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**SELF-LEARNING MATERIAL**

**REPORTING AND EDITING**

**MMC 104**

# SELF-LEARNING MATERIAL

Course Code: MMC 104

Course Title: REPORTING AND EDITING

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# **MMC 104 REPORTING AND EDITING**

## **UNIT-1: NEWS**

### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

- 1.1. OBJECTIVES
- 1.2. INTRODUCTION
- 1.3. CONCEPT OF NEWS
  - 1.3.1. DEFINITION OF NEWS AND NEWS VALUE
- 1.4 TYPES OF NEWS
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- 1.7 QUALITIES NEEDED FOR GOOD REPORTING
- 1.8 SUMMING UP
- 1.9 SUGGESTED READINGS
- 1.10 PROBABLE QUESTIONS

### **1.1. OBJECTIVES**

A thorough study of this unit shall enable you to ---

- Distinguish between news and non-news
- Explain sources of news and their news value
- Discuss the various important aspects of news
- Understand and analyze different types of news and their characteristics
- Know and discuss the importance of sources and their cultivation

### **1.2. INTRODUCTION**

We all know that human beings can not live in isolation and any important event or activity happening in one corner of the world is bound to influence other parts of the globe in direct or indirect ways. This is why there is an ever-growing urge and need among human beings to know what is going on in different parts of the world at any given point of time. Thus, journalism has become an integral part of our day-to-day life with no alternative to it as a means of information dissemination in today's world. Without a well-developed system of journalism we would remain ignorant about all the significant events of the world and also those in our own state and the country. This is why journalism has assumed such an important status nowadays. And not only news items about events and activities, disasters etc. but journalism is also a vital necessity for keeping people informed about the latest developments in research laboratories of all kinds including pure sciences, medical, social sciences among others. Journalism is one of the most convenient and effective tools for informing people about these developments so that people can

improve their living standard by utilizing knowledge. That is why a vibrant journalism practice is a basic requirement for the overall development of any society in the world. Besides, to know about the profession in detail is very significant for your training to become good mass communicators.

### **1.3. CONCEPT OF NEWS**

In simple terms news is something which is new, unusual and to some extent something unique happening anywhere across the world right from our immediate neighbourhood. Human beings are curious by nature and thus want to know anything important taking place all over the world. Besides, as the world has actually become a global village now-a-days. Anything happening in one place of the globe is going to have some implications over others in some way or the other. Hence, people are interested in knowing the news right after waking up from sleep every morning. And over the years it becomes such a habit that we feel restless unless we get to read the newspaper or listen to the radio news bulletin or see the TV news bulletin in the morning.

News is a happening which is new and of interest to a good number of people. It is not that each and every news item in a news bulletin or a newspaper will be of equal interest to every reader or TV audience. But as it is difficult to provide only those news items which are favourite of every member of the audience, newspapers, magazines and news bulletins do provide news items with an appeal to the majority of their readers.

Again, it is important to note that different persons have different interests and priorities depending on which their choice of news items also differs to a great extent. Similarly, depending upon the place of publication of that newspaper or place of origin of broadcasting of that specific TV / Radio bulletin preference for news also differs. A news item which is of great interest to one particular place may not evoke so much interest in people of another town or place in the same state or the country.

Further, it is also interesting to note that for every news item published in a newspaper or broadcast in an electronic media bulletin there are many news items which were rejected because of lack of space and interest of the people for whom that bulletin is meant.

#### **1.3.1. DEFINITION OF NEWS AND NEWS VALUE**

Now, we discuss a few definitions of news which will make the concept clear to you.

It needs to be mentioned at the outset that it is quite difficult to provide an all-encompassing definition of news as the majority of the definitions do not cover all the aspects or criteria involved in news. Another fact is that the outlook of the people towards what is news has been

changing with the passage of time. Definitions formulated earlier need to be refined or redrafted again in the light of new developments of modern times.

You should remember that if everything is running or going on in a normal or usual condition, then it is not news because there is nothing unusual happening there. Only when the normal smooth movement is interrupted and problems occur, it generates a good amount of interest among the people – the intended masses or the targeted audiences.

Now the question that may arise in the minds of everyone is how do we consider something as interesting and new for all the people reading a particular newspaper or watching a specific TV channel.

Yes, it is true that what is interesting for some people may not be so for all the readers of a particular newspaper. But the underlying principle is that the news items in newspaper or TV bulletin should be of such nature which is of interest to the maximum possible number of people reading it.

Besides, a few other characteristics which a news item must contain are – an immediacy of happening and being reported to the audiences, relevance to the people of the place where it is published or broadcast and news from local areas should be given a good and equal treatment to the maximum possible extent.

This is because if an event, however much it might be interesting will lose its value if not reported with the minimal loss of time since its happening. Otherwise, more the delay more will it lose its news value. It will become stale.

A few examples will make it clear for you what news is. An accident, an incident of breaking out of fire, a natural disaster, a new weapon defense system developed by our indigenous science and technology research institutions, an innovation which may have far-reaching impact on the society or an achievement of an individual or group that has wider social relevance--all of these make news.

One simple definition of news can be that *it is something which affects the majority of the lives of the people in a society directly or indirectly, possessing significant value for the majority of the people in a society.*

As we go on discussing other aspects in relation to this subject as given in the list above your idea about the core subject will also increase in a progressive manner.

## LET US KNOW

### Some Interesting Definitions and Quotes

- ‘NEWS is what interests a good newspaperman.’  
- Geraid Johnson, The Sun, Baltimore
- ‘When a dog bites a man it is not news, when a man bites a dog it is news.’  
- John Bogart
- ‘News is something someone somewhere wants suppressed. All the rest is advertising.’  
- William Randolph
- ‘For most times no news is good news, for the press, good news is not news.’

## ASSESS YOUR PROGRESS

1. Define news.
- 2) Identify the news items which would be more relevant for Assam or the north-eastern region at any given point of time
  - Killing of Col. Muammar Gaddafi of Libya
  - Chinese government constructing a major dam on the Brahmaputra river in their own area
  - Formula I racing activities in Delhi
  - Increasing pass percentage of HSLC and HSSLC examinations under SEBA and AHSEC
  - Marriage of the king of Bhutan
  - Economic recession in the USA
  - Camps of secessionist groups in Bangladesh and Myanmar

## News Value

It is important to know whether an incident or development can be termed as a news item or not in the proper sense of the term. There are two aspects of it.

First of all, an event or development may be of such a kind that it already possesses an element of importance for anyone interested in that kind of news items. In that case the journalist does not need to do much of an exercise.

Secondly, many a time such an incident or event may not possess a similar kind of element of interests for all human beings. In that case the journalist shall have to put up some efforts to find

out some such interesting angles to it so that people develop an interest in it without much of an effort.

Thirdly, in addition to these two aspects a journalist after years of experience in the job must also develop a kind of news sense by which he or she would be able to find out whether an activity or an event has the potential to be developed into news item or not. The ability to decide what is newsworthy or what has the potential to become 'news' may be called 'news sense' which is very much an integral part of the aspect of news value.

As we have already mentioned, a news item may not be equally important and interesting for each and every person. Similarly, news value may also differ from person to person, from journalist to journalist etc. Yet, a majority of the news items are of such nature that any journalist is able to spot the angle of 'news interest' out of it without much difficulty.

So, it must be kept in mind that a journalist must not only be able to spot news angle in any event, happening etc. but also be able to instill a news angle to any development or activity which may not readily have an interesting twist or angle to a potential story.

## 1.4 TYPES OF NEWS

News can be of several types depending upon various parameters.

In the first and basic classification it can be termed as **hard news and soft news**.

**1. Hard News:** Hard news is a news item which states plain, simple facts as it has happened. It usually answers the basic questions of five W's and H which are ---

- ✓ Who
- ✓ What
- ✓ When
- ✓ Where
- ✓ Why
- ✓ How

This type of news is usually an event, a happening or an activity that has taken place somewhere – either in a distant place or in our own neighbourhood which must be reported in the media that same day or with minimum loss of time between its happening and publication of the newspaper or broadcasting of a news bulletin.

Normally, a standard technique is followed while preparing a hard news item which is called the inverted pyramid style, i.e., the most important information is placed at the beginning of the story and the less important ones are placed thereafter in that order. In the broadcast media, the less important information are simply left out. The hard news writing style is usually followed while



writing news about important public events, government actions, international events, economic and social affairs, crime, science and technology, environment etc.

Let's take the example of the devastating earthquake which caused major damages in Sikkim in September, 2011. In this case, it must be accorded the highest priority in the newspapers and bulletins as it involves considerable damage to the property of the dwellers, and also loss of human lives etc. Here also the same principle of who, what, when, where, why, how has to be adopted to present a clear picture of the situation to the readers or audience.

Similarly when a bomb blast takes place, the news about it would be immediately flashed in the news media in the form of hard news stating straight facts like how and where it happened, the number of casualty and the action taken etc. .

In today's parlance items of hard news are also called spot news or breaking news, because the news organizations break out the news as soon as it happens, without delaying.

**2. Soft News:** This category may include a wide variety of news items including, offbeat stories, news features, among others. Reactions to published or broadcast news items of events, developments, happenings etc. and views are included in soft news apart from the plain facts. Stories that deal with human interest angles can rightly be termed as soft news. Soft news may also emanate from hard news items. Normally the follow up stories of a major event, highlighting the angles not covered in the hard news items, mostly the human interest angles are such type of news.

It is worth mentioning here that every newspaper or electronic media news bulletin usually subscribes to news agency ( we shall discuss this later) services which provide news items to these media outlets. Further, the hard news items which are happening everyday are common news items which any news media is sure to get its hands on any given day. There is hardly anything new or unique about serving such items to the readers/audience by the media.

However, it is mostly in the case of the soft news items that different news media outlets have an opportunity to prove itself to be unique, to be different from others. For example, every such news outlet employs several journalists in their staff for getting unique and exclusive news items for that media. This usually happens in the form of soft news items gathered from various sources

If this uniqueness is absent, then after a period of time people or the dedicated readers of that specific news media outlet lose their interest in it and may therefore stop subscribing to it. That is why in addition to hard news items of day-to-day happenings it is very important that all the

news media – whether it is newspaper or TV or Radio bulletins must present such exclusive offbeat and unique news items from time to time so that the readers do not feel let down.

The aim of such news stories is to arouse curiosity among the readers or viewers and heighten emotional appeal by presenting it in an interesting manner. Therefore the conventional news writing formula of 5 W and H may not necessarily be applied while dealing with soft news stories. The writer has the liberty to be extremely innovative and create an item that would attract as many readers as possible and at the same time create an impact in the minds of the people.

For example, sometime ago UNICEF has published a report that while the infant mortality across the world was improving to some extent, in the case of several developing nations including India the same was not improving with millions of new born babies losing their lives within five weeks of their birth. This is not a hard news or happening news but it has the potential to go deep into the factors and aspects of why such a situation is still occurring in our countries. And, depending upon the capacity of the journalist to present it in an effective manner, it possesses the potential to be attractive and interesting to the readers. At such points the creativity and skills of a journalist are put to test and one has the opportunity to prove his or her worth.

#### **Follow up stories**

A sequence of news events that follows a news break.

### **1.5 SOURCES OF NEWS**

Sources of news mean those people who may possess the potential to supply information or tips about a news to a journalist. Usually news sources are persons in different fields including officials, businessman, and office bearers of associations of different fields among others. Broadly there are two types of sources – Personal and Official or Impersonal sources.

1) **Personal sources** : These persons are termed as ‘personal sources’ because the journalist has to build up a relationship with them so that at times of crisis when official or formal sources are reluctant or unavailable to inform about any development, these sources would prove to be reliable and may provide information.

2) **Official or impersonal sources** are the ones from whom the news organization is anyway going to get the news items. For example – official press releases statements, press conferences, public meetings etc. These are sources of general nature and any journalist whoever is interested may get the news without much of a problem. Quite often these are sent to the newspaper offices by the people concerned.

However, you should always keep in mind that till the extent when positive developments which are worthy of being published as news items are happening, the formal or official sources normally do cooperate with journalists and provide information as these might not be controversial. But when there is something wrong and the organization may be shown in a negative light if the news is published, these sources may refuse to provide any information at all. And the test of a journalist's career is decided at such moments. This is because when the formal or official sources refuse to cooperate, you must be able to utilize the already developed relationship and rapport with your official sources so that they won't mind divulging the information to you, even if it is negative in nature.

First of all one has to definitely start with getting familiar with the official sources of news in any field and then develop the personal relationship and rapport so that the source may feel confident

### **ACTIVITY**

1. Watch the news bulletins of one or two TV channels for 10 / 20 days regularly. Make a list of the news items given in each of them. Write a note on how many of these do you feel are interesting for a majority of the people and how many of them may be interesting to a lesser number of people.
2. Again, out of this same exercise find out how many news items are on locally important issues and how many of them have issues not directly linked to India and Assam.
3. Regularly read two newspapers – one English and the other in a regional language and compare the lead news items for 30 days. Are the lead news items in both of them almost the same or otherwise? Note down whatever you have found.

on the journalist's ability to present the facts properly without endangering the source's official position.

### **Feature**

A story with news value, but not hard core news. It gives new dimension to news, examines and dissects news, giving opinions and comments.

### **ASSESS YOUR PROGRESS**

1. How should you prepare for writing a news item?
2. Discuss the various sources of news.
3. Is it necessary to cultivate sources for news? Explain.

### **ACTIVITY**

Go through a newspaper or watch a TV news bulletin or listen to a radio news bulletin and identify:

- i) 5 hard news items.
- ii) 5 soft news items.

## **1.6 OBJECTIVITY AND AUTHENTICITY OF NEWS**

In the previous section we have said that the duty of a journalist is to present the facts and figures as well as happenings exactly as they are, nothing less nothing more. This is Objectivity which means stating only what is true and to the point devoid of anything extra which are not directly linked to the event being reported. Mass media is a highly powerful instrument of influencing people. So a media person must do his or her best to present the things in the right perspective so that no confusion, controversy or sensation is created. Otherwise, there will be far-reaching implications. People may be misled into believing something which is not true and thereby may create widespread unrest, dissatisfaction etc. in the society. Once a mass media organization is established and it is engaged in the business of providing entertainment and news to the masses, people or the target audiences start developing a personal rapport with them and a relationship grows over the years. If the audience at any moment feel that the organization has been deceiving its readers or listeners, then this personal relationship or trust is breached and the mutual respect is disturbed which will prove fatal for that media organization.

Besides, every profession, whether in media or otherwise has a certain amount of social responsibility to be fulfilled. With the media profession this responsibility is much more intense compared to any other profession in this world. Because media also has to live up to the expectations of its being the Fourth pillar of democracy – that is being the watchdog of the

democratic principles of a country. So if it fails in keeping intact its own standards how will it be able perform its duties to the society and masses at large?

A reporter or journalist is the via media through which the world expects to know about a certain event, an issue etc. Thus it will be the utmost duty of the journalist to present the facts and figures and happenings as they have actually happened without the slightest doubt or ambiguity. If the journalist deliberately creates doubts or ambiguity, he or she will not only be earning a bad name in the industry but will also be earning a bad reputation for the organization for which he/she works. It is a question of moral integrity and responsibility also which must never be allowed to be threatened by any circumstances.

Of course we all know that it is quite difficult to remain a hundred per cent objective in one's duties, especially with the media as the events have to be presented through a human being whose signature, style, preferences etc. will be reflected in the writings. Yet one must do his or her best to remain as much to the point as possible.

#### **ASSESS YOUR PROGRESS**

1. What is Objectivity in news?
2. What is the importance of objectivity in news media ?

### **1.7 QUALITIES NEEDED FOR GOOD REPORTING**

Like any other profession a journalist also needs to develop certain qualities and traits for becoming successful in this field. Some of these are – a nose for news, an analytical mind, patience, systematic approach, ability to carry out background research, ability to listen to people, a conscious mind and the ability to think clearly and logically, etc. And good communication skills – both written and spoke would be added advantages in the profession.

The 'nose for news' or a special sense of being able to spot a potential news item whenever one is be about to evolve or appear is important. If a journalist is true to his job and learns from practical experiences he or she would be able to develop this trait over the years.

In journalism an analytical mind is specially required quite often. Because in the case of big events and happenings one has to analyze various tidbits of information collected from different

places and piece them together for arriving at a proper sequence of events worthy of printed or broadcast in the news media organizations.

Patience is another important requirement as one never knows how long he or she might have to keep waiting for a specific information for confirming a doubt, some preliminary information or tips about an event expected to happen in a short while. Besides, patience is also required for collecting background information or doing footwork for collecting various bits of information from different sources at different places about something big.

Background research is important when a journalist has to report on for example – frequency of famines in the country, developments in the defence systems of the country, for taking interview of an important political leader, a scientist, or any celebrity etc. Because only when someone knows about the background of that person or organization will he or she be able to ask interesting questions based upon the research. One must also be able to keep all these information to himself or herself always until the news item is published or broadcast and becomes public knowledge, not before.

A systematic approach is definitely important because a good beginning increases the potential for success in any field, more so in journalism where a journalist needs to keep oneself abreast of so many things at the same time.

A journalist must be a good listener also because only then he or she will be able to collect information or inputs for his writings. It will be good if a journalist is extrovert and outgoing so that he or she can gather necessary information in their respective fields for preparing their news reports.

And good communication skills – both written and spoken is a big advantage for a journalist because it helps him or her in two ways. First of all while attending a press conference or talking to people at the site of an event or a happening, or during an interview one would be able to make himself or herself clear about what they want from the other person. This will help in getting the desired information out of the source smoothly.

Secondly, being a reporter he or she is the person who has visited the spot of an event and thereby will be much better-placed to write whatever was seen or observed at the spot. As the journalist has visited the spot all the information and the scene of the event become clear to his or her mind like a clear picture. And thus that journalist would be the best person to write about what was seen at the spot.

### **Do's and don'ts of good reporting**

Quite a few of the traits of good reporting have already been discussed above. But for your benefit let us highlight some of them again here. A news report must be lucid, crisp in its form,

not too long or too short but just of the adequate length. In the case of happening events it is easier as the most important points of the news item can be given in the first few paragraphs whereas in the case of soft news it can be spread all over the story with some amount of literary writings.

Even though we say that the language should not be very literary, there is enough scope in any news story to write it in a language which is soothing to read and clear and crisp. This can not be achieved in a short time but has to be developed over years of experience and endless numbers of reports written for the news organization.

Cross checking of all the facts and figures, the story and other related aspects is a compulsory necessity for any news story and it is the responsibility of the journalist to have verified whatever he or she is presenting to the audiences.

### **Activity**

Watch the hourly news bulletins of a TV news channel every hour for 24 hours and find out the following :

- i) How many total news items have been included in all the bulletins of the channel through the day and night.
- ii) Make a list of the top news stories presented by the bulletins of that particular day of that channel.
- iii) Compare the lead news items of the bulletin in the next day's daily newspaper and find out how many of the TV news bulletin's news items have been included in the

## **1.8 SUMMING UP**

In this unit you have come to know the various aspects of news, news reporting and the responsibilities attached with the profession of journalism. You have also become familiar with how a news report should be prepared, how the contents should be included, presented and the moral duty of the journalist in verifying facts and preparing the news report. Further, ideas about authenticity and objectivity of news items, possible bad implications of a news item wrongly presented with a biased view etc. have been discussed. And by now you must have already developed a fair sense of the profession and responsibilities of the profession of journalism. Further, you will also be able to understand and learn a lot many practical things about the profession while practicing it hands on. We believe you are already making a major stride towards excelling in this profession.

## 1.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. *Journalism* -- N Jayapalan, Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi.
2. *Magazine article writing: substance and style* --- Betsy P. Graham, Holt Rinehart and Winston.
3. *Essentials of practical journalism* -- Vir Bala Agarwal, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi
4. *News Writing* – George A. Hough, Kanishka Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi.

### STOP AND READ

1. News is something new, interesting and relevant for the majority of the people in a society. It must have the capacity to influence a large number of people in the country or anywhere around the world to qualify to be called a news in the true sense of the term. It must be reported in the media on a timely basis.

While preparing a news item, the first paragraph should always invariably contain a brief summary of the whole news and the most important points should be explained in order of importance in the subsequent paragraphs. If the news item is concerned with several or many things happening at the same time or at short intervals then a general introductory paragraph should be written by incorporating the most important points of all of them.

2. Source of news means the potential persons or organizations from where there is possibility of generating news items on various subjects and occasions. It can be of two types. First – official or formal sources which include organizations, official press releases, statements, meetings etc. which are of general nature and any journalist may access them whenever needed.

However, there are personal sources who are officials or private individuals with whom journalists have to develop a personal rapport over the years so that whenever something controversial or negative involving their office or organization comes up, these personal sources may provide journalists the much-coveted inside information which will make good news items.

3. Cultivation of sources for news means developing a personal rapport and relationship with the personal or individual sources in order to find out information which might be difficult to get otherwise under normal circumstances. It is important to remember that even though government officials are actually not supposed to divulge official information to journalists yet majority of news items emanate from the official sources. And this is possible only when the journalist has a close relationship with the sources.

4. Objectivity in news means presenting only the facts and exactly describing what has happened in an event, nothing more nothing less. A news item must also not carry any personal comment of the journalist or the newspaper house. The responsibility of coming to a decision –



whether negative or positive should be left best to the audience/ readers and the journalist must never assume this responsibility on his own. Otherwise the objectivity will not be there and it will be a biased news item.

5.Objectivity is important for the journalist because if he or she continues to present non objective news items, after some time his employers and the audiences will lose faith on him and his or her personal reputation will go down steeply, endangering his professional career.It is important for the newspaper organization because if it continues presenting such news items to the audiences, people will also lose faith upon it and gradually they will stop subscribing to it causing a vital blow to its very survival.

5. To become successful, a journalist must be always very objective and authentic in presenting his or her facts and figures which he or she intends to present to the audiences through the newspaper or TV channel or Radio channel. Besides, a journalist must try his/her best to report about an event, activity or happening with the minimum gap of time between its happening and its presentation to the people.

6. While preparing a news report one must always make sure that the most important facts and figures are presented in the first half of the write up and other less important items in the lower half of the item. Besides, one must be extremely careful about the authenticity of the facts and figures presented in the news story so that no confusion or misleading situation is created on account of the news item.

### **1.10 PROBABLE QUESTIONS**

1. What are the characteristics of an event for making it newsworthy? Explain with examples.
2. What do you mean by sources of news? Briefly discuss various sources of news.
3. What are the qualities thought to be necessary for becoming a successful journalist?
4. What are the basic differences between hard news and soft news?
5. What are the social and professional responsibilities of a journalist?

# **MMC 104 REPORTING AND EDITING**

## **UNIT-2: NEWS WRITING**

### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

- 2.1 OBJECTIVES
- 2.2 INTRODUCTION
- 2.3 PRINCIPLES OF NEWS WRITING
- 2.4 NEWS STORY, NEWS STRUCTURE, WRITING NEWS STORY
- 2.5 HEADLINES
- 2.6 FEATURES
- 2.7 SUMMING UP
- 2.8 SUGGESTED READINGS
- 2.9 PROBABLE QUESTIONS

### **2.1 OBJECTIVES**

- A detailed study of this unit shall enable you to
- understand and use various techniques and styles of writing a news item
  - develop a hint or tip about something into a news item
  - identify a potential news item in the different happenings and developments all around us
  - convert an ordinary-looking piece of information into an interesting and attractive story
  - locate and develop interesting news ideas from already happening stories or developments

### **2.2 INTRODUCTION**

As you have by now studied the unit on News under this course you might be familiar with the broad concept of news in general. Here, we are going to focus specially on how to write a news item by observing all the necessary guidelines and principles. It should be noted here that a journalist has to write a news item keeping himself within the limits of the guidelines and principles. Yet there is enough scope for preparing the news item in an interesting and attractive way showing a good amount of creativity in the process. It should also be noted that there is no hard and fast rules and regulations about how a journalist can do a good news report under varied circumstance. But, the basic principles need to be observed while discharging your duties as a news reporter/editor. This is because a journalist does not know under what kind of situations – many a time highly adverse ones – one may have to perform one's duties. It is a tough task of collecting information and sending the same to the office for presenting it to the readers or listeners or viewers of that specific news media in turn.

### **2.3 PRINCIPLES OF NEWS WRITING**

The business of news writing is not an easy task in the initial years of one's career as a new entrant to the field of journalism. Whatever principles, guidelines and instructions one may be

given in the classrooms or through the study materials, these have to be backed up by a sufficient amount of on-the-job training for becoming successful in the profession.

Like any other profession, in journalism also, one has to learn the tricks of the job in the field applying the skills acquired in the classroom. Further, in this profession every passing day is a learning experience for the field practitioners as things keep changing always and one has to learn newer aspects from time to time for improvising one's skills.

While getting down to the business of writing a news item the first ever step is to select a suitable or relevant story idea. This may come in the form of a hint or a phenomenon already happening in the society which may point to some development to take place in the near or distant future.

Out of many things happening at the same time calling for our attention from all corners of the society, a journalist has to zero down on a few specific leads as it is not possible to do stories on all of them. This selection is based on quite a few important considerations like – the journalist's personal choice of issues and ideas, principles, aims and objectives of the newspaper or the news media, interests of the readers or audiences, importance of the event or happening for the society etc.

After selecting the issue or event to be written about, the journalist has to make an all out effort for collecting all the possible leads and information about it so that nothing vital or important is left out inadvertently.

Once the facts and figures are properly collected, the next step is to decide about which aspect of the issue or event is to be written/presented as the main lead point of the news item. And also the subsequent leads in order of their importance in a decreasing order. In other words, the inverted pyramid style of writing is to be followed.

This is important to be observed because each and every information or facts and figures may not be that relevant for the readers.

The next important step is to make efforts for making the news item interesting to read by a mixture of these aspects --- good language, an interesting start, properly sequencing the points so that the story flows in a smooth direction revealing all the important aspects in an orderly manner.

Further, it is interesting to tell you that depending upon the tactfulness, capacity for writing in a nice language, ability to spot the right points and aspects in any development or happening etc. allow us to convert a very ordinary-looking story into an interesting one so as to capture the attention of the masses.

This author once came across a news item in a prominent metropolitan daily published from New Delhi some years back that had described the problems of the postmen while delivering letters to

houses whose owners kept domestic dogs for security. The postman is heavily burdened with the difficulty of delivering the letters and at the same time faces the fury of the dogs guarding the houses.

Similarly, another news item focussed on the plight of the postman who has to climb many flights of stairs for delivering letters in high rise apartment blocks. The story also mentioned about the direction from a higher court of law allowing the postman to deliver the letters only to the caretaker of such buildings at the ground floor rather than climbing every floor for delivering the letters.

While writing news the universally-accepted principle of inverted pyramid should be followed with these guidelines for making the news item attractive and interesting :

The lead sentence should never be too long to make people feel lost by the end of the sentence or the paragraph. This would reduce peoples' interest on a certain news item with the risk of creating a dissatisfaction among the masses.

The words for the write up should be carefully chosen so that too complicated ones are avoided and replaced by those of everyday usage by the people. This is a great way of endearing a writing to the masses.

In providing facts and figures about anything in a news report every effort must be made for doubly verifying them so that there is no scope for controversy later , after its publication.

This is because as you all know once something is published or broadcast it can not be retrieved back even if wrong facts have been printed. That is why we must be one hundred per cent confirmed about what we are going to publish or broadcast at any given time. Media contents – whether it is news or features or opinions-influence the masses to a great extent. And something wrongly published or broadcast would create a wrong impression about a person or an institution which should never happen.

In addition to the possibility of legal problems arising out of such mistakes even if it may be an inadvertant one, this amounts to 'misleading the unsuspecting masses' by giving false information. Hence this proverb has become popular especially in journalism that - *when in doubt leave out*. It is a far better idea not to inform something to the people wrongly and drop it rather than publishing or broadcasting it with inadequate facts and thus mislead the masses.

In news writing it is a sacred duty of each and every journalist to strictly adhere to the professional responsibility of presenting news to the masses by being absolutely impartial and professional.

## **2.4 NEWS STORY, NEWS STRUCTURE, WRITING NEWS STORY**

If ever you are asked a question what makes a good news story, can there be a straight and plain answer? No. Anything and everything under the Sun can make for a good news item provided the journalist possesses the right kind of acumen and capacity to present it in an attractive way to the readers and audiences.

In addition to the everyday general news items like political debates, agitations, disasters, accidents, ups and downs in the financial world including downgrading the credit capacity and reliability and commercial and financial institutions by the credit rating agencies there is one important alternative called 'offbeat news' items.

This breed of news items is nothing but one which shifts the attention of the story to some such angles or aspects which have a strong appeal of human interest to a large number of people. These are different from those usual day-to-day happenings mentioned in the previous paragraph. Many a time these stories can be found, or followed up from other events already happening in the society. For example – the spirit of the people not be bogged down by terrorists' threats or natural or man-made disasters to rise once again after being devastated by such happenings like the Mumbai 26/11 attacks, the Tsunami in Japan as well as across the world about one-and-a-half decade ago.

Further, once a person has decided to join the profession of journalism one should also make it a point to look for possible news hints or feature tips in the otherwise dull and drab statistical information published or furnished by various organizations in the form of different types of diagrams or charts etc.

This is because it is a normal human tendency for a person to be deterred by the image of statistical data to understand something even if one wanted to study it. If this same set of data can be written in a convenient language and interesting manner that would go a long way in making people understand things much more effectively than the bare statistical presentations.

And it is sure and certain that many a time there are highly interesting – whether negative or positive or otherwise – stories waiting to be picked up from such data. For example, in the first quarter of 2010, the University Grants Commission (UGC) released a set of statistical data in its website which identified the most Educationally Backward Districts of the country in terms of having number of colleges and gross annual enrolment in them. It revealed that almost 60 % of the country's administrative districts fell in this category with some of them even having not a single college at all.

For most of the people,, even for those in academics, it may be a usual drab and dull set of statistical data, but for a journalist or feature writer this brings up a nice opportunity for preparing

a feature pointing out the fact that after more than six long decades of Independence, about 60 % of the districts of the country have failed to be included in the educationally-forward status with quite a few of them not even having a single college. In other words, the journalist should be able to find a hint or clue even when there is hardly anything like that for the common man's eyes.

//News or journalistic writing is the activity of writing about various issues and events using the minimum number of words while conveying the maximum meanings to the audience or readers.

While writing a news report this 'lead paragraph' or simply the 'lead' can be of the same 5Ws and H types. Such as – leads beginning with describing who has done something, what has been done or happened, where it has taken place, why it happened, and how it has happened. This is the very basic guideline for writing a news item and as a person becomes more experienced over the years one acquires more skills for writing a news item in more attractive and catchy style even while remaining within these broad parameters.

These are different ways of starting the news story with the expectation that the story appeals to the readers or audience.

While the various points of the story have to be written in a proper sequence in order of significance of each point, the journalist has to decide which of them is more important than the others.

Further, as you are already aware, 'space' in any medium is very limited. So each and every item, whether it is news or feature or columns to be published in a newspaper or a magazine, must be selected with utmost care so that the most relevant and significant ones among many competing events, issues etc. are not left out. Space in media should be utilized with the greatest care and judicious usage, not to waste even a miniscule portion of it.

A prominent blog in the field of journalism sums up the situation as --- "The inverted pyramid is the structural model for news writing. It simply means that the heaviest or most important information should be at the top – the beginning – of your story, and the least important information should go at the bottom. And as you move from top to bottom, the information presented should gradually become less important. The format may seem odd at first, but it's easy to pick up, and there are very practical reasons why reporters have used it for decades."

Further, it is always a good idea to quote a source or an eye witness as far as possible in any happening event while presenting a news item. However, the important consideration should be to make sure that the quote is presented correctly as it was said. A journalist should always strictly adhere to this principle, come what may. One should be more particular with those kinds of people who may show a tendency to refute their own quotes by saying that the person was

misquoted or the quotation was presented entirely out of the context. There are plenty of such examples presented in the media from time to time.

It is interesting also to note that quoting the name or the designation of a source accords a high value to the authenticity of any news item, yet sometimes it may not be feasible to identify a source by name and designation. This is so because many a time officials or even other persons may divulge tips or hints about something which have a potential to become controversial if the source's identity is revealed. So, if the journalist has been chasing such a news item then it is always better to clearly ask the source whether revealing the identity might prove troublesome. This is because a person (the source) may invite trouble if one reveals inside information about any scam or something which may show the organization in a bad light in public.

It should also be noted that a source is highly important for a journalist for the future also. Thus, while dealing with sources and cultivating them the sources must develop a sense of reliability and trust in the journalist and vice versa so that a meaningful working relationship can be formed over a period of time.

Besides, whenever there is a news item involving more than one party or persons, especially in case of potentially-controversial issues, it is a responsibility as much as a duty of the journalist to contact all the parties involved and take their views into consideration while writing the story. Otherwise, it shall lead to partiality or bias. Because, unless all the parties concerned are allowed to present their views on the issue it would be incomplete.

In addition to these aspects, the editing personnel should always give due respect to the views of the reporting personnel who have been to the spot of the happening of the news item and reporting from there. This is because whatever the journalist at the spot is experiencing with his own eyes can never be matched with even the highest level of empathy or imagination by the person sitting at the desk of the main office of the news media much away from the place of happening of the incident.

Even if the news item has to be re-written it must be done only in consultation with the reporter on the spot as far as possible. Of course, this may not be possible also in many cases when something happens in a far off place without any convenient communication system.

## **2.5 HEADLINES**

We have already discussed headlines in the Unit on News. It should always be kept in mind that the headline is the window of your news item to the world and to the target audiences. So people would stop to have a look at your news item only if they can be attracted by a good headline. It should be short and crisp and be able to create a sense of curiosity among the readers without being very elaborate.

Headline creation is an artistic as well as scientific exercise needed to be carried out in a cool brain. It is so important that in the earlier years some of the newspapers employed senior newsmen exclusively for giving headlines to the news items. It is interesting to note that these experts were not at all connected with the editing or reporting process of the newspaper. Yet their primary duties were to create a good and to the point and interesting headline just by looking at the news items already edited and selected for presentation to the readers.

A good headline can create interest among the readers even for a dull story whereas a bad headline may actually take away peoples' interest from a good news story.

While writing a headline or sub headlines for any news item or feature story etc. care should be taken for giving it from the first few paragraphs, preferably first one or two paragraphs of the story for more than one particular reason.

First of all, if a headline is given from the points of a news item from the lower parts, later on if at all the news item has to be shortened for lack of space in a newspaper or magazine then there is possibility that the portion from where the headline was chosen may be cut off. This will result in confusion in the minds of the readers.

Secondly, as you are already aware, in the inverted pyramid style of news writing the most important points of the story are usually packed in the first few paragraphs. So giving a headline from these would be safer.

## **2.6 FEATURES**

Features can be defined as human interest stories for consumption of the readers or audience in a news medium – whether print or electronic – virtually on any issue under the sun. Usually, these are not serious articles but are ones designed to give the readers a relief from the serious stuff in the newspaper or magazine.

A feature story can focus on any aspect of any issue or happening in the society. This author remembers an interesting feature story about the contrast in earning revenues and causing death to millions of people at the same time by the tobacco industry. The source of the information was a research report published by the Voluntary Health Association of India a few years back. The feature had shown that as a cottage industry tobacco production employed millions of people right from collecting leaves to the packing and distribution of the finished product. However, at the same time it was also causing death of millions of people every year.

While scouting for topics for writing a feature story, one should always try one's best to look for something interesting in everything one sees everyday. In other words, there should be something 'offbeat' or 'unique' about it which has a potential to appeal to human beings.



Unlike a proper news item and an article, in a feature the writer may exercise a considerable amount of freedom for by writing in a highly literary language to make it more attractive for the readers and audience.

## **2.7 SUMMING UP**

In this unit we have discussed in a nutshell various aspects and principles of writing news items and features, how to structure a news story, headline preparation etc. It would be worth repeating here that while there is no hard and fast rule as to how a news item can be made more interesting and attractive yet we must follow certain sets of guidelines for making news items and features easy, convenient and interesting to the readers/audience. There is no alternative to a combination of good language without any grammatical mistake, literary quality. not losing the main points of a story item, the sequence of events and happenings in the story or the smoothness in the flow of the information and most importantly proper usage of quotes, facts and figures among others. Even though in the initial years it may prove to be somewhat difficult, yet with practice and years of experience it would become a natural thing for a journalist who is keen on making a successful career in this field. It is also worth repeating here that the famous notion of ‘nose for news’ should be cultivated in a serious manner for being able to spot anything unusual and unique in any issue, happening or situation. Further, there is nothing called ‘in born’ talent in this regard. All these the skills and qualities highlighted here can be cultivated and developed over a period of time. The only requirement is the urge to learn.

## **2.8 SUGGESTED READINGS**

1. Biagi, Shirley (1992). *Interviews that Work: A Practical Guide for Journalists*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Wadsworth Publishing.
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3. Clark, Roy Peter. (2006). *Writing Tools: 50 Essential Strategies for Every Writer*. Little, Brown
4. Dedman, Bill . *Power Reporting*, <http://powerreporting.com>, resources and training in computer assisted reporting and editing.
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6. Kessler, Lauren & McDonald, Duncan. (1996). *When Words Collide: A Media Writer's Guide to Grammar and Style*. Belmont, California: Wadsworth.
7. Mencher, Melvin (2006), *News Reporting and Writing*, 10th edition, McGraw-Hill.
8. Pilger, John (2005), *Tell Me No Lies: Investigative Journalism that Changed the World*, Thunder Mouth's Press.
9. Rich, Carol (2007), *Writing and Reporting News*, 5th edition, Thomson Publishing.
10. Strunk, William & White, E.B. (1999). *The Elements of Style*. Longman.

## **2.9 PROBABLE QUESTIONS**

1. What are the principles of writing a news item and also a feature? Explain with examples.
2. Why should we put a major emphasis on providing correct facts and figures in a news item?
3. Identify some news items which can also be developed as features and write the points you would include in your features.

# **MMC 104 REPORTING AND EDITING**

## **UNIT-3: REPORTING**

### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

3.1 OBJECTIVES

3.2 INTRODUCTION

3.3 CONCEPT OF REPORTING

3.4 DIFFERENT TYPES OF REPORTING

3.5 REPORTING BEATS

3.6 BACKGROUND RESEARCH

3.7 QUALITIES REQUIRED FOR SUCCESSFUL REPORTING

3.8 SUMMING UP

3.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

3.10 PROBABLE QUESTIONS

### **3.1. OBJECTIVES**

A thorough study of this unit shall enable you to ---

-explain what reporting is and describe different types of reporting

-understand and explain what a Beat system in reporting is

-explain the importance of Background research

### **3.2. INTRODUCTION**

Reporting is one of the two most important activities in the field of journalism. Journalism can not survive

without this component at all. While in simple terms reporting means collection or gathering of information with

potential for becoming news, in practice it involves much more than this job.

To begin with, a journalist has to select the events, developments, activities which have more potential to be developed into a news item compared to others, collect or gather all relevant information about them and then write the same in a language compatible with the newspaper's or magazine's or news channel's mandate or style of presentation.

It would be a good idea to know in detail about the reporting process and system as it will help you become a better journalist in future as you would be familiar with both sides of the coin of journalism.

This is because if a reporter who has some basic ideas and experiences comes into the field of editing he or she would be much better-placed to produce a better news report for a newspaper or a magazine as a whole. On the other hand if an editor has a good and adequate exposure to the practical nuances of

reporting he or she would be able to better pick up the finer points of the reports filed by various sources and produce a better newspaper at the end of the day.

This unit is all the more important as it shall be your first step towards becoming familiar with the world of journalism practices and activities in the future.

### **3.3 CONCEPT OF REPORTING**

Reporting is the task of presenting information about a certain event, activity or development to the readers or listeners or viewers of a newspaper, radio news bulletin or TV news bulletin etc.

It is needless to say that each and every moment something or the other is happening all over the world and that something may not be directly or indirectly related to us. Reporting is the precise task of bringing all this information which has news value for a large number of people for publication or broadcasting in print or electronic media. This is a highly responsible task as it requires not missing any important information anywhere in the world while at the same time ensuring that whatever information is presented is accurate and to the point.

It is also to be kept in mind that orientation to news is different and is based upon the media – a news item may not be very interesting to be shown on TV while it may be otherwise while being presented in newspapers.

In reporting the journalist must go through the process of selective perception and selective exposure.

That is, a journalist must be able to choose a news item crying for attention among so many hundreds and thousands of issues worthy of being reported in the media. This initial selection based upon the journalist's sense of news or news judgment is crucial in making it popular and attractive among the masses who are readers of that news media.

When a journalist joins a news organization in his initial days, the organization usually places him or her under some senior journalists for some on-the-job training and grounding before the person can venture out independently on his or her own.

Besides, as a reporter grows up in an organization to a higher position and gains a lot of experience, he or she should be able to have developed a certain ability to spot a news item whenever he finds something interesting and knows that it will make a good news item.

In journalism as a whole one important aspect that should be remembered is that it is a job that requires a high amount of team spirit as more often than one has to work in groups for presenting a good news item to the readers or audience.

So the reporter's responsibilities include – selection of a news item out of so many happening things all around us inside the country as well as outside, collect all the necessary and relevant information about the issue, write down the report in a lucid and good writing style and present it to the editorial office. The responsibilities given here may look quite easy to read, but when you go to the field it assumes an

enormous scale because it will completely depend upon your capacity to get to the depth of the matter and collect every relevant information about it. Another important responsibility is to present the news item as 'exactly' as it has happened without the slightest of twist or personal opinion mixed with it.

While the job of both the editorial personnel and reporting personnel are equally important, it will be judicious to have both these personnel working in a perfect coordination and balanced manner. This is needed so that good news reports can be presented with adequate focus never diluting the significance of the report. The reporters as well as the editorial people both must be able to understand the pulse of each other so that the best news items are only presented for the benefit of the readers and thereby ensure a greater popularity for the news media.

We have mentioned at the outset that if both these persons know the job of the other side (a reporter knows how to edit and an editor knows how to report) they will be able to produce a much better quality newspaper or news bulletin.

Further, it is also assuming importance because of another new trend that is becoming popular over the last few years. That is – in the modern day TV news channels as well as the print media, it is almost becoming a routine activity that the reporter at times performs the task of editing and the editorial people do the job of a reporter whenever needed. Not only this, whenever the need arises and instructions are given these journalists also have to perform the task of presenting or anchoring news items – reading news bulletins on TV and Radio channels. So, it is also becoming important that a person interested in making a career out of journalism should be prepared to perform both these tasks whenever needed and do it effectively.

Hence, the job of a reporter is getting more and more challenging every passing day. Also, the dividing line between a reporter and editorial personnel is becoming thinner and everyday and many a time it even gets completely blurred and there is hardly any difference between the two.

While it is very much a welcome necessity that a reporter should be able to write or present his news items in a better language, it is not absolutely necessary. A reporter, when trying to find out the detailed information at the site of an accident, natural disaster, political development etc. may not be able to write in a good language or complete the news item as it actually appears in the newspaper or bulletin. This is because he or she might be too busy looking for the relevant information to bother much about good writing style.

At such times, it is the prime responsibility of the editorial desk to refine the language and present the news item in a language suitable for the newspaper or magazine or the news bulletin without changing the basic spirit of the news item at all. This is also a major challenge for the editorial people because it is quite difficult to rewrite or reshape someone else's write up or information without changing the basics at the same time and not having the benefit of experiencing the event or happening himself or herself.

### **ASSESS YOUR PROGRESS**

What do you understand by the term Reporting?

### Activity

Attend a public function or observe the celebration of a festival in your locality and write a report on it. Compare your write up to the one published in the newspapers immediately after the programme or festival and observe the differences in them.

Attend an important meeting or any other programme in your hometown and make a report by yourself after returning home. Next day, compare it with the report of the same event in newspapers and find out how they differed.

## 3.4 DIFFERENT TYPES OF REPORTING

Reporting can be divided into several important categories, For convenience of understanding and functioning of the profession, the following categories can be mentioned, among others :

- Investigative Reporting
- Interpretative Reporting

**Investigative Reporting:** As the nomenclature itself reflects it is the kind of reporting which means investigating into a certain happening or development, something out of the way that may be happening gradually or all of a sudden etc. in the society. Here, the reporter finds something amiss by chance or from tips from regular, trusted sources or may be from any source one might stumble upon about some negative developments taking place somewhere. And immediately the reporter begins his investigations by first collecting preliminary information about it secretly from people concerned without arousing suspicion of anyone. Then analyzing all the information the reporter has to delve deeper into the affair and finally find out why it is happening and gather information about the persons or organizations behind such developments.

A few classic examples of this type of reporting are – the recent 2G and 3G scams in the Ministry of Communication of the Union Government of India, the alleged financial irregularities during the latest Commonwealth games held in Delhi, the shares scam of the 1990s involving the big time share broker Harshad Mehta, the findings of the Tehelka sting operation, and the cash for questions deal of a few MPs etc.

It should be noted always that a journalist is a journalist for 24 hours 365 days a year. There is no recess period or rest period for a journalist. So whenever a journalist or reporter may notice something fishy or amiss or becomes suspicious about any development he or she must act promptly enough to make necessary arrangements for accessing detailed information about them which is definitely not an easy task. One must have patience, tactfulness, intelligence to overcome all hurdles in accessing those information and finally go to the core of the issues.

In the case of the Tehelka news item, it was common knowledge that bribes were paid in return for deals for buying of arms and ammunition which were worth many hundreds and thousands of crores of rupees by the India government's Ministry of Defence. So, the reporters of Tehelka laid a trap by secretly capturing a discussion on such a deal and actually paying a big amount as bribe to several prominent

political leaders. And it really created a major hue and cry all over the country and the government itself could not actually come out with a clean image after this scam.

This type of reporting requires patience, courage, presence of mind, close observational capacity etc. because it may take a lot of time to complete, requiring to meet many people for data collection etc. Besides, except that one is a reporter of a reputed newspaper or magazine one does not have any legal back up if he or she runs into some problem of law-and-order while trying to find out information regarding any such investigative reporting adventure.

Let me give you an example which has a very good scope for carrying out an investigative reporting. You probably know that all our MPs and MLAs are given crores of rupees by the central and state governments for taking up developmental works in their constituencies. But have you ever come across any detailed news items about how these large amounts of money are being spent? And if they are being spent, who are the actual beneficiaries, how many of these are only on papers, no concrete things has been achieved etc.? We do get a few reports in the media from time to time about a few MPs or MLAs taking up such projects but not in an exhaustive manner. This aspect offers a very suitable ground for an investigative reporting exercise.

There are endless such possibilities in the society. Similar exercises can be carried out also to identify and expose those involved in different types of scams, causes of any particular phenomenon like a disease spreading on a far more scale than the normal one in any specific area etc.

**Interpretative reporting:** On many occasions, a journalist, whether a reporter or an editorial person has to interpret or forecast certain happenings in future, based on various inputs they receive or acquire from the field reporting. A few nice examples will be the periods of elections, discussions or negotiations between different secessionist or agitating groups in a society or country, crisis of international or inter-state nature etc.

We all know that coalition governments have come to stay in the Indian context both at Central and State levels. Now, just before the general polls and immediately after it (on some occasions) most of the big and small political parties start negotiations with others for forming alliances. This has become a common practice and there is nothing wrong or new in it. Again, even if they did not engage themselves in such discussions prior to the polls, it is most likely that they would do so in the aftermath of the polls to form a government.

During these periods, the reporters, normally senior ones are usually given the task of observing the situation closely and then making forecasts and interpreting the developments that might take place--whether political party A will negotiate with party B or vice versa etc.

In case of international disputes like the China-Tibet issue, Iraq war, US presidential polls etc. media organizations do like to interpret the developments in their own way and inform the readers accordingly.

In doing this, mass media personnel have a certain advantage to their credit. That is – after long years of dealing with public affairs in almost every field of life, these media persons gradually develop such expertise and insight into these affairs that they become matured in interpreting such issues and aspects.

A media person must be able to judiciously apply experience, expertise, knowledge into newer developments and thereby come up with such interpretative reports or forecasts.

Right here, a dilemma is sure to arise. That is, we all know that news reports must never carry opinions. So how come this question of interpretative reports arise which definitely contain a strong amount of personal opinion. This is necessary because as we have said recently, mass media has to play the role of a leader of the society and lead them to a better life in future.

Hence, at times of crisis like the Assam agitation, the nuclear deal, problems faced by the society during times of transition times to a better era from the current one etc. this sort of Interpretative news reports are highly important for showing people the way in which to move.

**Objective Reporting:** Objective reporting refers to the plain presentation of facts as they have happened. Objective reporting does not involve contextualizing, back grounding, analyzing or opinionating. Here the reporter only reports what he has seen or observed without any kind of subjective inputs.

The following points can well summarize the concept of objective reporting:

- Balance and even handedness in presenting different sides of an issue
- Accuracy and realism in reporting
- Presenting all main relevant points
- Separating facts from opinions, but treating opinion as relevant
- Minimizing the influence of the writer's own opinions, attitudes or involvement.
- Avoiding slant, malicious or devious purposes.

It should be kept in mind that in journalism it is taken for granted that all news items would be based on facts and figures without ever deviating from the truth so that the masses are presented with actual news items, never with some partiality. This aspect should be maintained at all times by any journalist whether in electronic media or print media.

### **3.5 REPORTING BEATS**

A reporting beat means a specific area assigned for reporting to a journalist by news media which has been necessitated by a practical requirement. This is because in a big city every passing day many events and developments keep taking place that it is almost impossible for one or a few journalists to keep up with all these activities and report on them. Thus, teams or groups of journalists are assigned to some specific and established beats or areas where there is potential for important events occurring at regular intervals.

For example – we all know that crime incidents are always on the rise or usually stay constant always with many criminal activities taking place on any given day. Hence, teams of several journalists are assigned permanently for covering these issues.



Similarly, in the capital of a State or in New Delhi many political parties are active in the political scenario of the country, more so during the elections, or in some crisis in the government etc. During such periods and circumstances, teams of journalists need to be assigned to various political parties, mainly the major ones for catching hold of important snippets for reporting in the media.

Thus the media organizations organize their journalistic personnel in different beats for managing a wider coverage of many events taking places every day at different places and in different organizations.

The beat system was thought of by an enterprising owner editor of a newspaper in the USA in the initial days of freedom from the UK. At that time, a majority of the newspapers were published by the established political parties or their sympathizers and supporters. This went on for quite a long time.

However, this editor gradually realized that it was difficult to get enough news items and sustain readers' interests in the journals if there were no interesting political activities going on. So he devised a rather innovative system. He made a provision for his reporters to make regular rounds of selected organizations, people etc. who had the potential of doing something which could be termed as a news , for example, offices of political parties, their senior leaders, municipality offices, Sheriff's office (the defender of the town or city), a hospital etc.

Depending upon the interests of the readers, the aims and objectives and policies of the newspaper, their financial and business clout etc. there might be various beats ranging from the municipality office, police or law-and-order, hospitals, important ministries of the government, university or big college campuses, offices of associations of business or commercial establishments etc. A few common ones are - the government offices, political parties and their leaders, law-and-order beat, fire brigade, office of the district deputy commissioner, the state secretariat, legislative assembly or Parliaments etc.

Further it is not that this is a fixed division and allocation of duties. One may have to look after more than one beat at times whenever it might be required.

So, in simple words a 'reporting beat' is a specific organization, institution assigned to a reporter on a regular basis.

In this system, in the initial period the reporter will make rounds of the beats allocated to him or her alone or maybe with a senior from the news organization to make themselves familiar with the sources – the personnel employed in them.

After sometime he or she will have made adequate connections with the news sources in those organizations like journalists to develop and cultivate their sources under normal circumstances.

Despite all its limitations, the system is a highly popular and convenient one for the media all over the globe.

However, for smaller newspapers and magazine in small cities and semi urban areas, this may not be feasible where not many important happenings usually take place. And the news organizations can not afford to hire many people for the job.

It is a common practice that a news organization, whether a newspaper or a TV or Radio channel appoints a good number of staff reporters on their regular payroll who are to report on all the important matters

happening in that city. This is because invariably all readers or audience of newspapers and TV or Radio are definitely much more interested in what is happening in and around their city, state, region, nation, and then in the international area.

But, as we can't ignore national and global happenings, most of the established newspapers make it a point to have at least a few reporters in different places of the country and the world.

**Crime Beat:** From your personal life experiences you must have found that the majority of the readers are interested in knowing about crimes. Thus crime and law-and-order has been made a separate beat since a long time ago. This is very important also from the point of view of readers' or audience's interests. Major established news organizations in metropolitan cities have teams of 30 / 40 people on this beat.

**Culture Beat:** We know that a news organization has to cater to the diverse interests of the people with different attitudes, tastes etc. So, culture is also one of the important beats. In major news organizations they employ several persons for the job of reporting cultural events happening in the city including drama, music and dance recitals and other programmes, festivals and review of films etc. Or many of them outsource these functions, that is, they get these written by someone from outside the organization, people who are well-conversant in such subjects.

**Political Beat :** Politics has an overwhelming presence and influence over our lives in almost every walk of life. So how can a news organization ignore the presence of it? Thus politics is an important beat for any newspaper or channel. Major newspapers or channels assign quite a number of people for this beat and individual political parties for a smooth functioning of the beat. In an age when coalition governments have become more of a norm, reporters in the political beat have to be always on their toes – alert – as at anytime of the day or night there is a possibility of the alliance parties withdrawing support from the government.

**Economics Beat :** Economic situation is a major influence on every human being. Of late the abnormal hike in the crude oil prices has caused a worldwide crisis situation with even the rich and developed nations finding it difficult to sustain their general growth. And as crude oil is the fuel of life for the world, its crisis means a difficult economic situation across the world. This is only one example. Our life is too tightly tied up with the economic situation of our country as well as the world over. So this is a highly important beat.

**Sports:** We hardly need to say anything about the interest of people in various sports and games at every level. Hence newspapers and channels do devote a good amount of their space to sports news coverage whether it is from local, national or global arena. There is a good portion of people among the readers and

audience of newspapers and channels who subscribe to it more for the sports news items rather than the general news items.

As already mentioned, these are a few examples just to give you the idea of what is a beat. There may be many more beats depending upon the specific news organization's interests, readers or audience's profile, area of publication and so on.

### **ASSESS YOUR PROGRESS**

1. What is a Reporting Beat? Give examples.

## **3.6 BACKGROUND RESEARCH**

You have seen that preparation and presentation of a news item, an article, a feature on any topic or issue or aspect of life and the society seems to be simple enough from the readers' point of view. But only the journalists and people involved in these activities know what a painstaking, time-consuming and responsible job it is.

Now, when a journalist is assigned a specific task for reporting on an issue – whether it is a natural disaster, a political event, an economic crisis or a social phenomenon etc., he or she has to go through a few steps. These include – collection of adequate authentic information – the first and foremost and sacred activity, if it is a major happening try to ascertain whether similar events have occurred in the past, if yes how frequently, trying to know the cause of the events as to how they occurred or happened from personnel of responsible government or autonomous organizations so that the readers and audiences can be given a comprehensive idea about the entire issue.

Then again, if a background search is made prior to attending a press conference or an interview with a celebrity etc. questions regarding past issues can also be raised if it is found that the person is making a statements that contradict his organization's earlier stand.

Let me give you an example. Once the head of a prominent public sector undertaking of the central government was making very glowing statements about his organization's achievements at a press conference. However, just at that point a journalist reminded him about an incident that the Central Government minister of the time had made very adverse remarks against the head about the dismal status of the organization's establishment at Guwahati. The journalist wanted to know what was being done in this regard. The head of the organization did not expect this question and was initially at a loss as to what to say.

Hence, background research is a highly important aspect of journalism and even for the entertainment programmes.

### **3.7 QUALITIES REQUIRED FOR SUCCESSFUL REPORTING**

Reporting is also a highly demanding and engaging profession like many other professions. Therefore here also there are certain qualities and traits which need to be nurtured if a person wants to become successful in journalism. A few of these qualities include the following:

- The reporter must develop a 'sense of news' or 'news judgment' which would enable him or her to understand and realize the potential importance of a news item the moment a hint or tip is received.
- Patience, courage, zeal and tactfulness are other important qualities needed as many a time accessing tips and details for news items may take a long time, requiring to face hostile conditions in a foreign land.
- It would be much beneficial if the reporter has an understanding of the pulse of the readers or audience of the news organization in which he or she is working as this would help in preparing the news reports from the perspectives of the interests of the readers of that specific news media.
- The reporter must always keep his/her eyes and ears open any moment of the day or night as any news might happen at any moment of the 24 hours of the day.
- Once a hint or tip received from any source the reporter / journalist must never hesitate to take prompt action in chasing details of that event or development so that he or she can lay his or her hands on it before anyone else gets an idea about it.
- Whenever a journalist goes to a difficult place in a hostile terrain and environment for collecting information for news purpose, he/she must always make arrangements or at least keep in mind possible ways and means of going back to his or her place of work or at least to a place from where the news items can be transmitted to the office. This is more specially needed during one's visits to trouble-torn places where the journalist can't expect any protection from any quarters except his own courage and tact to escape the situation after gathering his information for the news items.

### **3.8 SUMMING UP**

In this unit you have been introduced to the exciting world of reporting and different types of reporting which will further equip you to carry out your job in a better way in future when you will have joined the mass media as a profession. Reporting is simply the job of presenting a news item after spotting it, collecting all the relevant information about it and writing it in a good language without any personal comment. There are quite a few types of reporting like Investigative, Interpretative and Objective, which represent different styles and aspects of reporting. Reporting beats, on the other hand, mean the areas to which a reporter might be assigned regularly for some time. He or she would be entrusted with the task of reporting any happening in his or her own field. This is a good provision because it helps a reporter to specialize in one field and there are less chances of missing a news item. There are also chances for getting to know one's sources of news far more closely than otherwise. And background research is

simply the ground work or study that we have to carry out before embarking on a reporting mission or an interview with someone or writing of a feature etc. Besides, persons interested in this profession should also be aware of the requirements in terms of skills and other requirements for a successful career in this field.

### **3.9 SUGGESTED READINGS**

1. *Handbook of journalism and mass communication* - VB Agarwal, VB Gupta, (Concept)
2. *Journalism* -- N Jayapalan, Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi.
3. *Essentials of practical journalism* -- Vir Bala Agarwal, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi

### **3.10 PROBABLE QUESTIONS**

1. What is Reporting?
2. What is Interpretative Reporting?
3. What is Investigative Reporting?
4. What do you understand by the term Reporting Beats? Why is it important in the field of journalism?
5. What is background research? Why is it important for mass media?

# **MMC 104 REPORTING AND EDITING**

## **UNIT-4: EDITING**

### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

- 4.1 OBJECTIVES
- 4.2 INTRODUCTION
- 4.3 CONCEPT OF EDITING
- 4.4 NEWSROOM / NEWS DESK SET UP
- 4.5 DEADLINE, REFERENCE SECTION
- 4.6 HEADLINES
- 4.7 PAGE LAY OUT
- 4.8 SUMMING UP
- 4.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

### **4.1. OBJECTIVES**

A thorough study of this particular unit shall enable you to ---

- explain the broad concept and process of editing
- describe the hierarchy or overall set up of an editing section in a news organization
- explain different aspects and nitty gritty of the editing system
- discuss the qualities and efforts needed for converting oneself into a good and successful editor at any level of the system

### **4.2. INTRODUCTION**

By now all of you must be familiar with the concepts of news and reporting and thus it is only natural that now we proceed towards a detailed study of the process of Editing. In simple words the system of editing is the overall and exhaustive activity of converting something into a presentable format keeping intact all the necessary elements of that article or item in any kind of media – whether films, newspapers, advertising, etc.

It is an important process which is practised by even human beings on a day to day basis. Do we say whatever we feel like saying or do whatever we want to do both in our private and social life? We exercise restraint and caution before we do anything in our personal life. This mental process is also part of editing that editors display in their profession.

### **4.3. CONCEPT OF EDITING**

As already mentioned above, Editing is the process of presenting a news item to the readers or audience by polishing the news items prepared by the reporters or those received from the news supplying agencies from across the nation or world.

While a reporter or the reporting section of a news media has to take care of looking for and gathering interesting, relevant and important happening news items, it is the overall total responsibility of the editing section to create an attractive newspaper, magazine or a news bulletin for consumption by the masses. Thus, it is a great responsibility which is usually accorded to senior people with years of experience in the entire business of news collection and presentation.

While reading about it, the process seems to be an easy task, but the editing persons have to take care of cross-checking the correctness of the facts and figures given in the news story, grammar, language in the newspaper or the sequence of the news items in an electronic media news bulletin, placement of various news items and photographs etc. what not. Hence it is a great responsibility to shoulder and one requires years of experience to carry out this task.

This is a core function of the profession of journalism – whether in print or electronic media, it is alike. Here it is important to distinguish between the functions of the reporting personnel and editing personnel.

In the world of journalism the reporter or the reporting section is basically concerned with looking for a collecting news items which are of high value to the specific news media where they are employed. And ‘high value’ for the news media in reality means value for the target audiences which are served by that newspaper or news channel.

As against this, the primary responsibility of the editing personnel is to brush up the news items or the facts and figures contained in these items and present them in a suitable manner to the audiences. While it looks quite a simple task yet it is a highly crucial job requiring a huge amount of patience, presence of mind, ability to keep oneself free from any tension at times of crisis, and language skills among others. This is because the job of editing has to include so many different important aspects like – re-confirming facts and figures in a news item supplied by the news organization’s own reporters or agencies or any other source, check its language, punctuation, writing a good and catchy headline, sub-headline, deciding upon the news item’s place in the overall layout of the newspaper or magazine etc.

Further, it is not only that the editing persons have to concern themselves only about news items. This section is also responsible for the overall look of the newspaper or magazine by giving it a creative and attractive layout at the end of the day.

Besides, as we know that news is something that may happen at any moment, the editing personnel have to be ready for the last minute disruptions which occur when a major breaking news item comes at the last moment – say at 9 p. m. when the paper was expected to have been sent to press for printing.

Not only these. Editorial personnel have to coordinate with the reporting section for planning ahead of expected or unexpected situations so that there is no crisis at the last minute after happening of a developing event.

For example, if elections are going to be held in a few months or other major events are expected to take place at a particular point of time such occasions must be planned in advance and reporters be trained to hunt for possible news stories from specific angles.

Similarly, at times of unexpectedly important breaking news happening like a disaster, death of a head of the state, prominent citizen, peoples' movement etc. the editing people must be able to show a good amount of foresightedness about what angle of such stories or news items to be focused upon or how to develop the stories matching with the expectations of the readers or audiences of that particular news media.

While it is a big relief for the editing section of a news organization if the reporters are also equally adept in writing a good news items, many a time the latter can not be expected to write a good item when they are under a lot of stress at the site of a disaster or accident at a remote place. Hence, on such occasions the responsibility falls upon the editing section for preparing a good news item out of the facts and figures or anything else supplied by the reporters from the site of the disasters or events. This process is known as gate-keeping in the parlance of Journalism.

It is basically a highly-important gate-keeping activity that can create a lot of goodwill for the news media or at the same time also create a bad reputation depending upon a proper and efficient selection of news items and story angles out of all the available leads and developments.

#### **A few Definitions and Quotes**

- Editing is the artistic presentation of news to the readers.
- Editing is the able director behind a successful and popular feature film
- Editing facilitates creation of a high quality finished product with raw materials supplied by Reporting.
- Editing can be considered as the 'first among equals' in the field of journalism.

#### **The Editing Process**

Contrary to the general impression prevailing in the minds of the masses that editing simply means setting right grammatical mistakes and the general language of the write up, however, editing is not simply correcting grammar and language of the news items filed by the various sources of a news organization day in and day out. It is much more than that. It is a much important and arduous task.

In a newspaper or electronic media news office news items trickle in from different sources on any number of issues under the sun. Here the term news also includes non-news items like features, articles, film or art criticisms etc.



While trying to give you an idea of the job profile of the editorial personnel in a news organization, we will address the process editing the news items in a media organization and then discuss the activities of all the persons involved here as editor, sub editor, news editor as the case might be.

First of all, the news items which fit into the newspaper's policy and principles are taken for the next phase of editing. And secondly, the news that holds immense importance for the readers and arouse their curiosity, even though they do not exactly fit into the newspaper's policy, but publication of which will not hamper its image or principles, are scanned for further consideration.

Once all the reports have been received in the editing office, the editorial personnel concerned with various sections, cells or divisions get down to their work. The first step is the sorting or selection of items. This involves several considerations.

The selected news items are then considered for further editing. Most of the news items require some amount of editing. Firstly, in order to fit into the specified space and secondly, in order to shape it to the style of the newspaper.

First of all – the reporter who has filed it has already selected it out of so many events, happenings in his or her field. Secondly, in every section or cell or beat, for example in the sports beat, there may be different stories or reports like ongoing Olympics, national level sports or games, individual sportspersons excelling in something, news about the government trying to develop sports infrastructure etc.

Similarly, in another section or beat, for example – politics, there may be so many news items like selection of a new prime minister by an alliance, or a minister by the chief minister or prime minister due to resignation or death of another minister, one party withdrawing support from the government etc.

The senior divisional or sectional editorial personnel will decide which of these news items are actually of a publishable quality. Then the next step is to arrange them in a list based on their importance – the most important one obviously on the top of the list. After this comes another significant step. That is, to edit these selected news items observing various rules and regulations of the organization as well as the general principles of editing. This exercise includes re-verifying of the facts and figures given in the news items, rewriting them if needed, changing the orientation of the news item itself by reorganizing the points taken up by the reporter, thinking of a good and catchy headline to go with the item etc.

Same is the case with photo editing also. Finally, arranging all the news items into a nice, attractive layout is also the responsibility of the editing people. This requires special skills as there is no hard and fast rule or formula for doing this.

The sub editor assigned to edit the news item first reads the story. Ideally a news item should be read thrice to become familiar with it as well as understand the same. Even when a news item has to be re-written, the writer's tone or angle of writing should be respected by the editor.

Sometimes the sub editor may be required to re-write the entire story. It happens when there are many loose ends in the reporter's or other source's write up.

Not only this. An editor has to be ever prepared for emergency. This is because it may so happen that even after completing the day's editing work and preparing the layout at 10 p. m. a very important and big volume news item may just come which has to be accommodated at any cost. It will result in a complete re-arrangement of the entire priority list of news items and a total re-organizing of the layout.

So, in every news organization there is a senior and responsible editorial person on duty till a very late hour of the night- in the case of print media till the time the last edition of the paper is printed.

Again, the responsibility of editing is not finished here. In addition to all these activities described here, the editing people must also plan for the future. They must be able to foresee what is going to happen in the near and distant future under the present circumstances and plan for filing of news items and features, articles etc.

So we see that an editor has to be sound in grammar, spellings, language, checking facts and figures, have a sharp bent of mind to spot the abnormal and wrong information or expression, inconsistency in the stories or write ups, quick and fast in decision-making, foresighted, good in analytical process etc.

#### **4.4 NEWSROOM / NEWS DESK SET UP**

There is a certain hierarchy in the setting of the editorial personnel desk in a news organization. It can be roughly described in the following manner :

<b>Designation</b>	<b>Jobs/Assignments/duties performed</b>
Editor	Over all head
Executive Editor	over sees the duties performed by colleagues below his rank
News Editor	over sees the overall news to be published
Deputy Editor	
Assistant Editor	
Chief sub editor	
Senior sub editor	
Sub editor	
Trainee sub editor	
Features / articles editor	
Sports editor	
Editor of cultural pages	
Photo editor	
Chief Reporter	
Senior Correspondents	

Correspondents

Freelancers

Further, it is important to note that this arrangement is only a general one and every news organization may have its own separate arrangement or system of hierarchy best suited to their own requirements, interests and taste of their readership etc. So it may not be exactly the same for any news organization and may be completely different in each one of them.

There is no hard and fast rule about how many editing or reporting personnel have to be employed by any news media. It depends upon the actual requirements of the organization which further depends upon the newspaper or news channel's area of operations, areas where there is a sufficiently large number of their audiences or readers or potential audiences or readers are spread over, the number of editions published etc. among others.

Yet, usually, established dailies and news channels in a metropolitan city in our country can have around a hundred journalists including all sections leaving aside those working in the DTP, advertising and sales, administration etc.

However, this author during a visit to a few newspaper offices and TV / Radio channels in the USA in an exchange programme in 2010 was quite surprised to find that on an average any daily even at a medium level of business and circulation in the various cities and towns have several hundred journalists working in close coordination. There, having about 300 – 500 journalists – in all relevant sections like reporting, editing, photo journalism etc. is a normal situation which is completely opposite in our country where a medium level newspaper usually has just about 15 / 20 journalists.

Having more persons is good from the point that this helps in being able to offer much more varied coverage by newspapers and magazines or news channels which facilitates attracting more readers and audiences in future.

### **Functions at each level of the newsroom hierarchy**

An Editor is the person responsible for the overall activities of the news organization in print or electronic media alike. Even though he or she may not exactly be aware of each and every news item being printed in the daily newspaper or broadcast in the TV or Radio journal yet will be responsible for any legal complicity or controversy which may arise out of the news items and to some extent the advertisements also.

An editor is normally a person of long years of experience in public affairs and thereby is expected to guide the team of colleagues right down to the trainee sub editor towards the goal of making the newspaper or magazine or the news bulletins popular and successful in the short as well as long run.

Many a time you may find designations like Chief Editor, Managing Editor etc. in a news media organization. A chief editor is usually a person of high reputation with a huge popularity among the public in a specific field – normally in literature, mass communication etc. whose association with that

particular newspaper or channel helps in making it sell more among the people. This person is usually not much involved with the day-to-day running of the newspaper or magazine or news channel though he or she may have a major say in case of policy decisions of the organization.

A Managing Editor is normally a majority stakeholder (it may not be the case also in many cases) in that business or publishing group which has been publishing that particular newspaper or news channel and by virtue of that runs the affairs of the organizations combining business with journalism to a large extent.

An Executive Editor is the person who actually exercises most of the day-to-day functioning and activities of the news organizations. In most of the cases, he or she represents the editor and carries out instructions accordingly. While the editor is expected to provide overall general leadership to the entire team of the reporters and editorial personnel it is the executive editor who actually looks after the everyday routine jobs of the news organizations.

The News Editor is normally a person who has long years of experience in journalism and considerable number of sources in the field. Even though the reporters and to some extent any journalist is responsible for news, the News Editor is specially responsible for making sure that not a single important news item is missing from the newspaper or news bulletin on any given day.

Deputy and Assistant Editors are usually senior journalists normally put in charge of a specific page or division. For example – such a person may be the head of the business section, culture section, features, women's issues, children's issues, rural issues, science and technology, finance.

The job of the Sports Editor hardly needs any explanation. It is better if the person has keen interests in sports so that he finds it easier to report and edit the sports news items for the newspaper or channel..

Chief sub-editor is also a mid-level senior person in the organization who is normally put in charge of the desk for a specific shift. This person is responsible for directing his or her junior sub editors in the job of selecting news items important for the newspaper and channel and then get the job of copy editing done by the senior sub editors.

Senior sub-editors as well as the Sub editors are the foot soldiers of the news organizations. It is this breed of people who actually carry out the practical job of editing the news items and features, checking them for grammatical, factual corrections, authenticity under the watchful eyes of the senior people in the organization.

A sub editor is normally at the lowest rung of the editorial desk hierarchy but sub editors actually carry out a major portion of the ground work of editing stories from all angles before passing it on to the senior personnel for further polishing.

Then there may be ‘trainee sub editors’ in many organizations.

Again, I believe there is hardly any need for explaining the responsibilities of a Photo editor in a news organization. He or she is the person who is responsible for coordinating photographs of events, happenings thought to be worthy of being reported or published or broadcast. He or she is also the person who has to play the role of an editor for the photo section of the news organization.

Further, do not ever be surprised to find the term called ‘copy editors’ in recruitment advertisements for journalists in news media. A copy editor is nothing but a sub editor.

Sometimes, you may also find a term Resident Editor which usually means an editorial person who is the head of a regional edition of a newspaper or channel located at a different place than the original or main office from where it is published or broadcast.

## **4.5 DEADLINE, REFERENCE SECTION**

**Deadline** is the time when filing of news items for the newspaper or news bulletin has to be stopped for facilitating timely publication or broadcasting of them. For example – a newspaper has to be edited, printed, packaged, transported and delivered physically to the people in remote areas by hand. All these take a lot of time and that is why a newspaper has to be sent to the printing press with sufficient time to spare for packing, transport and then delivering it to the readers’ homes. Hence, filing of news items has to be stopped around 8 or 9 o’clock in the evening so that all these steps can be completed on time for punctually delivering the paper to the people.

Same is the case for news bulletins on TV and Radio. There also, a news bulletin being time bound (must be broadcast at a specific pre-set time), a time limit is fixed after which no more news items will be accepted for editing. This is called deadline.

I am sure all of you would remember the term background research. It has a certain relationship here. That is, everyday in this world, hundreds and thousands of events are happening and many of them might be of some interest for the future. So, selecting anything published in this regard in one’s own newspaper or otherwise, these news items are kept as reference materials for future usage by the news organizations including electronic media.

This is called the **Reference section** in a news organization. For example, during these days many news items and related aspects are being reported about the Jasmine revolution which has changed the Arab world for good.

## ASSESS YOUR PROGRESS

1. What is the significance of deadline in the journalism profession?
2. Why do news organizations maintain reference sections?

### 4.6 HEADLINES

Headlines are nothing but interesting windows to the news items in a newspaper or a news bulletin. A headline serves the most important purpose of trying to attract peoples' attention to the particular news item by stimulating their interests in it. A headline has to be smooth, attractive, and whenever possible there should be a humorous touch to it so that people like to read it.

A headline is the first window to a news item in a newspaper or a magazine or even in an electronic media channel – whether it is radio or TV alike. It is a like sophisticated packaging of the news items which actually attracts the audiences or readers to that particular news item under any circumstances. Hence being able to provide a good and catchy headline speaks of a high amount of creative abilities in a journalist which needs to be exercised and developed effectively in the future.

A headline should not be very long, big or use high-sounding words to attract people which would actually have a repelling effect in reality. It should be good enough to create curiosity among the readers so that they do make it a point to read the headline the first time they look at it and then come back to it after glancing at the entire paper.

A news item may can be considered incomplete without a proper headline in it. A very drab story can also get peoples' attention by being made more interesting by the use of a catchy headline. Similarly, a very important story may appear dull and unimportant for the readers if the headline is poor. When the readers hold the newspaper in their hands in the morning they simply scan through all the headlines on the first reading. Having done this, they go on to read the news items which have the most attractive headlines because these catch their eyes at the first glance and arouse their interest to go through the entire news item.

It is the headline that sells a story. This is one of the reasons why many news organizations appoint skilled persons, specifically to write headlines. Not every media person has the skill of writing good headlines, despite having good grasp over other necessary skills of journalism. Even a very efficient desk person, with all the credibility of perfect editing acumen, may not be able to sell a story by giving the brightest possible headline.

Also, a headline, apart from catching the attention of the readers, helps in telling them about the nature of the news that the story contains. It helps to tell the readers whether that particular news is important for

them or not. Further, the design of the headline is also important in the sense that it determines the importance of the story. Bolder or bigger the size of the headline, more importance it seems to carry.

Another very important function of the headline is that it gives a typographic relief to the readers as well as the paper. Or in other words, it attempts to break the typographic monotony of a page and lends variety to the otherwise dull looking pages of the newspapers.

However, writing the headline is not an easy task. It takes years of experience and ample creativity on the part of the newsmen to hone this skill.

A few tips are :

- Normally a headline is written drawing from the information given in the first paragraph,
- A noun precedes a verb,
- The copy editor should be able to capture the flavour of the story,
- Short, simple words should be used to write the headlines,
- Only single quotation marks should be used while writing the headline,
- It must fit into the allotted space, neither too long nor too short for the specific space provided for the headline,
- There are various types of headlines commonly used by the news organizations,

## A FEW TYPES OF HEADLINES

### KICKER

When two important pieces of information are to be carried in the headline, then the headline is broken into two sentences. The second line of the headline is apparently bolder and bigger in size. Above this there is another sub-ordinate headline which is half the size of the one below and also with different font style. It is called **kicker** or **eyebrow line** or **strapline**. It adds a new thought but does not repeat the words or information in the main line below. To add white space, the kicker is always underlined.

Power shortage  
***Lack of alternatives  
adds to woes***

By A Staff Reporter      supply of Central sector pow-      ty of power shooting up to  
GUWAHATI, April 25 – It      er were known to the Power      around 230 MW during the  
seems that the failure of the      Department well in advance.      peak load hours and around 170

27 cadres surrender at Tamulpur  
**ULFA strength dwindling  
in lower Assam: Army**

By Our Correspondent      would, however, take some      in the Lower Assam area, and  
GUWAHATI, April 25 –      time before zeroing in on them.      this has helped in restoring  
Major General C Prakash, Gen-      The GOC was speaking to      peace," the GOC asserted.

KICKER


REVERSE      KICKER      OR  
HAMMER HEADLINE

As the name suggests, this headline is exactly the reverse of the kicker headline. Here the kicker over line is set twice the size of the hammer headline below. Although the over line is bigger than the hammer, the hammer is still considered to be the main headline. This headline was originally used mainly in feature stories only, but now-a-days it used for hard news stories as well.

**STRESSED OUT**  
Disorders Like Headaches & Sleeplessness Are Increasing Among Children

Naresh Mitra / 199

**A** It is not well with school-going children. They have to cope up with a more competitive and stressful world than their predecessors had to do. Today they have to strive to be the best in everything they do. And the ef-



mation. This leads to stress and sleeplessness as they do not enjoy learning at all. On the hand, parents want their wards to excel in everything which is literally not possible. Students don't enjoy learning as it is examination oriented rather than activity-based," said Father V M Thomas, executive director of Don Bosco Institute here. Increase in syllabus content has increased the weight of the school bag

**HAMMER**

### SINGLE- LINE HEADLINE

When the headline contains just one sentence and extends along the same line only, then it is called a single-line headline.

**Apolitical AASU in active politics?**  
Our conflict with AGP leaders, paving Mahanta's way to AGP, is inevitable: AASU

By our Staff Reporter  
GUWAHATI, May 1: If the Asom unit of the Congress seems to work overtime to expose Prafulla Kumar Mahanta apparently to prevent the

for Mahanta's joining the AGP" is inevitable. This statement has put a big question mark on the students' body's "apolitical character". Talking to newsmen in Guwahati

cannot be excused for all his vices, ills and conspiracies. All the other regional forces should come together. Regional forces of smaller tribes should also be roped in for a broader

he was quite silent on the Centre-NSCN(IM) ceasefire even in Asom territory, he supported the proposed river linking project, and he failed to solve the ethnic problems of the

Look at the example given below.

**Govt apathy over forest protection flayed**

By A Staff Reporter  
GUWAHATI, March 25 – Opposition members in the Assembly today alleged apathy

the cut motions on the demand for grant of Rs 20,865.52 lakh for the Forest Department in the State Assembly today, de-

ing by the smugglers has been adding to the problems of rise in the riverbeds and man-animal conflict. But the Govern-

most of the forest officers are lacking in their commitment to their assigned responsibilities, he said.

### DOUBLE- LINE HEADLINE

In case of some headlines, the sentence extends to two lines. This type of headline is called as double-line headline.

**Water crisis in Manipur, Singda dam under repair**

**IMPHAL, April 30:** Manipur is reeling under acute water crisis with the main water supply project at Singda near here not functioning properly.

Public Health Engineering Department Minister T N Haokip visited Singda yesterday and met the village chiefs to discuss about the maintenance of the dam.

The villagers also submitted a memorandum to the minister

### MULTIPLE LINE HEADLINE

If the same sentence extends to three lines or more, then it is called a multiple line headline.



## Sino-Indian trade at Nathu La postponed

GANGTOK, May 1 – The annual Sino-India border trade at Nathu La, which was to be reopened today, has been postponed following the Commerce Ministry's communique to the Sikkim government, official sources said here.

"We have received a fax message from the Union Commerce

## TN retreats on Vivekananda House

**M.R. VENKATESH**

Chennai, April 25: The Tamil Nadu government has handed victory to Ramakrishna Math, saying it had "no plans to take back or demolish" Vivekananda House where the monk-philosopher stayed four years

and the PMK had opposed any takeover bid by the state before or after the lease period ended in February 2010.

Karunanidhi said there was no proposal to take back the building, which the emissary to the Math had said would be used to house a centre

### FLUSH LEFT HEADLINE

When a single or multiple line headline is aligned to the left margin, it is called a flush left headline. The white space at the

right is considered enhancing, because it allows "air" into the otherwise stuffy column spaces and makes it more pleasing to the eye. Flush left is

the most commonly used headline today. When in a flush left headline, every next line is longer than the previous one, it is called a **stepped headline**.

## Medicinal plant garden inaugurated

From our Correspondent

BARPETA, April 28: In a financial aid provided by the Ministry of Central Forest and Environment Department in coordination with Assam Science Society a medicinal plant garden was inaugurated, to preserve the biodiversity here recently.

Arivan Chandra Das, former principal of MC

## New HAKP committee formed

From our Correspondent

HATSINGIMARI, April 28: The oath taking ceremony of the newly formed committee of Hatsingimari Anchalik Karmachari Parishad (HAKP) was held in the Press Club, here yesterday.

The meeting was presided over by Abdul

### FLUSH RIGHT HEADLINE/ REVERSE STEP HEADLINE

It is reverse of the flush left head. Here the lines are pushed against the right margin to create a stepped effect on the left. It is not a very commonly used headline.

**Nandana crosses swords with Sean Bean in *Sharpe's Peril***

**I**t seems 2008 is the year of the swashbuckler divas. After Aishwarya Rai crossed swords with Hrithik Roshan in *Jodhaa Akbar*, Nandana Sen does it with Sean Bean in *Sharpe's Peril*. Based on Bernard Cornwell historical fiction, *Sharpe's Peril* follows the career of British soldier Richard Sharpe. The film will first released in theatres and then later go

### FLUSH CENTRE HEADLINE/ CENTRED HEADLINE

This is also a headline of more than one line where all the lines are centre aligned.

## Sino-Indian trade at Nathu La postponed

GANGTOK, May 1 – The annual Sino-India border trade at Nathu La, which was to be reopened today, has been postponed following the Commerce Ministry's communique to the Sikkim government, official sources said here.

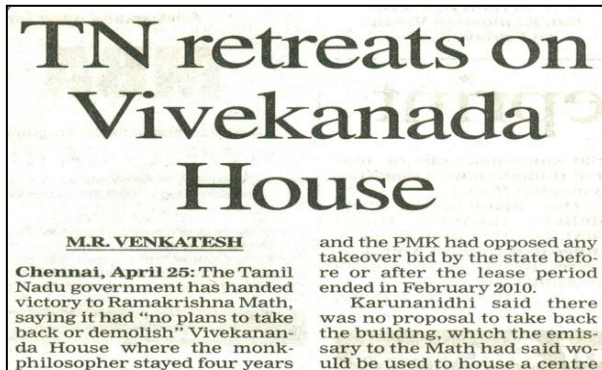
"We have received a fax message from the Union Commerce

## Badrinath to open for visitors on May 9

DEHRA DUN, May 1: A trip to the four most holy pilgrimages in Uttarakhand - the Yamnotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath, collectively referred to as the *Char Dham*, will now be costlier and

## INVERTED PYRAMID HEADLINE

This is a headline style of three or four lines aligned centre, where each successive line is shorter than the one above. Its use is relatively less.



## BANNER HEADLINE

Many a time you must have noticed that newspapers give a headline that runs fully across the breadth of the newspaper's front page from left to right when some major events take place. For example – when Bhupen Hazarika departed from this world, a major earthquake caused huge losses in Sikkim in 2011, Nepal's Royal Family members were killed by a relative etc. Simply speaking, a banner headline is nothing but a big headline given in such a way to convey the message that the event is really a major one that requires such a special treatment.

### ASSESS YOUR PROGRESS

1. Discuss the importance of a headline.

## 4.7 PAGE LAY OUT

In this age of stiff competition among publications, content alone is not the criterion that makes a newspaper or magazine sell. Newspaper is today like any other commercial product and readers have to be lured into buying the product not simply by giving them good quality of content but also packaging it in an attractive manner. That is why creating an attractive layout and ensuring attractive page make up for the newspaper is very important for any publication.

The layout is the look of the newspaper page. It is the blue print showing the placement of all the elements of the final product, designed to attract the readers and acquire a position in the market. It is the complete get up and personality of a newspaper. Hence, it is considered as one of the most vital processes in newspaper production. Whether it is a newspaper or magazine, all publications give due importance to this aspect. Designers in some newspapers are very highly paid professionals. Many publications, particularly

the big ones, have an art department where experts and art designers make up the pages with the help of sub-editors.

Preparing the layout of a newspaper is not an easy task as it involves many considerations operating upon the person making the layout. It involves judicious placement of news and pictures at the rightful places, so that the value of the news remains intact and pictures supplement and add credibility to the news. Laying out pictures is an art in itself and requires high degree of aesthetics. The right impact of a picture can be created only by the selection of the right picture, proper size, proper cutting and its proper placement within a page. As such, some publications even have picture editors at a very senior level. Layout also means usage of appropriate headline fonts and style so that the news items get properly highlighted. Placement of advertisements also comes under the purview of the layout artist, even though the positions of the advertisements are decided well in advance by the advertising department.

**Ear Panel:** Small box in the upper corner of a news page, usually on page 1.

**Anchor Story:** The news story (usually feature type) carried at the bottom middle position of the front page of newspapers. The position is called the anchor position.

Again, the layout of every page will not be the same. The layout of the first page will be very different from that of the inside pages as the first page will have some additional elements like the flag, **ear panels**, the **anchor story**, and in most newspapers, there is also a cartoon, the weather report, and brief news capsules/snippets. These elements will not be found in the inside pages. Again, the editorial page is also different from the rest of the pages. It has the editorial, letters to the editor and usually two articles. As such the layouts will also be different.

For most readers, ease of reading is very important. No one likes to read a newspaper carelessly crammed with news and pictures. A good, well planned and well executed layout is also indication of good and meticulously prepared content inside. For a publication which does not make the effort to present the newspaper properly will most likely do the same to the content inside as well. Again, when one buys a newspaper from the newsstand, he or she first scans the newspapers stocked in the newsstand. He or she would perhaps end up buying the one that stands out among the rest and which catches his attention first with an attractive pleasant design with colors and variety and which, with all the constituent elements, still looks balanced and soothing to the eyes.

Another thing which a lay out designer has to keep in mind is the creation of enough breathing space on the pages. White space is very crucial to the look and readability of a newspaper. It not only makes the page look neat and elegant, but also makes it soothing to the eye and increases its readability. Many newspapers ignore this aspect and in their attempt to accommodate maximum matter leave very little white space. The result is a fully packed page which often repels the readers.

A newspaper's layout can be static or dynamic. When a newspaper always uses the same kind of layout everyday, then it is said to have a static layout. On the other hand, if the newspaper experiments with different kinds of layouts all the time, then it is said to have dynamic layout. Both types have their own advantages and disadvantages. While a static layout establishes a style and identity for the newspaper, it can at times become monotonous for the readers who see the same layout day after day. But it can also guide the reader as the regular reader will know exactly where to look for what if the layout remains static. The dynamic layout, on the other hand, infuses an element of surprise and consequently expectation and excitement in the reader as they can never predict what is new about the newspaper that will greet the readers the next morning. But, at times, it can be confusing and irritating also, if the newspaper overdoes it. Dynamic layout is good, but within limits.

### **ASSESS YOUR PROGRESS**

1. What do you understand the term page lay out?
2. What are the important components of a news page in a newspaper?
3. Define the following:
  - a. Ear panel
  - b. Banner headline
  - c. Exclusive

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## **4.8 SUMMING UP**

Editing is a process of tailoring and shaping news items to the requisite size and design of the newspaper. There is a team of newsmen called sub editors or copy editors who are employed by the news organizations to carry out this specialized task. This team comprises highly skilled personnel who work sitting in the newspaper offices, unlike reporters who have to go the field in order to collect news.

In the editing process the news are first scanned for newsworthiness by the desk. The selected news items are then checked for factual and grammatical errors. The reporters who are hard-pressed in the pursuit of

meeting deadlines are bound to make mistakes which needs proper corrections in terms of facts, figures, grammars such as sentence construction, usage of words, punctuations etc.

Editorial team is headed by the editor followed by the executive editor, assistant editor, deputy editor, news editor, senior sub-editors, and sub-editors. They all have specialized roles to play and help the newspaper achieve its aims and objectives in the finest possible way.

Every newspaper follows a style book, which is nothing but a formal document containing guidelines for editing. There are many tools of editing which the copy desk keeps in handy for ready reference.

#### **4.9 SUGGESTED READINGS**

1. *News Writing* – George A. Hough, Kanishka Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi
2. *Basic Journalism* – Rangaswamy Parthasarathy, MacMilan India Ltd, New Delhi
3. *Handbook of journalism and mass communication* --- VB Agarwal, VB Gupta, (Concept)
4. *Journalism* -- N Jayapalan, Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi.
5. *Essentials of practical journalism* -- Vir Bala Agarwal, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi

# **MMC 104 REPORTING AND EDITING**

## **UNIT-5: PHOTO-JOURNALISM**

### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

- 5.1 OBJECTIVES
- 5.2 INTRODUCTION
- 5.3 IMPORTANCE OF PHOTOGRAPHS FOR PRINT MEDIA
- 5.4 CONCEPT OF PHOTO-EDITING
- 5.5 TECHNIQUES FOR GOOD JOURNALISTIC PHOTOGRAPHY
- 5.6 INTRODUCTION TO DIFFERENT TYPES OF CAMERA
- 5.7 SUMMING UP
- 5.8 SUGGESTED READINGS
- 5.9 PROBABLE QUESTIONS

### **5.1 OBJECTIVES**

A thorough study of this shall enable you to ---

- \* explain the basic idea about photo journalism and its significance
- \* describe the techniques and skills necessary for a successful photo journalism career
  - \* enumerate the ethical aspects in photo journalism
- \* explain the nature of and need for self-regulation for the photo journalists.

### **5.2 INTRODUCTION**

All of you must remember that in the examinations at school and college levels many a time a student is asked to draw a diagram of a machine or a system while explaining it. This is because a diagram or a picture explains the answer much more conveniently and effectively than what can be achieved by a few hundred words.

Similarly, it is a common saying in mass communication that a 'picture speaks a thousand words'. In other words, it means that a single picture is capable of conveying the meaning and expression of several hundreds or thousands of words with much less efforts.

In the field of mass communication while most of the times pictures are presented as a supporting content to a news story, but at certain times print media publication tell a news by themselves without support of the words. So we can say that in a news story or a feature, photographs should be able to supplement NEWS. Also, if a photograph is added to a news item it adds to the effectiveness of the item. Most of the photographs enhance and even sustain the readers' interest in the story.

### **5.3 IMPORTANCE OF PHOTOGRAPHS FOR PRINT MEDIA**

As we are all familiar with photographs in the mass media, especially in the print media we already know the importance of photographs in the media. A well-clicked and properly-edited

photograph enhances the appeal of news items to a great extent. There is something very interesting in the case of photographs, which is true also for photo journalism as well. That is, like journalists it is also expected from the photo journalists that they would be able to provide us with the most accurate pictures of an event or happening with the minimum gap of time – whenever the newspaper is published or the bulletin is broadcast on the TV / Radio channel. Besides, without a good photograph the newspaper or magazine or the electronic media news bulletins would look very dull and drab, failing to enthuse the readers towards the media.

When an incident or event takes place or when an unnatural event happens like a disaster, the facts and figures may be collected by the journalists even later on from other sources including the government agencies or fellow journalists in other newspapers or channels. But, in the case of photo journalism this is not so because an event cannot be repeated for the sake of a photograph. Hence the photo journalist should try his or her best to reach the spot of the event as soon as possible after it takes place. For scheduled events, the photo journalist must try one's best to reach the place well before the scheduled time.

#### **5.4 CONCEPT OF PHOTO-EDITING**

You may be surprised to read that photographs can be edited and that they do need editing before publishing or broadcast in the media. Photo editing means the very important task of making

a photograph suitable for publication, keeping intact its basic qualities by all manners. This is nothing but improving the contents of a photograph to properly highlight all its relevant aspects so that it can appeal to readers in an effective way.

You may well remember that in the Unit on News it was instructed that a journalist should try to gather each and every information, facts and figures related to an event, happening etc. which may

be directly or indirectly related to the event. This is because one never knows which of these information may prove necessary and important later on when preparing the story.

Similarly, when a photo journalist goes to the spot for collecting photographs one should take several photographs of the event so that even if one of them is defective, there is an alternative to bank upon at times of crisis.

Nowadays, photo editing has become quite a convenient and easy as there are several software available in the market which can do the job online on the instructions from the journalist whenever necessary.

In a newspaper or magazine of repute, usually there are several photo journalists who bring in photographs of important events and assignments taking place every passing day. In the evening or at the time when the photographs are to be selected for printing, the chief of the photo division and senior editors select them after a detailed consultation.

Once selection has been done, the time for editing them comes up for improving and smoothening the rough edges for making them match the news items and the newspaper's general make up as a whole. Editing a photograph in journalistic parlance includes the following aspects -  
--

**Crop or cropping** – this is removing the unwanted portions of a photograph if felt necessary.

**Re-sizing** – changing the size of the photograph to fit into the amount of space available for the purpose.

**Enhancing of the photograph's image** – this means refining the colour, contrast etc. for improving its image.

Right at this point an important aspect should be kept in mind by every photo journalist, especially the upcoming journalists: editing a photograph does not entail doctoring or changing the basic characteristics of the photographic facts in the photograph to be printed or broadcast from journalistic purposes.

This is mentioned here because there are plenty of such examples which can also be termed as manipulation of photos by persons concerned, which may include journalists, for various purposes.

Let us discuss such an example. You may well remember that a few years back there was an intense Israeli bombing of Palestinian places. One photograph of bombing was published by several reputed newspapers across the world. This was supplied by the globally-reputed news agency Reuters. However, after one or two days of publication of this specific photograph, several bloggers had passed the word around that this photograph was not proper and it was fake. As the complaint found its way to Reuters they enquired into the matter and found to their utter surprise that the photograph was actually 'doctored' by the photo journalist who had clicked it. The photograph as such was not fake. It was actually taken from the battlefield. But the contents were edited to a considerable amount for enhancing its appeal. More surprising than this was that the photo journalist admitted to the practice saying this was a normal activity practiced by the majority of the photo journalists and the average rate of doctoring was about 30 % of a



photograph. Reuters was embarrassed to a big extent by the issue and the job contract of that photo journalist was terminated immediately after the fiasco.

One should always stay away from such practices which are nothing but ‘misleading’ unsuspecting readers and it is equivalent to cheating the readers or audiences.

A photograph is required to be lively, encouraging, appealing, effective and speaking many things because it is not simply an instrument of showing the readers something but also an important tool for gaining insight into the life of human beings and the society as whole.

Like a journalist, a photo journalist also must be alert every moment of the 24 hours of the day as anything may happen at any moment of the day or night. More so at times of crisis either from natural disasters or war-like situations.

Photo journalism poses a big challenge of getting a good photograph from a spot as much near to the event as possible. In the process there might be threats to the photo journalist also. This is also a part of the game that one must know how to keep oneself safe from all these threats and yet get the best out of the situation.

Further, also like journalism, photo journalism must strictly adhere to the aspects of timeliness, objectivity, to the point among others and be able to express whatever it wanted to reflect without requiring too many photographs to tell a simple story.

Photo journalism allows ample scope for expressing one’s creativity to the fullest by taking photographs which are full of life, expressive and may convey meanings properly even without the support of the written words. Besides, the effectiveness of a photograph also depends upon the placement of it in the overall layout of the newspaper or magazine. That is because the layout of a page in any newspaper or magazine should be prepared in such a way that everything is balanced in a manner which is smooth looking for the eyes. Again, if a photograph is edited badly and presented in a squeezed manner that would also cause a major loss in its meaning and effect for the readers. Similarly, as far as possible a photograph should never be printed in a way where it is broken into two parts by the mid fold of the newspaper or between two pages of a magazine. This would disturb the smooth flow of the vision of the reader to the photograph.

From the discussions here it can be said that like journalism and other forms of mass communication photo journalism also entails a great responsibility on all the persons involved with the business of presenting a photograph to the masses to inform about something important. This is because as we all know a newspaper or magazine or a news channel reaches out to millions of people across the world with a potential for influencing the people with its appeal.

While professional associations of photo journalists have their own codes of conduct like any other profession including journalism, a great deal depends upon the quotient of self-regulation

by the photo journalists, especially in today's world when clicking and editing a photograph has become so convenient.

Further, it can be seen that over the last few years the concept of citizen journalism has been growing in acceptance among all societies in the world. Here, the question of self-regulation and filtering of photographs is posing a big concern as the majority of the citizen journalists are not trained journalists and may not be strictly adhering to the set norms and regulations.

From the point of using your skills effectively, photo journalism can be termed both as an art and a science at the same time. This is because photo journalists are creating something artistic using scientific tools and technology. A lot depends on the creativity of the photo journalist as he or she is the one who must know which point in the entire frame is to be selected and highlighted which to be discarded among so many different contents in a photo frame. Besides, a certain kind of coordination and compatibility with the journalist is a must if the photographs are expected to be supporting and thereby enhancing the effects of the news items if the photographs are published as part of the news items.

It needs to be kept in mind here that like a news item, a feature or a column among others, photographs can also have a headline in addition to the caption and cut line. While you are already aware of what a headline is, a caption is the short description of a photograph given below it for informing the masses about the event or happening. It is also termed a little headline by many experts. On the other hand, words or descriptions which appear under a caption are together termed as a cut line in a photograph.

## **5.5 TECHNIQUES FOR GOOD JOURNALISTIC PHOTOGRAPHY**

Photo journalism is an activity which combines technical, artistic and scientific acumen of the photo journalist for producing a good quality product to be presented to the readers through the print medium. Like the profession of journalism, in photo journalism also a photo journalist has to be active and tactful for clicking a good photograph. For example, it is a very basic requirement that the camera or more than one camera should be accessible to him or her at any moment of time of the day or night – whether one is on an official assignment or not as something interesting can happen any time without notice.

Secondly, like a journalist the photo journalist must also develop a sharp acumen for spotting the unusual in a crowd or anywhere at any moment of time and make it a point of clicking a photograph whenever the opportunity appears.

A photo journalist must also have an imaginative mind to anticipate what may happen after a specific event takes place or an unscheduled event takes place.

Again, once a photo journalist becomes experienced he or she should be able to compose the subjects or components of a certain photograph in a such a way that there is hardly any need for it to be edited at all. Otherwise there is a lot of possibility that important and relevant contents or portions of the photograph may be deleted while editing it. Or it may also happen that the most relevant portion was not included at all.

Further, a photo journalist must also keep in mind the restrictions, regulations, conventions etc. prevailing at many places while taking a photograph. For example – a place containing sensitive establishments from the Defence point of view or other security issues may not allow photographs to be taken. Similarly, a celebrity (maybe a film star, sports icon, prominent political leader, business magnate etc.) as an individual person may not want to be photographed anywhere and everywhere in public. Such restrictions, regulations and conventions should be respected while carrying out one's official duties as a photo journalist.

Let us look at a few examples from real life world in this regard. You may well remember the peculiar situation that arose when a section of the print media in the United Kingdom was desperately pursuing the girlfriend of Prince Williams in England day in and day out. This had caused a considerable amount of difficulties not only to the lady but also to her entire family as a whole.

Another incident was experienced by this author during his stint in *The Assam Tribune*, Guwahati. A journalist from another prominent local newspaper had written and published about some Defence installations on the Arunachal Pradesh border with China following a visit to the border outposts beyond Tawang. This had caused a major embarrassment for his newspaper as well as the Defence authorities. Of course, the journalist in question was taken there in a group of other journalists on a tour programme organized by the Press Information Bureau's (P.I.B.), Defence wing. Either the journalist was not briefed properly or may be he himself had decided to go ahead with it as it was an exclusive news for him. It needs to be mentioned here that the PIB is an agency of the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting of the Union Government of India dedicated to dissemination of information to the masses through the media.

A few years ago another interesting thing happened which has some connection to this issue in question. That is – the prime minister of the country called a press conference at his official residence in New Delhi where a good number of photo journalists were also present. While waiting for the prime minister on the lawns of the residence the journalists saw several peacocks dancing and moving around in a merry mood. Seeing such a beautiful scene the photo journalists started to take photographs of the dancing peacocks to be published as offbeat photographs in the next day's newspaper. However, the security personnel and other officials of the prime minister

present at the residence came up and politely requested them not to take photographs and also not to publish those which were already taken. The officials reasoned that though there was no official regulation about it yet it was a well-respected tradition as well as a convention that photographs of the residence were usually not clicked as a respect to privacy. The point was well taken and it should also be a pointer to all aspiring and practicing photo journalists that such traditions should be respected.

This author had also seen that in one of the famous beaches of Chennai city, monuments in memory of several leaders of the state have been erected on the sands. And there are placards in most of them asking people not to click photos of them. So these things should be kept in mind while doing one's duties.

This incident in the prime minister's residence also presents the 'offbeat' angle to the whole issue. That is, like a journalist a photo journalist should also be ready at any moment for capturing anything important happening without any warning or hint.

Further, on the question of ethical aspects relating to photo journalism, in addition to not tampering with a photograph for publication in the newspapers or magazines, one should also not download photographs from amongst all those available in the different sources of internet and pass it on as their own photographs. This is nothing but plagiarism.

## **5.6 INTRODUCTION TO DIFFERENT TYPES OF CAMERA**

While there are different types of cameras available in the market, the single-lens reflex or more widely known as the SLR camera is highly popular among all sections of people including the photo journalists alike. The website photography.com refers to this camera as one that uses a rotating mirror (maybe a pentaprism or a pentamirror) that reflects the image which comes through the lens onto a focusing screen. From the mirror's reflection, the images then appear in the camera's eyepiece. The image only reaches the film after the focal plane shutter opens (when the photographer takes the shot).

Produced in 1935, different models flourished throughout the World War II era that included improvements in the viewfinder's orientation and the camera's internal mirrors. Since the 1970s, amateur and professional photographers alike have been using SLR cameras.

Over the years as photographic technology has improved fast, retailers produced SLR cameras that are equipped with highly improved lenses, filters and microcomputers. Today, advanced technology and demand have made digital SLR cameras easily affordable and available to anyone

interested in photography. As a result, photography has become a convenient pastime for many people as the cameras are becoming highly user-friendly, more so for the photo journalists.

This author believes that one of the most important advantages of digital cameras and developed technology has been that much more photographs can be clicked and kept in storage inside the cameras for future usage and all of them can be viewed without printing them. So, the photo journalist can choose which picture is to be actually printed and which one to be rejected.

Besides, unlike the earlier years when photographs had to be printed in negative and positive before they could be published, nowadays a photograph can be directly downloaded into the computer from the camera or if needed transmitted to the computer from a far off place through internet.

While digital SLR cameras give the photographer the advantage of viewing the scene without parallax distortion (apparent movement of fixed objects when the photographer changes position), they do prevent the photographer from seeing his shot at the moment the picture is taken (photography.com)

Aperture is an important term in photo journalism that refers to the lens diaphragm on a camera that controls the amount of light that touches the film when the shutter opens. Aspect Ratio is a measurement of a photograph's width to height. Commonly, 35 mm film measures 36:24, creating an aspect ratio of 3:2.

## **5.7 SUMMING UP**

In this unit we have learnt the importance of photographs in mass media, especially journalism and how a photo journalist should prepare oneself for this profession. Photo journalism is equally if not more an active profession full of excitement of being able to click a good photograph that would be open for scrutiny and appreciation of many thousands of people, may be even across the world. And one also feels the highest sense of satisfaction of getting a good and attractive photograph published which would carry the name of the photo journalist thereby making the name a household one in the society. This is a profession where a photo journalist can showcase his or her talent and creative sensibilities to a great extent. On the other hand, photo journalists should also strictly adhere to the ethical aspects, more so, self regulation in carrying out their duties so that no norms or conventions or traditions are violated in the process. This includes not clicking a photograph of any person without specific permission, respecting regulations and

restrictions in force in many places or establishments because of their own valid reasons, ensuring that captions and attributions in photographs are given correctly and no photograph is published out of the context or mixing up photographs for vested interests for tarnishing someone's image in the public. You have also come to know about photo editing which is a highly important aspect of the business of photo journalism. You have also been informed about the very basic facts about cameras for photo journalism. However, one major aspect you should all remember every day of your professional life is that there is no short cut to becoming successful in this profession. And practice and practice alone followed by analysis of one's own works and good works of others in this field are must for excelling in the job. Nowadays cameras are not very costly and thus it is advisable that you should try your hands on it as soon as possible if you are really interested in this profession.

## **5.8 SUGGESTED READINGS**

Kobre, Kenneth. *Photojournalism: The Professionals' Approach* (2001), Fourth Edition.

Chapnik, Howard. *Truth Needs No Ally: Inside Photojournalism* (2001).

Cartier-Bresson, Henri. *The Man, the Image & the World: A Retrospective* (2003).

## **5.9 PROBABLE QUESTIONS**

1. What do you understand by the term photo journalism ? Is it different from journalism ? How ?
2. Why should a photo journalist follow ethical aspects in practicing this trade?
3. How can you gain success as a photo journalist?

# **MMC 104 REPORTING AND EDITING**

## **UNIT-6: OPINION IN JOURNALISM**

### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

- 6.1 OBJECTIVES
- 6.2 INTRODUCTION
- 6.3 TYPES OF OPINIONS IN A NEWSPAPER / MAGAZINE
- 6.4 IMPORTANCE OF OPINIONS IN NEWS MEDIA
- 6.5 WRITING OPINION PIECES
- 6.6 EDITORIAL PAGE AND OP-ED PAGE
- 6.6.1 ISSUES / TOPICS COVERED ON THESE TWO PAGES
- 6.7 EDITOR AS LEADER OF THE SOCIETY
- 6.8 EDUCATIONAL ROLE PLAYED BY NEWS MEDIA
- 6.9 SUMMING UP
- 6.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

### **6.1 OBJECTIVES**

A detailed study of this unit shall enable you to ---

- Understand and explain what an opinion is in terms of Journalism and its importance.
- Differentiate between opinion and news,
- Write a news item,
- Show how opinions in Journalism can lead a society.

### **6.2 INTRODUCTION**

You may find it highly surprising that in your study of the various nuances of Journalism it is always insisted that we should not mix up ‘news and views’ while practicing this profession. Then why should we provide opinions in newspapers and magazines and have programmes in electronic media channels where opinions on different themes and issues are solicited and discussed in an open forum?

An opinion is nothing but a comment on any issue or event by a person. In the case of a newspaper or the journalism media the editorial personnel, prominent citizens / leaders / experts in any field of the society or academia etc. would like to share their wisdom with the general public on any issue or event affecting the state or its people.

Coming to the fundamental question –should we have views apart from news--our simple answer is yes. At the same time we would hasten to add that- news and views should never be mixed up.

However, media – especially journalism is such a widely-circulated platform for public information that it can be utilized for passing on any important messages to the masses at any given moment of time. This is an ideal instrument for reaching out to the masses in time. Further, the editorial people or the journalists, more so the senior persons in the profession, have been in the field for years to acquire and develop a certain foresighted sense by which they can predict and lead the society at times of crisis.

In other words, a society may be passing through turmoil at some time. In times of peace also if a peculiar situation arises which poses a dilemma to the members of that society, then the people look forward to the leadership of the media for deciding what to do under such circumstances.

For example, during the pre-Independence days of the country, people, at least the educated ones were waiting for the media to learn what path to follow while engaging in the freedom struggle. Similarly, when crisis-like situations emerge such as the wars between two countries, the economic and political crisis caused during movement for separate state of Telengana, the Kargil war, the famous Assam agitation for expulsion of illegal migrants etc., the media can offer reasoned opinions and views. It is the media which has to take up the ambitious job of informing people about what is the right. Of course, it is not that the media shall ask people to do this or do that. But, it is the sacred duty of the media – especially journalism to present to the people through this great platform all the aspects of a issues – the positive, negative or the mid-path or a neutral way. This is because we live in a democracy and every person has a right to voice his or her concern in public and make his or her voice heard. And what can be a better platform than journalism for such an activity?

The masses would pick up the signal from these inputs. It is the high priority responsibility of the media to analyze all the pros and cons of each and every issue in front of the masses and this would empower the people to pick up their choices and thereby form a mass movement if needed.

However, while attempting to carry out this function, it must be always kept in mind that news items in the media must never be influenced by the personal opinion of the editors and people should be allowed to make up their minds by choosing from the news items as well as the opinions provided in the media for their benefit. It is a normal human tendency that while writing about something some shades of our personality or attitude or preferences get reflected to some extent. So a journalist should be doubly conscious of his or her writing not allowing even the slightest of preference or bias about anything in his or her writings of news.



### 6.3 TYPES OF OPINIONS IN A NEWSPAPER / MAGAZINE

Depending upon several factors the expression of an opinion takes different forms, such the following:

**Editorial** – It is nothing but the formal opinions of the newspaper or magazine on certain issue or events to be precise-usually on a highly relevant current issue confronting the society at a given time. It is a normal practice for many newspapers and magazines to publish more than one, usually two but at times even more than two editorials if there are quite a few issues for attention of the masses. These may be written by the Editor himself or herself or by any journalistic member of the fraternity of that newspaper or magazine. Many a time, it is also a normal practice for newspapers and magazines to engage prominent and established personalities accomplished in their own fields for writing an editorial piece on a specific issue suiting the requirement of the time.

**Article** – This is a write up usually with analytical endeavours about a certain issue or theme in which the author tries to establish something or to draw our attention to something important happening or which is about to come up soon in the near future. These are generally serious discussions about a topic with scholarly inputs analyzed and try to arrive at a certain conclusion. Usually, in a newspaper or bi-weekly / weekly, one or two articles are published in the editorial page itself which speaks of the article's importance for the current times and the readers at large. An editorial page article is considered to be of high importance and prestige for the readers as well as for the person who has written it. While an article published on the editorial page may not necessarily reflect the official stand of the newspaper or magazine, it is considered to be somewhat conforming to the mandate of that media-print or electronic where it has been published/ telecast.

**Op-Ed Article** – Many newspapers publish articles on the page opposite the editorial page of the newspaper and thus these are termed as 'Op-Ed' page articles. While there is no hard and fast rule about placing an article or an opinion piece on the Op-Ed page yet, loosely it is thought that opinions and articles which may not exactly and necessarily conform to the official principles of the newspaper or magazine are normally placed on this page.

**Features** – These are mostly 'human interest' stories published in the newspapers and magazines usually contributed by freelancers or members of the readers of that newspaper or magazine.

Even though these may come in the main newspaper yet the supplements are most popular places for them.

**Columns** - A column is a highly interesting and important opinion about any specific issue of the society and this world written in different formats by prominent personalities well-established in their respective professional domains. A column may be written by – one person on different topics or on one specific topic on a weekly or monthly basis. Again, different persons of eminence may also write on a single theme on a weekly or monthly basis for attracting more and more readers. For example, in *The Frontline*, a former Indian Police Service (IPS) officer Mr RK Raghavan writes on various aspects of law and justice delivery system involving the police and paramilitary forces in each issue of the magazine. This is just one among several columns published regularly by this magazine every month. Newspapers and magazines alike may have columns. Columns benefit us in several ways. First of all, it helps the people by allowing the public to gain knowledge from the rich and vast expertise and experiences of the columnist and apply the same in our own to enlighten ourselves and thereby become empowered in the end. Secondly, people receive a good analytical writing on a specific situation or issue and thereby become knowledgeable about it. For example, the analysis posted by eminent media critic Ms Sevanti Ninan who writes a regular column called ‘Media Matters’ in the *Sunday Magazine* (supplement) of *The Hindu* is highly informative and enlightening for the common public, informing them about the functioning of the mass media in our society in the last few days.

**Letter to the Editor** : This is an important type of opinion in Print Media which reflects the mood of the public or the readers of a newspapers or magazines about various events and issues in the society as well as some of the news items and other contents of the media. Even though the amount of space devoted to this column is very less compared to the entire newspaper or magazine yet this is an important part of that specific newspaper or magazine’s existence and presentation to its readers.

Reviews of films, books, music, art, painting, drama etc. can also usually be considered as opinion writings and they reflect the opinion of the writer within the wider framework of a scientific analysis and criticism of those art forms and products. For example, while reviewing a film or a drama or a book, the experts while expected to be following the universally accepted norms and guidelines for carrying out the assignment have ample opportunity for giving their own comments on the product. Besides, we know that every person has his or her own style of expression which is reflected in these writings also. These critical reviews are also important components of the newspapers and magazines.

## **6.4 IMPORTANCE OF OPINIONS IN NEWS MEDIA**

From your personal experiences you must have realized that masses are in general not very active towards anything happening in the society and they need to be encouraged and prodded for acting about something whenever the need may arise. At such times, opinion circulated through media plays a highly significant role in making the people enlightened about those issues and activities on which there should be some kind of action-oriented activity. For example, recently, the peace talks between the National Socialist Council of Nagaland's (NSCN) Issac-Muivahs group and the Union Home Ministry of the country had led towards the concept of establishing a 'supra state' which may include all those places mainly inhabited by people of Naga origin in any of the states of the north-eastern region of the country into a separate state. Now, there would definitely be opposing and supporting views about this development. It is the sacred duty of the media – especially the print media to present to the masses both the divergent views, and thereby let the masses actually decide whether this should be accepted as it is or think of something else as an alternative arrangement.

Similarly, if you would recall correctly, there was a law called Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunal) Act or the IM(DT) Act which was declared null and void (cancelled) by the Supreme Court in 2005 following a case filed against its continuation. However, during its existence there were a lot of debates on its continuation which included justifications both for continuing and also for dumping it. A similar kind of debate has also been going on about the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) whether it should be continued or discontinued.

In these circumstances opinion in media plays a highly important role in making people aware about different aspects of the issue and thereby facilitate the process of decision-making in the minds of the masses. This is so because all the opinions – except "Letter to the Editors" to some extent – are written by experts in their respective fields of profession with many years of experiences combined with or without adequate academic qualifications after a sufficient amount of research into the issues. Hence these opinions are of high value as they offer advice on many things with a potential for changing our life for the better if accepted and applied properly.

The editorial personnel should be able to develop a high sense of foresightedness as they have the privilege of dealing with so many aspects of public affairs day in and day out for many years on end and thereby become knowledgeable about those issues and develop an ability to be able to predict what would happen in the near and distant future if the trend continued like it is at present. This is highly expected by the masses and they look forward to the media for such ideas

from such opinions. In turn this is also one major duty of the media towards the public and the society at large.

## **6.5 WRITING OPINION PIECES**

Writing opinion pieces is not an easy task because of the following reasons:

First of all – these are not just run-of-the-mill writings written according to one's interests. These are important topics and themes written with valuable inputs acquired from a good amount of serious study and experience in the broad field of the profession.

Secondly, any person, however experienced or qualified he or she might be, may not be so proficient in writing whatever he/she has to say in a good and easily comprehensible language for the benefit of the public.

Thirdly, the topics and themes must be relevant for the society and the times when they are expected to be published in the newspaper or magazine. Otherwise, people would lose interest in them and also the newspaper or magazine may not accept them for publication at all.

Besides, many a time in the case of columns and articles etc. eminent personalities are requested to write regularly for that magazine or newspaper. If the writing is not up to mark or if the person fails to live up to the standards over a period of time then it would be discontinued.

Even though the opinions of every person may necessarily differ from others, every author of an opinion must be able to establish his or her findings and justifications with an adequate amount of reason or logic. The author must be able to analyze everything in a scientific and logical manner and thereby arrive at a conclusion about the issue and event.

Further, sources quoted or used for the write up must be latest and up-to-date so that it is not based upon any old and obsolete data which would nullify the authenticity of the writing.

Like a journalistic writing, here also the author must keep in mind – language, relevant facts and figures, suitability of the topic or theme etc. so that it can be translated into an article with smoothness of reading and easy to understand.

The only most important difference with journalistic writing is that here the author need not remain neutral and can express his opinions either in support or opposition of something or may take a mid path also. However, the most important condition is that all the opinions and decisions

have to be based on serious studies done in that connection with a logical conclusion arrived at in the end.

## **6.6 EDITORIAL PAGE AND OP-ED PAGE**

It is obvious that the Editorial page is the ‘heart’ of the newspaper of the magazine anywhere across the world. It reflects the editorials which are nothing but the newspapers’ and magazines’ stand on the important issues of the day in the society. This stand actually reflects the principles and standards that the specific newspaper or magazine actually subscribes to and would like to propagate through its existence.

While this page necessarily includes editorials, serious analytical articles, letter to the editor, many a time some newspapers also include columns in it only to increase the weight of the page in the real sense of the term.

On some rare occasions, you may be surprised to find editorial written by the editor or a senior editorial person in the newspaper or by a prominent intellectual or accomplished person in his or her own field which bears the signature of the writer prominently displayed on the front page of the newspaper. This is done to highlight and create awareness among the readers about some very important issues of events. For example, a newspaper may publish a signed editorial on the front page on the occasion of death of Bhupen Hazarika about some specific issues regarding the void created by the demise of this great personality and what can be done to make his memories immortal in the days to come. Or may be during a time when an active debate may be going on about whether we should go for more and more power production from nuclear plants or from other sources etc.

**The Op-Ed page** does not publish editorial as it is already published in the Editorial page. Loosely, this is a page devoted to articles, columns and other kinds of write ups which may not necessarily be reflecting the stand of the newspaper or magazine publishing house. In a way we can say that Editorial and Op-Ed pages publish points and counterpoints of the same issue. In other words if the Editorial page expresses opinions about a certain issue the Op-Ed page is expected to express views opposite to those in the Editorial page. The idea is to facilitate a diversity of opinions to be presented to the public so that masses can pick up the points relevant to them or those which they feel are justified by all counts. This serves the purpose of impartiality of the media to a great extent as this practice presents opinions from both the sides of the coin, not from only one side which may be dubbed as a partiality.

Of course, it is not that every newspaper or magazine publishes an Op-Ed page but a majority of them have started doing so nowadays to allow the readers the benefit of a different viewpoint on various issues confronting the society every moment.

#### **6.6.1 ISSUES / TOPICS COVERED ON THESE TWO PAGES**

Judging from the enormous commitments and responsibilities of the media to the society in which it exists there can be no end to the topics and issues to be covered on these two pages. It will be suffice to say that anything and everything under the sun is highly relevant for a sufficient coverage if it is relevant for the society at any given moment of time. For example - these may range very widely between a disproportionate increase in the number of vehicles in the urban areas of the country against a decreasing amount of road space to whether our country should possess nuclear weapons or not among many other important issues. Or it may include issues like how to handle the advances from our neighbouring countries about the secessionist movements inside the country or how to maintain a regional hegemony in the continent against potential threats and advances from powerful neighbours or even how to protect our maritime borders from foreign powers or pirates targeting out merchant navy ships in the high seas around us etc.

While there is no end to the topics and themes which are relevant to be covered on these two pages, authors of opinions in any of these pages should always keep in mind one important aspect. That is – being able to predict a future course of any phenomenon or development in the society which would ultimately lead to some major changes in the status of the society or the nation as a whole. Simply speaking, the opinion authors should be able to forecast the future end result of a certain current development. For example, we all know that urbanization has been growing by leaps and bounds in our country and in many countries across the world. Experts in the field should be able to study this phenomenon adequately and be able to predict what would be the situation in about two decades or half a century's time if the current trend continued to grow at the present rate. Or, depending upon the current developments in every field of life and society, what would be status of the society in about half a century's time.

In short, there is no limiting factor for topics and issues which merit coverage on the Editorial and Op-Ed pages of a newspaper at all. Something which may even be indirectly or remotely relevant may also be taken up for creating awareness among the public.

## **6.7 EDITOR AS LEADER OF THE SOCIETY**

From the discussions so far and after studying the different units of journalism under this course curriculum you must have come to know that the Editor is the leader of the entire team of journalists and other staff in any newspaper or magazine anywhere across the world. He or she is the person who has to inspire, guide and lead every person of the team together towards a new horizon and thereby make a deep impact on the masses through that specific media.

An editor has to play two important roles in his or her capacity as the leader of the team. First of all the editors must be able to present to the readers an all-encompassing, comprehensive, self-sufficient newspaper or magazine which carries all the important ingredients or contents like – relevant news items, opinions of burning current topics and issues, interests of the people reflected properly in its treatment of the issues etc.

The editor must be able to gauge the mood and requirements of the public and influence them properly for adopting certain principles and practices which would be beneficial for the masses in the end.

In a similar way and because of factors mentioned above, the editor is not simply an employee of a news organization or a publishing house. A highly able and competent editor is also a national asset towards whom the masses are looking forward for guidance and leadership both at normal time as well as in crisis situations alike in the society.

The media – particularly the news media has to come to the rescue of the readers and the society in times of crisis by offering proper leadership, advice and opinions about what to do and how to take even a single step under such circumstances. This is why in many societies the media – mainly news media don the mantle of leadership for leading the masses from the front towards a better situation in the long run.

We have also mentioned at the outset that as a carrier of any kind of message there is parallel to mass media – particularly the news media – newspapers, magazines and electronic media channels. Thus, this avenue must be exploited to the optimum level for reaching out to the masses in any society across the world for leading the masses towards a better future.

Hence, the editor is also termed as the leader of the society as a whole which is not saying much.

At this point there is a need for discussing the special relationship between media and the masses. This is because this relationship is essential for a successful growth of a society and media.

In an ideal condition the relationship between the masses and the media should be mentally highly cordial, constructive, complementary and beneficial. Media should be able to inculcate good habits among the readers by way of its contents including news and opinions. This is because the influence of media on the people is immense and beyond our imagination which had even moved Napoleon to remark “A pen is mightier than a sword.”

On the other hand, the readers should also be empowered, alerted and made conscious of their rights, duties and responsibilities so that whenever the media tend to falter in their duties it must be reminded of its real goals. Without such a kind of cordial and effective relationship the masses would be deprived of good practices of life because of media’s failure to carry out its duties properly.

We have already mentioned that media is an informal university. It is such an educational institution where one does not need any formal qualification to gain entry and also to enjoy its contents (except of course for the print media obviously) and become a ‘thinking person’. Media is an ‘open source’ knowledge database the benefits from which can be shared by anyone who cares to do so. The only condition is that it should be available at the place of that person’s living – whether it is print media or electronic media or today’s highly popular social media.

## **6.8 EDUCATIONAL ROLE PLAYED BY NEWS MEDIA**

You are definitely familiar with this term as we all have to go through this phase in our lives. There is no end to education and all our life we have to keep learning many things from various sources. It can be said that ‘education is something learnt from various sources which enrich our life and facilitate a better living standard for ourselves at different points of time’.

Depending upon from which source we learn about these things we can classify education into two broad categories – Formal and Informal. When we face any problem in society, mass media can set the priority about which issue to be discussed and considered for further deliberations than others and thereby enlighten the people about it.

We know that mass media enjoys a unique advantage of being privy to all types of issues, problems and developments confronting the society at any moment of time. Thus they usually develop the capability of



foreseeing whatever is going to happen in the near as well as distant future. Thus they are expected to lead the society during crisis periods and show the path found to be right for the nation to move forward to.

Masses, by nature are generally passive and lethargic and they look forward to media for guidance as they find it difficult to deliberate and arrive at a decision on their own. Hence, media, specially the senior editorial persons at media organizations have a serious task of leading the society.

You have already read that communication performs the function of ‘instruction’ and ‘education’ to the masses. Instruction is nothing but education for human beings. That is – communication instructs us about so many things in life and educates us to adopt certain new aspects of life. Besides, it converts us into ‘thinking human beings’. This means that communication helps in learning new things and then adopting and applying them to the practical situations in our life. In this sense we can term mass media as an ‘informal open university’ compared to a formal university. This is so because in the latter you can acquire knowledge in a structured pattern which is somewhat rigid and time-bound. On the other hand, in the former you can learn anything and everything in an informal manner never bound by any set pattern of syllabus or course.

Let us look at a few of these characteristics.

Mass media is an open platform for any and every issue on earth to be discussed properly so that we can arrive at a meaningful decision about so many things in our life. Except for print media, a human being does not need to be literate or highly intelligent to understand the language or meaning of the contents in the audio-visual media. Consider for a moment– do you need any help to understand what a film communicates to you even if it might be a silent one or in a foreign language? Again, while listening to radio programmes, particularly news, do you need to be instructed by anyone to understand it properly? Hence, mass media can be a very ideal and effective vehicle for delivering ‘instructional messages’ to the target people in any society of the world.

Let us look at two examples here.

In an issue in 2008 *The Frontline* published a news feature describing how several hundred very small and marginal ‘ginger’ farmers of Karbi Anglong district in Assam have managed to unite themselves to get quite a higher price for their produce.

Now, if only other such marginalized farmers can learn about this experiment and feel encouraged to take up similar steps for their benefit, that will be a big success in itself. This is one very important aspect of media’s educational initiatives.

There are two distinct aspects to the activity of media in education in practice. First of all – instructing or educating the people in basic literacy of life like teaching them how to read and write. And secondly, instructing and educating people in new and emerging areas of life. In this category we can include

information like how to take care of a pregnant woman in a place where there is scarcity of adequate medical facilities, encouraging and reminding people to go for proper vaccination of children, instructing people not to use tobacco-related products for preventing different deadly diseases, making people aware of the bad impacts of dowry, child marriage, infanticide, foeticide etc.

This practice is more suitable for people in the underprivileged category of society. At the same time it is also true for masses in the 'privileged' category as most of the people need to be instructed on a continuous basis in life.

## **6.9 SUMMING UP**

In this unit we have discussed in details the importance and relevance of opinions in media for the masses along with how to write them and why the media has to take up the responsibility of the society as a whole both at times of peace and crisis. Opinions are important as media also has to assume the all-important educational role for the society at large. Of course, this is not the usual formal education with which we are more familiar but this is the right example of an informal yet highly effective and fruitful means of education for the common people away from the formal educational system. We earlier mentioned in one of the units that media is an 'informal open university' which has something or the other for each and every person of the society, cutting across all kinds of differences or divisions. So, a successful and responsible media system – especially the news media or the newspapers, magazines or news channels do possess a huge potential for transforming the society whenever necessary. Thus opinions are so highly important for both the society and the media.

## **ASSESS YOUR PROGRESS**

**A.** Answer the following questions in your language with relevant examples (about 250 words each) :

- What do you understand by the terms Editorial and Op-Ed pages?
- What is an opinion in terms of journalism and why is it important? Should newspapers carry both news and views together? If yes, why?
- How does media play an educational role for the society? Is it sufficient for a person in a society if there is no formal education in that society

**B.** Carry out the following exercises :

**i) Watch and observe the various articles**, editorials, column writings in three different daily newspapers – preferably two in English (one national and one state level), one in a non-English Indian language for one month on a continuous basis and find out these aspects – which are topics and themes with the maximum number of write ups published. Arrange them in an descending order in order of maximum numbers at the top with least numbers towards lower positions. This exercise can also be done for two news bulletins – Radio and TV – with comparisons between one national English bulletin and one regional Assamese or other language bulletin.

**ii) From the same exercise given above**, also find out if any news report has been mixing up news with views and with which newspaper or news bulletin you have seen more such examples than the others.

## **6.10 SUGGESTED READINGS**

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