in your messages. Understanding the symbolic meaning behind them helps you identify ideal symbols to use and red-flag symbols to avoid.

### Social Judgment Theory

So far, we have discussed heuristics that focus upon *persuasive impact* of the message. Now it's time to consider the nature of the *audience* and how they might perceive and respond to your message. Social judgment theory, constructed by Carolyn Sherif, Muzafer Sherif, and Roger Nebergall in the 1960s, can help you analyze your audience in persuasive writing situations. Social judgment theory states that people filter messages through a set of comparisons to determine their position on a given message.

For instance, you hear a message and think of how it compares to other messages that you have internalized from past experiences with the topic. Some messages you accept, some you don't care about, and others you reject. Social judgment theory states that hot-button issues such as gun control or education are likely to have small areas, or latitudes, of *acceptance* and *noncommittal* and large areas of *rejection* (see Figure 11.3). By contrast, the issue of world poverty, although highly significant on a global scale, is sadly not a hot-button issue for many of us. Most US citizens probably exhibit a larger latitude of acceptance and commitment on this issue because they have not had much experience with it. Charting these latitudes as you create persuasive messages will help you to select the right words and messages to fit your audience's latitude of acceptance.

Imagine for a moment that you are creating an advertising campaign for a state senate candidate who favors raising gasoline taxes in order to repair the state's aging highways and bridges. Considering social judgment theory and the fact that new taxes are a hot-button issue for most state residents, you will probably encounter a very narrow latitude of acceptance here. You would be making a major mistake to frame your advertising messages in terms of new taxes. Instead, you wisely reason that it is better to build the campaign around messages based upon "new infrastructure investments for safety" or "shared responsibility for our roads." This theory works nicely as a heuristic to help you determine acceptable persuasive message for audiences.

The Aristotelian artistic proofs, semiotics, and social judgment theory all provide useful heuristic tools to help you analyze your audience and to predict their likely attitudes and behaviors. You must think hard about what the audience expects from your persuasive message, what words and images will hold important meanings for them, and what types of persuasive messages they are likely to accept, reject, or not care about. First, however, you must understand the ethical considerations in using persuasion.

Figure 11.3 Social Judgment Theory Diagram

Latitude of	Latitude of	Latitude of
Rejection	Noncommitment	Acceptance

Craft Essential: Using Persuasion Theories as Heuristics

Pick an issue under discussion in the media. Social issues such as gay marriage or political issues such as immigration policy would work well. Next, run an online search that starts with the words *reasons for* in front of your issue topic—for instance, *reasons for immigration policy*.

Examine the links you find and pick a few sources that provide written arguments. It doesn't matter whether you agree with the arguments and content provided. Use the following persuasion theory heuristics to see how the arguments are put together:

- 1. Aristotelian: look for logos (reasons connected to benefits), ethos ("you should believe this because the sources are credible" type of statements), and pathos (emotional appeals such as anger, guilt, fear, etc.).
- 2. Semiotics: look for words and symbols that have deep significance for people who care about the issue.
- 3. Social judgment: examine the way the writers construct arguments that connect what people would likely accept about the issue to outcomes that should logically proceed from accepting a set of points about the issue.

Explain how the writer appears to use the heuristics you have found to create the persuasion in his or her message. Be sure to explain how the message characteristics you found fit the characteristics of the heuristic to which you are matching it.

## Persuasion, Ethics, and Professionalism

As a media professional using persuasion in your writing, you bear responsibility for upholding a public trust. You should have a highly developed set of personal and professional ethics. Your responsibilities as a professional persuader include focusing on your client's needs yet producing writing that is fair to all of your audiences. In short, you must practice ethical persuasion in all that you do. Public relations and advertising professionals often gain certification through professional organizations that have developed codes of ethics for practitioners to follow. These organizations include those mentioned below.

## Public Relations Society of America (PRSA)

Chartered in 1947, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) is the world's largest and foremost organization of public relations professionals. PRSA provides professional development, sets standards of excellence, and upholds principles of ethics for its members and for the public relations profession as a whole.

## American Advertising Federation (AAF)

AAF is the nation's oldest national advertising trade association. As the only association representing all facets of the advertising industry, AAF is headquartered in Washington, DC. It acts as the "unifying voice for advertising."

# International Association of Business Communicators (IABC)

Founded in 1970, IABC is a professional network to help advance members' careers in public relations, corporate communications, public affairs, community relations, and other sectors.

Photo 11.2: Most professional organizations have produced codes of conduct for practitioners to follow and accreditation programs to reinforce these principles.



We will discuss these organizations in greater depth in upcoming chapters. In <u>Chapter 8</u>, we cover legal and ethical responsibilities of the media professional.

## Using the FAJA Points for Persuasion

Recall that media professionals begin their writing process by using strategies to focus their writing. You can do the same thing. First, apply the Professional Strategy Triangle to analyze your situation, audience, and message. Next, use the FAJA Points, first introduced in Chapter 2, to help you figure out the direction your piece will take. FAJA is an acronym that stands for "Fact-Analysis-Judgment-Action." In Chapter 4, we saw how journalists often focus on the *Fact* and *Analysis* points. Persuasive writers, by contrast, tend to focus more on the *Judgment* and *Action* points. Professional persuaders rely on careful analysis of audience and situation before they begin to write key messages.

Dro	Strategy	Connection
rro	Strategy	Connection

## Kevin O'Connell's Persuasion Imperatives

Kevin O'Connell, senior vice president of marketing with Eat'n Park Hospitality Group, Inc., spends a lot of time thinking about his audiences and how to craft the best persuasive messages for Eat'n Park brands.

Here are O'Connell's four persuasion imperatives, which he and his creative team strive to put to work in any situation:

- 1. *Try to understand audiences.* These are usually customers, but they could also be media members or other stakeholders. O'Connell asks,
  - What makes them tick?
  - What do they need?
  - What is going on in their lives?
  - How can we make their lives better, easier, more fun?
- 2. Translate the marketing team's understandings into strategies. How can those understandings meet a demand or fill a need through a strategy?
- 3. Flesh out strategies into executable steps.
- 4. Communicate those concepts or ideas well and at the right time.

Visit Eat'n Park online at <a href="www.eatnpark.com">www.eatnpark.com</a>. Explore the website's various links and locate examples of persuasive writing used in the restaurant's marketing and public relations programs.

- From what you can see, how does it appear that Eat'n Park uses O'Connell's persuasion imperatives in its messaging?
- Who appear to be its major audiences? How does Eat'n Park try to give them what they need, or make their lives better, easier, or more fun?
- What does the marketing team appear to understand about Eat'n Park audiences, and how do they translate those understandings into strategies?
- Does the Eat'n Park team appear to communicate key concepts and ideas well and at the right time? If so, how?

Explain O'Connell's persuasion imperatives in terms of the Professional Strategy Triangle as discussed in <a href="Chapter 2">Chapter 2</a>. Consider the following:

- Situation
- Audience
- Message

Photo 11.3: Research enables you to present your message with conviction. Without the proper research, you might not have a deep understanding of your situation and audience, which makes it difficult to craft an effective message.



Before initiating any persuasive writing project, media professionals carefully research key issues their client or employer is facing, including problems and opportunities, competitors, and the regulatory environment. Part of this research involves the simple monitoring of media messages. This is why media professionals are voracious consumers of the news. They read, watch, and listen to everything they can find on a daily basis—especially news that relates to their clients or employers. As a student, you should be developing these same informal research habits.

After conducting research, media professionals analyze their findings to determine important factors related to situation and audience. Heuristics again come in handy here. Knowing, for instance, that an audience is skeptical about the credibility of a source or that the audience has strong beliefs about an issue can help you to craft just the right message.

Media professionals often use established methods of persuasion in the public relations and advertising process. Consider the ROPE Model. Its elements are Research, Objectives, Programming, and Evaluation. Notice the emphasis on research, both at the beginning and at the end of the public relations process. It is set up this way because understanding the audience and the appeals that will most "move" an audience are so important in creating public relations messages. We will explore the ROPE Model in greater depth in <a href="Chapter 12">Chapter 12</a>.

Once you have gained a clear understanding of your situation and audience, you can get

busy creating your persuasive message with the FAJA Points. Let's look at some examples of how you can use the Judgment and Action points to focus your persuasive messages in public relations and advertising situations.

### Example 1: Using Judgment for Public Relations Writing

You are a junior-level public relations specialist employed with an agency in a large metropolitan area. Your agency has just landed a major contract with a nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote recreational opportunities on the city's waterways. The waterways feature forty miles of boating and fishing, along with numerous biking and walking paths. Your task is to research, write, and assemble a media kit for use with local and regional newspapers, travel magazines, and TV and radio stations.

You schedule an initial client meeting and conduct some background research to determine the public relations situation. Next, you turn your attention to the Judgment FAJA Point to write four questions that you will include in a major online survey of city residents. They might look like this:

- 1. Which recreational opportunities, if any, do you participate in on the city waterways?
- 2. What, if anything, do you enjoy about boating? Fishing? Biking? Hiking?
- 3. What might discourage you from using the city waterways?
- 4. Which improvements do you think should be made to the city's waterways?

Notice how these questions focus on two main areas of judgment: positive versus negative aspects of the waterways, and enjoyment versus dissatisfaction.

Armed with answers from the survey, you determine that you need to publicize the waterways as an undiscovered recreational opportunity that many city residents would enjoy. You find that most people who use the waterways speak highly of their benefits and list very few drawbacks about them. It's time to get to work on drafting news releases, fact sheets, and a media advisory for the media kit. Here are the persuasive approaches you decide to use to cement the positive judgments that respondents made about the city's waterways, and to address any negative judgments. You will include materials that highlight what residents referred to as enjoyable about the waterways. As with any worthy persuasive approach, yours is centered upon your audience and their beliefs, wants, and needs. Your research shows you can select Judgment points that focus on enjoyment:

- Q: Is this a good thing or a bad thing?
- A: The city waterways provide an enjoyable family experience, a good thing.
- Q: Whom might it affect (stakeholders)?
- A: Families and citizens in the city who seek valuable recreational experiences.
- Q: Is the effect good or bad, happy or sad, intense or relaxed, or something else?

- A: Your family will have a fun and safe time using the city waterways.
- A: Using the city waterways will bring your family together for a great recreational experience.
- A: Everyone, whether they are boaters, joggers, anglers, or those who enjoy a relaxing stroll along the waterway, will gain enjoyment from the city waterways.

## Example 2: Using Action for Advertising Writing

Suppose that you are employed at a large advertising agency with the Las Vegas Convention & Visitors Authority as your client. You are a junior member of the team charged with creating a series of outdoor advertisements in key Midwest cities. In your initial strategy session, you learn that your client wants to attract more Midwestern visitors to Las Vegas for winter weekend getaways.

Through background research and focus groups, your agency's research team has determined that 32 percent of Midwesterners consider Las Vegas for a potential winter vacation. However, a majority believe it to be a high crime area that is not a family-friendly destination. Your job is to overcome these negative perceptions with outdoor advertising messages that will move your audience to book a vacation in Las Vegas for next winter. You and your creative team consider the following Action point—oriented questions as you begin to draft ad copy:

What exactly do you want the consumer to do after seeing the billboard? (From the Action Point Question: "What kind of action should be taken?") What makes people in the Midwest want to go to Las Vegas? (From the Action Point Question: "Who should be involved in helping take the action?")

What assurances need to be in the copy to combat the misconception that they could be crime victims if they visit Las Vegas?

(From the Action Point Question: "What influences our decision to take action?") What kind of copy points will move people to request more information or book a Las Vegas vacation?

(From the Action Point Question: "What influences our decision to take action?") What kind of visual images will work to move people to request more information or book a Las Vegas vacation?

(From the Action Point Question: "What influences our decision to take action?")

The answers you derived from your strategy sessions allow your team to construct six advertising executions that address the above questions. The client chooses two of the executions for billboards, and your creative team produces the outdoor ads. The executions focus on family-friendly attractions and 24/7 safety in the city. The outdoor ads run that summer in four major Midwest cities, and vacation bookings jump 22 percent. Naturally, the Las Vegas Convention & Visitors Authority is quite happy.

#### Putting Persuasion Topic Points to Work

Next, let's utilize the Persuasion Topic Points to find appropriate supporting material. In <u>Chapter 4</u>, we learned how to use topic points (News Values, 5 Ws and H) for news writing. Now it's time to introduce topic points for persuasive writing that focus on structure and motive appeals.

Topic points are professional communicators' tried and true applications of the heuristics discussed above. Topic points serve as shorthand reminders of essential message elements that you will need to pull out of your "toolbox" on a regular basis. You need an easy-to-remember system to apply to a writing situation every time you prepare to write, every day. In persuasion messages, you can rely upon two topic point sets: Structure Topic Points and Motive Appeal Topic Points.

Figure 11.4 Structure Topic Points

Time Contrast

Space Relationship

Classification Problem-Solution

Analogy

Phillips and Zolten<sup>1</sup> put together a system for organizing messages called "structuring" that can help you arrange your key persuasive points. The seven structures are simple to learn and can be highly effective in helping you organize your supporting material. They are listed in <u>Figure 11.4</u>.

#### Time

Explaining things in the chronological order in which they occur can help to persuade audiences of the benefits of your product or service. For example, imagine that you are writing a thirty-second radio ad for a local pest control service. You might produce the following copy:

Are bug problems driving you out of house and home? Not to worry. Matthews Pest Control starts with an expert assessment of your pest problem. Next, we treat the affected areas with an environmentally friendly insecticide. Finally, we follow up in three months with a post-treatment inspection to ensure those nasty bugs never visit your home again.

## Space

Using space as a structure works well when you need to show how parts come together to form a whole. For example, as a public relations director at a large regional hospital promoting the opening of a new radiology wing, you might write a Twitter post that goes something like this:

Mesaba Hospital's new radiology wing is open! On the main floor, meet friendly staff. Then head upstairs to check out our new technology.

#### Classification

Classification works well when you need to show audiences how something falls into a certain category. We often see these types of persuasive messages in the crisis management function of public relations. Suppose that your public relations agency represents a cruise line that has just experienced a major food-borne illness outbreak. You draft a media statement that your CEO will be reading at a news conference this evening. The message must underscore the fact that the cruise ship's food was contaminated by a bacteria causing a flu-like illness. However, media-generated rumors of *E. coli* are false.

Good evening. I am happy to report that our food safety team has located the cause of the food-borne illness that sickened 980 of our passengers aboard the *Costa Rubia* ship two days ago. The team determined the bacteria to be Listerium-5, one that causes mild flu-like symptoms but is not life threatening. Media reports asserting the presence of *E. coli* bacteria are categorically false. There was, and is, no *E. coli* bacteria present. Our staff is now working alongside those sickened and their families to help ensure their well-being and speedy recovery.

## Analogy

Analogy is a comparison between two different things, such as people, objects, or events. Many advertising appeals draw upon analogies. As an advertising copywriter for a fashion company that sells sunglasses, you might create a slogan to promote them in the following way:

"Put on a pair of SunDrifter shades, and see the world with fresh eyes."

#### Contrast

Contrast compares two or more things and reveals the differences between them. This structure works well when you want to highlight the differences between you and a competitor's products, services, or ideas. Imagine that your public relations agency has launched a campaign to promote a private college in your region. The agency partner places you in charge of creating the overall campaign theme or slogan. You might come up with the following idea:

State University: large classes, boring instructors, bland dorm food, and campus buildings from the architectural dark ages of the 1970s.

Welton College: small classes with a focus on you, professors invested in your success, farm-to-table meal plans you will love—all on a charming, picturesque campus.

## Relationship

The relationship structure focuses on the way things are linked to one another. Suppose that you are putting together television commercial copy for Energa, a newly developed drug that will help middle-age women boost their energy levels. Researchers have found that diminishing levels of certain brain chemicals can reduce energy in this age group. Your copy might read:

Energa replenishes the brain's critical storage of Titanium 7, a key chemical that counterbalances the forces that can wear you out in a normal day. Studies have shown that Titanium 7 naturally begins to diminish in women over age 45. Energa works like a Titanium 7 multiplier.

#### Problem-Solution

The problem–solution structure is definitely audience centered. Aristotle summed it up perfectly when he said, "The fool tells me his reasons. The wise man persuades me with my own." As the name indicates, in this structure, you first introduce a problem and then provide a course of action to solve it.

Yet, using the problem–solution structure requires that you lead the audience through four steps:

- 1. Describe and illustrate a current problem that causes hardship for the audience.
- 2. Provide details about the exact nature of the hardship.
- 3. Propose a solution that will eliminate the hardship.
- 4. Be prepared to demonstrate that your program will not cause problems that are worse than the ones you are solving.

Imagine you do social media work for an advertising agency. You have just landed the Ride-On account. Ride-On is a new ride sharing service that enables commuters to connect with one another when they want to share rides to and from the airport, major sporting events, or other city destinations. Unions representing taxicab and bus services have objected to the service, saying it robs them of business they need and deserve. They also contend that Ride-On does not regulate its drivers properly, which could compromise rider safety. You have already created a Facebook page for Ride-On, which you maintain on a daily basis. Today, you decide to promote Ride-On and head off industry concerns by drafting the following Facebook status updates that identify various problems and present the solutions:

Smog in the city . . . traffic jams . . . too many cars! We've got to get more of them off the road. Ride-On can help us all get there. Share a ride to the airport or to the next basketball game with someone just like you, for less than the cost of a taxi or bus fare.

or

Ride-On has already been a huge hit in Atlanta, cutting traffic congestion with 54,000 fewer vehicles on the highways per day, according to industry estimates. Ride-On participants report feeling happy, secure, and satisfied with the Atlanta program. Let's also make it happen here in Milwaukee!

Concerned that Ride-On might not be a safe alternative to taking the taxi or bus? Don't worry! All Ride-On drivers must pass a comprehensive DMV background check and provide insurance verification before you get in the car with them. We worry about it all ahead of time so you don't have to.

As you can see from these examples, the Structure Topic Points can help you to find supporting materials for your persuasive messages. Using these structures saves you considerable time and mental energy as you encounter similar persuasive situations again and again.

Craft Essential: Using the Professional Strategy Triangle to Create a Unique Brand Voice

Eat'n Park Hospitality Group, Inc. in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, oversees seven different brands: Eat'n Park, Six Penn Kitchen, The Porch at Schenley, Hello Bistro, Smileycookie.com, Delicious Raw, and Parkhurst Dining.

According to Kevin O'Connell, senior vice president of marketing, each of those brands speaks to a distinct audience, and therefore requires a unique and consistent brand "voice." "You can't use just one voice for all brands, or the wrong voice for another brand," he says.

As you create posts for Twitter, Facebook, or other forms of social media, brand voice becomes even more important because you are cultivating a one-to-one relationship with each of your audience members.

To see what O'Connell means, go online at <a href="www.enphospitality.com/">www.enphospitality.com/</a>. Click on the "Our Brands" link to locate each of the company's seven brands. From there, click on the individual web links to go to the brands' own websites. After browsing a few of them, choose your favorite and review it carefully. Read all of the copy.

How would you describe the voice of this brand? Is it fun, edgy, irreverent, or something else? If this brand were a person, how would you describe its personality?

Explain this brand's voice in terms of the Professional Strategy Triangle. Why do you suppose the Eat'n Park team selected this particular voice for the brand? Consider the following:

#### Situation

- o location: rural vs. urban, physical vs. virtual, nature of the community
- food and beverage offerings
- o company strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats

#### Audience

- o consumer vs. institutional
- o demographics: age, race/ethnicity, gender, occupation, income, education
- o psychographics: personality, values, opinions, attitudes, interests, and lifestyles
- likely predispositions
- likely interpretations of messages

#### Message

- FAJA Points: does the writer rely mostly upon fact, analysis, judgment, action, or a mix?
- Structure Topic Points: which structures are most used in the copy?

• The fifteen Motive Appeals (see below): which of these does the writer draw upon?

### Moving Audiences to Action With Motive Appeals

Now it's time to get to the biggest job of persuasion: moving audiences to do something by using appeals that speak directly to their human needs. These are referred to as Motive Appeals (Figure 11.5). You can use Motive Appeals as tools to motivate your audience to take action in response to your message.

Figure 11.5 Motive Appeals

Sex Attention

Affiliation Autonomy

Nurture Escape

Guidance Safety

Aggress Aesthetic Sensation

Achieve Satisfy Curiosity

Dominate Satisfy Physical Needs

**Prominence** 

The Motive Appeals are not new. We owe their invention to the ancient Greek Sophists, who categorized them nearly 2,500 years ago. In the twentieth century, the advertising industry used psychological research to modernize and rebrand these ancient concepts. Communications scholar Jib Fowles<sup>2</sup> has summarized them as follows:

- 1. *The need for sex:* As obvious as this may seem, in persuasive terms, the need for sex translates to the need to be sexy, to believe we are attractive to others. It is a major advertising selling point.
- 2. *The need for affiliation:* By nature, human beings are joiners; we need to feel that we are attached to something larger, for example a group of people, an institution, or even a religious affiliation.
- 3. *The need to nurture:* Human beings exhibit the desire to take care of each other, whether they are parents, family, or friends. Nurturing means that we invest time,

- effort, and money into making sure that others are taken care of. You can extend this idea beyond people to pets, plants and other living things.
- 4. *The need for guidance:* At one time or another, all of us need assistance in matters that are beyond our expertise. Here, we might utilize authority figures to guide our audiences.
- 5. The need to aggress: There are times when all of us feel we need to take bold action to solve problems and dilemmas. This doesn't mean violent action; it means feeling confident in our ability to stand up for ourselves and others who need our protection and the need to combat helplessness.
- 6. *The need to achieve:* Most of us believe that we were made to attain things greater than a basic daily existence. Distinguishing oneself through achievements is a key motivating factor.
- 7. *The need to dominate:* Though we don't always like to admit it, we all have a desire to control others and act it out.
- 8. *The need for prominence:* This is the desire to go beyond mere achievements to gain a reputation for excellence in one's community or profession.
- 9. *The need for attention:* We want people to notice us for who we are and the things we accomplish.
- 10. *The need for autonomy:* This is the feeling of confidence that we can take care of ourselves, by ourselves.
- 11. *The need to escape:* At times, the pressure gets to be too much, and we just have to get away from it all. Escapes may take the form of vacations, nice meals, or expensive clothing, to mention just a few.
- 12. *The need to feel safe:* Safety and security are prime human needs. In order to pursue higher needs, we must feel secure in our daily lives.
- 13. *The need for aesthetic sensation:* Most all of us enjoy some sort of artistic experience, whether it be listening to our favorite music, looking at artwork, or enjoying a beautiful sunset.
- 14. *The need to satisfy curiosity:* Humans have a great desire to answer questions and find out what is beyond the next frontier.
- 15. *Physiological needs:* We all need to be free of pain and hunger, and to satisfy basic daily bodily needs such as food, drink, and sleep.

As a media professional, you are obligated to apply the fifteen Motive Appeals (and any other advertising appeals) in an ethical manner, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Always respect the people you are trying to reach with your persuasive messages. Creating advertising messages that exploit our audience's emotions and circumvent their rational thought process is both unethical and unprofessional. Referring back to the Professional Strategy Triangle, always assess your *situation*, respect your *audience*, and make sure they fully understand the content of your *message* before finalizing it.

The extreme application of any of the Motive Appeals can be unethical because it promotes

action without informed judgment. An artificial situation that can be served with a Motive Appeal is one extreme application. For instance, advertising often uses sex appeal by portraying beautiful and handsome models who demonstrate sexiness as they engage with products that vary from automobiles to beer. Sometimes these ads go too far in showing models in provocative settings that seem to promote morally questionable behavior. This happened in a Calvin Klein jeans ad campaign released in 1995. The campaign consisted of billboards, magazine picture ads, and television spots that showed models who looked like teenagers in sexually provocative clothing, postures, and settings. One critic of the ads said they promoted "the heart of adult darkness, where toying with the sexuality of young teens is thinkable."<sup>2</sup>

Two important questions must be asked every time a persuader creates a message with Motive Appeal Topic Points. First, are the best interests of the audience being considered? Second, what are the social consequences of the Motive Appeals used in the message? Clearly, the Calvin Klein ad campaign failed to adequately consider either of these questions. Pedophilia is not only illegal, but it is regarded as morally reprehensible. Similarly, appeals to safety that depict extremely fearful situations are not made in the best interest of the audience. We know that advertising is valuable because it connects audiences with products and services they need. Truthful advertising demonstrates real needs that are fulfilled with realistic motive appeals. It works because its messages are built from answers to both the questions above.

Let's briefly examine how to put the Motive Appeals to work by returning to the Las Vegas billboard ads discussed earlier on page 374. Recall the following questions:

- 1. What exactly do you want the consumer to do after seeing the billboard?
- 2. What makes people in the Midwest want to go to Las Vegas?
- 3. What assurances need to be in the copy to combat the misconception that they could be crime victims if they visit Las Vegas?
- 4. What kind of copy points will work to move people to request more information or book a Vegas vacation?
- 5. What kind of visual images will work to move people to request more information or book a Vegas vacation?

Starting with Question 1, we want consumers to seek out more information about a Las Vegas vacation. So we know we have to find a Motive Appeal that makes it worthwhile to remember a web address from a billboard, and then visit the address for more information. Motive Appeal #11, the need to escape, is a logical choice here.

Now, on to Question 2: What makes Midwesterners want to go to Las Vegas? That's an easy one: to escape unfavorable winter weather and to fulfill Motive Appeal #13, the need for aesthetic sensation.

Question 3 can easily be addressed by drawing upon Motive Appeal #12, the need to feel safe. Las Vegas features many family-friendly attractions within an environment that is safe and secure.

Jump to Question 4: What copy points will move people to request more information? The need to escape and the need for aesthetic sensation lead us to consider copy points about a warm, sunny, arid Las Vegas environment in comparison to a cold, dreary, snowy Midwestern winter.

To answer Question 5, consider Motive Appeal #2, the need for affiliation. Las Vegas is an exciting place to visit with one's friends, family, co-workers, or significant other.

Finally, Motive Appeal #3—the need to nurture—reveals that travelers often book vacations in order to take care of people they love and are willing to invest significant time, effort, and money to accomplish this.

Of course, you can extend the Motive Appeals even further. In the example above, once you are done considering the need to escape, you could try the need for affiliation Motive Appeal and show how Las Vegas is an exciting place to go with a significant other, or even to meet a significant other.

Photo 11.4: What kind of messages can be created using the Motive Appeal Topic Points?



As a professional persuader, you can use the Motive Appeals again and again to find appropriate supporting material for ad copy or other persuasive messages. Although technology and media channels have evolved greatly over the centuries, these basic human motives have remained remarkably stable over time. The War Room feature below shows you how Motive Appeals can be used in a public relations campaign.

The War Room

# Using the Fifteen Motive Appeals to Promote Canned Foods

You are a midlevel account executive at a major public relations agency in El Paso, Texas. The partners have just been approached by an association representing canned foods companies. Sales of canned foods have been lagging in recent years, and officials are looking to your agency for some creative campaign ideas on how to invigorate sales and reposition canned foods as the best choice for household food buyers. You and the creative team immediately think of the fifteen Motive Appeals to begin creating key messages.

Fast-forward to the agency "war room" on Monday morning. You and your creative counterparts gaze sleepily at each other over Starbucks cups across the table and ask, "Where do we begin?" You decide to start with Motive Appeal #15, physiological needs, the most basic item from the Motive Appeals list. But you need to think of other ways that buying canned food could fulfill more of the Motive Appeals. Some quick research reveals the following facts:

Some canned foods carry more vitamins per ounce than frozen vegetables. Canned foods are easy to prepare for time-pressured adults trying to feed their families. Consumers have rated canned vegetables highly in taste tests.

### The process

- 1. As a class, divide into three- or four-member agency teams.
- 2. Each agency team takes thirty minutes to write a 250-word mini-proposal for a campaign built around their top three Motive Appeals. The mini-proposal must include a campaign slogan and ideas for several strategies or tactics (social media, media kits, special events, in-store promotions, etc.), along with an explanation of why they chose each Motive Appeal.
- 3. Divide the class in half. Agency teams from the first half take two to three minutes to present their mini-proposals. The second half of the class plays the "client" role and votes on the top proposal.
- 4. Switch roles and repeat the process.
- 5. At the end, the entire class votes on the top proposal from the two finalists.
- 6. Debrief with a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of all mini-proposals.

### Summary

- 1. Explain how key persuasion theories can address one's audience and situation. Media professionals can use persuasion theories as heuristics to generate ideas for messages. Semiotics explains the impact of words and their meanings. Social judgment theory demonstrates how audience members are likely to respond to particular arguments.
- 2. Explain the relationship between persuasion, ethics, and professionalism. Media professionals must have a highly developed set of ethics, and always respect the people they are trying to influence. They adhere to professional codes of ethics that certify them as trustworthy in their use of persuasion. They do not defraud or take advantage of their audiences.
- 3. Identify which of the FAJA (Fact, Analysis, Judgment, and Action) Points are most effective in writing persuasive messages. Although *Fact* and *Analysis* are important in any writing situation, persuasive messages focus largely on *Judgment* and *Action*. The *Judgment* point works well when constructing persuasive messages that seek to influence audience beliefs. The *Action* point is appropriate for messages intended to move audiences to do something, such as purchase a product or service.
- 4. Describe how the Structure Topic Points can be used to create persuasive messages. These points give you an easy-to-remember set of tools you can apply to any persuasive writing situation. The Structure Topic Points are: time, space, classification, analogy, contrast, relationship, and problem—solution.
- 5. Describe how the fifteen Motive Appeal Topic Points can be used to create persuasive messages. The Motive Appeals help you to move audiences by speaking directly to their human needs. Although technology and media channels have evolved over the centuries, these basic human motives have remained remarkably stable over time.

### Key Terms

ethos 365 logos 365 pathos 365 semiotics 366 heuristic 366 social judgment theory 367 ethical persuasion 369 FAJA Points 370 ROPE Model 372 Motive Appeals 381

### Discussion Questions

- 1. Discuss Aristotle's system of persuasion including ethos, logos, and pathos. Do you believe this system works equally well in today's technology-based society? How can modern media professionals use ethos, logos, and pathos to persuade audiences?
- 2. As a professional persuader, why is it important to understand the meanings behind the words you use? What are some recent examples you can recall from the media in which words have been used or abused to persuade an audience to believe or do something?
- 3. Explain semiotics and its significance to the persuasion process. As a media professional, how can you use semiotics to become a more effective persuader?
- 4. Define and discuss social judgment theory. Do you believe it is a useful tool for understanding and persuading one's audiences in the media? Explain.
- 5. Do you believe persuasion is an ethical process? Explain your reasoning and cite at least one example from the media to back up your answer.
- 6. Why is it important for professionals in advertising and public relations to have a solid grounding in ethics, and to always persuade in an ethical manner? What can happen if they fail to do so?
- 7. Which of the FAJA (Fact, Analysis, Judgment, and Action) Points do you believe are most important in the persuasion process if you are trying to elect a political candidate? Explain.
- 8. Which of the Structure Topic Points would you use to construct an argument that the movie *Jaws* is more exciting than the movie *Jurassic Park*? Why is the structure you selected the best for this persuasive task?
- 9. Review the fifteen Motive Appeal Topic Points found in this chapter. Which of them do you see in yourself? How could an advertising copywriter use the fifteen Motive Appeals to craft an advertising message?

### Chapter Exercises

- Choose one of your favorite products or services and draft copy for an online advertisement (100 words
  or less) for a new variation of that product or service. On a separate page, write a brief paragraph
  describing which Structure Topic Points and/or Motive Appeals you used to create the ad copy, and why
  you chose them.
- 2. Recalling what you have learned about social judgment theory in this chapter, conduct additional research to learn more about the theory. Next, choose a controversial social issue and interview a classmate to determine their latitudes of acceptance on the issue. Compile your findings in a 300-word paper. Be sure to synthesize your background information on social judgment theory with the interview results.
- 3. Interview a public relations or advertising professional to learn about how he or she uses ethos, logos, and pathos in persuasive writing pieces including social media. Before the interview, ask the professional to assemble an example or two of each type of writing. From your interview notes, draft a 400-word paper describing your findings. Prepare to share your paper with the class.
- 4. Work with a classmate to locate a highly persuasive advertisement for a product or service. The sample may come from print, online, or broadcast and cable media. Using the fifteen Motive Appeals found in this chapter, determine the top two or three that provide the persuasive force behind this advertisement. Prepare to share your findings with the class. Be sure to note which, if any, of the Motive Appeals, you would have used instead to make this a more successful ad.
- 5. Using a public relations scenario provided by your instructor, use the FAJA Points (refer to <a href="Chapter 2">Chapter 2</a>), Structure Topic Points, or Motive Appeals to draft a 300-word campaign proposal for your client. Sell your client on your campaign's main appeals and how they draw upon the Structure Topic Points or Motive Appeals. Place yourself in the client's shoes and consider how they might respond to the proposal. Proofread and edit your piece carefully before submitting it.

#### Additional Resources

American Advertising Federation (AAF) Institute for Advertising Ethics:

http://www.aaf.org/AAFMemberR/Efforts/AAF Ethics/Institute for Advertising Ethics.aspx

International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) Code of Ethics for Professional

Communicators: https://www.iabc.com/about-us/governance/code-of-ethics/

Pathos, Logos, and Ethos in Advertising:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BpTb2RjbMn4

"Public Relations, Explained," Forbes Magazine:

http://www.forbes.com/sites/robertwynne/2013/09/04/public-relations-explained/

Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), Member Code of Ethics:

http://www.prsa.org/aboutprsa/ethics/codeenglish/#.U9kBUvldWSo

"Semiotics for Beginners":

http://visual-memory.co.uk/daniel/Documents/S4B/sem01.html

10 Motive Appeals: http://prezi.com/qwsefpkdqm-i/10-motive-appeals/

The Canned Food Alliance: http://www.mealtime.org

## Chapter 12 Public Relations

### Chapter Outline

**Learning Objectives** 

Frontline Media Writing Profile: Brad Groznik, PR Strategist, Groznik Public

**Relations** 

Public Relations Is Everywhere

**Defining Public Relations** 

The Public Relations Process

What Do Public Relations Practitioners Do?

**Key Personal Qualities** 

The Publics of Public Relations

Skilled Writing Is the Key

Public Relations Writing in the Digital Age

Pro Strategy Connection: Putting Strategy to Work in Social Media Writing

Public Relations and Strategic Communication

The Three Types of Media: Paid, Earned, and Owned

Paid Media

Earned Media

Owned Media

Craft Essential: How Can Paid, Earned, and Owned Media Work Together?

Uncontrolled and Controlled Media

Uncontrolled Media

Controlled Media

Professional Media Writing Strategy

Public Relations Writing Tools

Media Relations

The Email Pitch

The War Room: Using the Professional Strategy Triangle to Write an Email Pitch

The News Release

Craft Essential: A News Release Checklist

**Controlled Publications** 

The Presentation

Craft Essential: Strategizing a Presentation

Summary

Key Terms

**Discussion Questions** 

**Chapter Exercises** 

Additional Resources

<sup>&</sup>quot;In a world perpetually shaped by communication and interactions between

individuals, the skill of conveying a succinct and powerful message cannot be understated. By improving my writing skills, I've simultaneously gained a host of real-life skills—namely how to think critically, how to structure an argument, and how to communicate clearly—that make a difference in my day-to-day interactions with peers and professors. The benefits of writing don't simply end with the completion of an essay. Rather, you carry them with you for life."

—Noah Shearen, Schreyer Honors College, Penn State University

### Learning Objectives

- 1. Describe the public relations profession and public relations process.
- 2. Classify the three types of media: paid, earned, and owned.
- 3. Compare uncontrolled media and controlled media.
- 4. Demonstrate use of the Professional Strategy Triangle to write messages for key publics.
- 5. Compose email pitches, news releases, presentations, and other public relations documents.

Brad Groznik, PR Strategist Groznik Public Relations, State College, Pennsylvania
Groznik Public Relations, State College, Pennsylvania



As Brad Groznik sees it, public relations writing boils down to effective persuasion based upon hard thinking and a strong strategy.

"For me, writing is not so much a basic skill, but more about knowing how to develop strong arguments and be persuasive," he says. "Persuasion is very much at the core of good writing, whether you are a novelist persuading a reader to feel a certain way about a character, or persuading your boss to give you a raise. Writing well means developing persuasive arguments, and there is no more important task in public relations."

Groznik and his wife, Andrea, own and operate Groznik Public Relations, a specialty agency based in State College, Pennsylvania. Their clients include Airnest, Affinity Connection, Ben Franklin Technology Partners, and the Center for Private Forests.

A decade in the media professions has taught Groznik, thirty-one, plenty about effective writing strategy. He has managed a weekly community newspaper in Queens, New York, helped win political campaigns for the New York State Legislature, and developed advertisements for print, television, and radio that promoted everything from responsible retirement strategies to aiding victims of Hurricane Sandy. He's placed dozens of stories in outlets including the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, and CNN, and ghostwritten speeches and op-eds for sitting politicians and union presidents. He's produced marketing materials for clients including Bank of America, Norelco, and National Geographic. Groznik earned his bachelor's degree in English at Penn State University and his master's degree in strategic communications at Columbia University.

Recalling his early days as a news reporter, Groznik remembers writing stories on school board meetings and being dissatisfied with their straightforward, factual approaches. "It didn't make for strong stories," he said. "I realized I had to think about my audience, and what readers would consider interesting and relevant—in other words, being more strategic about it. Strong writing that keys in on the audience is always going to be better than a superficial discussion of events."

On a typical day, Groznik writes for two distinct audiences: journalists and clients. Each carries a completely different mindset and expectations. Groznik's success hinges upon knowing those mindsets as he develops news releases or marketing materials. "For journalists, I write brief pitches focused on stories that will interest their news audiences," he says. "Clients hire me because I can put myself in the mindset of a journalist and tell them what will be news." Writing for existing clients often includes explaining the public relations process, and for potential clients, persuading them to sign on with his agency.

Groznik advises college students to get involved with student media as early as possible, work closely with editors, and take their criticism as constructive advice. Deadline pressure is healthy as well. "Criticism can be tough at first, but it makes you a stronger writer," Groznik says. "Writing is a skill, and people aren't born with it. You have to develop that skill over time. And you will do badly at it until you get good at it."

### Public Relations Is Everywhere

When you think of "public relations," what sorts of images come into your head? Do you think of celebrity publicists, damage control experts, "flaks," or even "spin doctors"?

As tempting as it might be to conjure up these stereotypes, the public relations profession is far more ethical and its work more broadly influential than you might think. Public relations is a social science and a profession that has been practiced for more than a century in the United States, thanks to pioneers including Ivy Ledbetter Lee, Edward Bernays, Doris Fleischman, Arthur Page, and Moss Kendrix.

The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) is the world's preeminent organization for public relations professionals. Chartered in 1947, PRSA represents, educates, sets standards of excellence, and upholds principles of ethics for its twenty-two thousand members in more than one hundred chapters nationwide. The Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) is the preeminent organization for students interested in public relations and communications. With a membership of more than eleven thousand students and advisers, PRSSA oversees chapters at some three hundred colleges and universities across the United States and South America. If you are interested in a public relations career, PRSSA can help you to enhance your education, broaden your network, and launch your career in public relations. PRSA serves as the parent organization to PRSSA, offering professional development and networking opportunities to students and professionals.

### Defining Public Relations

Harold Burson, one of the twentieth century's public relations greats, defines public relations as "an applied social science that influences behavior and policy, when communicated effectively, motivates an individual or group to a specific course of action by creating, changing or reinforcing opinions and attitudes." According to Burson,

Public relations is a process that impacts public opinion. Its objective is to motivate individuals or groups to take a specific action. Like buying a certain brand of toothpaste or automobile; voting for a specific candidate; supporting one side or the other of a political issue; signing up with one cable provider over another. As such, public relations is an applied social science that draws on several social sciences, among them psychology, cultural anthropology, sociology, political science, economics, geography. 1

Other authorities have defined *public relations* in the following ways:

- *Relationship management.* Edward Bernays, one of the founders of the public relations profession, wrote, "Public relations is not a one-way street in which leadership manipulates the public opinion. It is a two-way street in which leadership and the public find integration with each other and in which objectives and goals are predicated on a coincidence of public and private interest."<sup>2</sup>
- Managing communications. Some practitioners define public relations as the process
  of orchestrating an organization's communications, managing what we say, how we
  say it, and through what media we say it.
- *Interpreter or liaison*. Public relations practitioners can be viewed as interpreters and liaisons between key publics. They must interpret management policies, programs, and practices to their publics, and the desires, opinions, and interests of their publics to management. In this way, public relations professionals broker goodwill between two or more publics. Messages from one side may not be welcome to the other, but it is the public relations practitioner's job to convey those messages quickly, accurately, and in good faith.
- *Ethical performance*. Here public relations is defined as doing the right thing (performance) and then communicating the substance of that performance to key publics. It means doing good works and getting credit for what you have done.

Significantly, all these definitions of public relations are based upon an organization's performance grounded in professional ethics. What you do is more important than what you say about it. Performance always precedes publicity.

Photo 12.2: Public relations professionals interact with a range of audiences inside and outside of their organizations. They also write specialized pieces including news releases, social media posts, brochures, annual reports, and advertisements.



#### The Public Relations Process

Note from the definitions above that true public relations is a *planned process*. Often, it takes the form of complete campaigns executed on behalf of a client or employer. It is not a collection of hastily assembled tactics or reactive activities based on gut-level hunches. It is not practiced to create hype, to spin negative publicity, or to simply make audience members feel good about themselves. On the contrary, true public relations is based upon solid research and informed by bottom-line objectives and creative strategies. Its tactics are ethically conceived and executed. Finally, true public relations is accountable to management, and it is always evaluated in the end. After all, a client or employer has paid good money for a campaign or project. He or she will expect to know, for example, how your work has helped win a gubernatorial election, enroll more students at their university, or advance their airline's brand.

Public relations educator Jerry Hendrix has proposed the four-step ROPE Model<sup>3</sup> as one way to explain the public relations process. The acronym stands for Research, Objectives, Programming, and Evaluation.

- Research—on the clients and their public relations situation to establish the basis for the campaign. Areas of investigation may include the organization itself, the environment, the product or service, problems and opportunities, key internal and external publics, and competitors.
- Objectives—these represent the client's desired outcome of the public relations
  campaign or project. Broadly speaking, objectives may be defined in terms of outputs
  (the tactics you execute) or outcomes (the ultimate results you produce). It is not
  surprising that most clients are concerned largely with outcomes. Well-defined
  objectives must be specific, attainable, and measurable. Often, they contain a time
  element.
- Programming—referring to the overall theme and tactics that you execute for your client or employer. These could range from blog posts on key sites or media relations work to print publications, videos, and special events.
- Evaluation—think of this as research that you do throughout and at the end of your campaign or project to monitor how well it has worked. Does your overall strategy appear to be on track? Are key publics responding to your tactics as you had hoped? Or, is a midcourse correction in order? Evaluation at the end of the campaign is invaluable, as it provides you with critical information to use for next time.

#### What Do Public Relations Practitioners Do?

Public relations practitioners, then, work to influence public opinion, build and manage relationships with key publics, and create favorable publicity for their clients and employers. Most of all, they write. A career in public relations enables you to practice in a multitude of work settings, including the following:

- 1. Public relations agencies: working on behalf of such clients as corporations, nonprofits, trade associations, and governments
- 2. Corporations: retailers, manufacturers, sports teams, and health care providers
- 3. Nonprofits and trade associations: hospitals, foundations, churches, and universities
- 4. Local, state, federal, or international government: offices, independent agencies, and political parties
- 5. Independent consultancies: a one-person agency offering specialized services to all of the above sectors.

Whatever stirs your passion, chances are good that you can find a public relations job to promote it.

In a public relations career, much of the work you will do takes place person to person, on the phone, and across print, digital, and broadcast and cable media channels. You will also use various social media channels to tell your clients' stories about their people, policies, products, services, and brands. In a typical week, you might expect to do the following:

- Write and issue news releases, or stories about your client, to journalists and editors.
- Pitch your client's news to journalists and editors via phone, email, and social media. This means reaching out to media gatekeepers and encouraging them to cover your client's news events or write favorably about them. This can result in free publicity that carries greater credibility than advertising.
- Reach multiple publics via social media and create conversations with them across numerous channels. These techniques are explored in depth in <a href="#">Chapter 9</a>.
- Write and design online and print publications including web pages, brochures, newsletters, and annual reports.
- Create and manage strategic communication campaigns for internal and external publics.
- Interact with and engage community members and groups.
- Write speeches for managers and organizational leaders.
- Counsel top management on communication-related issues.
- Create and coordinate publicity opportunities including special events.
- Manage crises as they emerge and communicate with key publics.

### Key Personal Qualities

What personal qualities make a successful public relations practitioner? People who succeed as public relations professionals are strong communicators—through their writing, the spoken word, in public speaking situations, and in small groups. They tend to be teamoriented extroverts who enjoy being around other people. Successful public relations professionals are adept at juggling multiple deadlines and thrive under creative and time pressures. They also work hard at building relationships and are proactive in maintaining them.

Equally important, successful public relations practitioners are intellectually curious and have diverse professional and personal interests. They are voracious media consumers and make it a habit to spend time each day reading as much news as they can from a variety of sources. Good PR professionals know a little bit about many different things, and it shows in the work they do for their clients and employers.

Successful public relations professionals are guided by a clear sense of personal and professional ethics—that is, the ability to distinguish right from wrong and then choose the most ethical course of action for the client or organization. Making the right decision can be difficult, especially in competitive situations in which others around you may not want to do what is most ethical. Yet, public relations practitioners are expected to be the ethical "standard bearers" for their organizations, often against considerable pressure to act otherwise. This responsibility extends to counseling top management on ethical matters. For a full discussion of media law and ethics, see <a href="Chapter 8">Chapter 8</a>.

#### The Publics of Public Relations

As a public relations practitioner, you can expect to communicate on behalf of many diverse publics. Some of them have become the foundation of areas of specialization within the profession. These areas include

- media relations,
- employee relations,
- government relations,
- community relations,
- consumer relations,
- business-to-business relations, and
- investor relations.

You are probably beginning to see why this profession is called *public relations*. If you think about the many combinations of publics that can arise from the above list, you will see that public relations is a two-way street between publics at all levels, both inside and outside of your organization. No organization can exist for long without the goodwill of its publics. Let's say you represent a major retailer planning to open a big-box store in a small, rural community. You would start by communicating the plans, policies, and practices of your organization from the inside to the outside. Much of that work will take place through the news media and social media channels. Your company's plans may or may not be welcome news to your external publics including community members, consumers, area businesses, the media, and potential employees. But as a public relations practitioner, you would carefully consider their wants and needs in the store development process.

At the same time, your outside publics' opinions and ideas may or may not be welcome news to company managers inside the organization. Still, they need to hear it loud and clear. It is your job to convey those messages quickly and clearly from the outside to the inside of the organization, as challenging as it may be. In some cases, you may even act as an advocate for your outside publics. This example illustrates the *interpreter* or *liaison* role that public relations professionals frequently play in spanning the boundaries between their internal and external publics.

### Skilled Writing Is the Key

Many public relations practitioners begin their careers as journalists in the news media—and for good reason. Journalists know what constitutes news and how the media process works. They have learned how to spot news angles, interview story subjects, and write many different types of stories on tight deadlines. Traditionally, newsroom experience was considered a core requirement for most public relations jobs. That rule has softened in recent decades as students and professionals from other disciplines have found career success in the public relations field.

In any job setting, you will probably be surrounded by people who are reasonably good at writing, public speaking, or facilitating small groups. However, as a public relations practitioner, you are expected to be the *best* communicator in your organization or for your client. That is why you were hired, isn't it? Think back to our Chapter 3 discussion on the connection between thinking and writing. Skilled writing constitutes the heavy lifting behind most public relations projects, and it requires hard thinking. Most people (including your bosses) are too busy or distracted or simply lack the inclination to write well. That part is up to you. As we learned in Chapter 3, accuracy, clarity, brevity, precision, and conciseness as well as proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation are the marks of a skilled public relations writer. They are essential to informing, motivating, and persuading key publics. This is true whether you want them to vote for a senate candidate, pass an important school bond issue, or check out your travel client's new hotel.

In a public relations career, you will work across a range of new digital and social marketing arenas that are constantly evolving as new channels and tools emerge. But at the same time, traditional public relations skills remain frontline responsibilities. In a 2015 salary survey by *PR News*, respondents rated two of the most important skills for advancement within an organization as written communications (57 percent) and media relations (48 percent). Today, more than ever, all organizations need strong writers to tell their stories in the crowded marketplace of ideas in which they operate. In public relations, the most important work you do and the biggest career jumps you make are likely to hinge upon your writing skills.

### Public Relations Writing in the Digital Age

The need for writing skills has not decreased in the digital media age in which public relations professionals operate; if anything, it has increased. After all, you may have only 140 characters in which to convey your message!

The following is a list of technology-related job duties you might expect to perform in any public relations position. Notice how many of them require writing:

- social networking (e.g., developing and maintaining Facebook pages)
- microblogging (e.g., developing and writing Twitter posts or tweets)
- social bookmarking (working with websites such as StumbleUpon or Delicious to set up online bookmarks)
- blogging and podcasting
- email pitches and marketing
- web content management
- search engine optimization, also known as SEO (embedding materials with searchable keywords and terms)

For further information about writing for social media and the web, refer to Chapters 9 and 10.

Pro Strategy Connection

### Putting Strategy to Work in Social Media Writing

"What's black and white and red (read) all over?" goes the old riddle. According to Brad Groznik, the subject of this chapter's Frontline Media Writing Profile, in the twenty-first century, it's not a newspaper. It's a mobile device.

"It's amazing how the written word is becoming more important as we go further into the future," Groznik says. "More than ever, it's all about effective writing and language use."

In his ten-year career, Groznik has operated social media accounts for politicians, nonprofits, and a variety of other clients. Regardless of the client, Groznik begins by considering his different audiences, and from that, assembling smart writing strategies.

"This audience is drastically different than the news media," he says. "They are more often fans or customers. You have to assume a more journalistic role, possibly talking to them as they would expect to hear from you as a person."

Writing for social media is brief and punchy. It may direct audiences to resources, fun facts, or new ideas. As a professional social media writer, your goal is to help followers understand your organization and gain greater insight into what your client does.

Groznik encourages students to consider the persuasive or informational strategies they may already be using in their own informal social media writing. "You might think it's just for fun or romance, but there are all kinds of strategic thinking that go into personal social media writing," he said. "In fact, my wife and I met over Google Messenger. Your challenge is to take that thinking into the professional realm."

For a complete discussion of social media writing techniques and guidelines, see Chapter 9.

#### As a class:

- Find two or three examples of persuasive or informational writing that you recently did on one or more of your own social media channels. Explain those strategies to the class. Did they work well or did they fail? How do you know?
- 2. Locate two examples of professional social media writing on any of your favorite sites and share them with the class. Who are the audiences? Analyze the persuasive or informational strategies the writer used in them. Do you believe they were effective? Explain your reasoning.
- 3. Recall an example of a persuasive social media post you recently made to friends, associates, or members of a volunteer group. Which persuasive strategies did you use? How were word choices, word placement, and sentence structure important? Did the strategy succeed or fail? How do you know?

### Public Relations and Strategic Communication

The big idea behind strategic communication is that organizations are always speaking with a "brand voice." Whether intentionally or otherwise, they are constantly saying something positive or negative about their brand and themselves through stories in the media, paid advertising, product packaging, store displays, employee behavior, and everything else its people say or do. Strategic communication takes a consumer-centric, outside-in approach to all messaging.

When you think about it as a consumer, strategic communication makes a lot of sense. Try to recall the last university campus you toured, the last bank you switched to, or the last pair of athletic shoes you bought, for example. In your head, did you neatly separate what you read about the subject in the media from the commercials you heard, the way someone answered the phone, or the way the product actually performed once you bought it? Of course not. As consumers, we lump all those brand experiences and "touchpoints" together to form one overall impression about the product, service, and brand. It is somewhat surprising that organizations did not understand this reality decades ago. In public relations, you will use your writing skills to tell your organization's brand story across multiple platforms in many new and exciting ways.

### The Three Types of Media: Paid, Earned, and Owned

Working as a public relations professional in the twenty-first century, you face an overwhelming yet exciting array of media choices through which to tell your story. Never before have there been so many creative channels and audiences out there waiting for your news stories, promotional videos, or social media postings. Yet, as a twenty-first-century media writer, you must be more skillful than ever in your use of writing tools to create the right message for the right audience, cast with just the right tone. Everyone else is out in the marketplace of ideas trying to tell their own stories, so somehow you've got to rise above all of the clutter. The better you understand each of the three media types and the subtleties required in writing for each one, the farther you will go in reaching key audiences —and in building a stellar media career for yourself.

Broadly speaking, we can divide the media into three categories on the basis of whether it is paid for, earned, or owned by the client or sponsoring organization. Here is a brief explanation of each.

#### Paid Media

Paid media refers to advertising, sponsored placements, or any other arrangement in which a sponsor has paid to have its name or message displayed. For example, CenturyLink, a multinational communications company, has paid a considerable sum for the naming rights to CenturyLink Field, where the Seattle Seahawks play. Paid media are an important strategic communication tool, because they expand your audience reach and give you almost complete control over the appearance, style, and timing of your message. Drawbacks of paid media include the fact that the market has become somewhat saturated. Audiences have grown tired of advertising clutter and may be unlikely to engage with it. These days, advertising is all too easy to tune out because there are so many other news and entertainment options competing for our audience's attention. Your use of paid media will also be strictly limited by your employer's or client's budget. However, emerging opportunities in paid media publishing appear promising. Here, you can stream your written pieces onto paid media sites, providing audiences with high-quality content as you promote your own organization. For instance, iReach, a service of PRNewswire, enables customers to distribute news releases, photos, and videos to targeted audiences worldwide. In other words, your content is the advertisement. As we will see later in this chapter, paid media is also referred to as *controlled media* because the sponsor controls all aspects of the message.

#### Earned Media

Long a staple of the public relations industry, earned (or free) media refers to news or publicity generated for an organization at no cost. Examples include news releases, publicity campaigns, and story pitches created by corporations, nonprofit organizations, or government agencies, along with reviews, discussions, and social media posts. The idea is that an organization has "earned" media coverage by providing newsworthy information to a media gatekeeper. For instance, many employees of Timberland, a New England–based shoe and apparel maker, participate in its annual Serv-a-palooza service event (Photo 12.3). Their stories generate news coverage in many media markets, both large and small.

Photo 12.3: When Timberland employees participate in the company's annual Serv-a-palooza event, their stories generate news coverage in many media markets.



Photo courtesy of Timberland, 2015.

Earned media also includes grassroots social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or Pinterest. Even better, these channels give your audiences a way to easily

extend your messages into owned and paid media publishing through sharing functions on their computers or mobile devices.

As noted later in this chapter, earned media is also known as *uncontrolled media*. It is created by you but handled by others beyond your client or employer, whom you do not control. For example, once you post a social media news release on a new-product website, you give up all control of your message. A reporter or blogger picking up the story from the site could choose to write it in a negative light or focus on an unintended aspect of the product. Earned media can be risky. Yet, because information given to the media has passed the "newsworthiness" test, most clients and employers believe that news audiences will view it as more credible than paid media. This is why so many newsrooms and news sites are overrun with media pitches from public relations professionals and publicists.

### Owned Media

Owned media refer to media that your client or employer owns or controls. Examples include a company's print publications, websites, and blogs. For instance, Tacoma Community College, a two-year school in western Washington, produces program brochures, annual reports, and a course catalog. It also maintains an interactive website that enables students and community members to blog and follow the college through various social media tools. Owned media also encompasses your Facebook page and Twitter account, provided that you monitor and moderate them.

As noted later in this chapter, owned media is also referred to as *controlled media*. The advantages of owned media include the fact that as the content originator, you exert complete control over it. However, owned media gives you only a limited audience reach because users must actively seek it out. Also, many of your audience members may perceive it to be less authentic than earned media, since it is understood that your organization produced it.

So far, you've read about the unique strengths and advantages of paid, earned, and owned media. To maximize audience reach, public relations professionals must place messages in each media type to complement the strengths of each and to compensate for their individual limitations. Professionals also create common message themes that will come through in all three media types. This commonality creates *synergy*, or added energy, that would not be possible if they used any of the individual media types alone.

Craft Essential: How Can Paid, Earned, and Owned Media Work Together?

Imagine you are the publicist for an up-and-coming indie rock band from the Pacific Northwest. You are publicizing an upcoming fall tour at colleges and universities across the Midwest. To begin your campaign, you would post a news release announcing the tour on the band's website and create a series of Twitter posts (owned media), which allow for comments (earned media). Next, you would place a series of Facebook advertisements (paid media) announcing the fall tour to the band's fan base. Across all three media types, you would carefully repeat key messages and themes related to campus sexual assault prevention, a key cause the band is promoting on the tour.

### On your own:

Facebook is an example of both paid media and earned media. Websites are typical sources of owned media. Considering the example above, locate a similar combination of media for a local entertainer, company, public utility, or media business.

Compare the messages on the owned media (website and Twitter) with comments made on the organization's Facebook page. If possible, find out if the entity is paying for advertising messages.

- 1. Can you see a common thread through the messages the organization places in all the types of media? What differences can you see?
- 2. Can you identify how the organization tailors its message to the audience?
- 3. Does the organization's representatives appear to listen to and respond to feedback from earned media? How do you know?

### Uncontrolled and Controlled Media

In the public relations profession, we can also view paid, earned, and owned media from the perspective of uncontrolled media versus controlled media. How do differences between the two affect the type of writing we do and the creative strategies we employ to influence key publics?

#### Uncontrolled Media

Uncontrolled media consist of news and persuasive pieces that you write and submit to news editors, journalists, bloggers, or social media sites. This is considered to be both earned media. Examples include conventional news releases, story pitches, blog posts, and social media news releases. Once you write your piece and hand it off to the next player in the media chain, it's up to that person to decide what to do with it. Not only will a news editor or blogger determine your story's final content, but he or she will decide whether it runs, where and when, and how it appears in final form. Your byline for the news release you spent hours writing will usually disappear.

"What's the point?" you may ask. The most important point is that uncontrolled media creates news stories and media opportunities. Readers, viewers, and listeners usually consider these stories to be highly credible, much more so than advertising. Such credibility cannot be bought. Instead, it must be earned through placement of stories. In addition, uncontrolled media is cheap to produce and distribute. It carries virtually no production or placement costs, so you and your boss or client are investing only your staff time, technology costs, and perhaps some office space.

### Controlled Media

Controlled media, which is also paid and owned, is another key tool in the public relations practitioner's toolbox. Often you must retain complete control over the content, appearance, style, and timing of information you want to share with key publics. The message needs to appear a certain way at a certain time, delivered precisely to a specific audience. Television commercials, print or web-based advertisements, and company publications all fall within this category. Although production and placement will cost your employer or client some money, it is usually money well spent, because controlled media deliver precise messaging and brand images that uncontrolled media cannot.

Public relations practitioners draw upon a mix of uncontrolled and controlled media in planning any campaign or project. Wisely, they know that drawing upon some of each will ensure that their messages are conveyed to the widest possible audience and to individuals who are likely to favor one form of media over the other. In summary, uncontrolled media and controlled media each have complementary strengths. They should be used together to create maximum impact and synergy for the organization.

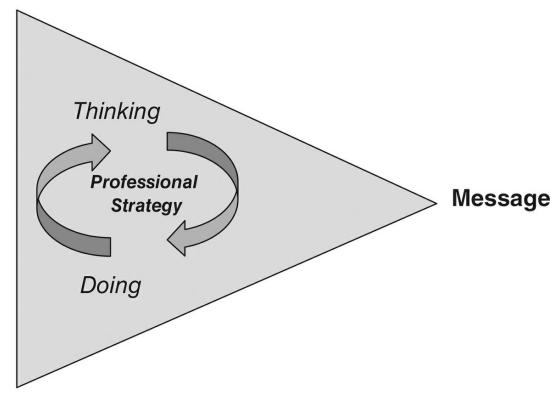
### Professional Media Writing Strategy

Recall from <u>Chapter 2</u> that media professionals, including public relations practitioners, use professional strategy to begin and organize their writing. To review, the Professional Strategy Triangle (<u>Figure 12.1</u>) is composed of three points that are critical to every media writing task, situation, audience, and message.

Situation: The situation is always your first consideration. Situation refers to the facts at hand and the type of writing you must do to complete your task. Here is a brief list of possible situation-related considerations for the public relations practitioner:

Figure 12.1 The Professional Strategy Triangle

### **Situation**



#### **Audience**

News versus persuasive writing—Am I writing a news release, an email pitch, or a presentation?

#### If news—

- What are the facts of the story? Which ones are most important?
- What details of the story are most important to the audience (news values)?
- What type of news story is this—a hard news story, a feature story, or something else?
- Who are the key players in the story?
- Where do I need to go to get the information I need?

#### If persuasive—

- Is this a positive or a negative situation?
- Who are the key players?
- Which arguments should I use?
- Which rational or emotional appeals should I use?
- How should I structure my argument and emotional appeals?

#### In either scenario—

• What are the organizational objectives for my employer or client?

 How does my message advance my employer's or client's profit or return on investment?

Audience: The audience consists of the people who read, hear, or see our message. We must be clear on who they are, so we tailor our messages to match their expectations and how they understand our messages.

#### If news or persuasion—

- Who are my readers, listeners, and viewers?
- Which demographic factors are relevant (race/ethnicity, sex, occupation, income, education level)?
- Which psychographic factors are relevant (attitudes, dispositions, lifestyles, hobbies)?
- How is my audience likely to interpret my message?
- How credible is my organization in the minds of my audience?
- What predispositions is my audience likely to have?

Message: After you've carefully considered your situation and audience, it's time to create the message. You've actively thought about all relevant factors and assembled the pieces you need to write your news or persuasive piece.

## Public Relations Writing Tools

#### Media Relations

Public relations is all about influencing public opinion. Much of that work takes place through the mass media. Even in the early twenty-first century, at a time when social media has become the channel of choice for much of our personal and professional communications, the mass media are still the go-to source for most audiences when they are seeking credible news and opinions on the major issues of the day. The mass media remain firmly rooted at the heart of the public opinion process.

As a public relations practitioner, you will devote a significant portion of your time and energy to media relations—writing and pitching news for your client or employer to journalists and editors who work in print, electronic, and digital media. In the twenty-first century, all mass media operate in a digital environment. Even small-town newspapers and radio stations utilize their websites as platforms for news content, advertising, and social media channels to interact with readers and listeners. Most reporters, editors, and news directors utilize Facebook, Twitter, and other social media tools to follow stories, cultivate news sources, and interact with their audiences.

Effective media relations starts with getting to know the key media gatekeepers in your market and establishing relationships with them long before you ask for news coverage. If you are new to the job, call and introduce yourself to the reporters who cover beats that are relevant to your client or employer. Get out of your office and meet them for coffee if possible. Invite them over for an informal tour of your client's or employer's location. The idea is to establish a one-on-one relationship with reporters. Set yourself up as a credible, professional source of information, someone the reporter can count on when he or she needs facts or quotes for a news story.

Professionals on both sides of the news desk understand that you represent your client or employer, and that the journalist represents the media and its audiences. This is perfectly acceptable, as long as you both remain professional and ethical throughout the news process. In reality, there are many ways in which public relations professionals and journalists help each other to do their jobs and to advance the public agenda. It is obvious how the journalist can help the public relations professional. If the public relations professional pitches a newsworthy story to the journalist, the client's or employer's news story gets covered and creates valuable publicity for them.

How can the public relations professional help the journalist do his or her job? Over the past few decades, newsroom staffs have shrunk considerably amid industry downsizing and layoffs. Fewer reporters, photographers, and editors are trying to cover more news stories. Here, the public relations professional can provide valuable assistance to overworked newsroom staffs by providing them with story ideas and materials, news contacts, and access to people and places they might need in order to cover a story. Otherwise, the news

staffs simply don't have the time or resources to do the job.

Was the news audience well served by the story provided by the public relations practitioner? Was the story newsworthy and somehow useful to them? Those are the most important questions. If the answer is yes, then both the journalist and public relations professional have done their jobs well. Next, we will explore the email pitch and the news release, two of the most common media relations tools used in the public relations industry.

Photo 12.4: Public relations practitioners devote significant time and effort to media relations. In news conferences, as shown here, the public relations practitioner must be able to think quickly and respond intelligently to questions from journalists.



#### The Email Pitch

In the course of a news day, reporters use social media extensively to generate leads, research stories, and communicate directly with readers and followers. A 2014 study by medium.com found, for instance, that among one hundred thousand of the top verified Twitter users, 24.6 percent were journalists and other media professionals.<sup>5</sup>

But do reporters want to receive story pitches via social media? Usually not, according to the 2014 State of the Media report released by marketing and PR software firm Vocus. In its survey of 256 media professionals from newspapers, online media, TV, magazines, and radio, Vocus found that more than 90 percent of respondents said email was their preferred method of receiving story ideas. <sup>6</sup>

Put yourself in the reporter's role, and it's easy to see why. The average reporter must write under constant deadline pressure. In an average work day, he or she is bombarded with numerous story pitches (often via phone, social media, or personal meetings). Email enables reporters to better manage their time by sifting through all those story pitches when they can catch a break and follow up with news sources, ask questions, clarify facts, or set up interviews. As a technology, email is sturdy, reliable, and accessible from mobile devices wherever the reporter might be working. It enables the sender to include web links, graphics, and attachments related to the story.

According to Brad Groznik, featured in this chapter's Frontline Media Writing Profile, the conventional news release has become less popular with journalists who now favor email pitches. "Journalists want brief, unique story pitches," he says. "I still write news releases in order to get my clients on the same page with journalists. But then I boil it down or break out pieces from it for the email pitch."

When putting together an email pitch (or any other type of news pitch), follow these guidelines:

Put relationships first. Before you even think about pitching a story via email, make sure that you have first established a personal relationship with the reporter (see above). Journalists are bombarded all day long with news pitches from PR people they may or may not know. Establish trust and credibility first. Make sure the reporter will recognize your name when it pops up in his or her inbox.

Make it brief. Write your pitch in 150 words or fewer. The journalist will appreciate this. If he or she is interested in the story, you can explain more later.

Make sure it's news. A newly hired manager or a fresh line of energy drinks may be big news to your client or employer, but is it news to the readers, viewers, or listeners in your media market? For a reporter to consider your story pitch, it must be actual news that serves his or her audience, not fake news that serves only your boss.

For help here, always remember impact, proximity, timeliness, conflict, prominence, and oddity or novelty—the news values addressed in this book. Media gatekeepers will expect that you know these news values, and that your story will contain one or more that are relevant to the news audience.

Ask, "Why this reporter? Why this news outlet?" Always make sure you are pitching the right story to the right reporter at the right news outlet. Are you publicizing a new workforce training program at your university? Then you should target the education or business reporter at your city's newspaper or television station. Or is the story about a new line of women's dress shoes coming out this fall? You should be in touch with the fashion editors at major newspapers, magazines, and digital publications. Reporters complain that they frequently receive email pitches from PR people they do not know for stories of dubious news value that have nothing to do with their story beat or news outlet. Do your homework to ensure that you do not commit these media relations sins.

Write your pitch using the Professional Strategy Triangle. Consider your news situation and audience in composing the message. If you already know the reporter, you can use a friendly tone that is somewhat less formal. Recalling that reporters are time pressured, write a tight subject line. In the message, get right to your point and explain succinctly how your story idea is news to their readers, viewers, or listeners. Be brief, punchy, and conversational. As a rule, limit your length to 150 words or so. Close with an offer to provide interview sources, additional materials, or anything else the reporter may need to write a story. Finally, don't forget to add all contact information including your cell phone number, email address, and social media handles.

If you find that it takes you 20 or 30 minutes to properly compose this brief email pitch, do not view it as a problem with your writing abilities. Good writing demands a serious time investment, even for experienced writers producing short pieces. You should take this as a sign that you are thinking carefully and employing *professional strategy*. A tight, strategically composed sentence or paragraph is difficult to write but can be highly effective—much more so than a long and windy piece that the reporter must decipher in order to grasp the key facts.

Here is another professional tip: Save that carefully composed email text and all your valuable turns of phrase for later use with other reporters and publications. You may be able to save them and avoid starting from scratch.

Proofread and edit carefully. Reporters and editors are wordsmiths. They will recognize and appreciate good writing. They will also quickly spot and discredit bad writing. Members of the media will judge your credibility and intelligence based upon your first email pitch, so make sure that your message is well composed and completely free of errors.

Send attachments with caution. Attached documents such as fact sheets, photos, graphics, or

media kits, may be useful to the reporter. But don't send them without asking permission first. Unsolicited attachments can slow down computers and add to an already overflowing inbox.

Follow up with tact. If you made a well-targeted pitch to a reporter whom you know and a week or so (depending upon the story) has passed, you may follow up tactfully to make sure the reporter received your message, and to see whether further information is needed. He or she probably won't mind and may appreciate the reminder. However, do not irritate journalists by pestering them repeatedly. Do not imply in any way that you expect them to come to your event or cover your story. That part is completely up to the journalist as the media gatekeeper, and what he or she deems newsworthy. At this point, simply be a courteous professional and to offer follow-up assistance as needed. The reporter will appreciate this approach.

Observe basic email cautions. Always be mindful that as a communications medium email has some unique characteristics. The message you send can be forwarded to many different people. Email is also instantaneous. Once you send a message, you usually cannot take it back. Don't write anything using email that you wouldn't be comfortable with the world seeing. As always, proofread and edit with great care.

Finally, ask yourself whether email is the best medium for this story pitch. Is the story controversial? Could anything be misunderstood? Have you had any past difficulties in working with this reporter? If so, pick up the phone and call or meet in person. Talking on the phone or meeting face-to-face is often the best way to break through misunderstandings and establish a lasting relationship.

For an example of a typical email pitch written according to the above guidelines, see <u>Figure 12.2</u>. This one was written to promote an upcoming concert by a popular rock group.

Figure 12.2 The Email Pitch

#### Subject Line: Jay-Tones Benefit Concert April 19 at SkyWest Theater

Dear Ryan,

Greetings from Allied Artists Talent! As you cover the entertainment beat at weeklyhappenings.com, I thought you might be interested in knowing that national recording artists the Jay-Tones will be playing a homecoming Wounded Warriors benefit concert April 19 at the SkyWest Theater in West Andover. The band, which began in West Andover in 2001, is donating all ticket proceeds to the southern Florida Wounded Warriors chapter.

If you are interested in previewing this concert, I would be happy to forward you the band's media kit. I can also arrange interviews with group members for you.

If you would like to review the concert and meet the Jay-Tones after the show, please let me know.

To learn more about the Jay-Tones or to download photos or graphics of the band, you can visit the Jay-Tones website at www.jaytonesmusic.com or on their Facebook page.

Thank you,

Tim Koplinski Lead Publicist, Allied Artists Talent (302) 445-0727 cell tkoplinski@alliedartists.com

The War Room

# Using the Professional Strategy Triangle to Write an Email Pitch

You are a junior-level public relations practitioner working for a major nonprofit agency in your city. This month, your agency is unveiling a \$2 million fund drive for a campaign to reduce teen pregnancy in the community. The fund drive is aimed at corporations, wealthy donors, and families who work or live within a 100-mile radius of the community. Funds raised will be used to launch a traveling educational exhibit for local high schools, as well as two outreach centers within the community.

Your manager asks you to write a series of email pitches to several journalists working at area newspapers and television stations to publicize the campaign. Recalling the Professional Strategy Triangle, you immediately recognize that this *situation* calls for email pitches that will be both news oriented and persuasive. You consider the needs of your employer to have the media and community members (the *audience*) think positively about the fund drive and to assist with it. You think carefully about your audience's needs and likely predispositions, along with the sensitivity of this issue, and plan accordingly. At the same time, you recall that teen pregnancy has been a major issue in the community, so your *message* will likely emphasize news values such as proximity, impact, and timeliness.

## In the Center of the Triangle: Professional Strategy

Noting the wheel in the center of the triangle in Figure 12.1, you remember that this illustrates the active thinking process you need to undertake in order to figure out how the situation and audiences will determine your message approach for the teen pregnancy campaign. You know that the quality of thinking and information gathering you do now will determine the strength of your final written piece. To recap, you need to do the following:

- 1. Consider situation and audience together.
- 2. Creatively envision the final story.
- 3. Actively learn.
- 4. Refocus thinking.
- 5. Write.

How might this process work in the case of your nonprofit agency? After carefully considering your situation and audience, you would creatively envision your news release as it might appear in finished story form on your local newspaper's website or your organization's Facebook page. Next, it's time to actively learn everything you can. Get out of your comfort zone. Leave the office and interview a few co-workers and community members. Walk around neighborhoods where you don't normally travel. Run some web searches to gather data on your community and the people who live there. Get the facts and try to assemble the most complete picture possible. Next, sit down and pore through all the information. What does it all add up to? What appears to be credible, and what needs further investigation? Run a mental "sort" on everything you have. Now, you can finally sit down and write.

#### Work with a classmate:

- Discuss how the Situation and Audience corners of the Professional Strategy Triangle will likely
  affect the message you convey in your email pitches.
- 2. Work through the center portion of the Professional Strategy Triangle and discuss how the five steps above could play out in this process. Besides the ideas mentioned above, how would you gather the information needed to make this email pitch come alive for your audiences?
- 3. Brainstorm and write two possible email pitches for the campaign. They should be brief (no more than 150 words or so), conversational, and news oriented. Keep in mind that print audiences differ from television audiences, so you may want to stress different news angles—for example, photo opportunities for a print story and visuals for a television news story. Can you provide the journalist with news sources (e.g., your manager or community volunteers) to interview? If so, indicate this in the story pitch.
- 4. Proofread and edit carefully, reading the drafts aloud to each other. Polish your copy to make it as professional as possible. Remember, if you send the email pitch with a typo or fact error in it, you cannot get it back.
- Share what you have written with the class and discuss why you took these approaches in your email pitches. Compare your final pieces with those of your classmates and discuss them with your instructor.

#### The News Release

A mainstay of the public relations profession for the past century, the news release and its variations are the most common media relations tools in the business. As a practitioner, you can expect to regularly write and issue news releases for your client or employer. Even in the high-tech twenty-first century, when many have predicted its demise, the sturdy old news release is still running strong. As consumer-friendly search engines came online in the 1990s, followed by social media in the early 2000s, news releases gave organizations a new way to bolster their online presence, often reaching consumers and end users directly with news of their products, events, or advancements.

Today, public relations professionals take advantage of search engine optimization (SEO) by embedding key searchable terms in their news releases so they can be more easily picked up by potential customers and news organizations. While newer technologies including social media, brand-based websites, and blogs are key to any public relations or marketing campaign, the news release still gives you the quickest, most reliable way to reach a wide cross-section of media. That's one reason paid news release distribution services such as PR Newswire email hundreds of news releases every day to thousands of websites and databases.

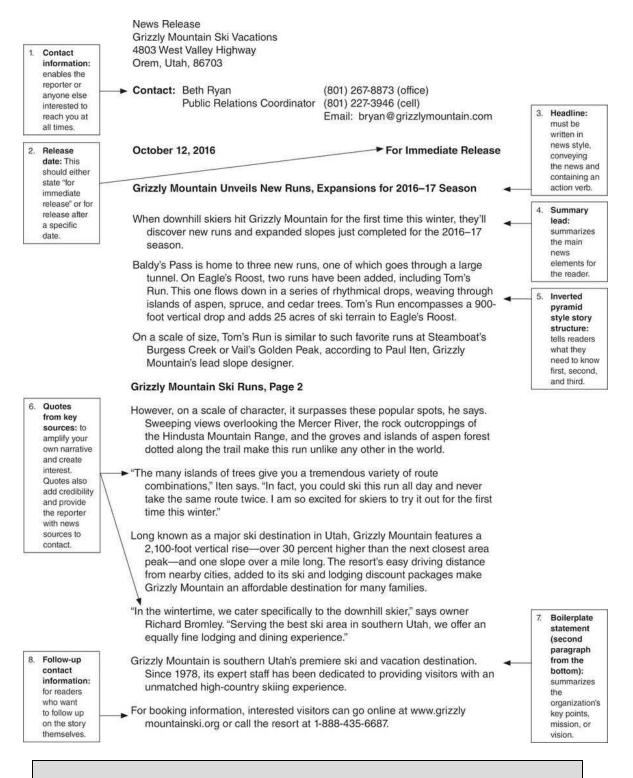
Corporations, agencies, nonprofits, and other organizations issue news releases to announce major company changes, publicize new products, preview community events, respond to crises, and release any type of news that may be useful to the public. The overriding purpose is to encourage the media to run positive stories about the organization and its accomplishments that can positively influence the public and their opinions of the organization. Positive news coverage can help elect a candidate, sell concert tickets, clarify a company's position, or repair a damaged reputation.

Organizations attach great significance to positive news coverage, and for good reason. Stories the media choose to run have passed their "credibility test" and are deemed newsworthy. In similar fashion, audiences believe news stories are more credible than advertisements and are more likely to pay attention to them. Anyone with money can buy advertising. Positive news coverage, by contrast, is harder to get and carries with it a legitimacy that advertising does not. The news release is the basic vehicle you use to tell your organization's story to the media.

Editors reject a large percentage of the releases they receive each day because they are poorly written or not relevant to their audience. Those that do run don't appear verbatim; instead media writers use them as the basis for their own stories. A good journalist will always approach your news release with a healthy degree of skepticism. He or she may view the piece as self-promotion or propaganda because it is not objective news reporting.

That's why you need to write a news release that closely resembles a news story in terms of its lead, use of quotes, precision and conciseness, and adherence to AP style. It also must answer all the possible questions a reader may have. Above all, your release must be newsworthy and well written if you expect media gatekeepers to take it seriously. For a useful example, see <u>Figure 12.3</u>.

Figure 12.3 News Release



#### Craft Essential: A News Release Checklist

To make sure that your news release grabs the media attention it deserves, follow this checklist:

- 1. Make sure it is really news. Do not steer by what your client or boss thinks is news, but by what the media considers news.
- 2. Keep it short. As a rule, limit your text to 500 words. Longer news releases are not likely to be read in their entirety. Instead, provide web links for additional information.
- 3. Create a strong headline. Your headline should clearly express your news and contain an action verb.

- 4. Write a clear summary lead. Clearly state the news in your lead, with an appropriate mix of the 5 Ws and H (who, what, when, where, why, and how). Do not bury the news further down and make the reader search for it.
- 5. Follow the inverted pyramid. Reporters or other readers are likely to spend less than a minute scanning your news release, so catch their attention with the most important facts up top. If you do not engage the reader right away, he or she will probably not read any further.
- 6. Include quotes. These add life, interest, and credibility.
- 7. Add data. Journalists will appreciate it. You can supply data from either your company or your own research. Be sure to cite sources where appropriate.
- 8. Include a boilerplate statement. This is a standard paragraph toward the end of the news release to describe your organization, what it does, and its mission or vision.
- 9. Carefully check spelling. If journalists find a typo, a grammatical error, a factual error, or an incorrect web address or phone number, they will probably toss the release immediately. Recheck everything with great care.
- 10. Double-check web links and phone numbers. Click on all those links and call all the phone numbers.
- 11. Don't forget contact information. In addition to your name, phone numbers, email address, and social media handles, you can also include links to your company website, photos and graphics, or social media accounts. All this strengthens your chances of media "pickup."

For an example of a news release that follows these guidelines, see <u>Figure 12.3</u> above.

Variations of the news release. At times, your client's situation may call for specialized versions of the news release, such as a news advisory, fact sheet, bio, or photo opportunity. These documents are usually abbreviated versions of the long-form news release and often contain bulleted items, enabling the reporter or reader to quickly scan them for key information. Often, these variations become part of a larger media kit that is posted on an organization's website, placed on a DVD, or packaged in a paper folder. Media kits are used for a variety of purposes ranging from product announcements and nonprofit fund drives to political campaigns, press conferences, and entertainment promotions. Public relations professionals customize the contents of their media kits according to the occasion.

As with writing news releases, the key to writing effective news release variations is to utilize the Professional Strategy Triangle and to think carefully about your news or persuasive situation, the audience, and the message you want to convey to them. In the news alert example below (Figure 12.4), the public relations professional is publicizing a groundbreaking for a new university building. Normally, these are dull, contrived news events that reporters try to avoid. Note how the writer in this case used professional strategy to find a clever news angle and photo/video opportunities that his or her audience of journalists and area residents will appreciate and find newsworthy.

Figure 12.4 News Alert/Photo Opportunity Sheet

## Northern Tier University Office of Campus Advancement

NEWS ALERT
January 24, 2017
Second-Graders Break Ground on University Campus
Building NTU's Campus Makes Room for Today's Elementary Kids as They Graduate

A dozen Westvale-area school children will dig their shovels into the dirt in a groundbreaking ceremony next week for the Blaine Science Center at Northern Tier University to represent the dramatic growth NTU must undergo to meet projected demand over the next few years. The groundbreaking ceremony begins at 10 a.m. on Tuesday, Feb. 1.

Today, a demographic bulge is making its way through the state's K–12 educational system. According to the State Board of Education, by 2028 more than 90,000 additional students will be seeking college degrees than we have seats for today in our public universities. NTU officials estimate that in 12 years, the university will have to serve more than 25,000 students compared to the 16,000 students it serves today.

The Blaine Science Center groundbreaking next week represents NTU's continuous commitment to growth in order to meet educational demand in the Westvale region in the next two decades.

#### **Photo Opportunities**

- A dozen second-grade students in hard hats breaking ground with golden shovels, supervised by university administrators.
- · A three-dimensional model of the Blaine Science Center and its grounds.
- · A cake made in the shape of the Blaine Science Center.
- A marching band from Westvale High School to play before and during the ceremony.
- Speeches and the first ceremonial shovel turns by James McCorkindale, president of the NTU Board of Regents and Paula Schrag, mayor of Westvale.

For information, contact Becky Edelman, NTU Office of College Relations, at (834) 355-0098 or bedelman@ntu.edu.

#### Controlled Publications

Over the course of your career as a public relations professional, you will write copy for a host of print and online publications. Depending upon the size of your employer and available staff, you are likely to also shoot photos for the publications and assist in their design and layout. Recall from our discussion at the beginning of this chapter that controlled publications are a form of controlled (in this case, owned) media.

Brochures. The print and electronic brochure serves as a mainstay for many organizations who use them to build interest in a product or service, answer questions, or provide further information. They can be mailed, posted online, placed in a display rack, or included within a media kit. They may be simple black-and-white pieces folded from a single sheet of paper, or complex four-color creations with multiple folds. The only limit is your organization's budget. As the writer, you will need to produce copy that is brief and conversational, often written in the second-person (you) voice. Drawing upon the Professional Strategy Triangle, carefully consider your situation and audience. From there, select the brochure's format and design, its intended uses, length, and order of presentation for the copy and visuals.

Photo 12.5: Organizations use print and electronic brochures to build interest in products and services, answer questions, and provide information.



Newsletters. The newsletter is a tremendously popular publication. Corporations, nonprofits, and nearly every other type of organization produce print and online versions of them for key publics including employees, volunteers, shareholders, customers, members, and many others. Mainly focused on internal publics, newsletters can range from basic black-and-white single-fold pieces to elaborate, multipage four-color publications.

As the public relations professional, you may serve as the newsletter's writer, photographer, editor, and perhaps even the designer, depending upon the size of your organization. You will interview story subjects and write brief news articles mostly in feature style. If you are starting a newsletter, your first step is to consider the Professional Strategy Triangle and the newsletter's purpose. Is it to inform key publics? To entertain them? To build support for a cause? What is the optimal mix of informational and entertainment content?

Annual Reports and Social Responsibility Reports. Corporations and nonprofit organizations produce annual reports and social responsibility reports for publics including shareholders, members, volunteers, partners, clients, media, and community members. The overriding purpose is to show stakeholders how their money, time, and efforts are being spent on behalf of the organization. Typical contents include a letter from the chairperson, an overview of the organization's activities during the past year, an income statement, and a balance sheet. Annual and social responsibility reports are produced in digital and paper formats; they are posted on organizational websites, mailed directly to stakeholders, and distributed in the community.

For this document, it is more important than ever to pay close attention to the Professional Strategy Triangle. Consider your current situation. Is it positive, negative, or something else? Your audience members likely know the organization well. They will scrutinize your copy and visuals and are counting on your information to be correct. Your writing task is to clearly explain what your organization stands for, what it does, how it spends its resources, why it chooses specific actions, and what it needs next. Your key messages must win readers' confidence, demonstrating that your organization is accountable, transparent, and providing a good value in return for their investment. Expect your draft copy to be extensively reviewed and edited by your bosses, clients, and managers before it is published.

#### The Presentation

Creating and carrying out a presentation usually requires you to write a script and prepare audiovisual materials. PowerPoint or web-based audiovisual elements can greatly enhance a speaker's message, add valuable information, and maintain your audience's attention. Here are some writing basics to make your presentation a winning one for both you and your audience:

- *Develop an outline.* Write a concise summary of your key points, but not a complete narrative of them. Note which audiovisual materials will be used with each point.
- *Plan out your slides or materials.* Working from your outline, assemble the text and graphics you will need for each slide or panel.
- Write concisely. Do not overload each slide or panel with too many words. Keep it simple, sticking to just one main idea for each slide or panel.
- Design carefully. In graphic design, good design communicates. Bad design fails to communicate. Remember this rule. Design your slides or panels simply, with plenty of white space to enhance audience comprehension. Every visual element must have a purpose. Utilize an overall theme that is appropriate for both the audience and occasion.
- Write a script for your speaker. Picture a sheet of paper with the numbered slides and titles on the left, a line down the middle, and the speakers' script on the right. The slides form the outline of the speaker's message, while the script contains the words the speaker will actually say. The slides are intended to supplement the speaker's words, not replace them. Do not hurry the audience, but do move them through the presentation at a fairly brisk pace. You will probably move to a new slide or panel every five to ten seconds.
- *Edit and rehearse*. Proofread and edit your presentation, making sure that you have covered all major points. Ensure that one slide or panel flows logically to the next, and that the overall presentation adds up to a visually coherent, well-designed piece. Finally, rehearse your presentation (or have your speaker rehearse it) several times.

#### Craft Essential: Strategizing a Presentation

As many experts have noted, the hardest part of getting started with a piece of writing is, well . . . getting started. But before you fire up your computer and hit the keyboard, step back and review the Professional Strategy Triangle discussed in this chapter. Having a strategy makes presentation writing so much easier. Consider the following:

Situation: Is it positive or negative? Am I announcing a piece of news or trying to persuade my audience of something? Which arguments and appeals should I use, and how should I structure them? What are my employer's or client's objectives? How does my message advance them? Audience: Who is my audience? What is important to them, and what do they need? How are they likely to interpret my message? Which predispositions might they have, and how credible is my organization in their minds? Also consider your audience members' ages, races, genders,

occupations, and education levels.

Remember, a presentation is never about you. Instead, it's always about the audience. Give your audience what they need, and they will probably come back to you for more of everything your organization can offer in the future.

The active thinking process: Review the center of the triangle, focusing on *creative visioning, active learning*, and *refocusing your thinking*. Picture your presentation as you deliver it to an engaged, enthusiastic audience at Rotary International. What kinds of great stories will you convey through your presentation? If you don't have any stories of your own to tell, get out of your office and talk to co-workers or other stakeholders. What anecdotes might they be willing to share? Sit down and think about how it all adds up.

Message: Now it's time to focus, to be clear about your presentation's *big idea or key message*. The audience is likely to remember only *one* idea, so you need to figure out what you want that to be. The big idea provides an internal structure for your presentation. Each sentence you write, each story you tell, and even each pause must connect directly to your big idea. A big idea well conveyed is powerful. It can turn your audience into advocates. It makes them more likely to remember your presentation and share your idea with others afterward.

Do not feel as though you must pack every possible idea into your presentation. If you try to focus on everything, you will end up focusing on nothing. Instead, think of your presentation as a piece of a larger conversation. Your job as the writer is to keep your focus and prevent it from getting too long. If anything, err on the side of brevity.

Next, focus on emotion. How do you want your audience to feel as they see and hear your presentation? Do you want them to feel optimistic? Challenged? Reassured? Guilty? Get this right, and you should be able to move your audience to your *call to action*. Ask yourself, "What is *one* thing I want the audience to do as a result of seeing this presentation?" And remember, before you can convince the audience to think or act, you must first help them solve their problems or impact their lives in a meaningful way.

Before you begin to write, it is often helpful to create a visual representation of your presentation and how they will fit together. Outlining, storyboarding, mind mapping, and scripting are a few possible techniques to use. You may find that others work better for you.

Once you begin writing, remember that your piece will likely go through several drafts before it is finalized. Do not fear the draft. Instead, view it as a way to quickly get your best thoughts down on paper. You can always revise them later.

### Summary

- 1. Describe the public relations profession and public relations process. Public relations is a social science rooted in the First Amendment. It is based upon telling the truth and ethical performance, and works alongside advertising and marketing to approach communication from the consumer's perspective and tell the organization's story through all available channels. The ROPE Model specifies that research, objectives, programming, and evaluation are key components of the public relations process. Public relations practitioners are relationship managers, communications managers, liaisons, or interpreters. Skilled writing lies at the core of the public relations profession.
- 2. Classify the three types of media: paid, earned, and owned. Paid media refers to advertising, sponsored placements, or any other arrangement in which a sponsor has paid to have its name or message displayed. Earned media refers to news or publicity generated for an organization at no cost. Owned media are media that your client or employer owns or controls.
- 3. Compare uncontrolled media and controlled media. When writing for uncontrolled media, the public relations practitioner gives up control of the piece once it is submitted to the news media or social media channels. Examples include news releases or tweets. When writing for controlled media, the public relations practitioner retains control of the material. Examples include organizational websites or brochures.
- 4. Demonstrate use of the Professional Strategy Triangle to write messages for key publics. The public relations professional first considers his or her overall *situation* and then carefully examines *audiences* that will see or hear the *message*. The professional then uses the *active thinking process* in the center of the triangle to craft the best-possible news or persuasive message.
- 5. Compose email pitches, news releases, presentations, and other public relations documents. These are foundational pieces that public relations practitioners write in the course of a normal work week. Carefully considering *audience*, *situation*, and *message* will help you to write these pieces competently. The Professional Strategy Triangle is helpful in this regard.

## Key Terms

public relations 393
ROPE Model 395
strategic communication 402
paid media 403
earned media 404
owned media 404
uncontrolled media 406
controlled media 407
media relations 410
email pitch 411
news release 417
brochure 422
newsletter 422
annual reports 423
presentation 423

### Discussion Questions

- 1. Define and discuss the public relations profession. Before you read this chapter, what were some of your initial stereotypes of the field? Now that you have read this chapter, how (if at all) has your impression of public relations changed?
- 2. Review the ROPE Model of public relations. Why is it important to conduct research before starting a campaign and conduct an evaluation afterward? How do these affect the task of writing?
- 3. Review the employment settings for public relations practitioners and the kinds of work they do. Next, recap the key personal qualities of public relations practitioners. Based on what you know about yourself, which (if any) of these settings and job duties might appeal to you as a career choice? Explain your reasoning.
- 4. Since so much of public relations is about representing organizations and managing relationships, why is skilled writing so important to the profession?
- 5. Do you believe the skill of public relations writing has become more or less important in the age of social media? Why?
- 6. What is strategic communication, and how does public relations fit into it? What can strategic communication do for an organization that public relations cannot on its own?
- 7. Discuss the differences between uncontrolled and controlled media. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?
- 8. Explain the importance of media relations to the public relations process. What are some of the things public relations practitioners should do to successfully place their news in the media?
- 9. Why is it important for a public relations practitioner to understand how journalists think and to learn how to write in news style?
- 10. How is the Professional Strategy Triangle useful in composing an email pitch? A news release? A presentation? What are the special *situation* and *audience* considerations for each type of writing assignment, and how do they impact your *message*?

### Chapter Exercises

- 1. Interview a public relations practitioner from your community or any major media market. Assemble a list of questions to determine
  - a. how this professional first entered the field and how he or she advanced to his or her current position;
  - b. the writing assignments the professional encounters in a typical week; and
  - c. the kinds of strategies he or she uses to generate ideas and write the pieces.

Note: You must interview your source either in person or by phone. Email is not acceptable.

From your interview notes, draft a 500-word profile story on this professional. The story should focus on his or her career and the strategies that he or she employs in the writing process. Write a catchy headline and a news lead. Be sure to include plenty of quotes from your interview source. Prepare to share your story with the class.

- 2. Visit your university library. Consult with a reference librarian and conduct some research on the history of the public relations profession. What surprising roles has it played in the history of the world and of the United States? Who were some of the key players and their accomplishments? Prepare a three- to four-minute talk for the class, highlighting what you learned in your research. You are also encouraged to develop visual aids to help tell your story.
- 3. Working with a partner, review the Professional Strategy Triangle. Locate an online or print publication from a public relations organization of your choice. Together, carefully read the publication along with any connected links. Write a brief analysis of your publication that addresses *situation*, *audience*, and *message* as outlined in this chapter. Describe how you think the public relations practitioner in this case utilized the four-step active thinking process in writing this piece. Be as specific as you can. Prepare to share your findings with the class, using the organization's website or a document camera to illustrate key points.
- 4. Interview a journalist from your community or any major media market. Assemble a list of questions to determine
  - a. what this media professional reports on and writes about in a typical week;
  - b. how this media professional views public relations practitioners in general, and how he or she interacts with them on the job;
  - c. how public relations practitioners might be useful to the news process, and how they might also detract from it; and
  - d. the key things that public relations practitioners should do to encourage positive news coverage of their client, organization, or story idea.

Note: You must interview your source either in person or by phone. Email is not acceptable.

From your interview notes, produce a ten- to fifteen-slide PowerPoint presentation. Focus on how this professional interfaces with public relations professionals, including the high and low points. Include practical points to help your classmates learn how to work effectively with journalists. Prepare to share your presentation with the class.

- 5. On your own, consider one or two of the public relations employment sectors above that might interest you. Briefly research them online. What do they pay? Where do the major job markets appear to be?
  - Next, pair with a classmate to discuss your findings. What did the two of you discover that was similar? Different? Share your thoughts and ideas with the class. Which types of public relations jobs and work locations seem to be the most popular with everyone, and why?
- 6. Choose a campus event, a community cause, product, or service with which you are familiar. Research print, broadcast, or online media in your community or region that would make a likely target for your

- news. Working according to the Professional Strategy Triangle and the guidelines and examples in this chapter, research and write a two-page news release targeted to this media organization. Proofread and edit the piece carefully and submit it to your instructor.
- 7. Based upon the above news release, locate the correct reporter or editor within the media organization you selected. Research his or her beat to make sure that he or she covers this type of news. Working according to the Professional Strategy Triangle and the guidelines and examples in this chapter, compose a 100- to 150-word email pitch to the reporter. Proofread and edit the piece carefully, and submit it to your instructor.
- 8. Choose a campus event, community cause, product, or service with which you are familiar. Work with organizers to design and write a basic brochure to promote it. Considering the Professional Strategy Triangle, discuss the organization's *situation* and *audience* as you gather information. Develop an overall design, as well as photos and visuals for the piece. Write and edit your copy. If you have access to design and layout software (such as InDesign), produce a final version of the brochure. Proofread and edit the piece carefully, and submit it to your instructor.

#### Additional Resources

The Museum of Public Relations: <a href="http://www.prmuseum.org">http://www.prmuseum.org</a>
Public Relations Society of America (PRSA): <a href="http://www.prsa.org">http://www.prsa.org</a>

Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSA): http://www.prssa.org

Top 10 PR Blogs You Should Be Reading:

http://www.forbes.com/sites/robertwynne/2015/07/22/top-10-pr-blogs-you-should-be-reading/

## Chapter 13 Advertising

## Chapter Outline

<u>Learning Objectives</u>
Frontline Media Writing Profile: Steven Asbury, President, Asbury Design
Advertising: A Timeless Enterprise
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The Roles of Advertising
The Advertising Profession
What Do Advertising Professionals Do?
Key Personal Qualities
The Art and Science of Copywriting
The Creative Process
Pro Strategy Connection: Are You a Design Geek or a Word Nerd? Try Being Both!
Applying the Professional Strategy Triangle to Advertising Copywriting
<u>Situation</u>
<u>Audience</u>
In the Center of the Triangle: Professional Strategy
<u>Message</u>
Time to Write: Keep It Simple
Tapping Into Human Appeals
The War Room: How Experts Write Strategy-Driven Ad Copy
Writing the Print Advertisement
The Headline
The Subhead
The Body Copy
The Call to Action
<u>Taglines and Slogans</u>
Writing the Online Advertisement
Types of Online Advertisements
Online Copywriting Guidelines
Writing an Online Advertisement Using the Professional Strategy Triangle
<u>Situation</u>
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Writing the Radio Commercial
The Four Types of Sound
Radio Copywriting and Formatting Guidelines
Writing the Television Commercial
Television Copywriting and Formatting Guidelines
Craft Essential: Writing a Television Commercial With the Fifteen Motive appeals

Summary
Key Terms
Discussion Questions
Chapter Exercises
Additional Resources

"The hardest thing about writing is getting my words to convey exactly what I'm hoping to express. I like to brainstorm. I generate a list of possible ideas and go from there. Physically writing them down with pen and paper is the most beneficial way for me personally. When I am ready to write, I find a quiet place in my apartment and attempt to minimize distractions by silencing other technology."

—Amanda Bryson, Appalachian State University

## Learning Objectives

- 1. Define advertising and its roles in society.
- 2. Describe the advertising profession and the advertising process.
- 3. Describe the art and science of copywriting.
- 4. Develop copy for a print advertisement and its various components.
- 5. Develop copy for an online advertisement.
- 6. Develop copy for a radio commercial.
- 7. Develop copy for a television commercial.

Frontline Media Writing Profile
Steven Asbury, President
Asbury Design, Eugene, Oregon
"Welcome to an agency where style meets substance." That's the slogan President Steven Asbury uses to greet clients at Asbury Design, a full-service advertising agency and design consultancy based in Eugene, Oregon.
The tagline speaks volumes about the creative approaches Asbury and his team put to work for their clients. But style and substance don't come together by accident. It takes hard thinking and a focus on strategy.



"We front-load the process with a major focus on strategy," Asbury says. "I don't believe in just sitting and writing a TV script or brand tagline. I want a real focus on strategy. What makes the company unique and well positioned in the market? Where do they want to be in ten years?"

Once Asbury's team nails down the creative strategy for a client, it's time to write the creative brief. "I constantly think, 'How can this product or service connect with the consumer, address the competition, or be relevant to the market?" Asbury says. Based on that thinking process, the designers and writers hammer out their best design and copywriting approaches.

Asbury is a twenty-year veteran of the news and advertising industries. A 1997 journalism graduate of the University of Oregon, he served as editor of UO's *Oregon Daily Emerald*. Asbury completed a design

internship at *The Oregonian* and worked as a page designer at the *News Tribune* in Tacoma, Washington. In 2005, he returned to his hometown of Eugene to open Asbury Design. The agency creates branding, advertising campaigns, websites, and related projects for clients in finance, retail, health care, nonprofit, and other sectors.

According to Asbury, the more technology advances in the twenty-first century, the more aspiring professionals should focus on their writing skills. "The technological environment is constantly evolving," he says. "But the skills of writing, strategy, and information presentation are human ones and do not change."

Successful ad copy writers must be able to express powerful ideas using few words. They can distill the essence of a brand into a brief web ad or television spot that's creative and memorable. "Give me a list of reasons why I should like a brand or buy a product; that's easy," he says. "Now do it in fewer than ten words on a billboard in a way that's memorable, gets your point across, and cuts through the clutter. That's the true genius of good advertising writing."

Asbury says that agencies are eager to hire smart graduates who can write coherent messages in a creative new way. "I don't believe that you can be a truly exceptional agency without having an exceptional writer on staff," he concludes. "The techie skills seem to always get the most attention, but having a strong copy writer on board has been a game changer for us."

### Advertising: A Timeless Enterprise

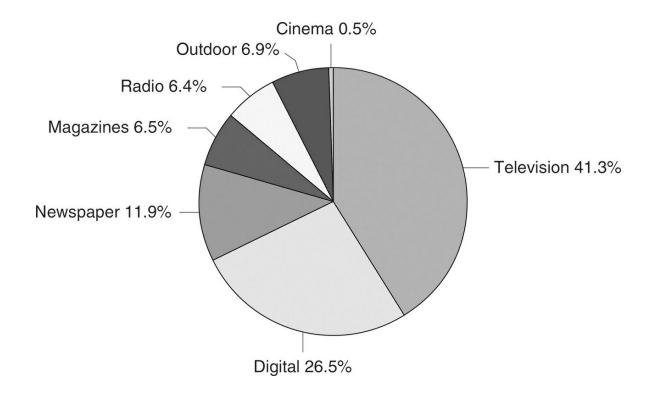
For thousands of years, buyers and sellers have needed to find each other in order to exchange goods. Advertisers have promoted their offerings through a variety of media. Graffiti from the first century CE found in Pompeii, Italy, contains advertisements for political campaigns. The modern advertising industry began in the United States in the late 1800s and is quickly moving into its third century. Love it or hate it, advertising appears to be here to stay.

Information, persuasion, and personal conversation all seem to run in one continuous circle in our digital, converged world. This can make it difficult to tell the difference between news, advertising, public relations, and marketing. Where does one begin and the other end? Is a sponsored tweet an advertisement? How do you know whether an article you read is news or paid content of some kind? As confusing as this all appears, advertising is a distinct discipline that differs from other forms of persuasion, as we will discover in this chapter.

Modern advertising is a research-driven enterprise. It is a form of strategic communication aimed at creating a desired impact or consumer response. It is compelled by a strategy informed by objectives, or measurable statements of the desired response. In the end, the advertisement's success in meeting these objectives is measured through evaluative research.

Advertising is a global, multibillion-dollar business. In 2015, advertisers including Procter & Gamble, Coca-Cola, and Toyota spent more than \$540 billion worldwide. In 2016, they invested in media ranging from television and digital to newspapers and outdoor, as shown in Figure 13.1. In 2014, the advertising industry employed more than 225,000 people in the United States alone.

Figure 13.1 2016 Global Advertising Expenditures by Media (Projected)



Source: Statista.com, 2016.

How well does advertising work? Measuring its effects can be tricky. US retailer and advertising pioneer John Wanamaker once lamented, "I know half the money I spend on advertising is wasted, but I can never find out which half." Although this dilemma still plagues advertisers a century later, large organizations recoup enough of their investment to know that advertising pays. Clearly the world's top advertisers (<u>Figure 13.2</u>) believe it to be effective.

Figure 13.2 Leading Global Advertisers by Estimated Expenditure in 2014<sup>4</sup>

- Procter & Gamble
- 2. Unilever
- L'Oréal
- 4. Coca-Cola Co.
- 5. Toyota
- 6. Volkswagen
- 7. Nestlé
- 8. General Motors
- 9. Mars Inc.
- 10. McDonald's
- 11. Reckitt Benckiser
- 12. Sony

At the same time, advertisers are sensitive to costs and will not tolerate errors in research, strategy, design, or copywriting. Smart advertising professionals know their brand. They understand their advertising situation, their audiences, the competition, and the media in which their advertisements will be placed. They engage in an *active thinking process* to carefully weigh all these factors in designing and writing their advertising messages. As we will learn in this chapter, the Professional Strategy Triangle provides a useful model to guide the process.

### **Defining Advertising**

We can define advertising according to these four basic attributes:

- 1. It is paid for by the message sponsor.
- 2. It clearly identifies the sponsor.
- 3. Traditionally, it utilizes the mass media to reach a broad audience of potential consumers. However, interactive media are changing this dynamic.
- 4. It always informs and often tries to influence or persuade consumers to take a specific action.

As we know from <u>Chapter 12</u> on public relations, advertising is a form of controlled, or paid, media. When a message must appear a certain way at a certain time, delivered to a specific audience, advertising is the vehicle of choice. It gives the organization complete control over the content, appearance, style, and timing of its message. Advertising delivers precise messaging and brand images that uncontrolled media cannot.

Advertising and Strategic Communication. Recall our Chapter 12 discussion of strategic communication (also known as integrated marketing communication or IMC). Over the past twenty years, the public relations, advertising, and marketing disciplines have largely merged under this banner. Strategic communication recognizes that organizations are always speaking with a positive or negative *brand voice* through paid advertising, stories in the news, product packaging, employee behavior, or anything else it says and does as an organization.

Strategic communication focuses on the consumer. Consumers do not separate everything they learn about a product, service, or organization into neat boxes. Rather, they gather all those brand experiences together to form an overall impression. That's why it is so important to make sure that as an organization, you are telling the same brand story through all available disciplines and channels. Picture strategic communication as a three-legged stool, with advertising as the first leg, public relations the second leg, and marketing the third leg.

Advertising is one component of strategic communication. Effective advertising generates impact or a consumer response in the form of understanding or purchasing behavior. It is based upon a strong creative strategy, driven by measurable objectives that can be evaluated at the conclusion of an advertising campaign.

## The Roles of Advertising

"Advertising nourishes the consuming power of men. It sets up before a man the goal of a better home, better clothing, better food for himself and his family. It spurs individual exertion and greater production."

—Sir Winston Churchill, 1947

Our modern society is saturated with advertising. Researchers estimate that the average consumer is subjected to more than five thousand advertisements and brand exposures each day—on phones, computers, television, radio, billboards, in newspapers and magazines, and just about everywhere else. As overwhelming as this may sound, remember that advertising benefits society in important ways that we often take for granted in the twenty-first century. The above quote from Sir Winston Churchill, prime minister of Britain during the 1940s and 1950s, reminds us that not long ago, relatively few families had the economic means to purchase a better home, better clothing, or better food. Only a few decades ago, relatively few societies were advanced enough to make common consumer goods available to the average person. In some parts of the world, people still do not enjoy this luxury. Modern advertising helps build a healthy economic marketplace in which people can buy the goods and services they need and have the necessary income to do so.

Have you ever wondered how major media organizations earn the profits they need in order to bring you objective, unbiased news each day? Advertising revenues make it possible. In the United States, we enjoy an independent system of media that is protected from control by the government or special interests, thanks to advertising.

Broadly speaking, there are three key roles of advertising:

- 1. To communicate. Advertising is a persuasive form of communication that conveys messages to consumers about products and services on a mass scale. It gives consumers information they often want and need in order to make purchasing decisions. Advertising can introduce products and brands, build awareness of them, and create positive brand images. In addition, advertising reminds established customers of their positive experiences with a brand and underscores their positive beliefs about that brand.
- 2. To contribute to the economy. Advertising provides a vital link between producers and consumers in the modern economy. It helps consumers to assess the value of a product or service based on price, quality, location, reputation, and other factors. It also stimulates economic competition. Theoretically, as more consumers learn about a product, more of them are likely to buy it. Higher sales levels tend to bring down the price of the product

over time.

3. To educate. Advertising can educate consumers by teaching them about new products and services and how to use them. Public service advertising enlightens consumers on important causes and issues. Advertising can provide us with self-images by establishing role models and forms of personal expression through the clothes we wear, the electronics we use, or the cars we drive. Advertising can both shape and mirror social values in society. This has often become a point of heated debate. For example, does the advertising industry encourage overconsumption of fast food or alcohol by heavily promoting these products? Or, is the advertising industry merely responding to what we already want as consumers? Which forces drive us to believe or act as we do? Because the values of advertising and society interact together, the answer probably lies somewhere in the middle.

#### The Advertising Profession

Advertising is a dynamic, challenging profession that will test your creative and problem-solving abilities every day on the job. As an advertising professional, you will face daily pressure to create innovative messages with fresh approaches to selling your clients' products, services, and overall brand. If this fast-paced creative buzz brings out your best qualities, you are likely to enjoy a career in this field. Here, you can put your talents to work in job settings including advertising agencies, corporations, hospitals, universities, nonprofits, media organizations, and small businesses. As a writer, you will produce creative copy ranging from outdoor slogans and web page ads to radio and television commercials and print newspaper ads.

Understand that today's advertising environment is highly converged with public relations and marketing under the strategic communication banner. For you, this means you are likely to be performing a variety of advertising-related duties in your job such as client research, writing campaign proposals and pitching them to prospective clients, copywriting, photography, videography, graphic design, and media placement. At agencies, these duties tend to be specialized and divided among team members. More often, though, you will be wearing several different hats for your employer regardless of your job title. For example, public relations practitioners typically write ad copy, shoot photographs and video, and place advertising with the media as part of their job. Your actual job title is less important to your client or employer than the creative work that you do for them.

The advertising industry is poised for major changes in the decades ahead. Emerging technologies built around mobile and interactive communication are making advertisements more personal, intimate, and interactive. These newer media channels represent a radical departure from the advertising profession's traditional mass media orientation and challenge advertisers to adopt creative new mindsets in reaching consumers. As revenue from traditional mass media advertising sales gradually decreases, advertising executives wonder how quickly revenues from new media will increase.

But whatever shape the industry takes, you can probably secure a rewarding career position in it if you are a creative and motivated individual. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts an overall 9 percent job growth for advertising professionals through 2024.

## What Do Advertising Professionals Do?

As an advertising professional, you must be able to turn out creative work in an environment that imposes tight deadlines and rapid gear shifts based on new market information. You will constantly be working to creatively solve problems—testing, revising, and updating as you go. Jobs in advertising often involve long hours and high stress levels. At the same time, producing advertising can be tremendously rewarding and plenty of fun. People who truly love the field cannot imagine doing anything else.

Your professional duties can vary widely. For example, at Asbury Design in Eugene, Oregon (see Frontline Media Writing Profile above), the team is constantly working on different types of projects. One week, they may be creating a website for a bank. The next week, they could be shooting a thirty-second television commercial for a local medical practice. Staff time is generally divided between meeting with clients, production, writing, and design work.

Photo 13.2: Advertising professionals work on teams to brainstorm creative concepts and develop innovative new ways to tell their client's "brand story" through print, digital, and broadcast media.



As an advertising professional, you also bear responsibility for your client's or employer's

overall messaging and brand image or *unique selling proposition*. Your job is to differentiate the brand of your product, service, or organization from that of the competition.

#### Key Personal Qualities

Successful advertising professionals tend to be . . .

- imaginative and able to think out of the box;
- curious and well-read;
- expressive and personable;
- energetic and driven;
- people with a good sense of humor;
- able to work and play well with others;
- flexible, diplomatic, and strong relationship builders;
- flexible in how they approach and execute strategies;
- excellent storytellers;
- strong visual thinkers;
- highly organized and able to manage multiple projects; and
- able to harness creative concepts and execute them as complete programs.

#### The Art and Science of Copywriting

Great ad copywriting is both an art and a science. Effective advertising is a marriage of creativity and logic. An imaginative, out-of-the-box approach may be exactly what your client needs in order to cut through the clutter of the other brands and to differentiate itself from the competition. Yet, that creativity must be informed by your rational analysis of the client's problem and what is needed to solve it. The answers you come up with and the strategy behind your planning decisions form the basis of your creative ideas and eventually, the finished advertisement. In other words, you logically plan out a strategy to solve the client's problem and then use creative thinking to come up with the best approach to carry out that strategy in your advertisement. Creativity means capturing the essence of a strategy and giving it creative vision.

You must also be a versatile wordsmith who understands the nuances of language and how to put it to work in print, online, and broadcast media. Most gifted copy writers confess to being "word nerds" and are constantly on the lookout for the best turn of phrase, punchline, or vivid description to create the perfect piece of ad copy. They may spend hours or days assembling the ideal paragraph of copy, returning to fine-tune it again after a review by managers or clients. Criticism and rejection are inevitable; you must not allow them to hurt your feelings.

Always remember that your client or employer is paying your salary based on your ability to use words to persuade consumers to think, believe, feel, or do something different. Even the most innovative piece of ad copy is not worth anything if it does not produce that change. Although writing advertising copy differs greatly from news writing, the basic principles we have covered so far in this text still apply. These include the need to be accurate, clear, precise, and concise in our writing. Like news writers, advertising copy writers use the Professional Strategy Triangle (Figure 13.3, p. 445) to consider *situation*, *audience*, and *message* factors, and then get to work on the *active thinking process* to break through to their best writing.

#### The Creative Process

"An idea that does not involve risk does not deserve to be an idea."

—Oscar Wilde, nineteenth-century author, playwright, and poet

As the above quote demonstrates, the creative process in advertising is about taking risks to find freshness and spontaneity. Advertising is a business of ideas, and ideas come from following strategic principles, not from sticking to rigid sets of rules. Many advertising experts have said that the biggest risk is to *not* take a creative risk. Above all, avoid doing what everyone else is doing. But proceed carefully. Although advertising is a creative endeavor, it does not give you free rein to write anything you please. Your copy must always be factual, based on a sound strategy, and written in good taste. As the Professional Strategy Triangle shows, *situation* and *audience* factors will always drive the advertising *message*.

In the advertising industry, creative professionals work to generate ideas through a process known as concepting, a form of mental creation. Ideas can spring from your ability to create new combinations and see relationships among people, places, concepts, or things that you hadn't considered before. Once you have that aha moment, you are well on your way to determining your creative concept or power idea that will fuel the advertisement or campaign.

Focusing on Step 3 in the center of the Professional Strategy Triangle below, let's explore one way to come up with a creative idea for an advertisement. In his 1926 book *The Art of Thought*, English sociologist Graham Wallas<sup>Z</sup> outlined a four-step process that advertising professionals still use today:

- 1. *Preparation:* Define the problem, need, or desire. Gather any information the solution or response needs to account for and set up criteria for verifying the solution's acceptability.
- 2. *Incubation:* Step back from the problem and let your mind work through it. This step can take minutes, weeks, or even longer.
- 3. *Illumination:* This is the aha moment. Here, ideas arise from your mind to provide the basis of a creative response. These ideas can be pieces of the whole or the whole thing itself. Unlike the other stages, illumination is often very brief, involving a rush of insights within a few minutes or hours.
- 4. *Verification:* In this final stage, carry out activities to discover whether or not what emerged in the illumination step satisfies the need and the criteria defined in the preparation stage.

Using the above process, suppose that you are a staff member with your county's United Way organization. Working with your local team, you determine through a survey that people who live in your region need a fun midwinter event to break up the cold-weather blues and enjoy doing something creative together. A musical event ranked as a top choice in the survey. The survey results also indicate that community support runs strong where you live, and that people want to donate to worthy causes to help their less fortunate neighbors who are often unable to pay their winter heating bills. After you have thought about your research findings for a few days, an idea strikes you: how about a "winter warmth" bluegrass jam weekend at a local hotel? A portion of the admission price would support the local United Way fund for heating assistance, and local businesses would also benefit from this event through the visitors it will draw.

You run the idea by your team and several community members, who all agree this is a strong concept. After some more creative thinking, you come up with the following advertising slogan to be used in print, online, and local radio advertising: *The Winter Warmth Bluegrass Jam: heating up the music and warming your neighbors too!* 

Pro Strategy Connection

# Are You a Design Geek or a Word Nerd? Try Being Both!

Consider your communication skills. Are you a visually driven person who can easily sketch out a drawing or glance at a design and know why it makes sense? Perhaps you are more of a word nerd who always knows what to say and how to say it.

According to advertising professional Steven Asbury, featured in this chapter's Frontline Media Writing Profile, you can be both. Throughout two decades in the news and advertising industries, Asbury has always worked to develop his visual and verbal skills alongside one another. "You can have the most aesthetically pleasing advertising, brand, or publication design, but if the content [writing] isn't there, it's not going to be effective. Similarly, good content is lost when not presented in a visually engaging manner," Asbury says.

At Asbury Design, Asbury and his creative team follow this strategy as they produce designs and copy for clients in finance, retail, health care, and other sectors with work that wins awards and delivers sales for their clients. "Even if you are a student interested in visual aspects of communication such as design or videography, you still need to be able to write well to succeed," Asbury says.

Figure 13.3 The Professional Strategy Triangle for Advertising

# Advertising Situation Thinking Professional Strategy Doing Advertising Message

Advertising Audience

# Applying the Professional Strategy Triangle to Advertising Copywriting

You can apply the Professional Strategy Triangle (Figure 13.3) to writing advertising copy by observing its three corners:

#### Situation

- your employer's or client's advertising objectives
- how your message can maximize their profit or return on investment
- what you are selling—a product, service, brand or a combination of all three
- what you are *really* selling—an image, a feeling, a solution, safety, love, or something else
- your client's brand position compared to competitors
- what you want your audience to think, feel, or do as a result of seeing your advertisement
- whether you should use an emotional appeal, a logical one, or some combination
- how you should structure your argument and its appeals
- which media you are using—print, broadcast, online, outdoor, or something else

#### Audience

- who your audience is, and whether they are retail, institutional, or business-tobusiness customers
- what your audience needs, wants, and desires (as opposed to what *you* want to communicate)
- credibility of your brand in the mind of the audience
- who is already loyal to your brand, who is undecided, and who you still need to win over
- audience research you have in hand, and what research is needed
- relevant demographic factors (e.g., race/ethnicity, sex, occupation, income, education level)
- relevant psychographic factors (e.g., attitudes, dispositions, life stages, hobbies)
- likely audience needs according to the fifteen Motive Appeals (discussed later in this chapter)
- audience likes, dislikes, or biases
- unique media characteristics likely to impact your audience's reading, viewing, or listening behavior

Next, turn your attention to the center of the triangle and follow these steps:

## In the center of the triangle: Professional strategy

- 1. Consider the answers to your *situation* and *audience* questions above.
- 2. Actively learn. Immerse yourself in the problem (speak with the client, spend time with customers, visit stores, try out the product or service, etc.).
- 3. Generate creative concepts and creatively envision the finished ad or commercial.
- 4. Refocus your thinking.
- 5. Write.

#### Message

After careful consideration of everything above, it's time to start drafting your rough ad copy. Here, you can put the fifteen Motive Appeals (discussed later in this chapter) to work.

Do you notice how the Professional Strategy Triangle forces you to mesh art with science, and creativity with logic? This is as it should be. Writing great advertising copy is both an art and a science.

#### Time to Write: Keep It Simple

Another key piece of professional strategy is to write your ad copy simply and briefly. In other words, be precise and concise. Remember, you are trying to gain space inside the consumer's head with an idea that will penetrate, stick, and make a difference for the client. A simple idea travels faster. The faster the idea travels, the more powerful it grows and the longer it stays in the consumer's head. Think of yourself as polishing your rough idea like a diamond, turning it over and over until you get down to its essence. This process sharpens the idea and increases its effectiveness.

Advertising pioneer Maurice Saatchi has underscored the overriding importance of simplicity saying, "Simplicity is all. Simple logic, simple arguments, simple visual images. If you can't reduce your argument to a few crisp words and phrases, there's something wrong with your argument." Like the other forms of media writing we study in this book, great ad copywriting is all about precision and conciseness—conveying the most powerful ideas using the fewest words possible.

These additional guidelines should help you to sharpen your ad copy:

- Focus on a single idea. Make one key point and support it with other copy points.
- *Make it personal.* Think of your audience and speak directly to them. Use the second-person voice (you) instead of the third-person voice (he, she, or they).
- *Have a conversation.* How would this copy sound if you read it to your friends at a party? Think of how people talk in every-day affairs and model these language patterns.
- Use descriptive imagery. Paint a picture in the mind of your reader or listener.
- *Bend a few English rules.* Unusual phrases, sentence fragments, oddly paired words, and other unconventional syntax can occasionally give you just the turn of phrase you need for the perfect ad copy. As long as it makes sense, it may sometimes be OK to deviate slightly from Standard English.
- *Break it up.* Readers find it easier to read short sentences and small blocks of copy. Break yours into smaller chunks to make it more digestible and visually friendly.
- Avoid ad-ese. Steer clear of the generalities, clichés, and stock phrases that make advertising irritating, such as "Prices have hit rock bottom at Whistler Electronics, but they won't last, so get your computer today!" There is nothing unique about such copy, and consumers have trained themselves to tune it out instinctively.

#### Tapping Into Human Appeals

The best advertising copy grabs consumers by appealing to their problems, goals, desires, or aspirations. As a copy writer, you must work to understand people, to gain insights into them, and to sympathize with them. As a starting point, consider that human nature is a constant, and that we all share universal senses, emotions, needs, and desires—for example, fear, sex, hunger, or anger. Most of us can see, hear, touch, smell, and taste things. As the writer, you can put these factors to work in your favor.

Communication scholar Jib Fowles has studied how advertisements work by examining their emotional or "subrational" appeals. He created the fifteen Motive Appeals, first introduced in <u>Chapter 11</u>. Fowles writes that all humans share the following:

- 1. The need for sex
- 2. The need for affiliation
- 3. The need to nurture
- 4. The need for guidance
- 5. The need to aggress
- 6. The need to achieve
- 7. The need to dominate
- 8. The need for prominence
- 9. The need for attention
- 10. The need for autonomy
- 11. The need to escape
- 12. The need to feel safe
- 13. The need for aesthetic sensations
- 14. The need to satisfy curiosity
- 15. Physiological needs

Later in this chapter, we will show you how to use the fifteen Motive Appeals to boost the effectiveness of your ad copy.

The War Room

# How Experts Write Strategy-Driven Ad Copy

In any advertising situation, members of the creative team must make sure every advertising campaign they produce is driven by a strong creative strategy. The team begins building the campaign's strategy by asking questions such as

- What is the essence of the brand?
- What makes this organization unique and well positioned in the market?
- Where does this organization want to be in ten years?
- How can this strategy
  - address the competition?
  - be relevant to the market?
  - o connect with the consumer?

As the team contemplates the optimal creative strategy, its members brainstorm collectively and also do some thinking on their own. Creative breakthroughs can come at odd times, sometimes when they are least expected, so be ready for them.

## As a class:

- 1. Explore "The 30 Best Print Ads of 2014," chosen by the editorial team at Creative Bloq, a leading design and advertising website at <a href="http://www.creativebloq.com/advertising/30-best-print-ads-2014-121413769">http://www.creativebloq.com/advertising/30-best-print-ads-2014-121413769</a>.
- 2. Choose one or two of your favorite ads from the lineup. Study the ads and read the background information provided with each one. Based on what you know, answer the following questions:
  - a. What do you believe was the creative strategy behind this ad?
  - b. How well does this ad address the strategy questions posed above?
  - c. How do you think creative strategy drove the copy for this commercial? Be as specific as you can.

# In pairs:

- 3. Choose one or more of "The 30 Best Print Ads of 2014" from Creative Bloq. As applicable, write
  - a. an alternate headline,
  - b. alternate body copy,
  - c. an alternate slogan or tagline, and
  - d. an alternate call to action.

If you need help identifying these elements, you can review the material found later in this chapter.

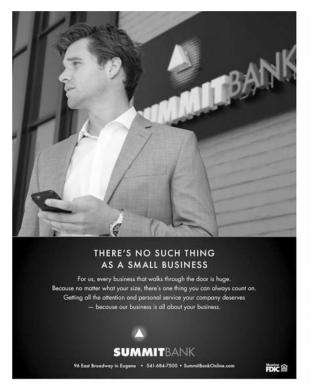
4. In a sentence or two, explain how these rewritten elements convey the original creative strategy behind this advertisement.

# Writing the Print Advertisement

In the advertising industry, professionals create print advertisements using a copy sheet and a layout sheet to show how it is designed. In general, the print advertisement includes one or more of the following elements (Figure 13.4):

- 1. Promise of the benefit (headline)
- 2. Explanation of the promise (subhead)
- 3. Elaboration of the story (body copy)
- 4. Proof of the claim (body copy, tagline, or slogan)
- 5. Call to action (at the end of the ad)

Figure 13.4 Print Ad Series From SummitBank







Source: Asbury Design, Inc., 2016.

#### The Headline

The headline is one of the key elements in a print advertisement and is just as important as the visual element. If written well, the headline grabs attention and conveys the main message behind the advertisement. If written poorly, it will not attract prime prospects, who in turn will probably not read the rest of the ad.

Copy writers create headlines designed to do one of several things. The headline may promise a benefit of a product or service. It may challenge an existing assumption or invoke curiosity. It may set the mood for the rest of the ad. Whichever approach you choose, your headline should usually be short and simple, narrowly targeted to prime prospects, invite the prospect into the ad, and use vivid language with an action verb.

Although you should be bold and creative in writing headlines, be careful that you do not mislead your readers, deceive them, or offend them with inappropriate language. Doing so can ruin your credibility with the reader and could even land your client or employer in legal trouble. If you find anything questionable, be sure to check with your manager or your organization's legal counsel.

## The Subhead

As noted above, the subhead enables you to expand upon the promise you made in the headline. Use it to present new material to invite the reader into your ad. Subheads are written in smaller type than the headline and usually run longer. Think of the subhead as the transitional link between the headline and the body copy. You may not always need a subhead. Let your logic and creativity guide you here.

#### The Body Copy

Now it's time to elaborate on the story you set out in the headline and subhead. If your ad uses body copy, it will form the persuasive core of your advertisement. Body copy must accomplish many things. It must state the ad's main argument, advance the sales message, explain and prove the product's benefits, and answer any questions raised in the headline. The body copy must clinch the deal for the reader.

You may choose to write your body copy using one of several different approaches:

- 1. Factual or straightforward: Provides basic information about the product or service.
- 2. *Narrative:* Tells the product's story; may be written in the first-person or third-person voice.
- 3. *Explanation:* How does the product or service work?
- 4. *Dialogue:* Creates a conversation for the reader to observe.

Although body copy is generally brief, always pay special attention to the first paragraph and the last paragraph. Your first (or lead) paragraph must be compelling because the reader will quickly decide here whether he or she wants to read the ad any further. The last paragraph should be tied to your original creative concept or power idea.

# The Call to Action

The call to action may run at the end of the body copy or as a line of its own. It prompts the reader to respond to the ad and provides information on how to take action.

# Taglines and Slogans

Taglines and slogans usually appear at the end of the body copy. A tagline is a brief phrase that summarizes the creative concept or power idea. A slogan is a unique phrase or motto that an organization uses consistently for its brand across many different settings.

#### Writing the Online Advertisement

The World Wide Web offers advertisers a unique medium thanks to its interactivity. Consumers can initiate two-way communication, directly responding to the ads they see, making contacts, and perhaps even purchasing on the spot. The web also enables consumers to provide instantaneous feedback on what they like, don't like, and are willing to purchase. Your client or employer must make sure that someone is tuned in and listening to them. Web analytics can show an advertiser immediately how many people clicked on an ad or even potentially saw it. Online advertising is also distinguished from traditional forms of media by its speed. A website with ads that load quickly and direct people to where they need to go is likely to pull in more visitors who will want to return for future purchases. Finally, web advertisements provide immediacy, enabling you to quickly produce, distribute, and update advertisements.

Although the web is a highly visual medium, readership studies have confirmed that readers respond mostly to words they see on web pages. The web is driven primarily by words. To write online ad copy that grabs potential consumer attention and makes them respond positively, return to the Professional Strategy Triangle in this chapter. Revisit the questions that are most relevant to online advertising. Contemplate your situation and think about the unique characteristics (interactivity, speed, and immediacy) of the web and how your client or employer can best exploit them in an advertisement. Consider your audience and how online media create a different reading experience for them.

People read online media much differently than they read print media. Unlike print, reading online is a nonlinear, point-and-click experience. Readers scan for quick, useful information, and then click elsewhere the second they see something new. Recall the last website that you visited or online ad that you read. You approached the reading experience much differently than a magazine or book, didn't you? Eye-tracking studies reveal that online text is harder to read, that it causes greater eye strain than reading printed text, and that people read about 25 percent slower online than they do on paper. Similar studies show that on the average web page visit, users read no more than 28 percent of the words. Instead of poring through lines of text in a linear fashion, online readers scan the page and pick out single words and sentences that grab their attention.

# Types of Online Advertisements

Generally speaking, online advertisements fall into one of the three following categories:

- 1. The banner ad: horizontally formatted and runs along the top or bottom of a web page
- 2. The sidebar ad: typically runs in vertical or block formats along the side of a web page
- 3. The pop-up ad: can run in any size and format. Although pop-ups tend to annoy readers, advertisers like the fact that they are nearly impossible to ignore.

The banner ad is the most common of these formats. Like other types of online ads, banner ads can contain images, color, sound, animation, and interactive features, in addition to text. Picture a banner ad as an outdoor advertisement. It must be brief and compelling, grabbing the reader's attention with as few words as possible. In addition, banner ads often work to drive readers to the advertiser's website by offering coupons or prizes.

#### Online Copywriting Guidelines

Noting these situation and audience-related factors, write your online ad copy with these guidelines in mind:

- *Be brief, precise, and concise.* This is key in all media writing, but especially so in the online environment. As a general rule, reduce your text by half compared to what you would write on paper.
- Be direct and conversational. Reach out to the prospect and tell him or her what to do next
- *Grab reader attention.* Make a compelling statement or ask a provocative question.
- Feature your brand, product, or company name prominently. Don't make it a mystery for the reader to uncover.
- *Highlight keywords*. Use boldface or italics, and when you need to offer more detail, highlight them as hyperlinks to take readers to other relevant pages.
- Stick to one idea per paragraph. Your readers will appreciate this.
- *Use bulleted lists*. Lists are more visually friendly than paragraphs. They also work well for presenting complex ideas. When needed, you can also turn bulleted items into hyperlinks.
- *Take advantage of interactivity.* View your ad as an opportunity to interact with the consumer. How can you entice him or her to contact you or make a purchase?

Online advertising is a rapidly evolving form of promotion, with fresh channels and formats appearing every time new technologies emerge. Many new ad formats are showing up in social media channels and on mobile devices. At the same time, keep in mind that regardless of the medium, your readers will always appreciate good writing. The creative and copywriting guidelines described in this chapter apply equally to online advertising.

# Writing an Online Advertisement Using the Professional Strategy Triangle

Scenario: You are a member of the creative team at the Concepts-Squared advertising agency in San Antonio, Texas. You are a strong creative type all the way around; copywriting is your strong suit. You have landed the contract to advertise the online product launch for RockMaster Electric Guitars, Inc., a new company based in nearby Austin. RockMaster makes high-quality affordable electric guitars and accessories for aspiring musicians on a budget. Its founders and technical staff are proud of how well the instruments play and sound for just \$499. The wood, electronics, and attractive finishes are among the instrument's strong selling points. Even better, professional musicians who have tested out the guitars in performance settings report that RockMaster guitars have their own special "groove" and that they perform better than many other more expensive models.



RockMaster electric guitars are available at major guitar retailers across the United States, including Guitar Zone and Music Planet. You could pursue several possible markets for this guitar, but your agency team and the RockMaster group decide that the prime prospects are male and female teenagers who are serious musicians in need of a well-made entry-level instrument.

#### Situation

Reviewing the situation corner of the Professional Strategy Triangle, you determine the following:

- 1. In order to succeed as a business, your client needs an immediate response from consumers followed by strong sales.
- 2. Beyond the superior build, playability, and sound of this guitar, you are selling its "groove" or "vibe," and its sonic power to take musicians to new artistic heights.
- 3. Compared to several other established brands of electric guitars, your client's brand position is relatively weak. Other guitar makers with ample advertising budgets are able to dominate much of the landscape.
- 4. Considering the guitars' high-quality construction, low price, and fun vibe, you know that you will be using a combination of rational and emotional appeals.

#### Audience

Moving over to the audience corner of the triangle, you think harder about your target

market for this advertising campaign. You hold a series of two focus groups at the agency. Key findings include the following:

- 1. Your prime prospects mostly live at home and enjoy a relatively high level of disposable income, perhaps with help from their parents.
- 2. Teenagers want a high-quality instrument they can afford, one that will enable them to grow as musicians. They also desire to be the "cool" musicians in their peer group—the ones who are playing trendy guitars that look and sound great.
- 3. Young musicians would like to be able to purchase more expensive electric guitars, but their \$1,500 to \$4,000 price tag usually makes this impossible. At the same time, they intensely dislike cheaper, poorly made instruments, and view them as amateurish.
- 4. So far, you have generated a small but rabid group of teenage brand loyalists who eagerly play and endorse the guitars wherever they go.
- 5. You also have some existing research on teenagers' musical tastes, psychographics, and disposable income. All indicators from it are positive for your client.
- 6. Reviewing the fifteen Motive Appeals from this chapter, you immediately recognize that number 6 (the need to achieve) and number 8 (the need for prominence) are your strongest appeals to use in this campaign. Number 13 (the need for aesthetic sensation) is a strong appeal, as well.

## In the center of the triangle: Professional strategy

Thinking about all you know about your advertising situation and audience, you set out to learn more. You visit local music stores and hang out with the sales staff and customers. You talk to them about RockMaster guitars and their likes and dislikes. You attend several performances and watch people play the guitars, carefully observing how they sound and how the players respond to them. Next, you go online and troll around on a few musicians' blogs to see what players have to say about RockMaster instruments. Everything appears to be very positive so far. As you are an amateur musician yourself, you take a RockMaster guitar home for a few evenings and try it out. You take special note of how it feels in your hands, its weight, how it smells, and how it sounds when you plug it in to try a few of your favorite tunes.

Now it's time to turn your creative gears. You and the team begin the concepting process to come up with your top creative concepts or power ideas. You creatively envision the final advertisements and try hard to break through to that aha moment. Eventually, you land on three creative concepts to present to the client:

- 1. RockMaster Guitars: Because it's your time to break through.
- 2. RockMaster Guitars: Go new places, with money left over to buy the amplifier.
- 3. RockMaster Guitars: For the build. For the vibe. For the groove.

#### Message

Following several focus groups to test the creative concepts, you and the RockMaster group settle on choice number 1 for the campaign. You get right to work on creating a web ad that will run on two websites aimed at teenage musicians, as well as the website of a major guitar retailer. You recall from this chapter that copywriting must be both a creative and logical process informed by strategy. You refer back to the guidelines for writing online advertisements in this chapter. After several hours of hard work, you create the following copy:

#### Headline:

RockMaster Guitars: Because it's your time to break through.

#### Body copy:

Head for the Big Time now at a price you can afford with:

- playability and tone to rock your world (links to sound samples).
- groovy designs and finishes made for your personal vibe.
- made-in-the-USA quality with hardwood construction and hand-wired electronics.

Interactive element with call to action:

Check us out at RockMaster Guitars (web link) or play one at any of these guitar retailers (web link).

Thanks to the analytics built into the web advertisement, your agency was able to track a high "click-through" rate on this ad, giving you a solid indication that many interested prospects are shopping on the company website and looking for dealers. Website hits and dealership visits confirm this data. Following the first month of web ads, the RockMaster Guitar sales division happily reports that it has sold 850 guitars across three key models—a 35 percent increase above previous sales levels. Two guitar retailers have secured advance orders for 445 more instruments. Your client is ecstatic!

## Writing the Radio Commercial

Radio is all about sound. Radio commercial copy emphasizes sound to help your audience visualize the action in your spot. Audio provides your *gateway to the mind* in radio commercial copy. That's what is meant by *writing for the ear* when you create radio ads. But what does it mean to emphasize sound in your radio copy? You might ask, "What type of sound should I use?" or "What types of sound are important?" Here are the four types of sound you can include in both radio and television commercials:

#### The Four Types of Sound

Radio and television commercials utilize the four types of sound: the human voice, natural sound, music, and sound effects. Let's look at each one:

- 1. The human voice. Announcers and actors supply the human voice in radio. Voices can be designed with instructions for a particular tone of voice (happy, excited, sad, sexy, etc.), gender, and accent. The sound of an actor's voice can communicate much to an audience, and you set up the personality of radio ad characters solely through actors' manipulations of their voices.
- 2. *Natural sounds*. The sounds of nature might include a rambling stream, trees blowing in the wind, storms, animal noises like a coyote's howl or an owl's hoot, the sounds of people in small groups and crowds, or the sound of traffic. Natural sound sets the scene for your commercial and gives the audience a sense of context for your action.
- 3. *Music.* Here, music serves as an underbed for the commercial. Underbed refers to music heard underneath the audio action. Underbed music is typically composed and sold for that very purpose. Never use copyrighted music, such as songs you hear on the radio, as underbeds for your radio advertisements. Copyright is a form of legal protection provided to the authors of "original works of authorship," including literary, dramatic, musical, and artistic works. You must have a *synchronization license* to use music as an underbed. This is granted when you buy a set of music specially composed for that purpose.

Music can also be up front in your commercial, playing a key role in its concept. Perhaps you create an ad that starts with the famous beginning of Beethoven's Symphony no. 5 as an attention getter, and then you have a silly character imitate it with a "duh duh duh . . . duh . . . duh duh duh duh . . . " before moving to your pitch. Here the music plays a direct role in the advertisement.

4. *Sound effects.* Sound effects modify other sounds. They might be an echo, a pitch variation, or filtered sound, which creates special effects based on the original sound.

#### Radio Copywriting and Formatting Guidelines

Radio copywriting features sound in a role that helps the audience picture a situation in the mind. Much like classic radio dramas focused on the *theater of the mind*, radio commercials draw upon sound to inspire imagery in people. Here, you should use natural sounds to set the scene. Give instructions to vocal actors and actresses to employ accents and vocal tone to stress characterizations. Use sound effects to enliven the sounds of voices and natural audio. Music underbeds help to warm up or soften the mood of a radio ad.

Script conventions play an important role in making your copy communicate all important details to the announcers, actors/actresses, and producers involved in creating the ad you write. The best copy ideas can be lost to those producing the ad if they are communicated poorly. Formatting guidelines vary across the radio industry. Here is one possible set of guidelines:

- 1. Use one-inch margins for your paper.
- 2. List your agency or organization name and date across the top.
- 3. List client, product, title, length, writer, and medium single-spaced and left aligned.
- 4. Line up announcer and character cues in the left-hand column, and dialogue in the right-hand column.
- 5. Write sound cues in ALL CAPS and single-space them.
- 6. Write music cues in ALL CAPS. Single-space and underline them.
- 7. Write all dialogue in upper and lower case, and double-space it.
- 8. Place sound or music cues within dialogue where they are to be heard in the copy.

Figure 13.5 below presents an example of a radio commercial script illustrating the above features in the copy:

Figure 13.5 The Radio Commercial Script

#### THE CREATIVE MINDS AGENCY Date: 9/23/17

Client: GoodEats2U

**Product:** Healthy Meals for Students

Title: A Tasty Discovery

Length: 60 seconds Writer: Shelly Lai Medium: Radio

SOUND: FADE IN: SOUNDS OF COOKING IN THE KITCHEN: FOODS ON THE

STOVETOP SIZZLE . . . . . A TIMER GOES DING, DING, DING . . . . .

A DINNER ENTRÉE COMES OUT.

EMMA: Hey, Noelle, what's that great smell? And where did that fancy chicken

parmesan come from? I didn't know you went grocery shopping.

NOELLE: I didn't! While you were struggling to find some decent food over at the

campus dining hall last week, I found this cool wholesome food delivery

service called GoodEats2U.

EMMA: Really? What's it all about?

NOELLE: Emma, it's so easy. All I had to do was go to the GoodEats2U website and

choose the meals I wanted. They brought it right to our door. Their foods are fresh, healthy and super easy to make with all the ingredients you

need. And—it's cheaper than our student meal plan.

SOUND: GLASSES CLINKING AND SILVERWARE CLICKING.

EMMA: Wow, I never knew that we had a better choice as college students. I'm

getting hungry just looking at it. Can I try some?

NOELLE: Sure. Just grab that plate and dig in.

EMMA: Yum . . . this tastes just like my mom's cooking, and we didn't even have to

leave our apartment to get it!

MUSIC: UPBEAT MUSIC: TWO STANZAS, THEN FADES UNDER

ANNCR: Who knew eating at college could be this good? GoodEats2U. The healthy

food you need, done your way. Check it out at GoodEats2U.com or give us

a call at 1-888-EATS2U2.

#### Writing the Television Commercial

Copywriting for television builds upon the same script practices used in writing radio copy, but with several key differences. Here, you use visual elements to make your appeal to the audience. This is one of the most important principles of writing television advertising. Visuals illustrate needs better than almost any other type of content. Our minds naturally react in an intense way to things we see, almost as though images create a direct connection to our emotions.

By their nature, television ads must be brief. You usually have sixty seconds at most to make your appeal and bring your audience to action. Emphasize only one or two appeals in your television ad. There is no time for sophisticated sequences that show subplots and secondary details. Develop only one theme fully and build it around one or two appeals. For possible starting points, revisit Jib Fowles's fifteen Motive Appeals discussed earlier in this chapter.

Make sure that your television ad copy clearly identifies your product's brand or company name. Place the brand front and center in the commercial at least twice—usually, the more the better—and always end with visuals and audio that directly represent the client's brand. Show the audience familiar brand representations including logos, signage, buildings, and products or services associated with your client.

Photo 13.3: Copywriting for television commercials is a highly creative endeavor that calls upon the advertising professional's best skills in visual and verbal communication.



# Television Copywriting and Formatting Guidelines

As with radio, television formatting guidelines vary across the industry. Here is one possible set of guidelines:

- 1. Use one-inch margins for your paper.
- 2. List your agency or organization name and date across the top.
- 3. List client, product, title, length, writer, and medium single-spaced and left aligned.
- 4. Set up a two-column format with descriptions of video content on the left and the audio content on the right.
- 5. On the video side, write video instructions in ALL CAPS and single-space them.
- 6. On the audio side, write all dialogue in upper and lower case and double-space it.
- 7. Place sound or music cues within dialogue where they are to be heard in the commercial.
- 8. Write sound instructions in ALL CAPS and single-space them.
- 9. Write music instructions in ALL CAPS. Single-space and underline them.

Photo 13.4: Advertising professionals create ad copy that is based on a strong creative concept or "power idea." They understand that inspired copywriting draws upon both creativity and logic.



Figure 13.6 below presents an example of a television commercial script illustrating the above features in the copy. It draws upon the same GoodEats2U scenario used in the radio commercial:

Figure 13.6 The Television Commercial Script

THE CREATIVE MINDS AGENCY

Client: GoodEats2U

Product: Healthy Meals for Students

Title: A Tasty Discovery

Length: 60 seconds
Writer: Shelly Lai
Medium: Television

VIDEO AUDIO

CAMERA UP ON EMMA AS SHE ENTERS THE APARTMENT AND THROWS DOWN

HER BOOK BAG

CUT TO EMMA AND NOELLE IN THE KITCHEN AS THEY GREET EACH OTHER

PAN TO NOELLE, WHO IS HAPPILY FINISHING UP A GREAT-LOOKING DINNER

CUT AND ZOOM IN TO EMMA, LOOKING INTERESTED AS SHE MOVES CLOSER TO CHECK OUT THE MEAL

ZOOM OUT TO THE TWO GIRLS. NOELLE EXPLAINS THE PRODUCT AS EMMA LOOKS ON IN AMAZEMENT

PAN RIGHT TO NOELLE, WHO IS SETTING THE TABLE AS EMMA WATCHES

ZOOM OUT ON THE KITCHEN AS THE GIRLS BEGIN EATING DINNER

IMAGE OF GOODEATS2U LOGO WITH WEBSITE ADDRESS AND PHONE NUMBER SOUND: COOKING IN THE KITCHEN: FOODS ON THE STOVETOP SIZZLE . . . . . A TIMER GOES DING, DING, DING.

Date: 9/25/17

EMMA: (EXCITEDLY) Hey Noelle, what's that great smell? And where did that fancy chicken parmesan come from? I didn't know you went grocery shopping.

NOELLE: I didn't! While you were struggling to find some decent food over at the campus dining hall last week, I found this cool wholesome food delivery service called GoodEats2U.

EMMA: Really? What's it all about?

NOELLE: Emma, it's so easy. All I had to do was go to the GoodEats2U website and choose the meals I wanted. They brought it right to our door. Their foods are fresh, healthy and super easy to make with all the ingredients you need. And — it's cheaper than our student meal plan.

SOUND: GLASSES CLINKING AND SILVERWARE CLICKING.

EMMA: Wow, I never knew that we had a better choice as college students. I'm getting hungry just looking at it. Can I try some?

NOELLE: Sure. Just grab that plate and dig in.

EMMA: Yum . . . this tastes just like my mom's cooking, and we didn't even have to leave our apartment to get it!

MUSIC: OPEN LOUD ON UPBEAT MELODY THEN

FADE UNDER AFTER 2 SECONDS

ANNCR: Who knew eating at college could be this good? GoodEats2U. The healthy food you need, done your way. Check it out at GoodEats2U.com or give us a call at 1-888-EATS2U2.

Craft Essential: Writing a Television Commercial With the Fifteen Motive Appeals

Recall Jib Fowles's fifteen Motive Appeals discussed in this chapter. Team up with one or two classmates to form an agency team. Write a fifteen-second television commercial.

# The Scenario

Product: PowerMax Torque Aid, an all-natural sports drink

*Product attributes:* naturally sweetened; contains an herbal blend proven to replenish electrolyte levels and revive exhausted athletes; no artificial coloring

*Current brand position:* weak compared to that of major beverage makers. PowerMax sports beverages were popular in the 1990s, but they have not been a serious competitor for the past fifteen years.

Prime prospects: high school and college-age athletes playing all sports

# The Process

- 1. Hold a twenty-minute concepting session to develop your creative concept or power idea. Review the fifteen Motive Appeals and discuss which ones best inform your concept. What will be your overall strategy?
- 2. Generate three creative concepts and choose the strongest one.
- 3. Write the commercial. Create a two-column video script sheet as shown above. Place descriptions of video content in the left-hand column, and place the audio in the right-hand column.
- 4. Dialing up your best creativity, write the video and audio portions of the commercials. Try to spread the creative and writing duties around so that everyone gets a turn.
- 5. Reconvene as a class to present your television commercial.
- 6. As a class, discuss the creative strengths and limitations of each commercial. After hearing your classmates' feedback, what might you do differently next time?

## Summary

- 1. Define advertising and its roles in society. Advertising is a message paid for by a sponsor that clearly identifies that sponsor. Traditionally, it utilizes the mass media to reach a broad audience, although interactive media are changing this. Advertising plays communication, economic, and educational roles in society.
- 2. Describe the advertising profession and the advertising process. Working at agencies, corporations, nonprofits, and other organizations, advertising professionals conduct research, write campaign proposals, write copy, shoot photos and video, and handle media placement. Successful professionals are imaginative, out-of-the-box thinkers who are also curious, energetic, and highly organized.
- 3. Describe the art and science of copywriting. Copywriting is a marriage of creativity and logic, an art form that captures the essence of a strategy. Professionals logically plan out strategies and then apply creative thinking to them.
- 4. Develop copy for a print advertisement and its various components. Use the Professional Strategy Triangle to analyze situation and audience and the fifteen Motive Appeals to create the print message.
- 5. Develop copy for an online advertisement. Like print advertisements, online ads use the Professional Strategy Triangle to analyze situation and audience and the fifteen Motive Appeals to create the online message.
- 6. Develop copy for a radio commercial. First, use the Professional Strategy Triangle to analyze situation and audience and the fifteen Motive Appeals to create the radio message. The role of sound is especially important here.
- 7. Develop copy for a television commercial. Use the Professional Strategy Triangle to analyze situation and audience and the fifteen Motive Appeals to create the television message. The roles of visuals and sound are especially important here.

# Key Terms

```
advertising 437
creative process 442
concepting 443
creative concept 443
power idea 443
fifteen Motive Appeals 448
headline 452
subhead 452
body copy 452
call to action 453
tagline 453
slogan 453
interactivity 453
banner ad 454
sidebar ad 454
pop-up ad 454
four types of sound: the human voice, natural sound, music, and sound effects 459
underbed 460
```

## Discussion Questions

- 1. Review the Frontline Media Writing Profile at the beginning of this chapter. Based on what you learned, what are the keys to becoming a successful advertising copy writer?
- 2. Define and discuss the advertising profession. Before you read this chapter, what were some of your initial stereotypes of the field? Now that you have read this chapter, how, if at all, has your impression of advertising changed?
- 3. Discuss the role of advertising in society. Start by reviewing the opening quote from Sir Winston Churchill. Do you believe that advertising benefits society in its communication, economic, and educational roles, or is it a negative force? Explain your thinking.
- 4. Review the employment settings for advertising professionals and the kinds of work they do. Next, recap the key personal qualities of advertising professionals. Based on what you know about yourself, which (if any) of these settings and job duties might appeal to you in a career? Explain your reasoning.
- 5. Why is advertising considered to be both an art and a science?
- 6. How is the Professional Strategy Triangle used in writing advertising copy? Provide some examples of situation, audience, and strategy-related questions one should ask as he or she prepares to create the advertising message.
- 7. List the major elements of a print advertisement, and discuss its attributes for success.
- 8. How do copy writers create online advertising copy? Which unique features of the web dictate their approaches?
- 9. What are the special message-related characteristics of radio that make it a unique medium? How does this impact the work of the copy writer?
- 10. What are the major elements of the television commercial? How can the copy writer use these to his or her advantage?

## Chapter Exercises

- 1. Interview an advertising professional from your community or any major media market. This person could work in print, online, radio, or television advertising. It is likely that he or she will work in several of these areas at once. Assemble a list of questions such as these:
  - a. How did this professional enter the advertising field and advance in it?
  - b. What are the writing assignments encountered in a typical week?
  - c. What kinds of strategies does this professional use to generate ideas and write advertising copy?
  - d. What does he or she enjoy most about this profession? What is most challenging?

Note: You must interview your source either in person or by phone. Email is not acceptable. Be sure to ask the advertising professional for samples of his or her work.

From your interview notes, produce a ten- to fifteen-slide PowerPoint presentation. Focus on the career of this professional, his or her personal qualities, and the role that strategy and creativity play in the copywriting process. Include ad samples in your presentation. Prepare to share your presentation with the class

- 2. Locate samples of three magazine advertisements that you believe represent significant creative risks for the advertisers. Consider the strategy behind these risks and why the advertiser thought those risks were worth taking. In your mind, did the creative risks succeed or fail? Which advertisement do you think was the biggest success and the biggest failure? Explain your findings to the class, using a document camera (a projector that displays printed material) to show your ads to them.
- 3. Working with one or two classmates, choose a campus event, a community cause, product, or service with which you are familiar. Working according to the Professional Strategy Triangle and the guidelines and examples in this chapter, come up with a creative concept for a series of print or online advertisements or radio and television commercials. Reflect upon the concepting process. What were your key insights that helped you arrive at the best creative concept or power idea? Prepare to present your findings to the class.
- 4. Based upon the results you generate in question 3 above, draft copy for a series of two or three advertisements or commercials for this client. Work according to the creative and copywriting guidelines presented in this chapter. If you are skilled with print or web design programs, you can also lay out rough designs for the ads. Make a presentation to the client and give them your best pitch for your favorite creative concepts. If the client likes the ads and wants to use them, finish the ads to the best of your ability and submit them to the client for production.
- 5. Working with a partner, review the Professional Strategy Triangle. Locate a radio and a television commercial online. Together, write a brief analysis of your commercial that addresses situation, audience, and message as outlined in this chapter. Describe how you think the copy writer in this case might have utilized the four-step active thinking process in writing this commercial. Be as specific as you can. Prepare to share your findings with the class. Play back the commercials to illustrate your key points.
- 6. Locate an online advertisement that you recently responded to for a product or service that interested you. Reviewing the fifteen Motive Appeals in this chapter, consider which of them made this advertisement work for you. What prompted you to respond to the ad and make a purchase or click through to the advertiser's website? Prepare a 350-word analysis paper for your instructor.

#### Additional Resources

Advertising Age Magazine: <a href="http://www.adage.com">http://www.adage.com</a> AdWeek Magazine: <a href="http://www.adweek.com">http://www.adweek.com</a>

American Advertising Federation: http://www.aaf.org

American Association of Advertising Agencies (4A's): http://www.aaaa.org

# Chapter 14 Business Communication

# Chapter Outline

Learning Objectives

Frontline Media Writing Profile: Michael Hissam, Communications Consultant,

Trans-National Executive Communications

Business Communication: Anything but Boring!

The Corporate Communication Profession

A Brief History of Corporate Communication

**Business Communication Flows Four Ways** 

**Downward** 

**Upward** 

Horizontal

Cross-Channel

Using the Professional Strategy Triangle for Business Communication

**Business Situation** 

**Business Audience** 

**Business Message** 

Tools of Business Communication

The Email Message

The War Room: Using the Professional Strategy Triangle Example to Compose an Email Message

The Memorandum

<u>Pro Strategy Connection: Five Ways to Boil Corporate Messages Down to Their Essential Meanings</u>

The Business Letter

The Proposal

Craft Essential: Writing a Proposal for Freelance Videography Services

**Summary** 

**Key Terms** 

**Discussion Questions** 

**Chapter Exercises** 

Additional Resources

"The ability to write well continues to be fundamental to my advancement as a person and a professional because it proves my ability to bring order to chaos, seek out resources, and focus on a singular purpose. I continue to tackle challenges intellectually, in teams, or when addressing a larger group because the ability to communicate translates into stronger interpersonal skills, action-oriented leadership, and influential presentations in every professional field."

—Nicole Grayburn, Allegheny College

# Learning Objectives

- 1. Discuss the corporate communication profession and its connection to skilled writing.
- 2. Describe how business communication flows four ways.
- 3. Explain how communicators use the Professional Strategy Triangle to create business communication pieces.
- 4. Write business communication pieces including email messages, memos, business letters, and proposals.

Frontline Media Writing Profile
Michael Hissam, Communications Consultant
Trans-National Executive Communications, El Paso, Texas



As a professional business communicator, Michael Hissam believes that any business communication worth its salt is rooted in truth, careful message design, and a deep respect for the audience.

"You should treat every piece of writing you do as though it is a news story in a major publication, not just a piece of spin," he says. "At the end of the day, what have you told your audience that they didn't know before?"

In four decades of work as a public relations executive with Delphi Corporation/General Motors (GM) in Warren, Ohio, and Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, Hissam found plenty of opportunities to test this belief as a liaison between management and shop-floor employees. During the Mexico assignment, he directed public

relations, communication, and regional media departments for Delphi/GM, specializing in Mexico and border trade issues.

Hissam served as editor of corporate publications for GM's Packard Electric Division, supervising weekly publication *Direct Connection* and divisional magazine *Cablegram*, earning thirteen Awards of Excellence. Hissam also produced and hosted two corporate regional radio programs, *Packard Electric Live* and *GM Together*. He produced and moderated a weekly audio-on-cassette *Let's Talk Business*, which brought together the divisional operations director and four hundred first-line supervisors (production foremen)—four levels below the director—for frank, unfiltered discussions of company-related issues. Each of these programs was a winner of the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) prestigious Gold Quill awards.

"Too often, management would pressure us to write 'fluff' pieces just to make the employees happy," Hissam says. "Employees really needed—and still need—issues-driven communication that truthfully conveys the facts and issues to them. They worked in a very competitive marketplace where to lose also meant losing jobs. I would tell my bosses, 'Look, you have one chance to tell employees your story on your terms. If you don't, someone else will do it for you and not on your terms.' I found that my writing not only helped management clearly convey their key messages, but it also made them accountable to employees."

Hissam earned his bachelor's degree in business administration at Cleveland State University in 1970 and his master's degree in mass media arts and journalism from Clarion University of Pennsylvania in 2013. In his first college job, he worked as a DJ and commercial writer for WNOB-FM in Cleveland. Following a successful career with GM and Delphi, Hissam founded Trans-National Executive Communications in El Paso, Texas. Fluent in Spanish, Hissam regularly travels throughout the United States and Mexico to provide public relations counsel to clients in a range of industries. Somehow, he still finds time to write a Sunday business column for the *El Paso Times*, and continue a twice-a-month podcast to six thousand Delphi/GM retirees involved in pension litigation.

Hissam acknowledges that media writing is a complex and difficult process. Sometimes it hurts.

"A wise person taught me that that pain is inevitable, but suffering is optional," he concludes. "If you want to help someone, do it through your writing. Never forget that you are helping somebody understand something today he or she did not understand yesterday."

# Business Communication: Anything but Boring!

Consider for a moment the many exciting career possibilities that lie ahead of you in the media professions. Regardless of your career choice, it is a safe bet that you will work at a number of different jobs over your lifetime. Wherever you work and whatever your job title, you will need to be able to produce routine business communication pieces that are clear, accurate, diplomatic, and written with the situation and audience in mind. The memos, email messages, letters, reports, and proposals you'll write over your career may not be contenders for the Pulitzer Prize, but they are more important than you may think to your organization's success and to your own career advancement. Build a reputation as a professional who can develop, write, and produce well-targeted business communication pieces, and you will go far. In many respects, employees who are skilled writers can determine their own career paths. If you go into business for yourself, your writing skills will enable you to promote your product or service, attract partners or investors, and manage employees more effectively than your competitors.

Employers appear to agree with this view. In its *Job Outlook 2016* survey, the National Association of Colleges and Employers asked 260 US employers which attributes they look for on a candidate's résumé. More than 78 percent of respondents chose both "leadership" and "the ability to work in a team structure." "Written communication skills" followed closely behind at 70.2 percent. This shows that when employers must choose between you and another equally qualified candidate, you will have an advantage if you exhibit stronger leadership, teamwork, and writing skills. These factors can make or break a hiring decision.

Rather than being routine correspondence anyone could write, everyday business communications are the lifeblood of a healthy, functioning organization. So many people on the inside and outside, from managers and employees to volunteers and community members, rely upon written communication in order to perform their jobs and advance the organization's goals.

## The Corporate Communication Profession

Professionals who excel at business communication often become specialists in corporate communication (see Frontline Media Writing Profile above). Corporate communication can be defined as "a set of activities involved in managing and orchestrating all internal and external communications aimed at creating a favorable point of view among stakeholders on which the company depends."<sup>2</sup>

Corporate communicators help create and manage the messages their client or employer sends to audiences. These audiences can include employees, media, marketing channel partners, and the general public. As with public relations (discussed in <a href="Chapter 12">Chapter 12</a>), the idea is that organizations should strive to communicate consistent messages to all their internal and external stakeholders. Corporate communicators use written and other forms of communication to help the company explain its mission to those stakeholders, and to combine the company's visions and values into one cohesive set of messages. They also serve as the conscience of the organization and share responsibility for upholding its reputation.

As a corporate communication professional, you would work on projects such as building a new brand or identity for a corporation, improving corporate reputation, communicating during a crisis, communicating with employees, or managing investor relations. If you are an aspiring writer who would enjoy working in a corporate setting, you may wish to explore a career in this profession.

# A Brief History of Corporate Communication

Modern corporate communication in the United States traces its history to the first half of the twentieth century, when leaders at companies such as General Motors (GM), General Electric (GE), and American Telephone & Telegraph (AT&T) began to realize that a corporate conscience, good works, and a positive image were crucial to their long-term business success. They needed corporate communication professionals to lead in those efforts.

Arthur Page was a public relations visionary and one of the nation's first true corporate communicators. Page became AT&T's first vice president for public relations in 1927. He was the first public relations executive to serve as an officer and member of the board of directors of a major public corporation and held board positions with Prudential Insurance, Westinghouse Electric, Chase Manhattan Bank, and other companies.

Photo 14.2: Corporate communicators create and manage the messages that flow between a company's management and employees, the media, marketing channel partners, and the general public.



Page's legacy of communication excellence lives on through the Arthur W. Page Society, an organization comprising public relations executives from leading agencies and corporations.

Its mission is to strengthen the management policy role of chief public relations officers. Based upon Page's lifetime of work, society members assembled The Page Principles<sup>3</sup> (Figure 14.1).

Figure 14.1 The Page Principles: Seven Proven Principles That Guide Our Actions and Behavior

#### Tell the truth.

Let the public know what's happening with honest and good intention; provide an ethically accurate picture of the enterprise's character, values, ideals, and actions.

#### 2. Prove it with action.

Public perception of an enterprise is determined 90 percent by what it does and 10 percent by what it says.

#### 3. Listen to stakeholders.

To serve the enterprise well, understand what the public wants and needs and advocate for engagement with all stakeholders. Keep top decision makers and other employees informed about stakeholder reaction to the enterprise's products, policies and practices. To listen effectively, engage a diverse range of stakeholders through inclusive dialogue.

#### 4. Manage for tomorrow.

Anticipate public reaction and eliminate practices that create difficulties. Generate goodwill.

#### 5. Conduct public relations as if the whole enterprise depends on it.

No strategy should be implemented without considering its impact on stakeholders. As a management and policymaking function, public relations should encourage the enterprise's decision making, policies and actions to consider its stakeholders' diverse range of views, values, experience, expectations and aspirations.

#### 6. Realize an enterprise's true character is expressed by its people.

The strongest opinions—good or bad—about an enterprise are shaped by the words and deeds of an increasingly diverse workforce. As a result, every employee—active or retired—is involved with public relations. It is the responsibility of corporate communications to advocate for respect, diversity and inclusion in the workforce and to support each employee's capability and desire to be an honest, knowledgeable ambassador to customers, friends, shareowners and public officials.

#### 7. Remain calm, patient and good-humored.

Lay the groundwork for public relations successes with consistent and reasoned attention to information and stakeholders. When a crisis arises, remember, cool heads communicate best.

Source: The Arthur W. Page Society; http://www.awpagesociety.com. Used with permission.

# Business Communication Flows Four Ways

Generally speaking, each of the business communication pieces you write will flow in one of four directions:

## Downward

Downward communications move from an employee in a position of higher authority, such as a supervisor or manager, to an employee in a position of lower authority. Subjects can range from policies and procedures to job performance and daily operational matters. Written formats include email, memos, newsletters, or policy manuals.

# Upward

Conversely, upward communications move from an employee in a position of lower authority to an employee in a position of higher authority. Subjects might include sales figures, human resources activities, or manufacturing productivity. Employees use written formats including email, memos, reports, and letters.

Worthy organizations promote upward communication because it provides an information pipeline managers and executives need in order to make sound decisions about their organizations. It also enables employees to be heard by their superiors as they offer suggestions or air grievances. Good managers appreciate upward communication because it provides them with feedback needed to understand whether employees received or understood the downward communications that were sent to them.

## Horizontal

Often, employees within the same department or organizational unit need to share information. Horizontal communications are used in a lateral fashion to schedule meetings, plan activities, or coordinate assignments, for example. Written formats can include email, memos, or reports.

# Cross-Channel

When employees across different work units need to share information, they use cross-channel communications. These pieces serve to coordinate work schedules, schedule meetings, or plan joint work activities. Written formats can include email, memos, and reports.

# Using the Professional Strategy Triangle for Business Communication

The Professional Strategy Triangle (Figure 14.2) provides a useful model as you prepare to write any type of business piece for internal or external audiences. The triangle focuses your thinking on these key considerations related to *business situation*, *business audience*, and *business message*:

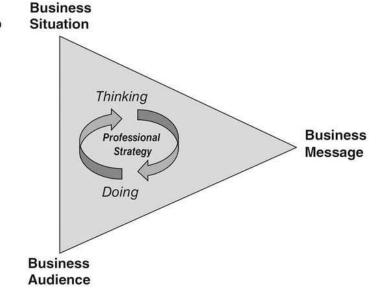
Figure 14.2 Applying the Professional Strategy Triangle to Business Communication

#### **Business Situation**

- positive, negative, or routine situation
- · employer's business or organizational objectives
- goals of this document
- · context of this situation
- background factors significant to this document

#### **Business Audience**

- primary and secondary audiences
- where they work and type of work they do
- · likely level of education
- type of stakeholder: customer, shareholder, community member, management team member, or employee, for example
- key positions held within the organization by audience members



- · what they should understand or do as a result of this message
- · audience expectations, needs or wants; work goals
- · how this document is likely to affect them, and how they are likely to respond to it
- · media channels used by this audience

#### **Business Message**

- essential message that must be conveyed
- best format for the message (face-to-face, presentation, email, memo, or letter, for example)
- optimal tone to strike in this piece
- primary information that must be included in the message; secondary information
- · ideal length for this message

Before you sit down to write, first carefully consider the tone you want to convey in your written piece. What is your attitude toward the subject of your message and your audience? Is this a serious, routine, or humorous piece? How do you want your personality to come across?

Tone is a significant factor because it affects the way your audience will perceive your message. It should project confidence, courteousness, and sincerity. Be sure to write your piece at an appropriate reading level for your audience and stress the benefits to them of paying attention to your message. To convey a tone of respect and professionalism, you must also write with sensitivity, carefully avoiding any language that could be perceived as discriminatory or offensive.

# Tools of Business Communication

Throughout your career, in whatever type organization you work, you will write many email messages, memos, business letters, and other routine communication pieces each month. The ability to write them quickly and proficiently is a sorely underrated skill, but it is one that you can refine through work and practice. Let's take a look at several of the most common tools of business communication and see how it's done.

## The Email Message

Although social media has become a highly popular form of communication, the email message still stands as the most common communication method used by organizations today. It is easy to see why. Working from your desktop, laptop, or mobile device, you can compose a single message and quickly send it out to multiple recipients with great accuracy. Email enables you to quickly transmit information when you need an immediate response from recipients. Because readers can also access email from their mobile devices, it is highly convenient for both senders and receivers. Finally, email allows you to attach documents, photos, graphics, and web links for the reader.

When is it appropriate to use email in your organizational setting? In general, you may choose this medium if your messages are relatively short and simple and require quick dissemination or reader response. Email is also a smart choice for conveying routine, fact-based information, and when visual and nonverbal cues are not important to readers' understanding of the message. Remember that nearly all companies monitor internal email, so use it accordingly. However, suppose your message is more complex, sensitive, or personal. Suppose it contains bad news or requires someone's immediate attention. In that case, pick up the phone or walk down the hall to speak with your co-worker in person. For serious company matters, a business letter may be the most appropriate choice. Choosing the correct medium for your message is just as important as composing the content of the message itself.

Organizational email culture. What is your organization's email culture, or accepted set of norms for sending email? It pays to know. Before sending your first message, consider the following questions:

- 1. How do employees communicate with one another? Do they typically use email, call one another, or walk down the hall to speak in person?
- 2. How formal is the chain of communication? For example, can employees email top managers directly or must they go through their immediate supervisors?
- 3. How much, if any, personal email does the organization allow among employees?
- 4. What is the overall tone of email communication in this setting? Do messages tend to be formal or more friendly and relaxed?
- 5. Which types of messages do employees tend to send out via email versus other forms of communication? Are email messages mostly routine and positive in nature, or might they address other topics?
- 6. How do employees typically treat attachments, copying, blind copying, and forwarding?

The popularity of email can make it a challenge to read and respond to the sheer volume of messages you might receive in an average day, not including the messages you send out to

others. That's why your writing must be concise and tightly targeted to the requirements of the medium. Consider the following guidelines:

- Write in short sentences and short paragraphs to aid readability. This is especially important in the first and last paragraphs.
- Do not use all capital letters in the body of your message. It is rude and considered to be the written equivalent of shouting.
- Use bold, italics, and underling as needed, but sparingly. Remember, all emphasis equals no emphasis.
- Choose a font style, size, and color that are readable on both mobile and desktop devices by a range of readers.
- Compose your subject line carefully. This is arguably the most important component of an email message. Your subject line must be specific and descriptive to capture reader interest and also convey the essence of your message as briefly as possible. How will you make it stand out from the dozens of other messages your reader receives in a day?

#### Examples:

Weak subject lines:

Subject: Checking in . . .

Subject: How Are You Doing?

Strong subject lines:

Subject: Follow-Up on Yesterday's Sales Meeting

Subject: Wrapping Up Your Performance Evaluation

- Address your message only to those recipients who really need to see it. Don't waste everyone else's time.
- Use the "cc" line for anyone else you wish to copy on the message, and the "bcc" line for those you want to "blind carbon copy." The bcc feature enables you to send your messages to multiple recipients, but each recipient will not be able to see who else has received a copy. This feature protects the privacy of each recipient. Be careful about whom you copy. Recheck your recipient list to ensure that you are not sending the message to those who shouldn't see it, or those who don't need to see it. And never forget that email is not a private form of communication. Assume your message will be shared far and wide, perhaps beyond your organization.
- Begin your message with a friendly greeting that projects your personality and the tone you wish to convey. Let situation and audience considerations guide your thinking here. For a familiar co-worker, you may begin with, "Good afternoon, Stephanie" or "Hello again, Jon." However, if you are addressing your boss or a company stockholder, you would more likely lead off with a more formal salutation such as, "Dear President Bruni" or "To the Members of the Committee." Be sure to spell the recipient's name correctly and use his or her correct title.
- Just as you would use the inverted pyramid for a news story, write your email

message in a clear and direct style. State your main idea up front in one or two sentences. Use succeeding paragraphs for secondary and third-level ideas. Use simple sentences and short, digestible paragraphs to aid reader comprehension.

- Remember the medium you are using. Email is all about brevity and reader convenience. It is not the place for lengthy narratives written in long dull blocks of text. That type of writing is better executed in a letter or report.
- Conclude your message on a positive note, with a summary of what you want and an offer of any assistance or further information needed.
- Below your signature, include a signature block with your name, job title, organization, and contact information including your professional Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook or other social media accounts.

You're almost ready to hit "send." But there are a few things you should do first:

- Proofread your email subject line and message carefully several times. Edit as needed.
- Double-check all facts, dates, names, numbers, and other information.
- Make sure you have said exactly what you needed to say, no more and no less.
- Verify that you have addressed the correct recipients.
- Be sure that you have set the proper tone for this piece of communication.

Photo 14.3: Although email provides a reliable channel for routine written communications, sensitive or extraordinary situations require you to walk out of your office and speak face-to-face with people.



With every email message you send, your credibility rests upon carefully composed text that is clean and error-free. Once you hit the "send" key, you cannot retrieve the message and edit it again. This is especially important to remember if the email is emotionally charged or involves sensitive subject matter. Think hard and think twice before sending your message.

The War Room

Using the Professional Strategy Triangle to Compose an Email Message

## **Business Situation**

You are the assistant manager of Riverview Pub & Grill, a recently opened local establishment with a dozen employees in a small college community. The place serves a variety of handcrafted beers along with appetizers, lunch, and dinner. Business has been brisk, but service and food quality have been spotty due to problems with employee turnover, server training, and food supplier issues.

Two weeks from today, you will be marking your one-year anniversary with an exclusive party to show your appreciation for pub customers, and to underscore your commitment to give them quality service and food. You will be mailing out invitations to 250 community members who have been especially loyal to the pub over the past year. The party will feature a lineup of unique beers at half price and free appetizers all night, plus live musical entertainment.

Employee enthusiasm has been mixed. You and your management team are excited about the event and fully committed to the success of the business. Part-time employees are understandably less committed and have not been happy about earning lower tips because of the service and food quality issues. You fear that their lack of enthusiasm could show on the big night and defeat the major goals of this event.

This morning, you are writing an email message to enlist everyone's help in preparing for the customer appreciation party. You will need everyone on hand for most of the day before to clean up, decorate, and prepare the food and beverages. This may cause your college-student employees to miss a class or two, and some of them will have to also work a shift that night.

# **Business Audience**

Your primary audience is a dozen part-time employees who work as servers and cooks. Most of them are college students at the local university. Several employees appear to be highly committed to your business and to customer service, while others don't seem to care much. You need to fire up their enthusiasm and make them understand that a successful event can lead to more business and greater earnings for them. You also need to instill a spirit of camaraderie and let them know this can be a fun place to work.

Your secondary audience consists of two other full-time managers, both of whom are co-owners of the Riverview Pub & Grill. Everything they have is riding on the success of the event, and they are very excited about the business. Both are local residents.

## Business Message

- 1. Review the Professional Strategy Triangle (Figure 14.2) and the email writing guidelines above.
- 2. Applying those guidelines to this scenario, write a 250-word email message to employees encouraging them to show up and spend the day working to prepare for the customer appreciation party. Do not look at the example below until you have fully composed your message.
- 3. Once you have composed the message, explain to your classmates how you applied situational and audience factors to your piece. Which factors were most important, and how did you account for them?
- 4. When you are finished, compare your email message to the one in <u>Figure 14.3</u> below. How does this message account for situational and audience factors? What sort of tone does it set? If you received this message from a work manager, would you respond positively to it? Explain your thinking.

# Figure 14.3 An Email Message to Riverview Pub & Grill Employees **TO: The Riverview Pub & Grill Team**

#### SUBJECT: Pre-Party Employee Event Thursday, Nov. 12!

Good morning, Riverview Pub & Grill employees! With our one-year anniversary and customer appreciation event coming up in exactly two weeks, I am writing to invite you to participate in a special employee work party on Thursday, Nov. 12. We plan to work from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. to prepare for the big day.

"What's in it for me?" you might ask. How about your regular hourly pay, free food for the day, and a \$20 Speedy Gas card? That's right—we appreciate you as employees and need your enthusiasm to make this event the best it can be. If our party is as successful as we are hoping, we anticipate a boost in business and customer loyalty, translating to more work hours and bigger tips for you.

I know that some of you have classes or other commitments on this day. We completely understand and would appreciate any hours that you may be able to work. Either way, you will still get your food and gas card. Please get back to me as soon as possible to let me know whether you are available.

This event can make a big difference for all of us. Thanks for all you do to make the Riverview Pub & Grill the best it can be!

Sincerely, Kelsey Flanigan, Assistant Manager Riverview Pub & Grill (805) 394-5528 cell kflanigan@brewpub.com

#### The Memorandum

The memorandum, or memo, is a message you send to someone who works within your organization. Because the memo is written on paper, it is considered to be a more formal document than an email message. Memos can be posted in high-visibility areas of the workplace or filed for later reference. Remember that some employees at your company, such as janitors or maintenance staff, may not have ready access to email or social media. A memo on the break room bulletin board may be one of the only ways they would see important workplace communications.

In general, memos serve two purposes. First, they bring attention to issues, problems, and tasks that need to be accomplished. Second, they help resolve those issues or problems. Memo writing follows many of the guidelines presented above for email writing. As with other types of business communication in this chapter, memos succeed when the writer carefully considers situation and audience in composing it:

- key issue or problem
- sensitivity of issue
- whether a memo is the best format, given the issue
- how this memo advances my organization's objectives
- who needs to read the memo; whether it will be sent to everyone in the office or just one individual
- what I expect the reader to do as a result

Standard memo formatting. Memos normally run one to two pages long. They should be concise and easy to read. Notice how the formatting in Figure 14.4 below helps the reader immediately identify the most important content and pinpoint the information he or she needs.

Figure 14.4 The Memo

The heading. **Newton International Corporation** This is doublespaced and 638 North Richland Way normally takes up about one-Opening. Minot, North Dakota 66834 This and the third of the page if you include following (814) 338-8874 letterhead. Be paragraphs sure to spell are singlespaced, with the reader's TO: Danielle Vinson, Pre-Cast Products Division Manager name correctly double spacing and use his or between FROM: Brian McClenny, Vendor Relations Coordinator her correct title. paragraphs. Briefly In the United DATE: June 20, 2016 States, spell out summarize the the month and purpose of your SUBJECT: **Vendor Credits for Wallmaster Concrete Blocks** place it before memo and give the month and the reader a year (example: brief overview of I need to touch base with you regarding vendor credits for lots 299-A4 and ◀ June 18, 2016). its content. 299-A5 of the Wallmaster concrete blocks sold to Home Base stores in the Fargo region between August and October of 2015. Context. In As you may know, 47 residential and commercial customers who bought Task. In this this paragraph, the blocks for garden and landscaping projects discovered that a paragraph, tell provide the vour reader reader with high percentage of them cracked under snow and ice conditions last what you are the context or winter. They returned the blocks to Home Base and were issued full asking him background for or her to do refunds. the issue being to address discussed. After conferring with engineers in our Pre-Cast Products Division, we have the issue or problem. Do determined that the elastomeric compounds used to seal the blocks in not bore or lots 299-A4 and 299-A5 were defective. Therefore, we have decided to confuse them reimburse Home Base for the full cost of its customer refunds. Could you with irrelevant details. please issue the proper authorizations to initiate this process on your Closing. In Together, this paragraph, the opening, context, and restate the ► These refunds need to be issued by Tuesday, July 5. If you have any task should action you need questions about these blocks or need to verify anything more about the take up around the reader to one-third of the take and offer reimbursement protocol, please do not hesitate to contact me. assistance. page.

Pro Strategy Connection

# Five Ways to Boil Corporate Messages Down to Their Essential Meanings

Michael Hissam is a communications consultant with Trans-National Executive Communications in El Paso, Texas. When approaching any piece of business communication, whether it is a management memo or an employee newsletter article, Hissam aims for simplicity and brevity. He faithfully observes these five rules:

- 1. Focus on the key issue. Name it in no more than eight words.
- 2. Identify and validate the central meaning or effect of the piece. Again, name it in no more than eight words.
- 3. List three key messages to keep the story straight; think in terms of memorable "sound bites," not Shakespeare.
- 4. Be honest with yourself and identify three things that employees, media, activist groups, or other stakeholders could get wrong or use against you. Then address them through accurate messaging.
- 5. Make the reader understand your problem.

Commenting on the last item on the list, Hissam says, "You've got to make sure the other guy 'gets your headache.' Unless you clearly distill the meaning of your message, the other guy will never be able to do that."

In addition, Hissam insists that managers and executives participate in the writing and editing process. "After all, the executive is the real communication catalyst," he notes.

# Working with one or two classmates:

- 1. Go online and locate an unfocused, overly wordy piece of business writing. It could be a CEO's letter to shareholders, a human resources memo, a business proposal, or another communication piece.
- 2. Rewrite the piece according to Michael Hissam's five rules listed above. Compare the original to your rewritten version. How have you improved it? How did you "make the other guy get your headache" or understand your problem?

#### The Business Letter

A business letter is a message that you send to someone who works outside of your organization. Knowing how to write a professional business letter is one of the most important skills you can develop in your career. Before you even finish college, you can count on writing them as you apply to internships, jobs, and graduate schools. If you are a freelance journalist, public relations practitioner, or small-business owner, you will frequently write business letters to pitch stories, services, or products.

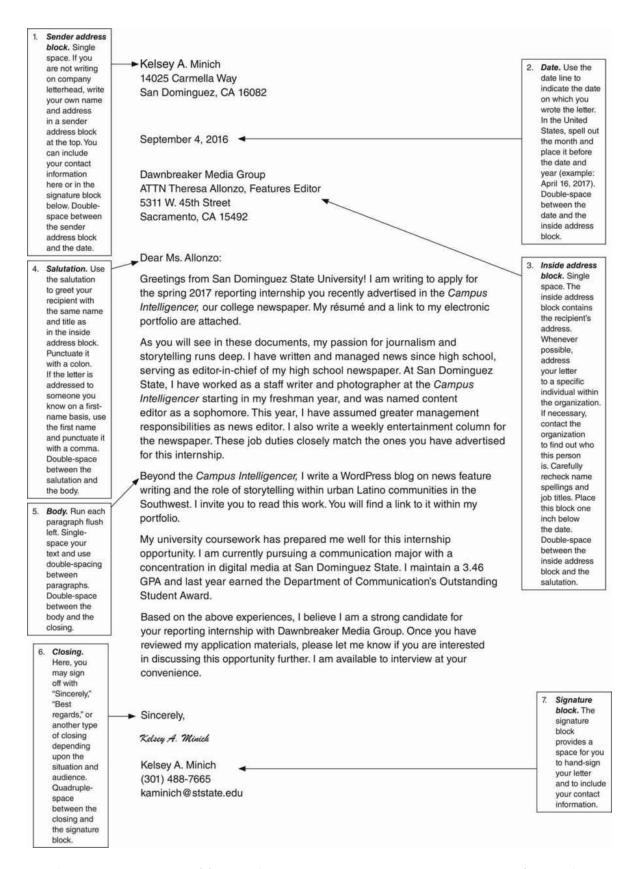
The business letter can be sent on paper or as part of an email message. It is your professional calling card and the first chance a potential editor, client, or customer will have to judge your writing skills and, by extension, your intelligence, education level, and professional competence. Everything is riding on it. Write your business letter poorly, and you will be passed over for employment and professional opportunities, perhaps never knowing why. Write your business letter well and you can expect to be called back with job offers and further interest in you and what you do. It is critical that you get this step right.

As with the email message and memo, you can write a successful business letter by considering how situation and audience impact your message:

- What am I trying to accomplish? Am I trying to land an internship, secure a job interview, sell a freelance story, or interest a potential client in what I have to sell?
- Do I have a previous history with this person or organization, or is this a first contact?
- Who is my reader? What does he or she do for a living?
- On what basis is my reader likely to judge the contents of my letter?
- What is the proper tone to strike in this letter?

Standard business letter formatting. Business letters usually run one or two pages in length. Longer letters can become annoying and difficult to read. The majority of business letters are written in *block format*. As shown in Figure 14.5 below, this means the entire document is left justified and single-spaced except for double-spacing between paragraphs. Formats vary widely, and often include letterhead at the top. Your company will probably specify its own format.

Figure 14.5 A Business Letter for an Internship Application



As a rule, use a 12-point serif font such as Times New Roman to impart a professional image and aid readability. Other fonts may be acceptable as well. Consider your audience here. Are you writing to a conservative organization or a more liberal one? Choose fonts accordingly and always use black ink.

In Figure 14.5 above, note that Kelsey has carefully considered her situation by researching the employer and the type of intern it is seeking. In the first line, she strikes a tone that is friendly and professional. She quickly conveys her passion for journalism and shows how her qualifications match those advertised for the job. Kelsey understands that her audience is an editor with a media organization. She knows the reader will scrutinize her writing even more closely than usual, especially her ability to tell her story in a compelling manner. This is the first and perhaps only chance she will get to showcase her best writing skills and convey her personality. Notice how throughout the letter she works to show this potential employer that she is an emerging professional who is job ready.

### The Proposal

Over the course of your career, you may need to write proposals for a client, an employer, or your own business. The proposal (see Figure 14.6) is a brief persuasive report most often written for someone outside your organization. In it, you are attempting to persuade the reader to adopt your suggested course of action. All the situation and audience considerations discussed in this chapter apply here. The proposal must be written in a clear, concise fashion and formatted so that readers can quickly locate the information they need in order to make a decision on it.

Photo 14.4: When you write a proposal, you are attempting to sell your audience on a product, service, or suggested course of action. As a business communicator, you may also have the opportunity to sell your proposal one-on-one or in group settings.



Business owners and freelance media professionals frequently use project proposals to persuade potential clients to purchase their goods or services. The proposals you write may be either solicited by your readers or unsolicited. They can be formatted as manuscripts, letters, or forms required by the organization that solicits your proposal. In the case of solicited proposals, businesses and government agencies issue RFPs (requests for proposals)

from potential vendors.

The RFP typically specifies the exact parameters for the needed products or services and invites interested parties to bid on the project. Several special guidelines apply to writing proposals:

- 1. Provide credible evidence for everything you state in the proposal. As necessary, include examples, testimonials, facts, and figures.
- 2. If the proposal is solicited by an organization, follow its instructions and requirements carefully. Failure to do so will probably result in rejection, no matter how well you write the proposal.
- 3. Remember that a proposal can become a legally binding document between you and the organization. In it, you specify precisely what products or services you will provide, at what cost, and under which circumstances. If the organization accepts your offer, it is similarly obligated to the terms of your proposal.

Figure 14.6 Sample Project Proposal

#### Success Forward Consulting

#### Group Sales Training • Leadership Seminars • Individualized Sales Coaching

May 4, 2017

Mr. Ronald Simmons Havershire Real Estate Corporation 4887 Woodhill Street, Suite 24 Roseville, MN 55113

Subject: Proposal for Success-Based Sales Training Seminar

Dear Mr. Simmons:

It was a pleasure to meet with you recently to discuss the Success-Based Sales Training seminar that you would like to offer your sales consultants at Havershire Real Estate Corporation. You asked me to assemble a proposal for a one-day workshop. I am happy to provide you with it here.

#### BACKGROUND

On April 23, I met with you and members of your management team to discuss the recent lagging enthusiasm of your sales force, their lack of basic sales skills, and the fact that many sales are currently being lost to competing real estate agencies. Issues including disorganization, lack of professionalism and high turnover were especially evident in that session.

Based on our discussion, I propose a one-day Success-Based Sales Training seminar. I can offer you the seminar any weekday between May 15 and June 30, 2017.

#### **OBJECTIVES**

This seminar will help members of your sales force to:

- 1. Approach the sales process with optimism and enthusiasm.
- 2. Understand the mental process that homebuyers go through in the purchasing process.
- 3. Organize their schedules and sales leads for optimal productivity.
- Close residential sales with diplomacy and professionalism.

#### **PROCEDURES**

I have enclosed an outline that details the proposed seminar topics. We would need a meeting room (preferably offsite) that is not subject to interruption. We would also need one large table, a dozen chairs, and a computer projector. The seminar would be divided into morning and afternoon sessions, with each one lasting four hours with a 10-minute break in the morning and afternoon. Participants would spend the final 30 minutes in a debriefing exercise.

My fee for the seminar is \$1,500 plus expenses, including automobile mileage, all presentation materials, and my own lunch. Havershire Real Estate would be responsible for providing morning refreshments and lunch for the participants.

#### QUALIFICATIONS

As the enclosed résumé indicates, I have 23 years of sales training experience in the real estate profession. I have lectured widely on the topic and recently authored the book titled *Breaking Through to Yes: The Keys to Successful Real Estate Negotiations*.

#### SUMMARY

Over the course of over 125 real estate sales training seminars, I have learned that members of the sales force and their managers expect to learn tangible new skills that will help build their careers and boost the organization's bottom line. This one-day seminar will deliver those results.

Working together, I believe that we can achieve a measurable increase in residential sales at Havershire Real Estate, as well as decrease associate turnover as employees build successful careers with your organization. Please contact me at (812) 544-9085 or via email at carolhartmann@successforward.com.

Best regards,

Carol Hartmann

President, SuccessForward Consulting

8830 West 45th Avenue • Chelsford, MN 55842 • www.successforward.com • 1-800-448-3220

Craft Essential: Writing a Proposal for Freelance Videography Services

# Scenario:

You are a freelance videographer with fifteen years of experience working for corporate and educational clients in the Pacific Northwest. A local community college has issued an RFP for a video it plans to use to recruit international students in Middle Eastern markets. You have done several similar projects in the past and are eager to bid on this one. To gather the needed information, you interview the director of college relations and the international student services coordinator.

# Project specifics:

#### The RFP specifies:

- Video length: 8 to 10 minutes
- Scenes to be included:
  - International students arriving at the airport
  - Individual students settling into the host family's home
  - Groups of students walking across campus
  - International and domestic students learning together in class
  - Students having fun doing campus activities with fellow students
- Script: to be provided by vendor
- Final editing: to be completed by vendor
- Shooting dates: April 10–30, 2017
- Deadline for completion: June 30, 2017
- Total cost (not an estimate): must not exceed \$15,000

# Your assignment:

- 1. Working alone or in teams, write a one- to two-page project proposal according to <u>Figure 14.6</u> above. Set up your spacing and text elements to match the formatting as closely as you can.
- 2. Create a brief paragraph for each of the sections including background, objectives, procedures, qualifications, and summary.
- 3. Use direct and straightforward language, writing in the active voice. Be persuasive, but stay grounded in the facts. Where necessary, provide examples and evidence. You may make up information here as needed.
- 4. Proofread and edit your document carefully. Read it aloud to a classmate. Remember that *your* reader will judge the proposal's worth based upon your writing skills, and that multiple reviewers will probably read it.
- 5. Print out your proposal and prepare to share it with the class.

### Summary

- 1. Discuss the corporate communication profession and its connection to skilled writing. Corporate communication encompasses corporate branding, organizational identity, corporate responsibility, corporate reputation, crisis communications, internal/employee communications, investor relations, and public relations. Corporate communicators use written and other communications to help the company explain its mission to those stakeholders and to combine its visions and values into one cohesive set of messages.
- 2. Describe how business communication flows four ways. Downward communication moves from someone in a position of higher authority to an employee in a position of lower authority. Upward communication moves from someone in a position of lower authority to an employee in a position of higher authority. Horizontal communication is used in a lateral fashion. Cross-channel communication is used to share information across different work units.
- 3. Explain how communicators use the Professional Strategy Triangle to create business communication pieces. Each business communication situation carries its own unique situation and audience considerations with it. The Professional Strategy Triangle provides a useful model to communicators as they prepare to write their message and strike the proper tone for any type of business piece.
- 4. Write business communication pieces including email messages, memos, business letters, and proposals. This type of writing relies upon many of the principles described throughout this text, including accuracy, precision, conciseness, use of the active voice, and careful attention to grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

# Key Terms

corporate communication 474
The Page Principles 475
downward communications 476
upward communications 476
horizontal communications 477
cross-channel communications 477
email message 479
email culture 479
memorandum 485
business letter 488
proposal 490

### Discussion Questions

- 1. Review the Frontline Media Writing Profile on Michael Hissam at the beginning of this chapter. Based upon his career story and quotes, what do you believe has made him a successful business communicator?
- 2. Why are routine business communication pieces so important to the healthy functioning of an organization? What are some of the dangers of ignoring their importance?
- 3. Recalling the chapter discussion on corporate communication, could you envision yourself doing this job? Why or why not? What do you believe would be most challenging about such a job?
- 4. As a corporate communication writer, how might you put The Page Principles to work on behalf of your organization in an email message? A proposal?
- 5. Considering cross-channel business communications, describe a workplace situation in which this direction would be necessary.
- 6. Why are situation and audience such important considerations in any type of business communication writing? What problems could the writer create by ignoring these factors?
- 7. When is it appropriate to use email? When is it best to avoid email and choose another communication channel?
- 8. Why is it important to consider your organizational email culture before composing or sending an email message?
- 9. Think about your developing career and discuss some of the reasons you might need to compose a business letter within the next several months. What will be most important to know about your situation and audience in order to succeed?
- 10. What makes a proposal different from the other types of business communication discussed in this chapter? What kinds of writing approaches work best for this format?

### Chapter Exercises

- 1. Interview someone who works as a corporate communicator or frequently writes business communication pieces. Ask this person about his or her career path and the types of writing he or she does in it. What approaches does this writer use to succeed at writing these pieces? *Note: You must interview your source either in person or by phone. Email is not acceptable.* 
  - Create a ten-slide PowerPoint presentation describing your findings and prepare to share it with a group of classmates or the rest of the class.
- 2. Visit the Arthur W. Page Society online at <a href="www.awpagesociety.com">www.awpagesociety.com</a>. Explore the various links to learn about the organization's background, history, mission, and philosophy. Consider the role of sound business communication in everything that Page accomplished in his lifetime. Prepare a 350-word paper describing how Page's major accomplishments still live on today, and the role that skilled writing played in them.
- 3. Locate a piece of business communication (email, memo, business letter, or proposal) that you believe strikes the incorrect tone for its situation and audience. The piece could come from your workplace, your university, or online. Rewrite the piece using a tone that you believe is more appropriate. Compare the original to the rewritten version and discuss the major differences with your class.
- 4. Compose a 200-word email message from you to members of a campus organization or a volunteer group regarding an important upcoming task or issue. Use the Professional Strategy Triangle to consider your situation and audience. Which considerations are most important here? Use the example shown in this chapter as a writing and formatting guide. Proofread and edit the message carefully before sending it to recipients.
- 5. Look around your workplace or university and locate a memorandum (or memo) that you consider to be poorly written. Rewrite it according to the principles presented in this chapter. Use the example shown in this chapter as a writing and formatting guide. Make sure that the heading, opening, context, task, and closing are all properly formatted and written to the correct length. Proofread and edit carefully. Prepare to submit the rewritten memo to your instructor.
- 6. Do some online research and locate a prospective internship or employer advertising for a position. Compose a one-page business letter to them to apply for that position. Concentrate on telling your personal story in a compelling manner and weaving your qualifications into that story. Use the example shown in this chapter as a writing and formatting guide. Proofread and edit carefully. If the letter is in response to an actual opening that interests you, submit the letter and see whether you receive any interest in it.
- 7. Compose a one- to two-page proposal for a family or local business to promote a product or service you would like to sell for them. Consider how situation and audience will influence your message. Use the example shown in this chapter as a writing and formatting guide. Proofread and edit carefully. Prepare to share your proposal with a classmate.
- 8. Michael Hissam, featured in this chapter's Frontline Media Writing Profile, has earned several Gold Quill Awards from the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) for his writing. Go online at <a href="http://gq.iabc.com/winners/">http://gq.iabc.com/winners/</a> to learn more about the Gold Quill Awards and the type of writing that wins this prestigious honor. What are the various categories and criteria for earning the Gold Quill?

#### Additional Resources

Arthur W. Page Society: <a href="http://www.awpagesociety.com">http://www.iabc.com</a>
International Association of Business Communicators: <a href="https://www.iabc.com">https://www.iabc.com</a>
Purdue University Online Writing Lab (OWL) Professional and Technical Writing Guide: <a href="https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/4/16/">https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/4/16/</a>

Appendix: Media Writer's Self-Perception Scale

# Your Perceptions of Writing Skills

Listed below are statements about writing skills. Please read each statement carefully. Then circle the letters that indicate the extent to which the statements reflect you. Do not spend too much time thinking about each item. List your *first* impression.

Use the following scale:

NT = Not at all true of me ST = Slightly true of me MT = Moderately true of me VT = Very true of me CT = Completely true of me

1.	When I know I've got a writing assignment due, I start work right away.	NT	ST	МТ	VT	СТ
2.	It's easier for me to write factual reports than to write my own ideas.	NT	ST	МТ	VT	СТ
3.	Having others read and evaluate my writing does not bother me.	NT	ST	МТ	VT	СТ
4.	I feel lost when it comes to grammar and punctuation.	NT	ST	МТ	VT	СТ
5.	I'm a good speller.	NT	ST	МТ	VT	СТ
6.	I have good basic writing skills.	NT	ST	МТ	VT	СТ
7.	My mind seems to go blank when I start to work on a writing task.	NT	ST	МТ	VT	СТ
8.	I'm nervous about writing.	NT	ST	МТ	VT	СТ
9.	I have a terrible time organizing my ideas when I try to write.	NT	ST	МТ	VT	СТ
10.	I have a hard time choosing the right words while I write.	NT	ST	МТ	VT	СТ
11.	I enjoy talking about writing.	NT	ST	МТ	VT	СТ
12.	I look forward to writing.	NT	ST	МТ	VT	СТ

13.	I practice my writing outside of class.	NT	ST	MT	VT	СТ
14.	I enjoy studying words and their meanings.	NT	ST	МТ	VT	СТ
15.	I write only when I have to.	NT	ST	МТ	VT	СТ
16.	I like seeing my thoughts on paper.	NT	ST	МТ	VT	СТ
17.	I worry about how much time my essay or paper will take.	NT	ST	МТ	VT	СТ
18.	At times, my writing has given me deep personal satisfaction.	NT	ST	МТ	VT	СТ
19.	I think about how I come across in my writing.	NT	ST	МТ	VT	СТ
20.	I sometimes get sudden inspirations in writing.	NT	ST	МТ	VT	СТ
21.	I imagine the reaction that my readers might have to my paper.	NT	ST	МТ	VT	СТ
22.	When writing a paper, I often get ideas for other papers.	NT	ST	МТ	VT	СТ
23.	I visualize what I'm writing about.	NT	ST	МТ	VT	СТ
24.	It's important to me to like what I've written.	NT	ST	МТ	VT	СТ
25.	I expect good grades on essays and papers.	NT	ST	МТ	VT	СТ
26.	If the assignment calls for 1,000 words, I try to write just about that many.	NT	ST	МТ	VT	СТ
27.	Often my first draft is my finished product.	NT	ST	МТ	VT	СТ
28.	Revision is a one-time process at the end.	NT	ST	МТ	VT	СТ
29.	I plan out my writing and stick to the plan.	NT	ST	МТ	VT	СТ
	My writing "just happens" with little planning					

	or preparation.					
31.	I start with a fairly detailed outline.	NT	ST	МТ	VT	СТ
32.	When I begin to write, I have only a vague idea of how my paper will come out.	NT	ST	МТ	VT	СТ
33.	I set aside specific time to do written assignments.	NT	ST	МТ	VT	СТ
34.	I keep my theme or topic clearly in mind as I write.	NT	ST	МТ	VT	СТ

From the following statements, please circle the letters that show how much you agree or disagree with the statement. Do not spend too much time thinking about each item. List your *first* impression. Use the following scale:

SA = Strongly agree A = Agree U = Undecided D = Disagree SD = Strongly disagree

35.	I need special encouragement to do my best writing.	SA	A	U	D	SD
36.	I can motivate myself to write a good paper, even if the writing doesn't go smoothly.	SA	A	U	D	SD
37.	I can think of ways of solving my problems if I get stuck in writing.	SA	A	U	D	SD
38.	I can use the right punctuation marks and put them in the right places in my text.	SA	A	U	D	SD
39.	I can write a paper that connects the different paragraphs in a coherent way.	SA	A	U	D	SD
40.	I can't revise my own writing because I can't see my own mistakes.	SA	A	U	D	SD
41.	The teacher is the most important audience.	SA	A	U	D	SD
42.	The main reason for writing an essay or paper is to get a good grade on it.	SA	A	U	D	SD

43.	Good writing skills are essential in my career.	SA	A	U	D	SD
44.	My writing skills will not be an important factor in whether I'm promoted in my profession.	SA	A	U	D	SD
45.	The ability to write well is becoming less important for professional success.	SA	A	U	D	SD
46.	Writing about myself on Facebook is good practice for developing professional media writing skills.	SA	A	U	D	SD
47.	The writing style used in texting gives media writers bad habits to overcome.	SA	A	U	D	SD
48.	Writing good blog copy uses the same skills as writing good newspaper copy.	SA	A	U	D	SD
49.	Because I can write witty "tweets" on Twitter, I can also write professional media articles.	SA	A	U	D	SD
50.	YouTube videos don't need the "textbook" production techniques taught in my program.	SA	A	U	D	SD

## How to Score the MWSP and What the Scores Mean

First, assign numbers to the answers. For items 1 through 34, assign numbers like this:

NT = 1ST = 2

MT = 3

VT = 4

CT = 5

For items 35 through 50, assign numbers like this:

SD = 1

D = 2

U = 3

A = 4

SA = 5

Write down in the far left column the number that corresponds to the answer you circled. Do this for each item.

#### Subscores

Next, we need to tally five subscores of the MWSP. We will add a set of numbers together, then subtract another set of numbers we added together. Here are the subscores and how they are tallied:

1) Elaborative/Surface score (ELscore) is a measure of how much you like to think about your writing and how important your writing is for you. The numbers in the parentheses are the item numbers. Add them together as follows:

$$(13 + 14 + 16 + 18 + 20 + 22 + 34) - (2 + 41 + 42 + 26) = ELscore$$

2) Reflective/Revisionist score (RRscore) is a measure of how much you like to review, edit, and revise your writing before you are happy with your final draft. The numbers in the parentheses are the item numbers. Add them together as follows:

$$(1 + 23 + 24 + 29 + 31 + 33) - (27 + 28 + 30 + 32 + 40) = RRscore$$

3) Writing Self-Efficacy score (SEscore) is a measure of your degree of confidence in your various writing skills, including spelling, grammar, punctuation, paragraph development, generating ideas, and organizing your writing. The numbers in the parentheses are the item numbers. Add them together as follows:

$$(5 + 6 + 19 + 21 + 25 + 37 + 38 + 39) - (4) = SEscore$$

4) Writing Apprehension score (WAscore) is a measure of the amount of your perceived anxiety and worry that accompanies your writing assignments. The numbers in the parentheses are the item numbers. Add them together as follows:

$$(7 + 8 + 9 + 10 + 15 + 17 + 35) - (3 + 11 + 12 + 36) = WAscore$$

5) Social Media/Professional score (SMPscore) is a measure of your perceptions of social media writing, such as the kind of writing one does on Twitter and Facebook, and your beliefs about the importance of this type of writing as it relates to your career choice. The numbers in the parentheses are the item numbers. Add them together as follows:

$$(44 + 45 + 46 + 48 + 49 + 50) - (43 + 47) = SMPscore$$

### Total MWSP score

Once you have computed your five subscores, you can easily add them together according to this plan to see your MWSP total score:

```
MWSP = (ELscore + RRscore + SEscore) – (WAscore + SMPscore)
```

Remember to keep negative numbers "straight" when you put them in the formula; negative numbers need to keep their sign. Using a calculator can help if you are not used to adding and subtracting negative numbers.

### What Your Numbers Mean

Your Elaborative/Surface score (ELscore) refers to how much you think about the writing process when you write, and any positive feelings you associate with the task of writing, improving your writing, and learning about writing. Elaborative/Surface scores can vary from a high of 31 to a low of -13. If you score between 18 and 31, you tend to see yourself as a "deep" writer who likes to think about what you write, and you enjoy doing it. If you score between 17 and 6, you don't think much about what you like to say in your writing. If you score 5 and below on ELscore, then you tend to just write what you need to as you complete a task, without necessarily enjoying, learning, and thinking about what it is you are writing about. Your Reflective/Revisionist score (RRscore) refers to how much you work to make your drafts as good as you think they can possibly be, including whether or not you plan time to write, whether or not you engage preparation writing skills, and how much you like to revise your drafts. Reflective/Revisionist scores can vary from a high of 25 to a low of -19. If you score between 13 and 25, you tend to see yourself as a "deep" writer who likes to rework what you write to make it the best you can, with as much preparation for writing as you can take. If you score between 12 and 0, you don't think much about preparing to write and you only occasionally work to revise your drafts. If you score -1 and below on RRscore, then you tend to just write what you need to in a single draft, without changing it, and you may procrastinate as a writer and write just a single draft without spending time thinking about your writing.

Your Writing Self-Efficacy score (SEscore) refers to your level of confidence in your writing skills, including things like spelling, punctuation, grammar, organization, paragraph development, and thinking about your intended audience. Writing Self-Efficacy scores can vary from a high of 39 to a low of 3. If you score between 25 and 39, you tend to see yourself as a confident writer who masters the skills of writing. If you score between 24 and 12, you may feel fairly competent as a writer, but possibly think you have some areas in your writing skill set that you can improve. If you score 11 and below on SEscore, then you tend to have low confidence in one or more of your writing skill areas.

Your Writing Apprehension score (WAscore) refers to your level of anxiety and worry when working on writing tasks. Writing Apprehension scores can vary from a high of 31 to a low of –13. The higher the Writing Apprehension score, the more anxiety and worry you say you experience when working on a writing task. If you score between 31 and 18, you tend to experience significant anxiety and worry when you think about writing tasks. If you score between 17 and 6, you have moderate to low levels of anxiety and worry about writing. If you score 5 and below on WAscore, then you say you approach writing as an enjoyable task without anxiety or worry. Your Social Media/Professional score (SMPscore) refers to how much you think

the informal writing that you do in texting, and on Twitter and Facebook, is the same quality of writing that is used on the job in your career. It also refers to how important you believe good professional writing is in your career. Social Media/Professional scores can vary from a high of 28 to a low of –4. If you score between 18 and 28, you tend to see your informal writing in social media as skilled, and good enough for you to use on the job. If you score between 17 and 8, you tend to think that some social media writing is good, but that you need to do more formal writing on the job. If you score 7 and below on the SMPscore, then you tend to think that social media writing is something different from good writing in your profession, and that you believe you must use better writing skills on the job than what you do in social media writing amongst friends.

MWSP total scores can vary from 112 to -88. The higher the score, the more you enjoy writing; the more you feel confident about your writing skills; the more you like to analyze and learn about your topic; the more you like to write in detail about your topic; the more you like to plan, rework, and revise your writing; and the more you like to take a professional approach to writing in your career.

If you scored between 112 and 45, you tend to manifest all these positive elements in the way you think about your writing.

If you scored between 44 and 10, you experience moderate enjoyment of writing and feel pretty confident in your skills, but you may not spend much time preparing for your writing, or you may not see the need to revise your drafts, and you may not think that your social media writing is much different from what you would need to do on the job.

Scoring below 10 probably means that you are not very happy with your writing and you don't like doing formal writing. You may avoid writing, and try not to spend time analyzing a writing task. You may experience high writing apprehension and feel low confidence in your skills. You may feel that the informal type of writing you do in texting and on social media is good enough for you to do OK on your job, even if there are punctuation, grammatical, and spelling errors. You may not care about writing at all.

### Grammar, Spelling, and Punctuation Tests

Here are some links to online grammar, spelling, and punctuation tests. These online tests can be very useful when they offer the correct answers and analysis about your score.

http://newsu.org/course/language-primer

http://www.dailywritingtips.com/tests/

http://www.writersdigest.com/wp-

content/uploads/PunctuationSpellingGrammarTest.pdf

http://www.testprepreview.com/modules/grammarpart3.htm

http://www.grammarbook.com/interactive quizzes exercises.asp

http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/quiz\_list.htm

http://www.englishgrammar.org/exercises/

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