MERIT BADGE SERIES

JOURNALISM

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Requirements

1. Explain what freedom of the press is and how the First Amendment guarantees that you can voice your opinion. In your discussion, tell how to distinguish between fact and opinion, and explain the terms *libel, slander, defamation, fair comment and criticism, public figure, privacy,* and *malice.* Discuss how these matters relate to ethics in journalism.
2. Do either A OR B:
   a. Newspaper and magazine journalism
      (1) All on the same day, read a local newspaper, a national newspaper, a newsmagazine, and (with your parent's permission) an online news source. From each source, clip, read, and compare a story about the same event. Tell your counselor how long each story is and how fair and accurate the stories are in presenting different points of view. Tell how each source handled the story differently, depending on its purpose or audience.
      (2) Visit a newspaper or magazine office. Ask for a tour of the various divisions (editorial, business, and printing). During your tour, talk to an executive from the business side about management's relations with reporters, editors, and photographers and what makes a "good" newspaper or magazine.

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   b. Radio and television journalism
      (1) All on the same day, watch a local and national network newscast, listen to a radio newscast, and (with your parent's permission) view a national broadcast news source online. List the different news items and features presented, the different elements used, and the time in minutes and seconds and the online space devoted to each story. Compare the story lists and discuss whether the stories are fair and accurate. Explain why different news outlets treated the stories differently and/or presented a different point of view.
      (2) Visit a radio or television station. Ask for a tour of the various departments, concentrating on those related to news broadcasts. During your tour, talk to the station manager or other station management executive about station operations, particularly how management and the news staff work together, and what makes a "good" station. If possible, go with a reporter to cover a news event.

3. Discuss the differences between a hard news story and a feature story. Explain what is the "five W's and H." Then do ONE of the following:
   a. Choose a current or an unusual event of interest to you, and write either a hard news article OR a feature article about the event. Gear the article for print OR audio OR video journalism. Share your article with your counselor.
   b. With your parent's permission and counselor's approval, interview someone in your community who is influential because of his or her leadership, talent, career, or life experiences. Then present to your counselor either a written or oral report telling what you learned about this person.
   c. With your parent's permission and counselor's approval, read an autobiography written by a journalist you want to learn more about. Write an article that tells what you learned about this person and the contributions this person has made to the field of journalism.
   d. Attend a Scouting event and write a 200-word article (feature or hard news) about the event. Use either the inverted pyramid style or the chronological style. Review the article with your counselor, then submit it to your community newspaper or BSA local council or district newsletter for consideration.
4. Attend a public event and do ONE of the following:
   a. Write two newspaper articles about the event, one using the inverted pyramid style and one using the chronological style.
   b. Using a radio or television broadcasting style, write a news story, a feature story, and a critical review of the event.
   c. Take a series of photographs to help tell the story of the event in pictures. Include news photos and feature photos in your presentation. Write a brief synopsis of the event as well as captions for your photos.
5. Find out about three career opportunities in journalism. Pick one and find out the education, training, and experience required for this profession. Discuss this with your counselor, and explain why this profession might interest you.

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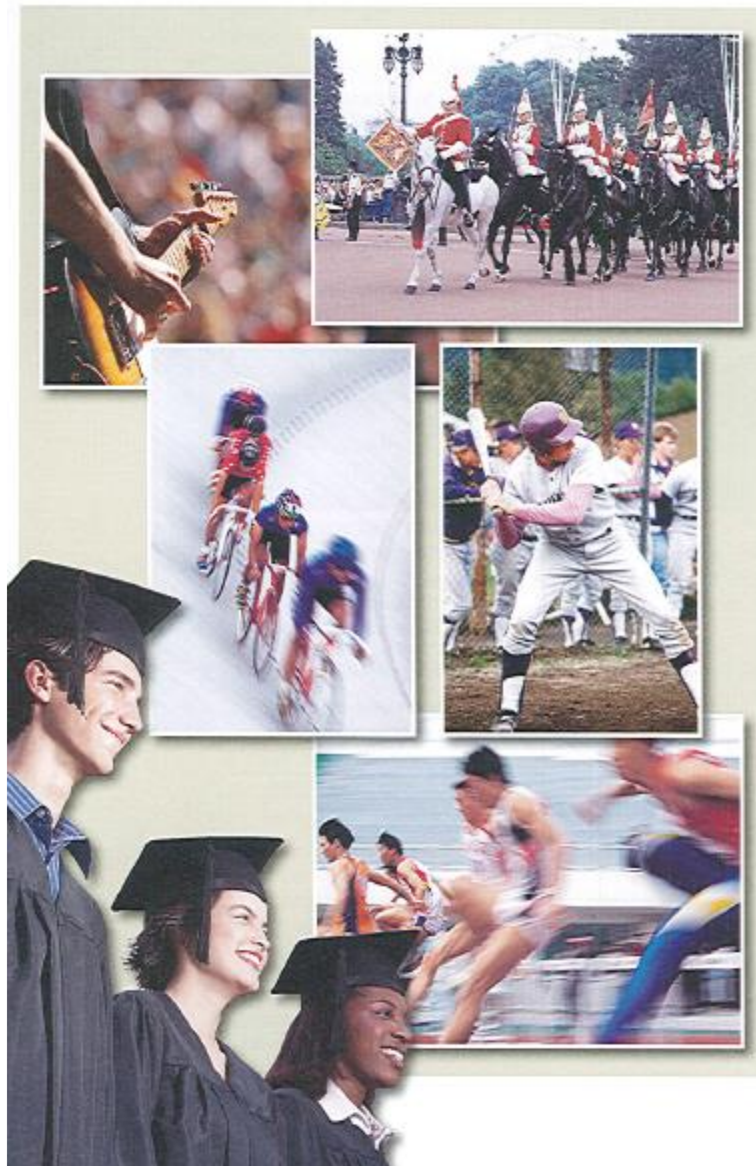


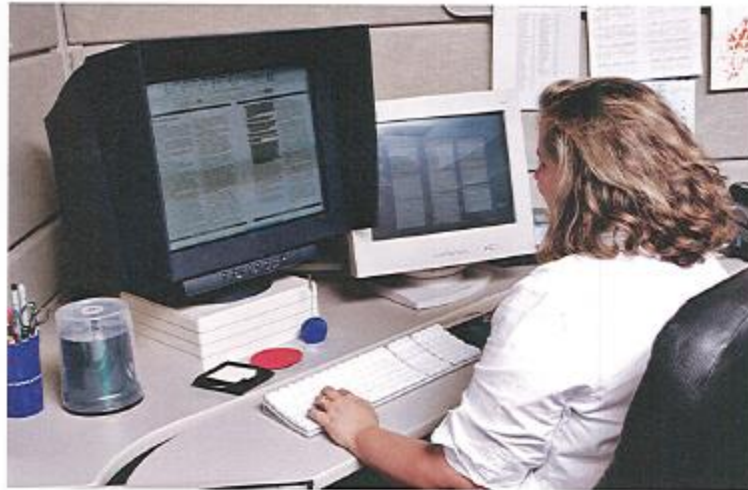
Introduction

One thing is for sure about journalism: It is never boring. For a reporter, almost every day is different from the last. One day you might interview the mayor of the city, the next day report on a car accident, and the day after that preview a new movie.

Sports writers may travel to cover the home team's games across the state or the nation. Foreign correspondents go to faraway countries to write about wars and conflicts. Technology reporters try out all the latest computers, video game machines, digital cameras, and the like to tell readers how well they work.

Journalism is for people who love excitement, who want to get involved and see how the world operates. Journalists pursue stories of interest to themselves and to the general public, and this all makes journalism lots of fun. But journalism also is hard work, and there are usually daily deadlines. Journalism can deal with matters of life and death—accidents, fires, natural disasters, and war—and often involves victims of personal tragedy.

Journalists write about crime and dishonesty. Their reports may cause people to go to jail or lose their jobs for being corrupt. Journalists help citizens form sound judgments when they vote new leaders into power. Journalists expose problems affecting the community, anything from a dangerous street intersection to pollution in the drinking water. Journalism can change public opinion and affect how governments spend money. It is not a career to be taken lightly.



Not all journalists are reporters. The field also employs photographers, editors, graphic artists, designers, producers, researchers, and others. But almost all journalists share at least one trait: They are curious and eager to share what they know with others.

How the Free Press Was Born

Journalism helps shape history.

Here in the United States, we tend to take freedom of the press for granted. We have our pick of thousands of different books, newspapers, magazines, broadcast stations, and Internet news outlets. Journalists here don't need government permission to report the news. They cover whatever stories they wish.

Many other countries do not have a free press; instead, their governments control what people are permitted to read in newspapers, see on television broadcasts, and browse on the Internet. Even in this country, the press has not always been free. The freedoms we enjoy today came about after many years of struggle.

Almost from the beginning, government exerted power over the press. In England, the government forced printers to get licenses. If its license was withdrawn, a print shop could be shut down. When the first English newspapers began appearing in London in the 1620s, the editors were so worried about offending local officials that they filled their papers mostly with news from other countries.

As newspapers became more popular, the government found new ways to control them. Journalists who criticized the government were punished under laws against treason and "seditious libel." In 1644, poet John Milton wrote a famous tract, the *Areopagitica*, which appealed for freedom of the press.

One journalist repeatedly jailed or pilloried for his work in England was Benjamin Harris. Hoping to escape such tyranny, he fled to America and published, in 1690, what many regard as the first American newspaper, *Publick Occurrences, Both Foreign and Domestic*. Unfortunately, Boston authorities banned Harris' newspaper after just one issue. In 1704, a more frequent newspaper appeared, the *Boston News-Letter*. Every article was submitted to the governor of the colony for approval before publication. Because of that, the newspaper was boring. It attracted few readers.

In 1721 came the first newspaper edited to please readers instead of government officials. It was the *New-England Courant*, published by James Franklin. One writer for the paper was his younger brother, Benjamin. Later, Benjamin Franklin would publish his own newspaper and would become one of the Founding Fathers of our nation.

Our press freedom makes the United States the envy of the world, but that freedom is not inevitable. Freedom of the press must be constantly protected.

The history of modern journalism begins with the invention of the printing press in Germany in 1450. Before long, books, news sheets, and pamphlets started appearing across Europe.

During these years, American journalists could still be arrested for what they wrote. In one famous case, John Peter Zenger, publisher of the *New York Weekly Journal*, was put on trial in 1735 for publishing articles critical of government officials. In defending Zenger, his attorney argued that criticizing the government should not be a crime when the criticisms are based in truth.

The government found another way to strangle the press—by imposing taxes. This made newspapers more expensive, reducing readership. In 1765, England imposed one such tax, called the Stamp Tax, on paper used in the American colonies. Outrage over this tax helped push the colonies into war against England.

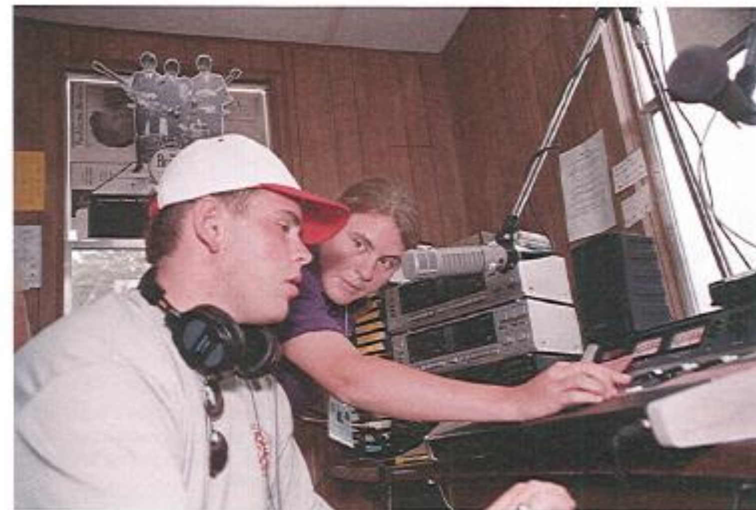
In 1787, after America had won its independence in the Revolutionary War, the Founding Fathers drafted the U.S. Constitution. The Bill of Rights, consisting of 10 amendments to the Constitution, took effect in 1791. The first amendment established freedom of religion, freedom of speech, the right to assemble, and freedom of the press. This amendment became the foundation of a powerful American news media.

News However You Like It

The history of the press is closely linked to breakthroughs in technology. The invention of the printing press put books and news sheets into the hands of the common person, not just rich people, helping to spread literacy around the world.

The first radio broadcasts in the 1920s, and the first television stations in the 1950s, brought news to people who did not read newspapers. In the early 1990s, mass communications made a leap forward with the emergence of the World Wide Web, which now brings almost unlimited information to anyone with a home computer and network link. Today, news is being zapped wirelessly to mobile phones and handheld computers. With each advance in technology have come new opportunities—and new challenges—for journalists.

In 1837, the invention of the telegraph made it possible for information to be transmitted instantly along wires over great distances—even between nations.



What Is News?

News, simply put, is information about something new, rather than something already known. Today's weather is news; yesterday's weather is history. News is information of interest to a particular audience. Reporters and editors decide which of the many events that happen each day are newsworthy to their particular audience. Here are some factors they consider.

Timing. *When did it happen?* Most news is about something recent or upcoming—what happened yesterday, what is happening today, or what might happen tomorrow or next week. This helps people get along in their daily lives and plan for the near future. Different news media have different news cycles. Radio may update its news reports hourly; television, three times a day; print newspapers, every morning; magazines, monthly.

Distance. *How close was it?* The proximity of a news event affects how interesting it is to your audience. A power outage in your own town is much more newsworthy than one in the town 50 miles away.

Impact. *How strongly does it affect our audience?* The news that schools will be closed today due to snow has a big effect on the audience, so it is a leading news item on radio and TV. The fact that Mrs. Brown's lost cat finally came home has little consequence for other people, so it has little news value (though it might still get covered in a small-town newspaper).

Fame. *How famous are the people involved?* If the mayor breaks his leg, it is news to the whole city. If you do, it probably is not. If a U.S. congressman speaks at your troop meeting, the local newspaper will probably cover it. If Bobby's dad gives the speech, the newspaper probably won't (though the troop newsletter probably will).

Novelty. *How unusual was it?* An old saying in journalism goes, "When a dog bites a man, it's not news; when a man bites a dog, it is." People love to read about the odd, the extreme, and the unexpected—a 1,400-pound pumpkin, a balloonist circling the world, a dog going scuba diving. "Firsts" often make the news, such as the first man to walk on the moon (Neil Armstrong) and the first Eagle Scout to explore Antarctica (Paul Siple).

Conflict. *Who's fighting whom over what?* When people disagree, the results can often make news—whether it is a war between nations, an argument between city leaders over how much money will be spent on the new town swimming pool, or a conflict over which fund-raisers the troop should hold to raise money for summer camp. A particular challenge for journalists covering conflict is to be fair to all sides of the argument.

A newsworthy story can be one that helps spur the community to action, such as organizing a cleanup effort after a tornado.

Human Interest. Some stories are newsworthy simply because they reveal something about our humanity. These are stories that appeal to our emotions, making us laugh, cry, or feel inspired. Examples include stories about Scouts doing Good Turns for their communities, such as collecting blankets for the homeless or helping victims of a flood or tornado clean up their damaged homes. Acts of kindness and examples of people overcoming adversity or hardship are often good topics for human interest stories.

Fair and Balanced Reporting

It is a reporter's responsibility to report the facts and keep personal opinions out of the story. When the facts are unclear, or people in the story disagree, the reporter must present the conflicting information and cover all sides of the argument, even if personally the reporter favors one side or another. This is called being fair, balanced, and objective.

Objective reporting can be tricky. Suppose, for example, that the highway department wants to add lanes to the freeway going through your town. Some say the extra lanes will improve traffic flow. Opponents disagree, saying a wider highway will only encourage more people to drive instead of taking the bus, making traffic worse.

Fair and balanced reporting lets the reader make up his or her own mind based on the facts alone.

Say that you, the reporter covering the story, live next to the highway, and that your backyard will be destroyed if the highway is widened. You must be careful not to let your personal stake in the matter affect your reporting. Instead, you must present both arguments fairly and seek out more objective sources, such as studies done on the highway plan by experts. You must also avoid using "loaded" words or phrases that reveal your own opinion in a subtle way. Then your readers can decide on their own whether the highway should be widened.

Often, news events must be put into a broader perspective to be understood. For this reason, some journalists take sides on certain public issues and present their views on special pages of the newspaper labeled as the "opinion" or "editorial" section. Journalists who specialize in writing carefully thought-out opinions are called "editorialists" or "columnists." On TV or radio, they are called "commentators."

Suppose the city mayor presents the town council her annual budget spelling out how the city's tax money will be spent. The editorial writer, after weighing all the facts, may decide that the mayor's budget gives too much money to a new baseball stadium and not enough to schools. By publishing

that opinion on the editorial page, readers know it is the newspaper's opinion and not a news report. The readers, in turn, may express their own opinions in letters to the editor—or in a phone call to a radio or TV station, to be played on the air. In this way, a news outlet can inspire public debate about important community issues and ensure a wide range of views.

Let's say the Scouts of Troop 160 vote to sell holiday trees to raise money for summer camp, although almost half the troop wanted to sell lightbulbs instead. Good journalism in the troop newsletter would cover both sides of the issue in an objective report. Then, if he wishes, the newsletter editor may decide to support one side or the other, persuasively explaining his reasons in a clearly labeled editorial.

Here's how the objective news report might appear in the newsletter.

Troop Will Sell Trees to Earn Money

Troop 160 will sell pine trees again this holiday season to earn money for Scout camp next summer. The decision came Tuesday night at the weekly troop meeting at Springfield Recreation Center after a 15-13 vote. "There was a lively debate among patrols," said Scoutmaster Jim Robinson.

Members of the Eagle and Lion patrols proposed selling lightbulbs instead of trees. "Lightbulbs can be sold year-round and not just during the holidays," said Eagle Patrol leader Jason Smith. "They're a smarter choice than Christmas trees."

But holiday trees make a bigger profit, said Star Patrol's Bob Sawyer. "We can make all the money we need in a short amount of time. We should stick with trees." Agreeing with him were the Badger, Mountain, and Rocket patrols.

"Regardless of how the vote came out," Scoutmaster Robinson said after the meeting, "I was proud of the Scouts for making strong arguments on both sides of the issue."

Here is the same report written in an unprofessional way by a reporter who allowed his own feelings to color the story.

Lightbulbs Are a Dim Idea, Says Troop 160

Troop 160 wisely voted down a proposal to sell lightbulbs this year instead of holiday trees to earn money for summer camp. The 15-13 vote came Tuesday night at the weekly troop meeting at Springfield Recreation Center.

It was surprising how many Scouts were taken in by Eagle Patrol leader Jason Smith's arguments in favor of lightbulbs. They must have believed his comment that "everybody needs lightbulbs and we should make lots of money selling them." Luckily, Bob Sawyer of the Star Patrol was more persuasive than Smith. He argued that trees sell for higher prices than lightbulbs and therefore make more profit. The trees won the vote. Thank goodness.

Instead of this biased news report, a clearly labeled "editorial" would have been a more appropriate way for the troop newsletter editor to express his opinion.

Editorial: Scout Activities Are More Important Than Money Raising

This newsletter includes a report about a debate over whether Troop 160 should sell holiday trees or lightbulbs for earning money. Those in favor of selling lightbulbs made strong arguments for their cause. Patrol leader Jason Smith said that because lightbulbs are not a seasonal item, the troop could sell them whenever money was needed instead of only for a couple of weeks a year.

That is true, but raising money is not our main purpose. This troop exists so that our Scouts can enjoy everything that Scouting has to offer. We are lucky that a local tree farm lets us sell its trees during the holidays. We raise the funds we need for summer camp and other troop activities in a very short period. This quick fund-raiser lets us devote the rest of the year to Scouting program activities and community service projects, not money raising. This is how it should be.

Pitfalls to Avoid

Journalists should never write something they know in advance to be false, nor should they write something carelessly, with reckless disregard for the truth. Doing so can be used in a civil court as evidence of *malice*, the intention of doing someone harm.

Journalists must be careful to avoid committing *defamation*, or damaging someone's reputation with false statements. When the damage comes from written words or photographs, it is called *libel*. When the offending words are spoken, it is called *slander*. Libel or slander happens when a journalist falsely reports that someone has committed a crime. The person falsely accused can sue the journalist and news organization in civil court.

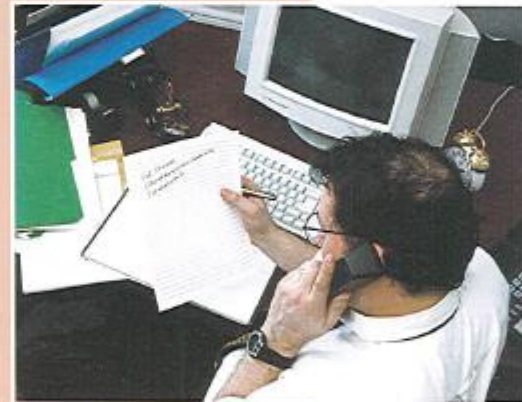
Journalists should respect people's privacy—their right to be left alone, out of public view. That is why, in many cases, you should seek permission before taking a person's picture or writing about the individual in a news story.

People give up some of their privacy when they are involved in an event of public interest, such as a fire, accident, or public meeting. They may temporarily become a public figure, subject to being reported on without giving their permission. Other examples of public figures are celebrities and entertainers who have thrust themselves into the limelight. Journalists have the right to make fair comment and criticism on the activities and performances of such people, as well as those of public officials, such as politicians in office.

Journalism Code of Ethics

Various journalism organizations, newspapers, and broadcasters have developed codes of ethics, or principles of good behavior, for journalists. Here are some main principles common to many of them:

1. **Be accurate.** Present facts honestly and fully. Treat all sides of a controversial issue fairly.
2. **Name your sources.** Whenever feasible, journalists should say where they got their information.
3. **Respect people's privacy.**
4. **Correct your mistakes.** If you publish something that is wrong, publish a correction promptly.
5. **Avoid conflicts of interest.** Don't report on something in order to benefit yourself.
6. **Clearly label as opinion any statements of the journalist's own views on an issue.** Keep those opinions on the editorial page of the newspaper or on a commentary segment of a newscast.
7. **Never plagiarize, or copy someone else's work without attributing the material to the original author.**
8. **Avoid stereotyping people.** That is, don't present a simplified image of a group of people—for example, people of a particular race, age, religion, region, or disability—based on the idea that all people in the group are similar. Each person is an individual.



How the News Media Work

Newspapers, magazines, television, radio, and the Internet are the main types of mass news media. But advancing technology is causing rapid change in them all. In some cases, news media are converging, or coming together—for example, newspaper reporters appearing on TV news broadcasts, or cable and network news broadcasts being posted on Web sites. This blurs the dividing lines between media types.

Still, each medium has its advantages and disadvantages and can require special reporting techniques. Well-informed citizens need to be "media savvy," that is, they need to have the skills to evaluate the accuracy and believability of information from many different sources. Then they see news events from different angles and form judgments on their own. How we get our news is rapidly changing, but the quality of the news we find still depends on the skills and integrity of the journalists who gather it.

News organizations need a variety of professionals to operate. In general terms, there is the news or *editorial* staff; the *business* staff, which includes marketing and advertising; and the *production* or *engineering* staff, which handles the technical aspects, such as getting the magazine into print or the news broadcast on the air. Each of these staffs may have a separate manager who reports to an overall manager of the whole operation. The larger the medium, the more people involved and the more specialized each person's position. This pamphlet focuses on the news side of the operation.

Newspapers, which employ more than 54,000 newsroom journalists nationwide, have the largest newsgathering staffs of any news media.

Newspapers

Newspapers provide the most thorough news reports on the widest range of topics, especially local news.

Like the other news media, newspapers are in transition. For years, newspapers have been suffering from falling circulations, due to competition from television and, more recently, the Internet. These businesses, however, still make money and aren't going away anytime soon. Newspapers are taking steps to attract more readers, such as offering their content over the Internet. Many large dailies also publish scaled-down editions for younger readers.

U.S. newspapers sold more copies each day (about 60 million) in 1965 than in 2003 (about 55 million), despite a large increase in the nation's population over that same time period. First it was afternoon newspapers that suffered, but then morning dailies also started losing readers. In 1940, there were 1,878 daily newspapers in the United States; by 2000, there were only 1,480.

ORGANIZATION

The *editor in chief* or *executive editor* oversees the entire *newsroom* operation, often concentrating on administration, budget, and editorial planning rather than hands-on editing. This editor reports directly to the *publisher,* the business-side head, who will hire or fire an editor but usually does not get involved in daily editorial decisions.

The *managing editor* manages the day-to-day flow of articles, often editing text as well as planning multipart series and coordinating special sections with the production and advertising departments. The "M.E." runs daily news meetings and serves as the newspaper's "traffic cop," making sure the whole operation runs smoothly.

Newspapers are divided into sections, each handled by a *section editor.* Typical sections include metro (city), state, national, international, lifestyle, business, sports, and entertainment (arts). Each section typically has its own reporters, who gather and write the news. *General assignment reporters* might have more than one section.

Other important positions on a newspaper include *copy editors,* who correct spelling, grammar, style, and factual errors; *photo editors,* who manage the photography staff; and *page designers,* who lay out the articles. The *editorial page* may have its own staff of editors, who write editorials expressing the newspaper's opinions on timely events, edit letters to the editor from readers, and select columns for the facing page—the "op-ed" page—often written by nationally syndicated columnists.

Finally, the *online* department or *Web page editors* work to upload content onto the newspaper's Web site. At some newspapers, the Web page editors also prepare original or supporting content—such as audio or video clips or reader forums—that augment the newspaper's print content.

Magazines

Like newspapers, the three main newsmagazines—*Time, Newsweek,* and *U.S. News*—have been losing readers. But unlike newspapers, consumer magazines on the whole have been gaining readership. In 1970, paid circulation of all U.S. magazines was 244 million. By 2004, that figure had grown to 363 million.

Most magazines appeal to particular groups of readers—say, sports fans, guitar players, or travel buffs—and are national in scope, rather than local. The trend in magazine publishing has been away from large-circulation, general-interest titles, such as *Life* and *Look,* toward specialized magazines with smaller readerships highly devoted to particular areas of interest. This trend of *fragmenting* the audience into special groups, and *customizing* content to appeal to those groups, is going on in most other mass news media, including radio and cable television.

The number of magazines being published in the United States increased from 13,541 in 1988 to 18,821 in 2004.

ORGANIZATION

Magazine staffs vary greatly in size depending on the nature and scope of the magazine but are usually much smaller than newspaper staffs. The main positions on many magazine staffs, however, are similar to those of newspapers: editor in chief, executive editor, managing editor, senior editor, copy editor, director of design, photography editor, and Web site editor. Magazines may also have *staff researchers*, who do in-depth fact checking, and *contributing editors*, who typically are not staff members but rather freelance writers who get regular assignments from the magazine.

To help keep their staff sizes to a minimum, magazines tend to use freelance writers and photographers—independent workers who sell their talents to a variety of publications—more than do newspapers.

Radio

Unlike TV, newspapers, or the Internet, radio can be used while the listener is also doing something else, such as jogging, washing dishes, or driving a car. That makes it the most convenient of news media. However, most radio stations today are not good sources of in-depth news, especially local news. Rather, they broadcast news headlines, often national or international in scope.

Many public radio stations have their own local news staffs and also carry "Morning Edition" and "All Things Considered," the two major news programs produced daily by National Public Radio.

This situation came about for two main reasons. In 1987, the Federal Communication Commission, which grants radio and television stations licenses to broadcast, repealed the Fairness Doctrine. This rule had required stations to present news of controversial issues of public importance, with all viewpoints given fair treatment. After the repeal, many stations reduced or eliminated their news staffs.

Radio ranks second only to television in how much time people use it each day. Broadcast radio reaches some 94 percent of all Americans. In 2004 there were 13,525 licensed broadcast radio stations in the United States, a number that has been slowly increasing over the past 15 years.

The other important development was consolidation. A single company owning dozens or even hundreds of radio stations could combine staffs and broadcast national—instead of local—programming. Flourishing in this environment have been "talk radio," in which opinionated commentators interview guests about current events, and public radio, which has filled the need for in-depth news coverage in many communities.

Since 2001, two national satellite radio networks—XM and Sirius—have brought new competition to broadcast radio. The satellite networks transmit highly customized radio programming, mostly commercial-free music, to nationwide listeners who pay a subscription fee.

ORGANIZATION

Most radio stations have small staffs overseen by a *general manager*, who handles both the business and news operations. If the station produces local news, there may also be a *news director*, who makes story assignments; *staff reporters*, who work in the field and by telephone, and technicians. Larger stations that cover local news or have an all-news format may also have *news anchors*, who host drive-time news talk shows; a staff *meteorologist*, or weather reporter; a *sports reporter*; a *traffic reporter*, who helps steer commuters around road

problems; and *staff writers*, who write stories for anchors and reporters. Some of these positions—particularly traffic and weather reporters—may be shared with other radio or television stations in the same market.

Television

More than 1,700 television stations operate in this country today—an increase of almost 300 stations since 1990. Many of them are affiliated with one of the national networks—NBC, CBS, ABC, PBS, or Fox. A network *affiliate* broadcasts much of the network's programming, including such morning and evening news programs as ABC's "Good Morning America," the "NBC Nightly News," or the PBS "Newshour With Jim Lehrer."

Network affiliates also air newsmagazine shows such as "60 Minutes," "Frontline," and "20/20," as well as news commentaries such as "The O'Reilly Factor" on Fox. In addition, most TV stations originate local newscasts of their own, typically aired early in the morning, at noon, in the evening before the national newscast, and at 10 or 11 P.M., after prime-time network programming has concluded.

For an additional service fee, viewers may choose from dozens of cable or satellite TV channels. Like magazines, many subscription channels are focused by topic or format, be it comedy, animals, science, or cartoons. There also are news-only channels, including CNN and MSNBC, as well as ESPN for sports, the Weather Channel, Court TV, and CSPAN.

Cable TV news has steadily stolen viewers away from network television. Studies show that since CNN was launched in 1980, the viewership of the three commercial network evening newscasts has declined by 45 percent. This is largely for cable TV's convenience appeal. Cable news can be watched at any time Hof the day. Now, in turn, cable news is facing competition from the Internet, where viewers can find what they want whenever they want it, rather than having to watch the program being aired on TV at the moment.

One side benefit of cable and satellite TV is *public access* or *community* television. This service allows community groups, ranging from Boy Scout troops to religious organizations to local universities, to use a subscription station's studios and equipment to broadcast their own programs. There are hundreds of public access stations across the country.

ORGANIZATION

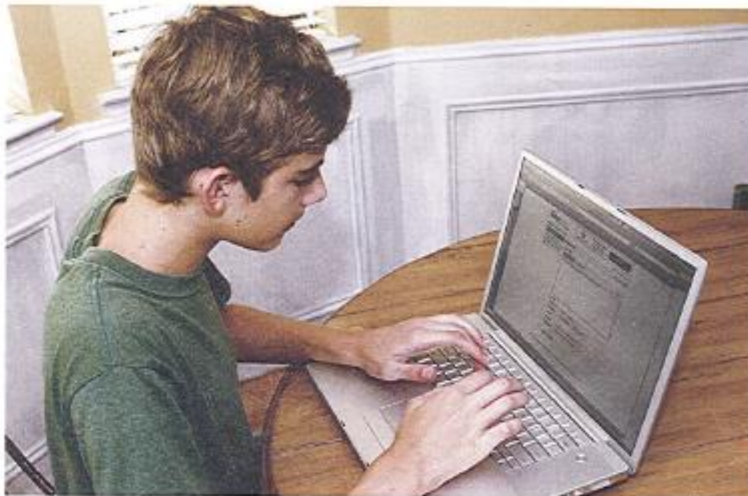
Besides their star *anchors*, the network TV news operations have extensive staffs of producers, assistant producers, assignment editors, reporters (and foreign correspondents), news writers, videographers, graphics designers and editors, film and tape librarians, and others. Local TV stations have many of these same positions, as well as meteorologists, sports anchors, and reporters. The local TV station's *general manager* is responsible for everything that goes out over the air; the *news director* runs the newsroom; a *programming manager* handles all non-news programming.

Online Media

The Internet, the network linking computers worldwide, is the newest and fastest growing news medium. Traditional print and broadcast news media provide much of the news content on the Internet. For instance, most newspapers, magazines, and broadcast outlets have some sort of Web site where you can read stories, listen to audio clips, or view photographs or footage of newscasts.

In the past, the huge cost of printing presses and broadcast equipment made it very expensive to become a publisher or broadcaster. Now, almost anyone with access to a computer can "spread the news." As more and more people get high-speed access to the Internet, getting news online will become even more convenient and the selection of news sources will grow.

The Internet has many technical advantages—unlimited storage capacity, the ability to search vast databases in mere seconds—that journalists are only beginning to realize. A news Web site can augment a news story with related materials such as the full text of a presidential speech, or a list of victims' names from an airplane crash. News Web sites come in many varieties. Some consist almost entirely of links to other news outlets, while others include original, in-depth reporting.



The Internet is fostering entirely new ways of distributing information. One of these is the Web log, or *blog*, in which journalists (or anyone) can publish diarylike entries for public viewing on the Web. Unlike a newspaper story, a blog can be as long as the writer wants it to be.

There are millions of blogs, collectively referred to as the *blogosphere*, some of which have broken news stories that the traditional media have missed. Blogs, however, can be highly opinionated and partisan, promoting certain political or personal views. Blogs are unlikely to stick to the standards of accuracy common among mainstream news media.

Yet another innovation in Web publishing appeared when the Google search engine began its automated news service in 2004. The Google news site updates news from 4,500 sources continuously, using a computer program rather than a human editor to select and present the stories.

An audio version of blogging is called *podcasting*, in which people record their own radio-type program and make it available on the Internet. You can listen to these audio files on a computer or download them to a portable music player. Some commercial broadcast stations now offer their own podcasts.

The Boy Scouts of America has a variety of podcasts on its official Web site, which you can visit with your parent's permission at *http://www.scouting.org*.

ORGANIZATION

Internet news sites are still in their infancy and haven't settled into a standard model yet. Most operate as a department of an established print or broadcast news outlet, *repurposing* or enhancing content from the newspaper, magazine, or broadcast station. A number of online operations are large enough to have their own editors, producers, reporters, writers, graphic designers, and programmers. Others outsource some of these functions, typically the technical side, to independent Web production companies.

The Role of Wire Services and Syndicates

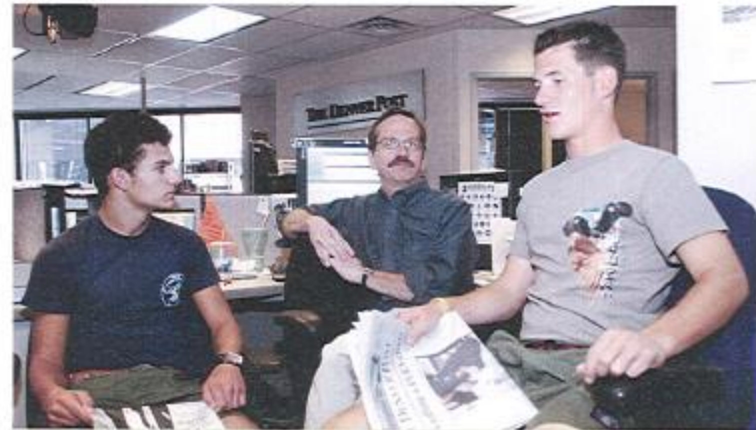
Almost every local newspaper carries more than just local news. The paper will also cover major national and international news events—say, a deadly earthquake or the discovery of a new treatment for cancer. A wire service might transmit these stories by telegraph wire, though now more often by satellite feed and computer networks.

Wire services are also known as news agencies. The major wire services include Reuters in the United Kingdom; Agence France-Presse in France; and, in the United States, the Associated Press, which is a nonprofit news cooperative. Newspapers and broadcast stations receive articles, photographs, video, and audio reports from the AP and, in return, make their own local content available to other AP members.

The AP also maintains its own reporters and editors in 242 news bureaus worldwide. They cover important news events that may not have been covered by AP members. A related type of news service is the feature syndicate, which sells the right to use the work of noted writers, political cartoonists, comic strip creators, and others to local newspapers. The newspaper usually gets exclusive use of the work in its market so that no other paper with the same readers can publish the same item.

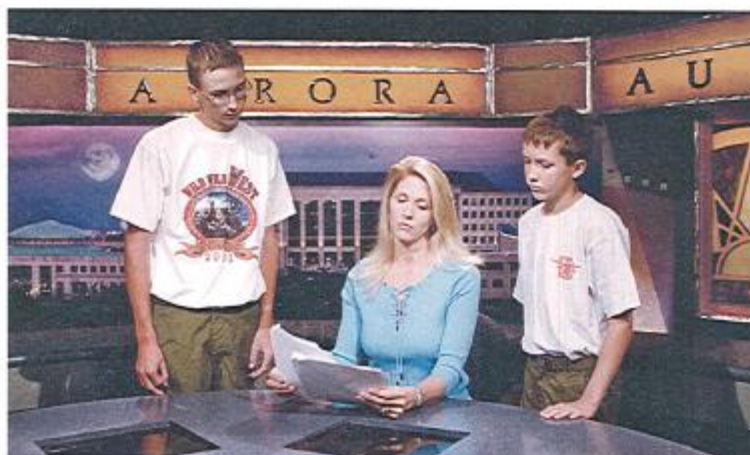
Questions to Ask When You Tour News Operations

When visiting a newspaper or magazine office, talk to section editors, photo editors, copy editors, and someone on the business side, such as an advertisement salesman or publisher.



Newspaper and Magazine Employees

- Where do you get story ideas?
- How far in advance of publication are the stories written?
- How much of your publication consists of feature news? Hard news?
- Please explain the copy flow process. Which editors work on an article after the reporter has written it?
- Ask to see a page layout in progress. Ask the designer what elements make a good layout. Ask the copy editor what makes a good headline or title.
- When are the newspaper's deadlines each day? How much time do the magazine editors have to prepare each issue?
- Ask to see a copy of the magazine's production schedule and ask for an explanation of the various steps in the schedule. Ask to see a story schedule. Ask the editor how he creates an appealing mix of articles for each issue. Ask for a copy of the publication's writer's guidelines.
- Visit the ad sales staff. Ask to see a rate card, which shows how much advertising pages in the magazine cost. Ask for an explanation of the different rates. Ask how important advertising is to the economics of the publication.



Broadcast Station Employees

- Ask for a tour of the studio and broadcast control room. Ask about the essential equipment used in preparing the broadcast. Ask for a demonstration of the tape editing equipment.
- Ask to watch a live broadcast from the control room (or to watch the control room through a window). How many minutes in a typical news broadcast are allotted for news, sports, weather, and commercials? How do the producers keep everyone on time, second by second?
- Ask about the typical shifts (hours of work) for anchors and for reporters.
- Ask for a tour of a news van or truck and an explanation of the video gear that is kept in the vehicle.
- Ask a reporter how to prepare a typical package, or news story shot in the field. Ask how to determine which of the following elements to include: natural sound, narration (voice-over), standup (reporter standing before the camera).
- Ask what must be done to prepare the package for broadcast.
- Ask how well the station is doing in local ratings. Ask what steps the station has taken in recent months to improve its ratings.

Freelance Writing

Most magazines (and some newspapers) rely on freelance writers for some of their content. Freelance assignments are a good opportunity for young journalists to get valuable experience before landing their first staff position.

Most magazines publish writer's guidelines that spell out what type of freelance work they need and how they like it presented. These guidelines usually can be found on the magazine's Web site. Be sure you also study copies of the publication itself carefully before trying to sell a story idea.

Most magazines want to receive a *query letter* that presents the story proposal and suggests how the article will be tailored to that magazine's audience—rather than a finished manuscript. On the other hand, newspapers often want to see the finished manuscript first. Many newspapers, especially smaller ones, use *stringers*, or freelance reporters. Stringers often cover events in a nearby community or a suburb not regularly reported on by the newspaper's own staff.

To get an assignment as a stringer, study the newspaper to find gaps in its coverage. Develop a list of story ideas to fill those gaps. Then schedule a meeting with the city editor or a section editor and present your ideas. Some newspapers will accept news about your Scout troop, such as who was awarded the Eagle rank at a recent court of honor, or a report about a camporee or troop high-adventure outing.

Freelance magazine writer Scott Wallace travels the world to write articles for various magazines. He has written about wars, the environment, native peoples, politicians, and international travel. Magazine writers like Wallace usually dig much deeper into their subject matter than newspaper reporters, because they have more time. They are not reporting on daily news events. They cover subjects in more depth. They may have to spend weeks interviewing dozens of people and doing extensive research before the article can be written.

Writers like Wallace are often freelancers. That means to earn a living they must constantly seek story ideas to suggest to magazine editors. Sometimes the editors call Wallace with an idea they want someone to make into an article. He never knows what his next assignment might be or where it will take him.

Wallace says his life is exciting but unpredictable. "I just got back from Afghanistan and Iran," he says, "and now there are assignments waiting for me in Alaska and back in the Amazon. This job allows me to travel not as a tourist but as a writer with a purpose—to tell my readers about important events, to become a witness to history."

Scott Wallace was a Boy Scout in his youth. His son Aaron is now a Boy Scout in New Hartford, New York.

How the Media Make Money

Most media in the United States must make a profit in order to stay in business. The print media make money by sales of the publication itself—either on the newsstand or by home subscriptions. They also sell advertising space in the publication to clients who want to reach that publication's readers with messages about products or services.

Newspapers have a general, local readership, so the advertisers are often local businesses, such as grocery stores and automobile dealerships. Magazines tend to have a specialized, national readership. Their advertisers are often equally specialized, selling guitar strings, for example, in a guitar magazine.

Some publications make all of their revenue from ads and give the publication away for free. Others do just the opposite, charging a high price for the publication but carrying no advertisements at all.

Online news media are still searching for ways to be profitable. Many rely on subsidies from their print or broadcast parent or sell advertising space, offering free access to the public in order to get as large a readership as possible. A few publications charge readers to access their sites—or to see archived stories from past issues. But with so much free content available on the Internet, many readers are not willing to pay for access.

Most radio stations get all of their revenue from advertising. They broadcast their programs over the airwaves for free, receiving no direct payments from listeners. (An exception are the two satellite radio broadcasters—XM and Sirius—that charge a subscription fee.) Television stations also get most revenue from advertising but may also get payments from cable or satellite TV companies that carry their programming. Public radio and TV stations operate differently. They receive some funding from taxpayers and also receive donations from listeners and viewers.

Whenever a publication or broadcast station accepts advertising, there is the danger that the advertiser will try to influence editorial coverage. Journalists with integrity who adhere to the ethical principles of their profession do not let advertisers influence their reporting or editorial positions. They know that doing so, in the long run, is not good for business. Readers or viewers may lose their trust and abandon a publication or broadcast station. Once that happens, the advertisers leave also.

Gathering the News

All news media have editors and managers (or directors) who plan coverage and decide how much space, time, or emphasis different stories should receive. These same editors and managers may also edit the stories before they go into print or on the air. But the most important people in the news process are the news gatherers. These *reporters* or *correspondents* seek the facts and write the news or feature articles or gather the news footage and interviews to make a good broadcast report.

The news gathering process begins with planning. Early in the day the editors look at their calendars, their lists of news tips, and the future file (a list of upcoming events kept by date) to see what events will be occurring in the city that day. They plan where to send their reporters and photographers.

Some reporters have regular *beats* to cover, such as city hall, police headquarters, or the city's professional baseball, football, or basketball team. Others are *general assignment reporters* who cover spot news such as accidents or other events that cannot be predicted, such as an elephant escaping from the zoo, or an unexpected public appearance in town by a famous movie star.

In another meeting, editors decide what subjects to write about on the editorial page that day and which opinion columns will run on the op-ed page opposite the editorials. Meanwhile, wire services send national and foreign editors their schedules of the stories that are planned to be distributed that day via satellite or Internet.

The reporter's work revolves around planning, research, covering news events, and finding and cultivating the right sources of information.

When the news reporters arrive at work, they will check their assignment sheets and might call sources to find out what is happening on their beat. Then the reporter will have a quick meeting or phone discussion with the city editor or other section editor to help decide what to cover that day. After the decision is made, the reporter might do some preliminary research online (including reading earlier articles on the same topic or issue), and then will go to a news event, conduct interviews in person, make telephone calls to other sources, and finally, write the article before deadline.

As the day progresses, news events will often occur that will persuade the editors to shift assignments. Newsrooms typically have a police scanner on at all times with someone assigned to listen to it. Reporters may be called off one story and put onto something more important—say, a broken water main that will affect thousands of residents—as the day goes on.

Finding News

Most news stories emerge from sources and events. Sources are identified, or *attributed*, so that readers know where the information in the story came from and that the facts are not just the reporter's opinions. Following are examples of common types of news sources and news events.

Witnesses and Participants. When reporters arrive at the scene of any newsworthy event, their first instinct is to listen to what is being said and to ask questions. Reporters interview people who saw the event unfold, called *witnesses*, or someone who was personally involved in the action, a *participant*.

Official and Expert Sources. Most news stories rely on official and expert sources such as city council members, police officers, economists, or forensic scientists. Reporters arriving at the scene of an accident or disaster will talk to the police officer or firefighter on hand. Beat reporters will "make the rounds" each day to visit official sources such as city hall, the county courthouse, the police department, the sheriff's office, or the school administration building. Good reporters will also keep a file of important and knowledgeable people, as well as subject experts who can be called upon for comments—perhaps a town historian or a roster of faculty members at a local university.

Press Conferences and Speeches. Reporters spend a lot of time covering speeches and press conferences. Speeches generally are given to a public audience; press conferences are held for reporters only. In both cases, someone of public interest has a message to share.

Press Releases. Every day news outlets receive dozens of press releases. Some can lead to a good news story. Others do not. All of them are sent by organizations—government agencies, private companies, universities, business or special-interest groups—trying to get favorable news coverage, or public relations firms hired to portray their clients favorably to the media. Most news outlets won't run the press release verbatim but may assign a reporter to rewrite the release in an objective way, doing additional reporting if necessary.

Accidents and Disasters. The public has a deep interest in the causes and circumstances of accidents, fires, and disasters. Thorough reporting can alert readers to dangers they may not have known about. It may point out an unsafe road condition or the need for a new traffic light. When a disaster happens, readers want to know how effectively the emergency workers responded. The readers' own sense of safety is at stake.