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## UNIT 25 WRITING FOR PRINT – 2

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### Structure

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- 25.3 The Organization of Print Media
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### 25.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this chapter, you will learn about:

- the different kinds of newspaper articles,
- how work is divided in a newspaper office,
- the editorial decision making process,
- the basic organization of a news story,
- the process of writing for print media, and
- the basic differences between news writing and other forms of print

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### 25.1 INTRODUCTION

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As mentioned in the earlier unit, different types of publications are organized differently to suit the needs of their audience or market and the subject matter they deal with. Broadly, however, a daily newspaper incorporates all the functions that are found in greater or lesser degree in other publications. The daily newspapers that most of us are familiar with are called **broadsheets**, because of their size. Some dailies, such as evening newspapers, are published as **tabloids** (roughly half the size of a broadsheet). But what we are interested in here are the contents of these publications—the matter that goes into making a newspaper of any kind.

News stories follow a rather formulaic approach, while features (stories that elaborate on or take off from current events) offer more scope for different structures and styles. Studying a newspaper's contents will give you an idea of what this formula is and how it varies through the different parts of the paper.

#### *Activity*

Look through a newspaper and try to arrive at a map of its contents. What are the different divisions you can identify? Now, look through the different articles and see if you can classify those in any way, by subject or by style. How are stories on the front page different from those on the back page, or on the middle pages of the paper?

## 25.2 WHAT MAKES UP A NEWSPAPER?

A daily newspaper serves a general audience, but also caters to different interests within that audience. Just a cursory look at the paper will make it clear that there are different sections—local/city, state/region, business, international, entertainment (usually in the supplements), and sports, among others. Sometimes the paper carries different supplements that cater to special interests such as health, science, fashion, etc. This strategy of sectioning the paper in a way that speaks to different interests is known as ‘**vertical zoning**’, and the interest groups are known as ‘**vertical markets**’. Some large newspapers have different editions catering to different geographic areas, and this is called **horizontal zoning**. So *The Hindu*, and the *Times of India* both have different editions for each of the metropolitan cities and also for some of the larger towns. This allows them to give more space and devote more resources to the interests of that geographic location. Because even within a given geographic area, there may be a wide range of subject-specific interests, the paper also makes sure it covers all these areas in sections of the daily paper or in special weekly supplements.

The content of the paper can also be differentiated in other ways. If you look at most of the stories on page one, and on many of the other pages, you will see that they are written in a very straightforward, direct manner, and also tend to be quite short. Most of these are about current happenings, both events and issues. These are known as **straight news stories**. But here and there you will find longer stories, and some that are demarcated by a ‘box’ (marked with a border). These may be written in a more loose, sometimes humorous and sometimes analytical style. These are **news features**. Apart from these, usually on the editorial pages (where the newspaper’s voice is heard) are articles that express an opinion on issues of current interest or provide an analysis of a current topic. These are called **editorials** (when written by the newspaper, usually marked as such), while those that are written by contributing writers are called **opinion pieces**. In addition, there are other forms of information in the newspaper, such as **briefs** (very short news items, no more than 50 to 75 words in length), **sidebars** (graphs, tables, charts or bulleted lists that provide additional information on a story), **letters to the editor** (from readers) and **interviews/profiles** (often in question & answer format).

All the articles described here together form what is known as the ‘**news hole**’ of the publication—the information that is provided to the public by the editorial department, and written either by staff writers or contributors but checked and selected by the editors. There is, in addition to this, a lot of material that comes to the newspaper through the business department. This includes advertisements of various kinds publicizing a range of goods and services, public notices announcements and obituaries. Most of this material is paid for by those who request its insertion in the paper, and this is where the bulk of the newspaper’s revenue comes from. While writers generally do not need to worry about the advertising content of the paper, copy editors and layout artists often must tailor the size of articles to the space made available to them after the insertion of advertisements.

### Activity

Compare two or three different newspapers and/or magazines in terms of their editorial content and advertising. What kinds of stories dominate? What is the rough proportion of advertising to news? What types of advertisements are carried and why do you think so? A newspaper’s advertising reflects its readership, and one can arrive at a broad idea of who the main audience or readership is from a survey of the advertisements. Create a graph or a chart that shows the relative proportions of advertising to news, and within news, the different kinds of editorial content according to the classification described above.

### ✓ Check Your Progress 1

Fill in the blanks.

1. Daily newspapers are called \_\_\_\_\_, because of their size.
2. Evening newspapers that are roughly half the size of a daily newspaper are called \_\_\_\_\_.
3. When a newspaper caters to special interests such as health, science, fashion, etc. it is using the strategy of \_\_\_\_\_.
4. The special interest groups are known as \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Catering to different geographic areas is called \_\_\_\_\_.
6. News stories about current happenings written in a very straightforward, direct manner, and also quite short, are known as \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Longer stories, sometimes marked with a border and written in a more loose, humorous or sometimes analytical style are \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Articles that express an opinion on issues of current interest or provide an analysis of a current topic are called \_\_\_\_\_ when written by the newspaper and when such articles are written by contributing writers they are called \_\_\_\_\_.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ are very short news items, no more than 50 to 75 words in length.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ are graphs, tables, charts or bulleted lists that provide additional information on a story.
11. \_\_\_\_\_ come from readers.
12. \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ are often in question & answer format.
13. Material that comes to the newspaper through the business department includes \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.
14. Find one example from a newspaper of each of the items named above.

## 25.3 THE ORGANIZATION OF PRINT MEDIA

Each type of publication has a unique style of functioning and an organization that reflects this style, but there are nevertheless certain similarities in roles and responsibilities, as well as workflow, across the diversity of print media vehicles. In general, publications organize their work along three main functions, as described below:

**Editorial:** This is the department that generates the matter for publication. In a newspaper or magazine, this would include the reporters (who go out and get the news and write it), the copy editors (who edit the stories and do some of the background research and writing), the editorial and feature writers (who do the more in-depth analytical and interpretive stories), and the photographers and artists. The editorial department is usually headed by the Chief Editor or Managing Editor supported by section editors (Business editor, Sports editor, News editor, Features editor, etc.) and this team makes decisions about what major stories to pursue and how they are to be prioritized in the publication.

**Production:** The production staff handles layout (placing the news and feature stories as well as the graphic elements on to the page) and design of the publication, and coordinates the printing. This group works closely with the copy editors in deciding how to place stories on a page and how headlines and photographs are to be displayed.

**Marketing & Administration:** The business end of the work is handled by these departments, which also ‘sell space’ (bring in advertising to the publication) and handle circulation and distribution. In most news publications, care is taken to separate editorial and marketing departments, so that the content of the paper remains independent of market considerations.

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## 25.4 THE FLOW OF WORK ON A NEWSPAPER

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As in all writing, the work in an editorial department of a newspaper begins with an idea—or rather, a set of ideas. From all the millions of events that take place each day, and all the issues that need to be discussed, the editors must choose a few that can be pursued and carried in the newspaper. It is a difficult process of decision making, but one that must be done very quickly, as the news cycle must begin and end within a less than twenty-four hour period, allowing for enough time to print and distribute the paper! In order to aid decision making, journalists have evolved a set of broad principles that guide the selection of news. These are known as **news values**. The most commonly applied news values are listed below.

*Timeliness:* how ‘new’ is the news? Is it something that is fresh, and not covered before? For a daily newspaper, unless the news is something that is happening today, or, in some cases, happened just yesterday, it is not really news.

*Prominence:* Who are the people involved? Does the news relate to people in power, or those who are popular, notorious, influential or interesting because of what they do? People who are in the public eye make news, even if the events themselves are not particularly newsworthy. If someone in power makes a controversial statement, it gets covered, while the same comments, if made by an obscure academic, even if knowledgeable, may not receive attention.

*Proximity:* If the event is happening in the immediate vicinity of the audience served by the newspaper, it is of more importance than something that happens far away. Proximity could be geographic, or it could be psychological—so for instance, an event that concerns Indians living in the United States makes news because the Indian readership feels ‘connected’ to this group even if located at a distance.

*Magnitude:* Events that are large in scale make news; so disasters, conflicts or accidents that cause substantial damage to life and property, always find space in the newspaper.

*Relevance/Usefulness:* Issues that affect people’s lives in direct or indirect ways are usually covered by newspapers. So this is why you find news of traffic regulations, price hikes, new educational policies, new products available in the market, etc.

*Conflict:* Wars always make news, as do battles of a more minor nature. Killings, armed and unarmed encounters between different groups, crime, controversy...these are all the stuff of many news stories.

*Oddness:* The unexpected and the unusual always makes news, as people like to read about the out-of-the-ordinary, about things that they do not see in their daily routine.

*Human interest:* People respond to stories of human success and failure, courage in the face of adversity and achievement against odds, as well as human foibles and frailty. This is why you often find funny, quirky, or heartwarming little snippets in the newspaper, that are just interesting to spend a moment on, and that sometimes make you think in a slightly different way about the mundane.

Most news and feature stories have more than one news value, and some will have all the news values embodied in their different aspects. A story about a train accident that leaves 200 people dead, for instance, is timely (if it happened the day before or that day), has magnitude (affects a lot of people), human interest (if there are stories of bravery, human failure), proximity (particularly if it is within the region) and relevance (if there is information that impacts other travelers on the accident route).

### Activity

Look through the front page of the newspaper and try to identify the dominant news values that are expressed in the articles. Why do you think these stories were selected, particularly for page one? Do you agree with the prioritization of the stories on the different pages? Which news values do you think should guide editorial decision making and why?

Apart from looking at the day's (or recent days') events, the editorial team also draws ideas for stories from areas of activity known as 'beats'. These are designated subject areas or locations which need to be covered regularly, because they are important to civic life. Traditional beats include crime (the police department and the courts), politics (local, state, national policy making and governing bodies), education (schools, colleges and universities), entertainment (film, theatre, music), health (the medical establishment), sports, business (stock market, industry, commerce), defence, foreign policy, environment, and science. Other areas that are now covered regularly include fashion and lifestyle and technology. Reporters are usually assigned a beat that they keep track of on a regular basis, maintaining contact with key people within that area, and watching for new developments. Some beats yield stories daily, sometimes many stories (such as politics), and therefore require coverage by more than one reporter, while others are more specialized and produce story ideas less frequently (such as science or education, perhaps).

Ideas for feature stories take a slightly different path. Feature writers have a larger canvas to work with, and while their ideas also must incorporate one or more news values, they can work from a certain perspective or focus on a certain angle of the story, in a manner that is not possible within straight news. Feature stories also can take longer to prepare, so these writers do not have to work within the same stringent deadlines as those who write for the main sections of the newspaper.

Once story ideas are discussed and approved in the preliminary editorial meetings, reporters begin the process of collection information. This is an important phase in the news creation process, and the saying goes that a story is only as good as its sources. This means that a reporter must find and cultivate reliable sources, people who can provide dependable information, and documents or other information sites. A reporter must be a good researcher and be able to use all the tools of research to gain information—this might involve looking at documents and sifting through records to find evidence, observing situations to gain insight into the workings of systems, as well as developing rapport and talking to people to get information and opinions. Some stories are written based on information from just one or two sources, while others require more extensive research that takes longer and requires a greater diversity of sources. While gathering information for a story, reporters tend to ask questions that elicit the “5Ws and H” of news—who (was involved, or affected), what (happened, was done), when (did it happen), where (did it happen),

why (what are the reasons and implications) and how (what was the process). Increasingly, reporters also want to know the 'so what?' of an event—what makes it significant, why should people care?

After the information is collected, the reporter begins writing the story. Writing for the news media demands the ability to work very quickly, often under pressure of tight deadlines. Those who write straight news stories often have to collect information and write up the article, all in less than four to five hours. They must also write to fit the space that has been allocated, and be able to present all the necessary details in a balanced and clear manner. The article then goes to a copy editor who checks it for correctness of language and style, and occasionally adds background material. The copy editor also writes the headlines, selects photographs or commissions illustrations if needed, and writes captions/legends for these illustrations.

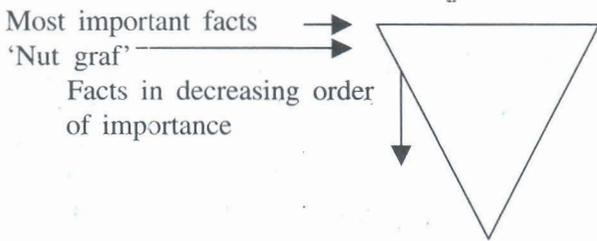
After a certain number of articles have been completed, the copy editors begin working with the production staff on laying out the pages. At this stage too, stories may require rewriting or shortening to fit the layout. Occasionally reporters are called back in to provide their inputs to a story they have originally written, but more often than not, the copy editor handles the changes. After the entire page is laid out, it is proofread and checked thoroughly and then sent for final processing and printing.

#### ✓ Check Your Progress 2

15. The \_\_\_\_\_ department generates the matter for publication.
16. The production department handles \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and coordinates \_\_\_\_\_.
17. The marketing and administration department, among other things, \_\_\_\_\_ to advertisers.
18. \_\_\_\_\_ guide editorial decision making about what to include in the newspaper.
19. Find stories in the newspaper that demonstrate each of the news values mentioned in this unit.
20. Specific areas of activity that journalists are assigned to are called \_\_\_\_\_.
21. Reporters ask questions related to the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of news.
22. The \_\_\_\_\_ work with the production staff on laying out pages of the newspaper.

## 25.5 THE ANATOMY OF A NEWS STORY

As mentioned earlier, news follows a format that is very different from other forms of writing. Often, in order to write good news copy, we have to unlearn all that we have been taught in school and college about good writing! The best news stories are those which use simple, direct language and clear attribution (showing where the information has come from). The basic structure of the news story is the **inverted pyramid**—beginning with the most important facts and progressing toward the least.



The inverted pyramid owes its origins to the early days of the telegraph, when reporters wired in stories from remote locations over undependable lines. It was important that they got across the most important information before the line broke, and gradually this structure came to stay, as it also made editing easy—copy editors could simply chop off the last few lines or paragraphs of a story if it didn't fit the space! The first paragraph – or **lead** – contained the gist of the story in a way that sparked interest and drew in readers. The paragraph following the lead, provided important background or contextual information, and this was sometimes referred to as the 'nut graf' (the paragraph containing the nuts and bolts). This was followed by other key facts and opinions presented in decreasing order of importance. The inverted pyramid format ensures that even those who simply skim or scan the paper get the important details up front, and those who are keenly interested or have the time, can read further for more information.

### Activity

Read through a few stories in the newspaper and see if they fit the inverted pyramid structure. What variations do you find? What sorts of stories use different structures?

Feature stories use a less structured format, as they tend to be longer and more reflective, and are aimed at a readership that has more time to spend with the newspaper. Features can also use a wider range of writing styles, from narrative to descriptive to interpretive, depending on the subject matter and the tone they wish to adopt.

No matter how the article is structured, there are certain points to be kept in mind as one writes for the daily press—or for any publication, for that matter.

*Simple is better.* Use short sentences where the links are clear between subject, object, verb and qualifiers. Use active voice as far as possible.

*Stick to one idea per paragraph.* Use short paragraphs that focus on one idea, one source, and one point in the story. When you move to a different aspect, change location or source, move to a new paragraph.

*Attribute clearly.* Make sure that you link the 'who' and the 'what' of facts and opinions but stating clearly the source of a statement.

*Separate fact and opinion.* Mention clearly things that you saw or heard, or facts that were given by key sources, and separate these from "I think" or "I believe" statements of opinion that may be given by people. Facts should hold up to checking. Opinions are important in some contexts, but it is important to make it clear that they are just opinions.

*Use clear transitions.* Mark shifts in location, source, topic, time and viewpoint with appropriate signposts like 'on the other hand', 'in the meantime', 'on the contrary', 'later/earlier', 'elsewhere', etc.

*Show, don't tell!* Provide clear descriptions that allow the reader to make up his or her own mind about a situation. This means that you use strong verbs rather than

adjectives—so, for instance, rather than say ‘it was an amazing show’, you would say ‘a crowd of ten thousand clapped to the rhythm of their music.’

### Activity

Choose two stories from the daily newspaper: one, a front page, ‘straight’ news story that is a summary of a major event or current issue, and the other, a feature from one of the inside sections such as international news, science, or even lifestyle. Compare the structure and the language used in both. What differences do you see? How do the writers make use of language to get their point across in completely different ways?

## 25.6 THE WRITING PROCESS

It helps to think of writing as a four-stage process that fits into the news production cycle as well. These four stages are briefly outlined below.

*Conceive* (*‘Newsthinking’*): You begin by looking for ideas and thinking about what you are going to write. This is the point where you not only decide on the topic but also the way you are going to approach the topic. While news reporters do not have to search far and wide for ideas – their stories come from happenings around them and on their beats – feature writers must look more actively for ideas that can be turned into good stories. Often the best ideas come from everyday happenings. Look and listen to things happening around you, what are people talking about, what do they feel strongly about, what are the issues that preoccupy them? If something bothers you, then it might be worth thinking about or brainstorming with your colleagues and turning into an article idea. Are there aspects of the news that haven’t been explored in the daily press? Are there interesting people outside the public view who have done things worth talking about? Look in less explored places for ideas.

*Collect* (*‘Newsgathering’*): Now that you have an idea you have to turn it into a story. This involves collecting information and ideas that support and expand upon your initial idea. It could mean spending time in observation and exploration, reading through background files and books to learn more about the topic, and talking to people connected with the topic for information, opinions and experiences that you can use. This is perhaps the most important phase of the writing process, and the more time you spend on exploring the topic through documentary research and interviews, the better your story will be.

*Construct* (*‘News writing’*): Now you have all your information, you need to get down to writing. This is what many people feel is the difficult part, but if you have spent time on the first two phases, then this becomes relatively easier. Begin by studying your notes and making a mental plan of what you need to use and what is possible to discard. Write a focus statement that clearly sets out what your article is about, in as specific terms as possible. Ask yourself what is the most interesting and unusual aspect of what you have found out in the newsgathering phase and use that to begin your article. Some people like to first create an outline of the article, listing out the points and then elaborating upon them as they proceed. Others suggest that you put your notes away after studying them and write a first draft quickly, from memory—this makes your writing more spontaneous and achieves a natural flow. Once you have completed the first draft, look through your notes again and fill in details that you may have missed out.

*Correct* (*‘News editing’*): This is where you go over your draft carefully and check it for accuracy, completeness and clarity. Verify all the facts and check that

all statements have been attributed to the correct sources, and that the sources are named correctly (spellings of names are particularly important in the print media!). Is the language appropriate and easily understandable? Are the transitions clearly marked? Is there a logical flow? Have you used quotes effectively? When you finish editing your document, ask yourself: Have I said what I wanted to say? Have I said it as clearly as possible? Have I said it as effectively as possible?

### ✓ Check Your Progress 3

23. The most common news story structure is the \_\_\_\_\_.

24. The first paragraph of a news story is called the \_\_\_\_\_.

25. \_\_\_\_\_ are longer and more reflective or detailed.

26. The four stages in the writing process are \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

## 25.7 WRITING FOR OTHER PRINT MEDIA

News writing offers a good training ground for all other kinds of writing in print media, because the demands of news are particularly difficult—writers have to write well under the pressure of time and space, and often under a variety of other kinds of pressures as well (controversial topics where influential people are involved, for instance). In other publications, while the production cycle may be less demanding, the attention to detail and correctness of language may be greater. In some forms, like advertising, the writer is called upon to encapsulate entire ideas in a slogan of four or five words, while in brochures and marketing literature, the writer must balance objectivity and persuasion in a delicate manner.

However, across all print forms, there are certain commonalities and certain shared notions of quality, some of which have been outlined here. Good writing is writing that works, that gets the results it sets out to achieve, that makes sense to the reader—the first time around.

## 25.8 LET US SUM UP

- The daily newspapers that most of us are familiar with are called **broadsheets**, because of their size. Some dailies, such as evening newspapers, are published as **tabloids**.
- The strategy of sectioning the paper according to different interests such as sports, business, international news, etc. is known as '**vertical zoning**', and the interest groups are known as '**vertical markets**'.
- Some large newspapers have different editions catering to different geographic areas, and this is called **horizontal zoning**.
- Most of the articles in the paper are **straight news stories**, which focus on the main facts of current events and issues.

- Features are more analytical, descriptive or interpretive articles that elaborate on or relate to a specific aspect of a current event or issue.
- The newspaper office is organized across three main functions—editorial, which takes care of the content of the publication; production, which handles the design and printing; and marketing & administration, which takes care of the business and organizational details.
- Editors make decisions about what to include or leave out of the newspaper based on certain criteria called news values, such as timeliness, prominence, proximity, conflict, magnitude, relevance, oddness and human interest.
- The inverted pyramid is the most common type of news story, in which the most important facts are presented at the beginning, followed by the remaining facts in decreasing order of importance.
- News stories are written in a simple, direct style, with sources of information clearly stated.
- The writing process may be broken down into four stages—conception (idea generation), collection (research and interviewing), construction (the actual writing) and correction (checking and editing).
- Other kinds of writing draw heavily on the style and format of news writing, and newspapers are a good training ground for all kinds of media writing.

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## 25.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

1. Broadsheets
2. Tabloids
3. Vertical zoning
4. Vertical markets
5. Horizontal zoning
6. Straight news stories
7. Features
8. Editorial; opinion pieces
9. Briefs
10. Sidebars
11. Letters to the editor
12. Interviews, profiles
13. Advertisements, public notices, announcements and obituaries
14. Do the activity suggested.

**Check Your Progress 2**

15. Editorial
16. Design, layout, printing
17. Sells space
18. News values
19. Do the suggested activity
20. Beats
21. 5 Ws and H
22. Copy editors

**Check Your Progress 3**

23. Inverted pyramid
24. Lead
25. Feature stories
26. Conceive, collect, construct, correct

## NOTES