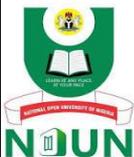


## **COURSE GUIDE**

### **MAC118 WRITING FOR THE MASS MEDIA II**

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Printed in 2021

Reviewed in January 2022

ISBN: 978-978-058-899-1

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Welcome to MAC 118: Writing for the Mass Media II. It is a two credit unit course offered in the first year by students of the Mass Communication degree programme. In all, this is a 14-unit course. Writing for Mass media I is a prerequisite to the present course (MAC 118). This course has been developed with appropriate examples suitable for the Nigerian audience. Specifically, this course Guide is designed for learners enrolled in the B.Sc Mass Communication programme of the National Open University of Nigeria. This guide is one of the several resource tools available to you to help you successfully complete this course and ultimately your programme.

In this guide you will find very useful information about this course: aims, objectives, what it is about, what course material you will be using, available services to support your learning, information on assignments and examination. It also offers you guidelines on how to plan your time for study, the amount of time you are likely to spend on each study unit, and your tutor marked assignments. (TMAs)

### **Course Aims**

Fundamentally, good writing skills are of required in all areas of the mass media. This course is therefore aimed at equipping and helping you develop and hone your writing skill. The aims of the course are as follows:

- i. To help the student to appreciate and better understand the nitty gritty of media writing.
- ii. To produce a Nigerian trained media writer with a global passion and desire to positively impact the world through the mass media.
- iii. To enable you write in a socially responsible and legal manner.
- iv. To creatively develop your writing skill as a specialist and a consultant.

- v. These aims will be achieved within this course by exposing the student to critical issues in effective media writing such as types of writing styles, organisation of paragraph, and other units of writing such as words, phrases, clauses, spelling etc.

### **Course Objectives**

There are objectives to be achieved in each unit of the course. You should read them before studying each unit. On completion of this course you should be able to:

- Know the importance of word choice in effective writing.
- Know the qualities of good writing
- Know the basic writing units such as phrases, clauses etc
- Know how to write effective paragraph
- Know how to be a specialist in media writing
- Know how to write legally and responsibility
- Know how to develop creative writing skill
- Know how to initial and carry out journalistic interviews and presenting the materials in both print and broadcast
- Understand how to go beyond dead pan writing to giving facts substance
- Know how to write and operate as a foreign correspondent to a medium.

### **3.0 Working through the Course**

This course is written for students who need to learn basic principles and skills required for writing for the mass media. It is aimed at equipping you with the rudiments and various considerations that determine the styles and patterns of packaging news and other publicity materials for the mass media. Upon completing the course you should be able to explain the various actions and activities involved in the preparation/packaging of information for the media.

Through this course, students will gain the basic understanding of writing for the mass media as an important aspect of mass communication studies that plays the

role of imparting the structures, idioms and style characteristic of media writing as well as a lubricant for effective communication in human society.

### **Course Materials**

The major components of this course are the following:

- Course Guide
- Study units
- Textbooks
- Assignment File
- Presentation Schedule

### **Study Units**

These are 14 units excluding the course guide (of 3 modules) in the course there are as follows

#### **Module 1**

Topic: Rudiments of Media Writing

- Unit 1: Understanding the Writing Process
- Unit 2: Feature Writing
- Unit 3: Editorial Writing
- Unit 4: Simple Story Structures Rewrite, Advance, Follow up
- Unit 5: Media Writing: Skills And Practices

#### **Module 2**

- Topic : Perspectives in Media Writing
- Unit 1: Writing For the On-Line Journalism
- Unit 2: Law and Ethics of Media Writing
- Unit 3: Correspondent Reporting
- Unit 4: Presenting the News
- Unit 5: Leads and Captions

#### **Module 3**

- Topic : Creative Media Writing
- Unit 1: Comedy Writing
- Unit 2: Book Reviewing
- Unit 3: Specialization
- Unit 4: Interviewing

Module 1 introduces you to the field of actual writing and presentation of information in the mass media.

Module 2 examines the various perspectives in media writing.

Module 3 deals with creative media writing.

### Course Marking Scheme

The following table lays out the actual course mark allocation is broken down.

Assessment	Marks
Assignments 1 - 4	Best three marks of the four count as 30% of course mark
Final Examination	70% of overall marks
Total	100% of course marks

### Course Overview

This table brings together the units, the number of weeks you should take them, and the accompanying assignments.

UNIT	TITLE OF STUDY UNIT	WEEKS/ACTIVITY	ASSIGNMENT
	<b>COURSE GUIDE</b>	<b>1</b>	Course Guide Form

### MODULE 1: RUDIMENTS OF MEDIA WRITING

Unit 1	Understanding the Writing Process	2	Assignment
Unit 2	Feature Writing	3	Assignment

Unit 3	Editorial Writing	4	Assignment
Unit 4	Simple Story Structures Rewrite, Advance, Follow up	5	TMA I to be submitted
Unit 5	Media Writing: Skills And Practices	6	TMA I to be submitted

### **MODULE 2: PERSPECTIVES IN MEDIA WRITING**

Unit 1	Writing For the On-Line Journalism	7	TMA I to be submitted
Unit 2	Law and Ethics of Media Writing	8	TMA 2 to be submitted
Unit 3	Correspondent Reporting	9	Assignment
Unit 4	Presenting the News	10	Assignment
Unit 5	Leads and Captions	11	Assignment

### **MODULE 3: CREATIVE MEDIA WRITING**

Unit 1	Comedy Writing	12	TMA 3 to be submitted
Unit 2	Book Reviewing	13	TMA 3 to be submitted
Unit 3	Specialization	14	TMA 3 to be submitted
Unit 4	Interviewing	15	TMA 4 to be submitted
	Revision	16	
	Examination	17	
	Total	18	

Now, use this overview to plan your personal timetable

### **Textbooks and References**

Your course material is the main text for this course. However, you are encouraged to consult other sources as provided for you in list of references in the various units.

### **Assignment File**

An assignment file and a marking scheme will be made available to you. In this file, you will find all the details of the work you must submit to your tutor for marking. The marks you obtain from these assignments will count towards the marks you obtain for this course. Further information on assignments will be found in the assignment file itself and later in this Course Guide in the section on assessment.

### **Tutor – Marked Assignment**

There are four tutor – marked Assignments for this course. The Assignments are designed to cover all areas treated in the course. You will be given your assignments and the dates for submission at your study centre. You are required to attempt all four Tutor – marked Assignments. You will be assessed on all four, but the best three will be used for your continuous assessment.

Each assignment carries 10% and together will count for 30% of your total score for the course. The assignments must be submitted to your tutorial facilitator for formal assessment on or before the stipulated dates for submission. The work that you submit to your tutorial facilitator for assessment will count for 30% of your total course score.

### **Presentation Schedule**

The dates for submission of all assignments will be communicated to you. You will also be told the date for completing the study units and dates for examinations.

### **Assessment**

There are two aspects to the assessment of the course. First are the tutor-marked assignments; second, there is a written examination.

In tackling the assignments, you are expected to apply information and knowledge acquired during this course.

The assignments must be submitted to your tutor for formal assessment in accordance with the deadlines stated in the Assignment File. The work you submit to your tutor for assessment will count for 30% of your total course mark.

At the end of the course, you will need to sit for a final three-hour examination. This will also count for 70% of your total course mark.

### **Final Examination and Grading**

The final examination for MAC118 will be of two hours duration, and will carry 70% of the total course grade. The examination will consist of questions which reflect the kinds of self Assignment Exercises and questions in the Tutor – marked Assignment which you have previously encountered. All areas of the course will be assessed. You should use the time between finishing the last unit and taking the examination to revise the Self Assessment Exercises and Tutor – marked Assignments before the examination.

### **How to get the most from this course.**

In distance learning, the study units replace the University lecturer/lecture. The advantage is that you can read and work through the course material at your pace and at a time and place that suits you best. Think of it as reading the lecture instead of listening to a lecturer. Just as a lecturer might give you in-class exercise, your study units provide exercises for you to do at appropriate times.

Each of the study units has common features which are designed to aid your learning. The first feature is an introduction to the subject matter of the unit and how a particular unit is integrated with other units and the course as a whole. Next is a set of learning objectives. These objectives let you know what you should be able to do by the time you have completed the unit.

You should use these objectives to guide your study.

When you have finished the unit, you should go back and check whether you have achieved the objectives. Self Assessment Exercises are interspersed throughout each study unit and answers are given at the end of the course.

These exercises are designed to help you recall what you have studied and to evaluate your learning by yourself. You should do each Self Assessment Exercise as you come to it in the study unit. The summary at the end of each unit also helps you to recall all the main topics discussed in the main content of each unit. These are also tutor – marked questions at the end of each unit. Working on these questions will help you to achieve the objectives of the unit and prepare you for the assignment which you will submit and the final examination.

It should take you about three hours to complete a study unit, the exercises and assignment. When you have completed the first study unit take note of how long it took you and use this information to draw up a timetable to guide your study for the rest of your course. The wide margins on the left and right sides of the pages of your course brochure meant are for you to make notes of main ideas or key points at which you use when revising the course. If you make use of all these features you will significantly increase your chances of passing the course.

### **Facilitators/ Tutors and Tutorials**

The total number of tutorial hours for this course is 8 hours. Tutorial sessions form a part of your learning process as you have an opportunity to receive face to face contact with your tutorial facilitator and to receive answers to questions or clarifications which you may love. Also you may contact your tutorial facilitator by phone or mail.

On your part, you will be expected to prepare ahead of time by studying the relevant study Units. Write your questions so as to gain maximum benefit from tutorial sessions. Information about the location and time schedule for facilitation will be available at your study centre.

Tutorial sessions are a flexible arrangement between you and your tutorial facilitator. You will need to contact your study centre to arrange the time schedule for the sessions. You will also need to obtain your tutorial facilitator's phone

number and email address. Tutorials are optional. However, the benefits of participating in them provide you a forum for interaction and peer group discussions which will minimize the isolation you may experience as a distance learner.

**Contact your tutorial facilitator if:**

- \* You do not understand any part of the study units.
- \* You have difficulty with the self tests or exercises.
- \* You have a question or a problem with an assignment, your tutor's comments on an assignment, or with the grading of an assignment

Counseling forms a part of your learning because it is provided to make your learning experience easier. Counseling is available to you at two levels: academic and personal counseling. Student counselors are available at the study centre to provide guidance for personal issues that may affect your studies. Your study centre manager and tutorial facilitators can assist you with questions on academic matters such as course materials, facilitation, grades and so on. Make sure that you have the phone numbers and email addresses of your study centre and the various individuals.

**Self Assessment Exercises (SAEs)**

These are self Assessment Exercises spread out through your course material. You should attempt each exercise immediately after reading the section that precedes it. Possible answers to the exercises are provided at the end of the course book. However, you should check the answers only after you must have attempted the exercises. The exercises are for you to evaluate your learning; they are not to be submitted. There are also questions spread through each study unit. You are required to attempt these questions after you have read a study unit. Again, the

questions are to help you assess your knowledge of the content of the unit. You are not required to submit the answers for SAEs.

### **Guidelines for Writing Tutor–Marked Assignment**

On the cover page of your assignment, write the course code and title, assignment number (TMA1,TMA2) and date of submission, your name and matriculation number. It should look like this.

Course Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Course Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Tutor – Marked Assignment Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Submission: \_\_\_\_\_

School and Programme: \_\_\_\_\_

Matriculation Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Facilitator in charge: \_\_\_\_\_

2. You should endeavour to be concise and to the point in your answers and adhere to word unit where given. Your answers should be based on your course material, further reading and experience. However, do not copy from any of these materials. If you do, you will be penalized. Remember to give relevant examples and illustrations.
3. Use ruled foolscap sized paper for writing answers, make and keep a copy of your assignments.
4. Your answers should be hand written by you. Leave a margin of about 1.5 inches of the left side and about 5 lines before the answer to the next question for your tutorial facilitator's comments.
5. For assignments involving practical reports of experiments, the following format is required for submission in addition to 1 above

Experiment Report Sheet

A Observation:

---

B Readings:

---

C Diagrams:

---

D Graphs:

---

E Precautions:

---

F Results:

---

G Calculations:

---

H Sources of Errors:

---

I Conclusions:

---

6. When you have completed each assignment make sure that it reaches your tutorial facilitator on or before the deadline. If for any reason you cannot complete your work on time, contact your study centre manager and tutorial facilitator before the assignment is due, to discuss the possibility of an extension. Extension will not be granted after the due date unless under exceptional circumstances.

#### **4.0 Summary**

MAC118: Writing for the Mass Media II provides you the theoretical foundations and practical considerations upon which you develop a mastery of the structure and use of media writing. It is aimed at equipping you with the rudiments and

various considerations that determine the styles and patterns of packaging news and other publicity materials for the mass media. Upon completing the course you should be able to explain the various actions and activities involved in the preparation/packaging of information for the media.

I wish you all the best in your learning experience and successful completion of this course.

## **MODULE 1**

### **UNIT 1 :UNDERSTANDING THE WRITING PROCESS**

#### **CONTENT**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main contents
  - 3.1 Explanation of “process Notion”
  - 3.2 The information gathering process
  - 3.3 The writing process
  - 3.4 The Editing process
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments
- 7.0 Reference/future reading

#### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The chief way by which we record our thoughts and speech and pass them on to other people is by writing them down. Writing became one of the major means of communication among humans when certain things were put in place, (Prominent amongst these things that were put together include; - paper. A flat soft surface that include can be deposited to express an idea. The earliest type of paper known to man came from the papyrus reeds that grow around the river Nile in Egypt.)

Writing is a creative process that engages the writer both mentally and physically. Writing as means of communication has some advantages over its opposite – the oral form of communication for instance, information that is written down is already in permanent form and cannot be easily denied, it also has recall value. It is generally believed that good writers are made rather than born which mean that with concrete and consistent effort, one can emerge as a good writer. Those who specialize in writing like journalists are sometimes called writers or pen pushers. The writing skill is one skill that every modern society man or woman must develop and for mass communicators like us, the writing skill must be a way of life. Sometimes writers are called encoders (a process of transforming our thought to ways other people can use).

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

On completion of this unit, the student is expected to know the following:

- What is writing and how it came about
- The tools used in writing
- The entire writing process

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 Writing Tools / Instruments**

PAPER: The earliest writing instruments were finely pointed flints with which primitive people draw pictures on. Later, this culminated in a paper as we know it

today. Modern paper came from the papyrus reeds which is a kind of tree that grew around the bank of river Nile in Egypt. We have various varieties of this instrument and in various qualities and quantities. The quality of these papers positively or negatively affects the writing process.

**PEN:** when paper became the chief writing material of the ancient world, the letter traced with a kind of pen made from the hollow stems of a reed, known as a calamus (Oxford junior encyclopedia volume). The Egyptians used it with a soft point, rather like a paint brush, and the Greeks and Romans sharpened it to a sharp point and slit it like a quill pen. The word 'pen' is derived from Latin 'penna', a feather: Goose feathers were generally used, the quill being cut with a knife (the pen-knife) and the nib slit to make it hold, Nile Bronze pens dating from old Roman times.

Fountain pens were first made about 1886; a later invention was the ball-point pen.

**PENCIL** – the word 'pencil' comes from a Latin word *pencilum*, meaning 'a little tail'; this name was applied by the Romans to the brushes used for drawing and painting. Today, pencil leads are made of powdered graphite and clay moistened into paste, then forced out of holes into a cylinder.

**India-Rubber:** - Before India-rubber was discovered ink was erased by scratching with a knife, India-rubber was first discovered in South America by Columbus but was not introduced into English until the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Today it has become a staple of most written and graphic people.

### **Self Assessment question 3:1**

Apart from writing and printing what else can paper be used for?

#### 3.2 Explanation of the 'process notion'.

The notion or understanding of writing as a process means that writing is not a sophistic one-act drama but rather a complex venture. The description of writing as a process means that it involves stages. By process we mean course of action or procedure for writing depending on the writer or the subject of the write up, the writing process means the best way for a writer to work. Nay person can best any piece of write up done in anyway: but for desired and lasting effects writers are advised to understand and master the writing process, when a writing assignment, many laboriously write it out beginning with the introduction and working through to the conclusion. Before the write up is completed numerous drafts may have been prepared. The writing process can take hours, days, months and even years depending on the subject at the writer and the deadline. As we can see presently, this process has component, arranged at the whims of writer. And it is not all writing that must follow this process to the letter. There are some write ups that cannot follow the entire process I dally, the process dictates main points begin at the left margin and is written in capital letter. A proper understanding of the writing process will assist the writer in hunting for materials.

Writing skills are important for creating and communicating information through the mass media one other it provided a physical record of a communication that

can be used as proof if necessary. Good communication skills are a great asset in the writer has good writing skill and the reader has good reading skills. If only half of the pair operates effectively, something is lost in the process. The lost is more glaring whom it comes from the writing angle. This is because an effective writer not only masters his/her writing skills but also writers to manage seemingly in adequacies of the prospective reader. All writing assignments, are tasking and demand devotion) concentration practical steps focus and determination to succeed.

\

### **Self assessment exercise 3:2**

#### 3.3 The Information, gathering process.

An average write should understand make a thorough search because he/she is interested in writing. It is beneficial to engage in research anytime we have a writing assignment what is research? It is a careful search for information about a particular matter. It includes reading, and it requires the application of the principles of study, it must also involve interviewing people. Before running in search of information, consider your reader, what will they already know? What do they need to know? Then definition of your objective, will aid your information search. Is it to explain? or to convince to refute? or to motivate? Explanations require providing further information to make a matter clear. Although the basic facts may be understood, you may need to expand on when or how of the issue

you writing on. Convincing a reader calls for giving reasons and outlining why a thing is so; including presentation of evidence. Refuting requires a thorough knowledge of both sides of an issue along with a careful analysis of evidence used etc.

The quality of information you gather the quality and the bent depends on what you want to do with the information, that is, the objective or mission statement of your write up. Time may be an important factor. If you are going to present the information in the broadcast media or publish it in the print media depends on the time and space available to you.

A media writer as an information manager must have plethora of sources of information apart from himself. It is advisable to collect more material than you actually need so that when you have started writing, you will not run out of material. Technology has opened a whole new world of electronic resources to help media and universities libraries. According to Johnson cited in Satterwhite (2005:3520) knowledge is of two kinds. We know a subject ourselves, or we know where we can find information upon it. The value of any write up depends on the quality of the material going into it with reliable facts behind it, a reliable article can be written, with questionable data, a questionable report can result. According to Agbese, (2008:41) media writers should gather information from dependable, reliable authoritative, competent and informed source.

## **Self assessment exercise for 3:2**

### 3.3 The Actual Writing.

You are now ready to begin. Writing is a virtue to be acquired, developed and used. It is an art worth working out. America was said to be named after the man who wrote about it, not the man who discovered it, with the information at your disposal, you may not be ready yet to start writing until you have drawn your outline. As you are doing this, you are trying to find a good approach as you spend sometime on something else. This is the most mysterious and most fascinating part of the whole process. According to Flesch 91970;500 this is the period when you search for a good approach, the period when you abandon the search, and the moment when, out of nowhere, an idea pops into your mind.

According to Bromfield cited in flesh 1970:56) a writer should know how to apply the services of the subconscious mind in his/her writing by learning to relax or even sleep over writing assignments. This process is partly a mental and partly a mechanical process. Generally, the facts and ideas must be classified. This may require you to put in some days world until require you to put in some days work until you could think through the whole piece. This is what Flesch (1970:43) calls getting one's ideas in shape. Most professional writers know that this period of just sitting and thinking between leg work and outline is the most important part

of the whole writing process. It is what makes a piece of writing what it is. This period offers you opportunity to look for a sharp focus perspective that will make you see clearly the shape of whatever it is you are writing about.

Outlining is very important to a writer because, you will no longer need to write everything out. A grasp of the principle of outlining and prepare a good write up in a reasonable amount to time. A proper outline will enable you to have a theme which is the central idea that you want to convey, and it indicates the angle from which you plan, to write your subject the writers outline is to serve as the structure, or framework of the article. After the outline, one big obstacle that writers need to guide against is what Soks (1991:50) celled writer's block – it is supply the fear that what you write will not be good enough. He went further to advise that the worst thing you write is better than the best things you didn't write. Depending on the level of experience of a writer, there is likely going to be some number of drafts. You will usually find, after the frustration of the unwieldy, wordy first draft that didn't come out at all as you intended that it is preferable to do the rewrite piecemeal rather than in one desperate whole. To correct with each pass, the more obvious errors, the work improves slowly. To reduce the number of drafts, the beginning writer should write consistently and continuously, with an assignment or not, to gain more experience writing is one of the loneliest of professions. One of the most useful self-help derive for the writer is a writer's workshop. It provides a stimulating environment for the best possible training for

a writer, which is writing. After you are satisfied with the writing, you are now ready to move to the last phase of the process.

### **Self assessment exercise for 3.3**

#### **Editing a Revising**

Writing you start in news, public relations or advertising, you will spend a great deal of time rewriting – reviewing your work you will be upgrading it. Your writing like almost anything else in life may never be as bad as you feared, or as good as you dream. Editing and revising is therefore necessary to complete the writing process. After the write up or rather the drafts, there are certain things that are supposed to be part of the write up that is not included while there are certain parts of the draft that the article can do without. In the former case, those materials are included or added while in the latter case, they are expunged or removed from the write up. The process of going through the piece in order to discover what is superfluous and what is necessary is the revision process. While the actual carryout of the surgery on the write up as dictated by the revision is editing. It is therefore important to note that revision comes before editing in the writing process. There are certain words and phrases that can throw a reader off. While you are writing you cannot spot them. But in the cold light of the morning after you are able to look at them with a detached reader's eye. The need for transposing may be harder to see. Somehow, at first writing, we don't always hit

on the best arrangement of words for emphasis. Things are different when it abstracting such additional hands craft is beyond the call of duty of the ordinary person, but it is worthwhile to know something about the basic principles. Editing in media writing tries to boil things down for the hurried information-seeker. This is done through the principles of selection. Here you look for the inner core of facts, since most writing consists of a structure of facts and ideas covered with digressions, comments and illustrations, this means that the some piece of writing may be shortened depending on the editor.

Editing Checklist:

- Is the message clear?
- Is the message complete?
- Is the wording concise?
- Is the wording consistent?
- Is the wording correct?
- Is the message courteous?

### **Self assessment exercise for 3.5**

Graphically distinguish editing from revising.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

No matter the level of a writer in terms of educational attainment or experience revising and editing cannot be wished away, it is every important for all forms of writing. And it is even more important when it comes to media writing because media offerings are instrumental for public opinion formation in society. Secondly, media people are known to be always in a hurry. This hurriedness will definitely affect the quality of the write up. It is therefore proper for another set of cold and calm eyes to look at the write up before it is published or included in the bulletin. So that the public will not be fed with wrong information and half truths.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

Editing is the process of checking a revised draft to make sure it meets the criteria of the publishing medium. That is you make sure the document is clear, complete, concise, consistent, correct and courteous. Editing not only helps improve the quality of your document but also helps improve your skill as a writer.

Editing skill is important for anyone involved with media writing. In this unit, we have explained the notion of process in writing; the information gathering process; the actual writing process and the editing process.

## **6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

Writers must write with special attention to the writing process.

## **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING**

Flesch, Rudolf (1998). *The Art of Readable writing*. 8<sup>th</sup> Edition. New York: Macmillan.

## **MOUDULE 1**

### **UNIT 2: FEATURE WRITING**

#### **CONTENT**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Contents.
  - 3.1 Definition of a feature.
  - 3.2 Common denominators for feature writing
  - 3.3 Types of feature
  - 3.4 Writing the feature proper
  - 3.5 Writing to get Published
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor Marked Assignments
- 7.0 References/further reading

#### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Feature stories are soft news – the human interest. A feature assignment is often considered a writer's reward for handling routine news faithfully. The implication is that feature writing is easy in terms of deadline demands. Actually, it makes more demands on writing ability than the straight news story, because it has no specific format. Feature stories are very close to columns although column's have

more personal tone than features. Column writers indulge their own interests and that's okay as long as they entertain. A feature cannot go the extent a column writer goes in terms of being personal. Feature writing is one of the media writing that is very close to creative writing in any medium. Although as an opinion piece, some scholars believe that feature writers are really essayists. In features, the story is the star and not the opinion of the writer. However, the writer's skills and style will go a long way in making or marring the story.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

After completing this unit, you should be able to understand:

- What a feature is
- The common denominators for features
- Types of feature
- How to handle feature writing proper
- How to writing to get published.

## **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

### **3.1 Definition of Feature.**

Feature stories can be news meant to enlighten and inform; investigative reports meant to offer insight through in depth analysis or it can be entertainment and fun geared towards providing scope for the reading public.

Feature writing can be fascinating and challenging its subject is limitless. Depending on your orientation as the writer and the frame of reference and world outlook of your reading public, it can include:

- \* Places: in journalism, there are some places that are newsworthy. Some places because of circumstances, surrounding them or historical facts, makes them subject of curiosity and interest for the public. Such places abound globally. For instance in Nigeria places Lagos, Abuja, Okija, Benin, etc have something intrinsic them that makes the public to want to know more about them.

- \* Topic: - There are certain topics that are generally speaking crowd pulling whenever they are discussed or mentioned in the media. Such topics include education, Aids, Religion, Economy, Teenage pregnancy Football etc. A well written article on feature in these topic and similar ones like them are likely to command high level of readership as such topic have emotional and sentimental attachment on the people. Agriculture in another crowd pulling topic.

- \* Events: - There are certain events that command national and international attention. Such events maybe seasonal, cultured or religious. Feature on such events, makes an interesting and requires some detailed skill and research in order to ensure its readability. Globally, we have events like the world football cups, the Olympics. In Nigeria, we have the yam festival events in the East, the Arugungu fish festival in the North, the Oshogboba festival in the west and the Igue festival in Benin. Writing features on these events requires some measure of fact and caution in order not to modern a lot to break protocol. As a feature writer, you

must engage in a research to be able to understand the language, the relevance and cultural import of these events in order to communicate intelligently about them in your write up. Also the events can include the Armed forces Remembrance Day, the valentine day, etc.

In addition you can skillfully develop and write a feature about people well known and unknown. It has been observed that the biographies and autobiographies of successful people make a very interesting reading because most people are interested to know that someone else succeeded. Success in life is the dream of most people therefore any write up or story that tells them how to go about it will be well read. Usually, there are some names and personages that are newsworthy. Features, written around such names usually have high readability. In Nigeria, Africa, and the world, such names abound. You as a writer only have to use your journalistic ingenuity to research them out and write on them.

Finally beautiful articles could be written on animals that are unusual in one form or another or ordinary in nature. There are some animals that are globally known and can make interesting reading if articles are written about them. Also objects, either arts or products can as well be subjects to well written articles and other write ups in the mass media.

A newspaper or magazine feature is an article that finds its impact outside or beyond the realm of the straight news story's basic unvarnished who-what-where-when-why and how (Newson, 1988:297).

The justification, strength and identify of the feature lies in its presentation of the imagination, that is piercing the peculiar and particular truths that strike the reader's curiosity, sympathy, skepticism, humor, consternation and amazement (Rivers, 1975:285).

### **Self assessment exercise for 3.1**

Look through some Newspapers and magazines and find ten (10) straight news stories that you believe could be turned into features stories.

### 3.2 Common denominators for feature writing.

No matter the type of feature you want to write, there are certain common denominators (CD) that determine the structure shape and readability of the feature, that is these denominator are like the news values or elements in straight news reporting that score our selection and mode of presentation of news stories and features. But that doesn't mean a feature story doesn't have news value. It's just all different kind of news value.

For instance, instead of reporting the facts, of suicide attack in which life and properties are destroyed, you might focus on menace of terrorism. You can create images and evoke emotions that you can't with the straight reporting. These elements include:

\* **Human Interest:** Interest in human being as such, and in events because they concern men and women in situations that might confront anyone else, is called human interest (MacDougal, 1982:118). It is about features that mirror man at the state of nature where he is absolutely helpless. Such features evoke personal appeal because it touches the life of human beings like us.

\* **Drama:** People everywhere, love thrill and anything with an "est" to it includes windfall, and dramatic down turns and incidents that are too true to be real. Sometimes the feature consists in the contrast between the immediate and a former situation or between the event at hand and another of which, for any of a number of reasons, it is a reminder.

\* **Humour:** This humour by the use of amusing anecdotes and exaggeration for comic effect. The humour in the features is meant not to only entertain but to persuade and engineer readability. It includes satire, whimsy and slapstick. Humour is the palm oil with which readers eat stories and write ups. Journalism as a writing profession thrives much on humour both in verbal and iron verbal form like cartoons. A media writer must be conversant with these forms.

\* **Pathos.** A pathos writer of features or plays emphasis the power of performance and description to produced play or feature that will invoke on the

reader a feeling of sadness and sympathy. The writer does this by making the readers knowledgeable of the context under which the information is being shared.

\* Empathy: A feature writer must learn how to empathize with something or somebody, or how to empathize for somebody or something. In the first instance to empathize with somebody or something means to write from the perspective of the those involved in the issue, you re writing about. That is putting yourself in their shoes so that they will feel you at the end of the feature, and to empathize for is under a form of journalism called advocacy journalism. That is to lend credence, support and populace to an issue to enhance its public acceptance. The role of empathy in feature writing is to ensure that this is an understanding of one another feeling amongst the public.

Apart from all these, a good feature story should be well written, filled with solid information and details, sparkling and imaginative. The reason for such qualities is simple, you can spared more time crafting, the feature, because it usually isn't so timely as a hard-news story. But that does not mean a feature story does not have time value.

Public relations writers find feature stories an important tool in getting their organization outside recognition. Inside the organization features are a useful device to convey information and build a sense if belonging. Features can capture the imagination, and their anecdotal nature makes them memorable.

## **Self assessment Exercise for 3.2**

Identify some of the central features in feature writing.

### **3.3 Types of Features**

Though the numbers of ideas for features are listless, there is a finite set of categories of them, these categories are not so rigid, they are only labels to help you describe story because in the real world of newspaper journalism, nobody really bothers about classification. To most journalists, a feature is a feature no matter what kind. Let's look to some of the categories.

\* News feature: This is the most common in print journalism. After all the stock in trade of journalism is information gathering and dissemination. It is usually built around a timely event but with a personal touch than straight news story. Consequently, more human interest is brought to the story, through direct quotes, graphic descriptions and perhaps emotion. Often times news features are written as sidebars to straight news stories. Here the journalist is no longer a mere reporter of news but also researcher and interpreter of events who must give the reader everything he or she needs to understand the news. Like news, a news features is best, when it is timely. It should be fresh and up to date. It may not be appropriate to do a news feature on an item that has long lost its news value. According to Iwere, (1991: 24) if you don't do a story when the subject is still within the public consciousness, it wouldn't Strike the kind of chord it normally would.

\* Personality Sketch or Profile: It focuses on the accomplishments, attitudes and characteristics that make an individual stand out and interesting enough to make interesting reading. It can be on anybody – rich, famous, hero, villain, and ordinary folk. People want to read about the high and mighty. This is not to say that common people do not have a place in features. One of the best features in the Nigerian Observer in Benin in 2005 was on a female traffic warder in Benin City. In personality features, you are holding a mirror to the man or woman being written about and portraying him or her as vividly as possible. You must include in your story anecdotes or interesting incidents in the life of the person. To get a complete picture of the person you also talk to often who know him or her. It is not a praise singing or a white-washing exercise where the person is portrayed as a saint. You must look for the good as well in the bad sides for your story to be balanced. (Awoyinfa, 1991:24).

Some writers make a distinction between the personality sketch and the profile. The sketch attempts to convey a sense of the total person, with emphasize on overall achievements, life style and philosophy or world outlook. The profile, usually a magazine piece depends a great deal on photography to tell the story. (Newson, 1988:308).

\* How –to-do-it features: This kind of features is educational. It teaches readers how to do certain things. There are lots of people who are craving for new skills in almost all human Endeavour – how to cook certain dishes, how to become

a millionaire, how to keep fit, how to win and keep a friend etc. These features are popular because they teach people how to be self-reliant by looking more on the inward than outward. Furthermore, they are popular because people now have more leisure time want to save money and want to experience the thrill of creative work. Your readers are limited only by their own limitation, in understanding the subject. The search to successful how-to-do-it features is in its reward for the audience. A project or a suggestion that is too complicated, too expensive or too time consuming is likely to lose the audience.

\* Personal Experience Features: Many of them recount the accomplishment, of an individual or group. The disabled war veteran who controls traffic with one hand captures audiences' interest. Also it is a feature story based on the personal or eye witness account of the writer in the course of carrying out a daily duty, one may find himself caught in a whirl storm of events, like getting arrested by the police and detained in a cell you may want to narrate your ordered. Some newspapers had a column called "reporter's notebook. Where journalists recount their personal experiences in feature form. Personal experience according to (Awoyinfa 1991:25) could also be a form of feature based on participant observations with police patrol team or firemen. A media writer who wants to excel in this kind of feature writing should learn how to keep diaries.

\* Descriptive Feature: these stories center on places, people can visit or events, they can also take parts in or enjoy as spectators. As we said earlier on, almost every community has tourist spots, historic landmarks or sites, recreational

areas, festivals etc. such stories are cyclic. They can be written and rewritten almost every year. The purpose of these features is to provide specific facts about things. They are usually found in the travel and entertainment sections of newspapers and magazines and in the feature segment of radio and TV programs.

\* Entertainment Feature: This term is used for lack of better generic label. Stories that do not fit any specific category are called enterprise features and that, “stories and can be written about the everyday occurrences in our lives. You look at a fairly common situation but ask “why” and a story results, ideas can develop from something you read or heard on radio or Tv or picked up in classes or causal conversations. The list is as long as your curiosity.

### **Self assessment exercises for 3.3**

List and explain types of features.

### 3.4 Writing The Feature Proper

A feature usually attempts to involve the reader emotionally in some way. As a feature writer, you will draw on the human interest element we have mentioned earlier on. You strive for identification on the part of your audience.

Feature writing proper demand certain rituals to be accomplished. And they include:

\* Creativity: Features dispel the notion held by so many beginning writers that news writing cramps creativity. Creativity involves using all the writing and reporting skills you have to craft a story that probes under the surface, reveals the unknown, the unusual, the unique etc. Overwriting, hyperbole and imprecise language have a place in a feature story. Creativity makes our feature, films or TV programs exciting and rewarding. It enables you to find an unusual approach to a single story and then embellish it with original angle, discriminating use of facts, and interesting language.

\* Structure Features: have given structure that all features written must conform to. It often is written in a chronological format, much as a story is told. The main point may be withheld until the end as a climax contrary to what is obtainable in news stories. Structurally you are expected to just tell enough to attract attention and interest to the story. You have to organize carefully by first deciding what the theme is. Then carefully outline the sub points so they will support the theme for the story to flow smoothly. Due to its unique structure, it will be suicide to cut a feature from the bottom. All the parts of a feature story must be kept intact if it is to succeed. In the well planed story, every paragraph, every sentence should add to the total effect. The structural parts of a feature are as follows – Lead which is the opening that must attract immediate attention and pull the reader into the story. Transmission. This has to do with movement. No matter how good the lead is, you need a solid transition into the body of the feature. You

can use entertainment, information or self awareness or anything that is of value to the reader to engineer transition.

\* Body Sound knowledge of the subject, coupled with good writing skills will let you take the reader through a variety of experiences. You use the standard writing devices of crisp dialogue and documentable but vivid facts and details.

\* Conclusion: The conclusion should give the reader a sense of satisfaction. To ensure that the story has unity, you have to tie the conclusion to the lead. You can conclude with an antedate or a quote that sums up the substance of the story. A prolific writer and journalistic scholar sum up the relationship between the beginning and the ending of a feature story thus-

\* Length: feature stories can be of any length. Examine any newspaper or magazine or listen to any radio or TV station and you will note the range. Edition and news directors have classified feather into short and long feature. Short features are almost filters that have a light touch, a bit of humor, something heart warning – are practically welcome in the newspaper. Short features are popular because they give the reader a break from the more serious straight news that dominates the page and help code visual variety to the page.

Longer features are equally popular. In newspapering they may be accompanied by photographs or art works. As you work on a feature, think about possible illustrations or photographs to complement the story for TV viewers the visual generally tell most of the story.

\* Language: Generally the language of feature is simple, even when dealing with medical or scientific subject matter. Occasionally, a story benefits from beginning with a literary or historical allusion. The writer has to be sure in choosing this approved that the allusion is familiar and appropriate, not strained or contrived. Literary techniques – metaphor and similes narrative and dialogue etc can be used as well, but you must be sure that such techniques contribute and are not mere ornaments. Symbols are used a great deal in feature writing. A person or an incident is chosen to represent a problem or a situation. For this reason, the present tense is used often in features it creates a sense of ongoing activity.

#### **Self assessment exercise for 3.4**

#### 3.5 Writing to Impress your editor

The joy of every media writers is to be published and read. You can achieve these by making concrete effort to impress your editor while you write. That is, you must develop a good style that will not only impress your editor but also interest your prospective readers. This brings us to the question, what is a good style for features? According to struck, (1991:184) a good style must be vigorous. This means that every word used must be functional.

The great English journalist and former editor of the Sunday Times of London Harold Evans speaking on style said “look after the words and the style will look

after itself” (MacDougal 1991:181). Hemingway, noble prize winning writer and journalists cited in MacDougal said that best rules of writing for the media encourage the use of short sentences and paragraphs and the maintenance of positive rather than negative mentality. Also speaking on good style Aristotle also cited in MacDougal said that writers should express themselves like the common man but think like a wise man.

The feature editor is one of the most powerful gatekeepers in print journalism who scrutinizes content to ensure that everything is correct or in order before he can allow it to pass. In making his choice, one of the things the features editor takes into consideration is how timely and topical the story is. One of the quickest ways of getting your feature published by the editor is to anchor it on the news of the day or something topical. And of course as we said before, one of the ways to “bribe” him is to write well. In order to ensure this, it is important to take note of the following.

- \* Start with shorter Articles: As a beginner you start with shorter articles that you can easily handle. Short features will enable you maintain control of the write up from start to finish. By the time the feature become excessively long, you may lose grip of the entire story structure and things will fall apart.

- \* Don't Beat About the Bush – No editor or newspaper reader is happy to read a story that starts with the reporter beating about the bush with a long intro,

that has no action. A feature should be a good blend of inverted and pyramid style of writing. The suspense should not be too long.

\* Be your own Editor. It is a truism in journalism that the writer should be an editor. The gate-keeping chain actually starts with the writer who is like a court of first instance. The best features article are the ones the writer has spent time writing re-writing and editing carefully until he comes out with a clean copy that is almost flawless. By the time you re-read your work, you are likely to discover some errors, which you are likely to discover some errors, which you can correct. Editing is very important to feature writing because features are meant to be consumed by a relaxed public. It is therefore necessary that the story be properly packaged, so that it flows and holds on the readers to read on. Without proper editing, it will be difficult for the features to radiate such qualities.

### **Self assessment exercise 3.5**

## **4.5 CONCLUSION**

One of the victories won by the global work force after the industrial revolution is increased time for recreation and relaxation. The implication of this to the media is that our prospective readers now have free time at their disposal. This development explains and calls for increased features in our print media and increased magazines presentations. The broadcast media more than ever before, features are now necessary in publication as a way of not only offering escape to

the readers but also provide them with further information and education. Feature writing has become a skill all media writers must development since it has become the staple of all modern publications. It will not be a wasted effort if a prospective student journalist like you can make the necessary sacrifice to horn your feature writing skill. You will definitely need it in the future and it will establish you firmly in the angle of journalism.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit, we have tried to demonstrate why it is necessary for modern media writers to perfect the art of feature writing. Amongst the sub units treated are – definition of a feature; common yardsticks for feature writing, types of features; writing the feature proper and writing to get published.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARK ASSIGNMENT**

- (a) Discuss the reasons that led to increased features in modern publications.
- (b) List and discuss types of features you know.

## **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING**

Awoyinfa, Mike and Dimagba Igwe (1991). *The Art of Feature Writing –for Newspapers and Magazine*. Ibadan: Shaneson.

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## **MODULE 1**

### **UNIT 3: EDITORIAL WRITING**

#### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Writing the editorial
  - 3.2 Editorial Style for Print or broadcast
  - 3.3 Types of Editorial
  - 3.4 The Impact of Editorials
  - 3.5 Purposes of Editorials
  - 3.6 Framing the Editorial topics
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading.

#### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Editorials reflect opinion. But the editorial is usually a reflection of management's attitude rather than the reporter's or the editor's personal view. Most editorial, unlike reviews are unsigned. When people cite any editorial in conversation, they usually say something like, "well, the Guardian said..." or "Punch said..."

#### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

On completion of this study unit you are expected to be knowledgeable about the following.

- i. How to frame an editorial opinion

- ii. Purposes of editorial
- iii. Types of editorial
- iv. Writing the editorial
- v. Impact of editorial/slanting editorial for print and broadcast.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Framing an Editorial | Opinion:

The editorial page is management's soapbox. Writers of editorial and broadcast commentaries do a great deal of fact finding, checking to see what their own medium and others have said; conducting symposium. Interviews of people in the news, such as government officials and political candidates, as MacDougal (1990) observed, it is about knowing what you're talking about or keeping still.

After the fact finding, a decision has to be made about what to say, what position to take. Decision-Making System vary. Sometimes an editorial board hears all sides of a controversial issue and then votes. Of course, only one member of staff writes the piece. A writer with the same editorial position as the board is usually chosen to make the piece more persuasive. When an editorial | board takes a position that is likely to cause problems in the publisher's office, the publisher is generally advised. Few publishers today make much effort to control the editorial | page. The person responsible for seeing that the views the publication generally supports are presented to the public is the editorial page editor.

The editor's views are generally in harmony with those of the publisher, and it's usually to the publisher that he or she reports. Occasionally, an editorial | page editor will report to the paper's editor-in-chief who has overall responsibility for the news product. The editorial | page editor is the one who assigns and approved editorial ideas, reads the piece and generally controls the content of the page, including the selection and editing of letters from the readers.

### Self assessment exercise 3.1

List and discuss the factors to consider when framing an editorial topic.

### 3.2 Purposes of Editorial:

Editorials either comment on a current issue or on something that is important but not timely. Generally speaking, an editorial piece is a kind of news meant for public perusal. An editorial's purpose determines its categories viz commendation and condemnation- Praising the actions and policies of government is a way for the newspaper or broadcast stations to act as the public's voice. And if someone's hand needs slapping, the editorial page can act for the community at large. Most editorials in Nigeria take the attack format because of our leaders insincerity to accountability.

\* Persuasion Editorials are editorials that condemn or complain are also intended to arouse public indignation and are close, therefore to the persuasive category. Editorials that persuade try to get people to think or do something specific. They often pose problems and offer solutions. Persuasive editorials are written to support political candidates or support a government policy or programme. Sometimes the persuasive editorial is one that judges the morality of some event, action or issue.

Keep in mind that a single editorial is not likely to result in immediate attitude shifts or action. Current observations about editorial impacts indicate that editorials over time about a subject of significance have long-range effect, the one-shot editorial does not, any more than the one-shot advert or commercial would.

\* Entertainment. Some subjects, such as Christmas (Xmas) Independence Day, etc can inspire an editorial that is just meant to entertain. However, some lightly written pieces may have an underlying point. With entertainment news becoming one of the most sort after news beat in journalism today, entertainment editorials are fast emerging, as a staple in editorial writing. Editorial journalism is

not about war! War!! only. It can provide an opportunity for the media organization to put the public in the lighter mood at least as a counter to the accusation that the media are interested in ‘bad’ news only.

### **Self assessment exercise 3.2**

How does the persuasive editorial differ from the entertainment editorial?

### 3.3 Writing the Editorial.

Because an editorial presumably reflects the official stand or belief of management concerning a particular topic, the editorial “we” is used. The assumption is that the audience recognizes the anonymous first-person plural as representing the medium, not the individual who wrote the copy

Editorial Organization is different from that of the straight news story. Because an editorial takes a point of view, it cannot be edited and trimmed in the same manner as news. The editorial has three essential units: the lead, the body and the clincher.

- **Lead.** The first sentence or two should be explicit. You need to state the topic and why it’s important to the audience. The lead should be short, crisp and to the point.
- **Body.** Here you present our pertinent facts, persuasive language and logical arguments. One way you can develop the body is to point out alternatives, opinions or solutions, particularly if you intend to call for action or for a shift in attitudes. Above all, use hard facts to support your ideas. Give examples and illustrations, draw comparisons cite authority e.g for editorial on health a medical doctor is an authority etc. avoid glittering generalities and clichés. Be specific concrete. A popular technique is to start with the least desirable of opinions or alternatives and end with the one you believe is most acceptable and reasonable.

- Clincher: The clincher is where you provide what you believe is an inevitable conclusion. The clincher should be carefully composed. If you've done a good job of presenting the facts and of building and argument, the conclusion can be one logically drawn by the audience. All you have done in the clincher, in fact, is to put into a coherent sentence what you hope the audience already has deducted.

### **Self Assessment exercise for 3.3**

Cut out five editorial pieces from five national dailies and identify the important parts of an editorial in each.

#### 3.4 Editorial Style for Print/Broadcast.

Having discussed the important parts of an editorial it is only necessary to look into the issue of style appropriate for packaging the editorial for both the print and the broadcast media. After you have written the editorial you need to review it for logic, consistency of thought and style. Be certain there are no ambiguities, no possibility for misinterpretation. Check sentence and paragraph length carefully. A basic tenet in persuasive writing is that the more complex the subject, the simpler the sentences should be.

\* Newspaper Editorials: The total length of the editorial is very important. Readership studies of newspapers indicates that the average readers just skims the editorial page unless a topic is compelling. (Newson, 2000:114). The wise editorial writer knows that a long, column of copy will turn the reader off. Short, tight editorials are the best. Apart from the length, the topicality and social consequence of the issue can enhance readability. To encourage readability most newspapers now place artworks like cartoons in the editorial page as a way of calling attention to the page which officially is the most important.

\* Broadcast Editorials. Almost every newspaper carries editorial, whereas only few broadcast stations do. Part of the reason for this low percentage is regulation. This has made broadcast editorials not to be hard-hitting.

According to Newson (1998), broadcasters practically editorialize only about human interest and self issues e.g. “Milk for children”.

Editorials are the responsibility of station management in most cases. Station managers often form editorial committees to advise on topics and content. The news directors and other news staff usually serve on these committees, assist in the research and do any reporting that needs to be done. Unlike features or commentaries, though, in the end editorials are the product of station management station and station manager usually read them on the air themselves.

However, today TV editorials are often much more than a general manager sitting in front of a camera reading copy. The example below demonstrates how copy is written for broadcast. Some stations also handle letters to the station on the air, much in the same way newspapers do. Any example in the way stations handles feedback.

#### Broadcast Editorial

Title: Security Situation in Benin City

Presented: by James Okoro

Broadcast: May 18: 6:30am

Reference No.13-46

A recent shorting in Benin City drew national attention and outrage. A young woman kidnapped after she left a church seminar. The next day, the victim’s mother was also kidnapped in Lagos.

Now their abductors are demanding a whopping sum of N100,000,000 for each them.

The kidnappers are definitely targeting the huge fortune of Otunba Deji, the oil magnet.

It is Otunba today, who knows who will be the next victim as kidnapping has become the order of the day.

And we must respond as a people, citizens and legislation should press for a tough punishment for kidnappers. Our law enforcement agencies should be revamped to deal effectively with kidnappers. All of us should channel our outrage over these waves of kidnappers into sustained lobbying for safer streets and a more civilized society.

-30-

A formula of sorts exists for a good broadcast editorial.

- Define the issue to be addressed
- Provide some background information on the issue
- Call for some action on the issue, or provide a recommendation
- Expand on step 3 by starting why your recommendation should be followed, who must do it, when and where it should begin, and how action called for can be accomplished.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:4**

List and discuss the characteristics of both point and broadcast that calls for different editorial for them?

### 3.5 The Impact of Editorials

If nothing else, the experience of writing editorials will teach you that everyone has an opinion about something. Try as you might to compose a well reasoned, coherent and convincing editorial, you will undoubtedly draw some responses you didn't anticipate. Letters to the editor or crank calls, but isn't that the point of an

editorial-to make the public think about a subject and elicit some response. The role of the editorial in influencing public opinion has been studied by professionals and academics alike ( Newson, 1990: 398). As more is learned about how the public reacts to editorials, editorial writers and those who suggest editorial topics are changing their approach. Editors once thought that their editorials would cause significant change. That isn't true today. Experience indicates that compared to the news, sports, and features pages, editorials have relatively low readership. Other media, not just other parts of the paper's compete for the public's attention. The old lament from politicians and other public figures that a single editorial could ruin them is not heard so often today as it was in the past.

Publishers are well aware of the diminishing effect of editorials on public opinion. A number of vivid ways have been used to warn editorial writers against expecting too much from editorial campaigns. Bernard Kilgore publisher of the wall street journal said he thought it was all right for newspapers to regard themselves as thunders and for editorial writers to picture themselves with a bolt of lightening in each hand about to smash down on something. But he urged writers to be very careful about demolishing a subject with one swoops because good subjects for the editorial page are hard to come by. His point was that most editorials topics require analyze and study over a period of time, not a single definitive pronouncement. The former editor of the economist of London, Donald Tyerman recently reminded editorial writers that they are neither Moses nor God. He warned against the 'Tablet of stone theory' - "that you can hand down the truth or, indeed, that you have it to hand down". Nor did he believe that editorial writers can effect a conversion, such as occurred to Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus (Rystrain, 2003).

All of this is not to denigrate the importance of the editorial page. For despite its low readership and sometimes inane of turgid content, the editorial page remains a

bastion of expression of opinions and ideas. While editorials don't exert immediate impact on a majority of the public, they are influential in what has been termed "agenda-setting", establishing for the public the importance of topic. Agenda-setting helps give the public a syllabus, a list of things to think about the more a subject is brought before the public, the more significance it takes on.

Ethics for editorial writers includes not only presenting facts accurately but refraining from propaganda. The opinion presented should be the best judgment you as a writer, can make from a thorough investigation. To produce a piece without adequate information is to jeopardize the credibility of the medium's news as well.

The impact of an editorial depends on certain variable like

- The personality of the medium, which is a function of its professionalism.
- Relevance and topicality; an editorial piece that discusses topics that have social consequences appeals an always pull readership. (Njoku, 2008).

### **Self assessment exercise 3:5**

Discuss some of the factors that have reduced editorial influence in recent times.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Editorials are necessary for media houses because it enables them to express their own opinion on topical issues. Media organizations have symbolic relations with the society. In order to continue to maintain their relevance in society, they are not only expected to report happenings around society accurately but they are expected to hold an opinion concerning those issues. This way, they will be able to fulfill their all important function of public opinion formation. As the official stand of the media house concerning issues, it must be written in a way that it will be a good public image making for the media outfit.

Editorials are usually written with the – ‘WE’ even if it is written by “one person. And because of this, editorials do not have by-lines and any fallout, positive or negative concerning an editorial comment is usually directed to the media house as a legal entity.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

Editorials are one of the standard requirement in media writing. No matter how it is looked at or accessed, media presentations will be incomplete without them. In this unit, we have tried to explain, what an editorial is, its types, how you can write one, and the purposes and impacts of editorials.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT.

Assess the importance of an editorial to a medium and what can be done to encourage its patronage by the public?

## 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING.

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Newson D and James Wollerr

## **MODULE 1**

### **UNIT 4: SIMPLE STORY STRUCTURE, REWRITES, ADVANCES, FOLLOW UP.**

#### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content.
  - 3.1 Point story structure-manuscript and organization
  - 3.2 Holding readers interest
  - 3.3 Writing radio News – fruit and style
    - 3.3.1 Writing to tape
  - 3.4 Writing TV news-fruit and style
  - 3.5 Rewrites
  - 3.6 Futures and follow ups.
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/further reading.

#### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

One characteristics of writing for the mass media that makes the process easier is the existence of patterns –story structures you can follow. The simplest story structures for print and broadcast have many elements in common, the most significant being the placement of emphasis on a single item in the story. However, there are some differences, so in this unit, we will deal with the structure for point then radio and then television. We will also look at the other concepts is like rewrites and advances.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

On completion of this unit, the student is expected to be conversant and knowledgeable about:

- The basic manuscript mechanics and origination for print
- Know how to hold readers interest
- Know how to write radio news-the format and style
- Be able to write to tape
- Know the format and style for writing for television
- Be able to rewrite stories, handle follow ups and combine stories.

## 2.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 Print Story Structure, Mechanism and Organization

Most news writers now work on computer system, which have their own individual format and styles. This is part of what is called computer assisted reporting (CAR) in precision journalism Meyer 2008). However, when copy is typed on paper, as in news releases, a few conventions remain. No paragraphs are divided at the end of a page. If there is not enough room, the copy is taken to the top of the second and page. The word more is types in the bottom center of the first page, as well as any pages that follow until the end of the story. The second page is generally labeled Add 1, the third page is Add 2 and so on. At the end, a tradition from the civil war wireless days in America remains: 30- or triple hash: ### is placed at the end.

Most news stories have the following elements.

- The head (the main point)
- Secondary point in a tie-in transition
- Elaboration on the main point
- Support for the lead
- Background

- Development of the main idea
- Details.

The role of the lead and secondary points – The lead captures the essence of the main point but does not give a complete, thorough account of it. If there are major secondary points, you should introduce them right behind the lead. A major secondary point that turns will surprise the reader.

Print story format

Your name

Story I.D (slug line)

Date

(A date line here, if not local). Our lead is here.

Your transition from lead to body of story goes here, usually one sentence.

The body of your story starts here.

You always double space. Don't divide paragraphs between pages or on the screen.

If you have to go to a second page, complete your paragraph on the first page and put (more) at the bottom.

On the second page, put your name, and indicator may be Take I or add I and the slug line. At the end of the story, use ### or -30- to signify that end.

-30-

Elaboration on the main point. This is further expansion and explanation to the lead.

Support for the lead. The lead makes a claim, the story should prove it. Thus, it is necessary to give specific supporting evidence for the point made in the lead. Sometimes the support can be simple and brief. In other cases you might need several paragraphs of statistics examples or expert testimony. Here is an example

The lead:

World hunger is caused not by over population but by politics, the keynote speakers for Hunger week said Monday.

- Shortly thereafter is the direct quote supporting the lead.
- “The reason people remain hungry in this world is that they are powerless, said Comrade Adams President Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC).

Background: All beginning news writers soon learn this cardinal rule of journalism: never assume any thing. And the most important thing not to assume is knowledge on the past of your readers. That is not to say readers are stupid – just don’t assume they will know or should understand what happened yesterday, or last week or last month. You may have given the background in a story you wrote for yesterday’s paper, but some readers will have missed that issue. So you must repeat essential background information in every story. Ask yourself, what must readers know to be able to understand the facts, you are reporting? Some of the background a story must contain is not a matter of repeating information from earlier stories. Some stories just are not comprehensible without simple explanatory information.

Development of the main idea: - the lead, its elaboration and support, and background information are the basics of the news story. What are the consequences of this news? How will it alter the upcoming events or the economy, or the environment? How will it affect residents of the area? What will happen next. The news writer must explain the significance of an event, not just present the facts of it.

Details – In a news story details are the subsidiary points that relate to the main one. They should be worked into the story on the course of elaborating on the lead. But others might not be so easily assimilated. Exactly where to put them depends on their importance. Very important details will be introduced right after the lead, and returned to later on – perhaps before the lead is developed, perhaps

after. Less important ones may be introduced near the beginning or may be held back until after the development of the main point is exhausted.

Throw away paragraphs are the way writers have traditionally ended their stories. These contain information that they expect may be deleted if the story is too long to fit the allotted space.

### **Self assessment exercises 3:1**

Explain the following term – lead, slug, dateline. Background.

### 3.2 Holding Reader Interest

The utmost desire of every media writer is to read if he is writing for print and to be listened to if he is for broadcast. There are some structural ways to bring this about. It includes the following:

- Use direct quotes. Using direct quotes makes writing sound more natural and helps credibility too. Both reasons are why broadcast writers use so many actualities or tapes. Choosing quotes carefully is essential, though because most people don't speak all that clearly and concisely. That also means you shouldn't use too many quotes. Often you can effectively paraphrase what was said. Quotes also break up the monotony of a straight forward presentation of the facts and vary the pace of the story. They add human interest to the piece as well as providing illustrations or examples and substantiation. And they let reader know the speaker's exact words. Sometimes that is very important, as when the president makes a major policy statement. Many people will be commenting on what he meant and what the significance is, so your readers should have the specific words, consider this example.

Mark said the plan was ridiculous, outrageous and stupid.

Did Mark actually use those words, or did the writer summarize and paraphrase?  
Direct quotation would clarify.

“The Minister’s remark is ridiculous, it’s outrageous  
And it’s stupid” Mark said.

One other rule to remember about direct quotations: quote only those sentences that are worth quoting. Use quotations when a speaker says something that is extraordinary dramatic or expressive or significant. Do not quote straight forward information, e.g. “The meeting will begin at 6pm,” Osagie said.

It is usually best to place the attribution for a direct quotation at the end. One of the main reasons for quoting is to make the story more interesting and conversational, and you destroy the conversational nature of the quote if you begin it with, “He said”.

There are exceptions to this general rule. Whenever more than one speaker is being quoted in a story, you must make sure the reader knows who’s speaking. E.g. “As long as the case is in court, I’m not going to comment on it,” said Barrister Giwa Amu. But Council Chairman Ehima Mike said a solution to the problem is still possible “we are still working with the Ministry to see if we can reach a compromise”.

- Show, don’t tell. Stimulate your reader’s imagination by creating pictures in their minds. A statement like “The governor was well received by the audience” does not create much of a picture. But the “6,000 people in the audience stood and cheered when the governor had finished” describes a scene to paint the scene.
- Answer reader’s questions – People are curious. The writer’s job is to anticipate what readers will want to know and to provide that information in the story. Every story is different so the readers will want to know

different things about different things about different stories. But there are several guideline that writers follow in determining what to include. Here are some general guidelines:

1. Explain effects on people. It is not enough to tell the people about an event but to add how it will affect them in the final analysis.
2. Include all relevant times, places, dates and names. They might not be answered at once, but the information must be included in the story somewhere.
3. Identify people and organization. This will make the people be interested in the story; but use identification pattern to the story for people and organization.
4. Present relevant numbers. Don't just write that the senate passed a bill – what was the vote? What was the score of the game? How many people attended? How long did it last? Be especially careful to include any figure having to do with money.
5. Support generalities with specifics. To say or write that somebody has vast experience in government or business is vague, general statement. What kind of experience? What branch of government or business? Such a sentence must be followed by specific examples. He served three terms in the senate or four time CEO of ABC multinational.
6. Give background beyond what is needed to make a story understandable – what past events have contributed to the current situation? Have public school teachers ever had to embark on strike before? Background information makes a write-up understandable and gives it perspective.
7. Describe the circumstances when covering an event. Don't just write on what was said or done – describe the environment surrounding the action. What sort of people were in the audience? How big was the crowd? What were the weather conditions at the-time of the event?

8. Note any unusual aspects that distinguish the story. While news writers are often criticized for their pre-occupation with the first, biggest, most and other such records, the citations if accurate, are of legitimate interest to readers. If the council adopts the largest budget in its history, you should say so.
9. Discuss expected future development. It is not enough just to tell what happened. Readers want to know what is going to happen next. Sometimes no one knows of course and you should never speculate without a basis. But you can interview knowledgeable people who have some idea. Certain events are scheduled for coming weeks and months, and they may indicate what they are going to do. You owe it to the readers to find out as much as you can about possible future developments and to pass that information on.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:2**

List and discuss the various strategies that media writers can use to hold the reader's interest?

### 3.3 Writing Radio News; format and style.

Before 1992 all the radio stations operation in Nigeria were government owned. That power of monopoly was broken by the Ibrahim Babangida regime with the promulgation of Decree 38 of 1992. The existing of private initiative into the ownership and operations of radio stations in Nigeria has increased the number of radio stations operating in Nigeria today. Cable systems are also offering radio services including news programme.

Radio news copy is typed full page, using regular left-and right-hand margins. Each story is typed on a separate page, so that stories can be shuffled around as the newscast is being put together. Each page is slugged with the writer's name, the date, the time of the newscast and some brief identifier as to what the story is

about. A typical slug, typed in the upper left-hand corner of each page, might look like this:

Ozioma Usuma

2/08/09

10 am Newscast.

Collapsed Building

Slugs containing this information can also be typed across the top of each page on a single line. If a story continued to the next page, which is rare, the word “more” is used, and the slug line appears on the second page, ADDI. At the end of each story, the indication is -0-, -30- is reserved for the end of the newscast itself. Some radio writers type their stories in all caps, others use upper and lower case. Show a live example, possibly 9, 8 radio script.

Broadcast news copy should be typed according to the announcer’s preference. Broadcast news is written to fill line, no space, so all broadcast copy must be lined out. In radio news, one typewritten 60-space line equals about 4 second of reading time. Thus a 20 seconds of reading time. Thus a 20 second story would equal five line of copy, G 30-second story seven or eight lines, and so on.

Writing the reader:- readers are stories without audiotape inserts in radio, or videotape in TV. When beginning a radio reader, the writer often has some idea of how long the story should be. Copy can always be edited down or increased in length if necessary. The writer sets about answering the most important questions as discussed earlier on. However, all the questions generally can not be answered in the usual 5 to 10 lines of copy. Broadcast news writers must choose only the most crucial facts. You must ask, of all those facts, which are really essential for the audience to know? And because broadcast written must leave out so much information, the information included must be well original make sense and support the lead. In many stories, the final sentence makes reference to the future,

somehow: The senate committee on Education will met tonight to discuss the ASUU strike. The National assembly will begin deliberations on the strike next week.

3.3.1 Writing to tape. Let us assume that the radio reporter covering the committee meeting taped the following statement below.

“Today’s approval of N21.3billion represents an important step forward in the search for an effective solution to the situation in our universities, but it was only a small step” (Prof. Ukachukwu, National Chairman of ASUU)

The radio reporter now wants to write a story. To do that he or she starts by writing a lead-in to the taped quote. Two types of tapes segments are used in radio newscasts. An actuality in the actual voice of the newsmaker or news source speaking; a voicer is the voice of the station’s report. The first step in writing the story is writing the lead-in to the tape. Examples lead-in to Radio Actualities.

The Senate Committee on Education and Ministry of Labour services have announced a measure to end the protracted ASUU strike. TAKE TAPE (UKACHUKWU) TIME: 10: ENDCUE “ONLY a small step”

Today’s announcement represents an important step forward in the search for an effective solution to ASUU strike; but it is only a small step.

That was Prof. Ukachukwu, National Chairman of ASUU. More information on the announcement will be coming in our next major newscast.

The Senate Committee on Education and the Ministry of Labour Services today announced the approval of N21.3billion to address the ASUU demands. BIU’S Abel Osaro was at the meeting and has this report.

TAKE TAPE (#30) TIME: 20<sup>s</sup> ENDCUE “Abel Osaro”.

Lecturers said today that the approval fell short of the total ASUU demands to give Nigerian Universities a face lift. For BIU news, this is Abel Osaro

Cues are typed into all tape stories to give the broadcast personal directions. All tape stories most contain these cues; take tape; time; and end cue or (cue out). The cue take tape. Simply indicates to all involved that a tape is to be inserted at this spot in the newscast. The total times of all stories must be known so that the copy time equals the time allocated for news. End cue, tells the announcer how the tape ends, so he or she can prepare to read copy once again.

Tape IDS are the nations within parenthesis that follow the take-take cues. Most radio stations record all tape cues to be used on the air on cartridge or cassette tape. Each cart or cassette is then labeled with the name of the person speaking on that cut or with a number. This system is designed to eliminate such mix-ups as the announce reading the ASUU story followed by the tape out of the collapsed building.

Taglines are copy read by the announcer after the tape is played. A voicer is a reporter's summary of events. It implies the reporter was at the scene. Viocers are often written out before hand, then are recorded for air use. Learning to write voice is an integral part of the broadcast news writer's job. Some viocers, however, are ad-libbed these days as both radio and TV newscasts are doing more and ore live coverage.

Technological techniques – Tape-editing techniques and equipment allow actualities to be incorporated into voicers and can be used for much more complex tasks as well. Live coverage from the scene telephone reporting –all are produced by broadcast newswriters and incorporated into the newscast, although it is less complex than the TV.

### **Self assessment exercise 3.3.**

Choose a news report and write the lead-out for the actualities and the viocers. Be sure to explain and include all the necessary elements.

#### 3.4 Writing TV News-format and style.

Writing for television is technically more complicated than writing for radio. That is why the copy set-up of TV news differs from that of radio. The copy the announcer will read is typed on the right-hand side of the pages the left-hand side is reserved for the cues to the director, audio control people and other technicians. These cues almost always indicate what pictures the TV newscaster want shown as the copy is being read. As in radio all TV copy is slugged. In radio it is rare for a story to run more than one page, but in TV this often happen because, PAGE 2 should be noted somewhere in the slug and at the bottom of the preceding page should appear

-MORE-

Because TV copy is typed on a half page, you count 2 seconds per line, as compared to 4 second per line in radio. In TV, then, a 30-seconds story would run 15 lines, a 20-seconds story 10 lines, and so on. Typing in all caps is much a habit with TV news writers. However, as in radio, there is no hard and fast rule and it is usually left to the preference of the announcer. In TV, most announcers and writers seem to prefer all caps.

Writing copy for TV means learning how to write for the technology. TV news writers can't just put words down on paper for announcers to read. They have to think and writer for the mechanics of the newscast.

There are many broadcast TV stations and many more cable TV systems in the country, many of them doing local news. The principles of TV news writing

outlined in this section apply to both broadcast and cable TV. There are four basic types of TV news stories the beginner should know how to write

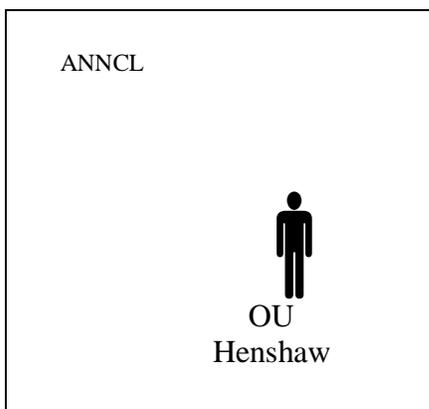
- (1) The reader
- (2) The slide or chromakey story
- (3) The lead-in to videotape
- (4) The voice-over tape story

The reader-in very similar to a radio reader, if you compare them. The way reporters and writers write cues varies from station to station.

The slide, or chromakey, shot and story involves one picture super imposed over another. Compare figure 1 to 2. The written copy is exactly the same, but the pictures are different. That picture framed over the announced on the screen. This types of shot and story is also called a picture chromakey or just key. The technology used to achieve this effect change from station to station, but the result is the same.

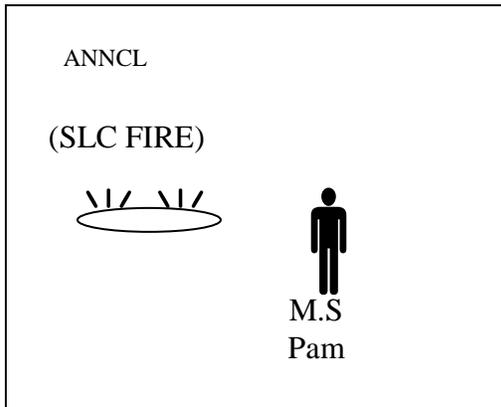
All modern TV stations are capable of making several pictures appear in one shot. TV news writers must know how to incorporate this capability into their writing. Thus in 2 the writer calls for a slide shot with the cue SL. The identifier (FIRE) after the cue is a presentation. You don't want the announcer reading a story about a fire and having a picture of Eyimba appear on the screen.

Figure I



Fire officials are still n the scene of an overnight fore at the New Benin market. Fire Chief Bello told BIU TV News that arson is suspected. Last night's fire caused major damage and the amount of damage is still unknown.

Figure 2

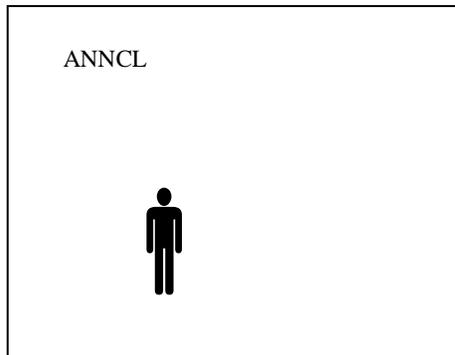


Fire officials are still on the scene on overnight fire at the New Benin market. Fire Chief Bello told BIU TV News that arson is suspected. Last night fire caused major damage and the amount of damage is still unknown.

The lead-in to tapes differs little from radio lead-ins, the same rules apply. The TV lead-in does not repeat what is said on the videotape and identifies who is speaking on tape. An example of lead-in to a videotape story is shown in figure 3. The cue SOT that appears in figure 3 means ‘sound on tape’ (if this interview with Chief Bello had been shot on film instead of tape, the cue would have been ‘SOF’ sound on film). The SOT cue, used as a signal to the audio control people, indicates there is sound on a particular cut of tape. Not all tape cuts have sound on them as you will see in the next section on voice-overs. Another cue on the figure is SUPER, short for superimposed words, letters and numbers can all be supered. They are typed into an electronic character generator, which is a microcomputer. It identifies the person speaking on videotape so this information does not need to be included in the lead-in. note that in the figure, the tagline following the tape is accompanied by a cue. The director has to know what picture to put on the screen at all times for every thing written on the right-hand side of the page, some sort of shot must be indicated on the left-hand side.

Figure 3 lead-in to videotape story.

ANNCR: SL FIRE



Fire officials are still on the scene of an overnight fire at the New Benin market. Fire Chief Bello says arson is suspected as the cause...

TAKE TAP (SOT)

SUPPER (Chief Bello)

Tape Runs: 15 And the amount of damage is Endcue "looking for still unknown

The arsonists"

ANNCR

Voice-Overs involve an announcer reading copy "over" a videotape. Sports writers use them as much as anyone in TV news, describing the videotaped highlights of a game that appear on the screen. Many stories demand voice-overs. It doesn't make much sense to interview someone about a parade that took place downtown this afternoon. Instead you'd shoot some tape of the parade and write copy for the announcer to read as the tape is shown.

The cue Voice-over in figure 4 means voice-over. S/L means the tape appearing on the screen is silent. Note the shot lead-in before the tape begins. This is standard procedure in many TV newsroom. After the tape is over, the writer can tag the story with more copy and a studio shot of the announcer. That's also standard procedure in some newsrooms.

Figure 4: Voice-over tape story.



Aron is suspected as the cause of a fire last night of the New Benin market. Fiore Chief Bello told BIU TV news there have been three fires in this market in the past two months... and two of them were set by arsonists... But no one was injured.

ANNCR.  
SL (STATION id)  
Take Tape (S.L) Voice Over  
Super (downtown).

Another type of tape use din voice-over is called natural sound or background sound. Natural sound on the tape cut in figure 4 might be the sound of the fire fighters cleaning up at the scene, the pumps plumping water, traffic on New Benin –Mission road junction, siren as another fire truck pulls up to help. Because camera and field equipment have become so high, and portable, it’s no problem to short sound along with the pictures for most stories, so most videotapes shot TV news today natural sound in the background on your voice-overs you write it like this:

ANNCR	Arson suspected as the
TAKE TAPE	cause of a fire last night at
(NAT SOT) V/O	the New Benin market.

Writing copy for the announcer to read is still, the most important part of all broadcast news writing. Unintelligible copy result in an unintelligible story, no matter how good the picture are, if the lead-in to the tape (radio or TV) doesn’t make sense, chances are good the words the speaker utters on tape won’t make sense either.

The technical devices shouldn't dominate or detract, but they often do, according to TV news critics. Much of the difficulty centers on the brevity of the stories, which suggests that perhaps fewer stories better told, might be the answer.

#### 3.4:1 Electronic News gathering

Electronic news gathering or ENG is so much a part of everyday news operation in TV and some extent in radio that the beginning broadcast newswriter and reporter must have some knowledge of this area. Starting around 1975, various advances in broadcast and communications technology enabled TV reporting crews in the field to send reports from the scene. ENG vans are common sights in most large events these days. The vans are mobile newsrooms where TV reporters can write their copy on the fly, shoot and edit the tape in the field, and then send it all back to the station via microwaves in the form of a finished report. Many live reports from the field are ad-libbed by reporters, the ability to ad-lib on the spot is a skill that's difficult to reach or learn and probably impossible to teach or learn from a book becoming a good ad-libber just takes practice. These field reports can also be taped back at the station for editing and replay within the news casts. However, the primary contribution of ENG is that ability to go live when called for. In visions of the future, there is the notion that ENG transmission copy captured in the newsroom by computerized voice transmission units convert the spoken words in print and print into spoken words. Then the story will exist on paper for reworking either for print or broadcast. Rewriting drafting different versions of a story, is already a basic newsroom task.

#### 3.5 Rewrites

Whether you start in news, public relations or advertising, you will spend a great deal of time rewriting-reworking someone else's efforts or your own. You will be updating stories, rewriting release materials or putting a slightly different twist

(slant) on some copy for a different audience. All three of these instances can fit all three types of occupations.

Rewriting anything will challenge your creativity. How can you take a story and make it not only fresh but better. If you write advertising or publicity copy, you could easily recite them in your sleep. How can you write each new draft with enthusiasm? Broadcast copy writers have the same volume of rewriting, but they do have different news stories are rewritten every hour to give a new sound to the news. How can to dig into a story and come up with fresh leads without distorting the emphasis? Television news, because of production considerations, is likely to use some of the same stories in the late evening news that appeared on the earlier afternoon broadcast. But if they are breaking stories, like a fire or food, these repeats will have fresh leads. This discussion will deal only news writing news stories for print and broadcast, since that affects both news writer and public relations people handling publicity. Additional information about rewriting for public relations is in part one of this course so also reworking material for advertising copy.

Four story types require reworking. Combined stories, holdover copy, follow-ups and futures. You asses the information you have, discover what is missing find it and put it in place.

Combined stories – when there’s a crisis, such as religions riots, or a holiday that involves many types of celebrations and observations, or an election story, there are likely to be a number of stories from different sources that are written as separate pieces. Your job may be to weave them into one cohesive article, sometimes referred to as a combine. Or you may be given the police blotter reports to rewrite into a single crime over the weekend piece, or all of the traffic

accidents and fires over a period to write as one story. Write service stories are frequently combined.

Holdover copy – stories about honours, awards meeting, installations and tree planting campaigns are often held to make room for ones about robbers, kidnapping, fires and accidents. A rewrite for a story that has been put on hold is fairly simple. A new lead giving new information is added. Times and dates need to be checked. Words like “today”, if used may need replacing. If new material changes the emphasis of the story, restructuring may be needed. If the first-day story about a week long festival, for example didn’t get used obviously the secondary events becomes the lead. The opening can be covered as a past event in a subsequent paragraph. The next paragraph can include a summary of the rest of the week’s event with some quotes form the organizer about the festival’s history or significance.

Follow-ups – New developments are the important aspect of these second-day stories and dominate the lead. Has the kidnapped child been found? Was the fire caused by arson? A summary of the events from previous reports should follow the lead. Checking for completeness and accuracy in the original report is especially critical, because the initial coverage may have been rushed. Verify a; names Identification and figures. In writing the follow-up story, you have to be especially conscious of other news reports the audience many have received. Also, be aware of conflicting early reports. Preliminary broadcast report of the attempted assassination of President Ronald Regan of America in 1981 said Reagan was not injured and Press Secretary James Brady was dead.

You want your story to sound new, at the same time, you have to consider the person who has had, no previous exposure to the stories – someone returning from a trip, a visitor in town, a new resident. Enough information has to be included so

the story can stand on its own, not dependent on the audience's memory of previous reports it brings the public up to date on what has happened since the story broke. When you are the public relations person supplying information on a follow-up story, your real job is to anticipate the needs and questions of the various news media – actuality for broadcast, some additional activity for television, for all the latest information covering all specifics, as well as some quotes from persons of authority. Many news editors fault public relations people for failure to carry out this junction. According to Newson (1998:157) Editors hear a lot from PR people in advance when they want the space to call attention to something, but once it is over and the editors used a write-up, the PR people are nowhere to be found.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:5**

When and how do we rewrite in mass communication?

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Structuring stories properly for the mass media requires the right arrangement of the various elements connected with packaging the news. The extent of interest shown by the readers or listeners viewers of the write-up dispatch on the write up is structured. Effective structuring brings about effectiveness in the communicated message. Every media writer must be conscious of the role structuring play in message effectiveness. However, the structuring takes different dimensions depending on the medium in question. That is, whether the piece is a print, broadcast public relations and advertising piece. It has been said that it is not enough to have something to say or write about, but how you say it or write it (structuring) positively or negatively influence the degree of reception and acceptance.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

To make a story interesting to the audience, it is important to use direct quotation, answer people's question, or explain effect on people. In doing this, we have to include all relevant times, places, date and names. Also it is important to identify people and organizations and to support generalities with specifics, and more importantly give background information and take special note of the technical in copy preparation for radio, Tv and print. Rewriting is an art or skill that must be honed by all media writers no matter their level of experience and status.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

Select four news stories from a current paper and label the various parts.

## **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING**

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## **MODULE 1**

### **UNIT 5: MEDIA WRITING: SKILL AND PRACTICES**

#### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Accuracy of statement
  - 3.2 Being informative to your readers
  - 3.3 Understandable to others.
  - 3.4 Learning to write for the media
  - 3.5 Writing Errors.
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading.

#### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In the previous units, we concentrated on the choice of words you need to make for effective media writing. We are continuing this word orientation in this unit as we focus on how outlining can aid effective media writing.

#### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of the study unit you should be able to:

- 1 Understand the skills and practices you need as a journalist
- 2 Organise your material to appeal to your reading public.

#### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

- 3.1 Accuracy of Statement

Media writing demands that writers impart information that is in complete harmony with the facts. Why might a media writer make a statement that is not true? He might simply be repeating something that he has learned without taking time to check the facts, or he might overshoot a matter because without realizing it, he misread or miss heard his source. These are possible because of the hurriedness with which media work is carried out for right from information gathering, to processing and finally, transmission. When we give careful attention to accuracy even in minor matters, our readers and listeners will see that they can have confidence in the veracity of the more important aspects of our message or write up.

Realizing that you still have much to learn, you have to feel apprehensive about starting in the media industry. Yet you quickly find that you will be able to write effectively, even with only a basic knowledge and experience. The key word is preparation. Before setting out to write, you have to be familiar with the subject you want to write about. It is a basic principle in writing for the media to anticipate your reader's questions and provide answers to them. You have to search diligently for satisfying answers in a relaxed frame of mind. This will prepare you to give accurate answers whether you going to conduct a 'vox pop', monitor other media houses or review available materials carefully, the principle is the same because this will prepare you to give accurate answers to your readers. Make sure that you understand the logical basis for the answers to the questions, If you not sure of the facts, resist the temptation to guess. Your heart should meditate so as to answer your reader's questions. Working under an experienced publisher can help you to develop skill in handling words aright. Observe which methods and principles they use and how they use them. And humbly be open to an good suggestions or correction, no matter how well versed and aglow with the spirit you might be. It is important to observe the following;

- Resist the pressure to write when you are unsure.

- Base your comments on the pattern healthy words.
- Research on your subject before writing
- Check the accuracy of statistics, quotes, and experiences, and use them without exaggerating.
- Avoid guessing at detail that you do not clearly remember.

Your presentation in the media should reflect high regard for the media's role as a pillar and support of the truth and the watch dog of societal activities. In order to uphold the truth, it is important that you get the logical sense or background knowledge of the subject that you plan to write so that you quote or write out of context and in fact. In media writing it is not a mortal sin to misfire sometime we all stumble at times. But you will benefit by developing habits that contribute to accurate writing. The following suggestions can assist you to analyze materials that you are thinking about using in your write up.

First, ask yourself: Is this material in harmony with what I have already learned before now? Will it draw my readers closer to the point being made? Next make good use of your house style. There will help you not only to understand your medium correctly but also to apply them with balance and reasonableness.

Current events, quotations and experiences can be helpful when you are illustrating and applying certain points. How can you be sure that are accurate? One way is by extracting such item from reliable sources. Remember to check that the information is up-to-date. Statistics become obsolete; scientific discoveries are quickly surpassed; and as man grows in understanding of history and accident events, conclusions based on previous knowledge need to be revised. Exercise great caution if you are thinking of using information from other newspapers, television, radio, or the Internet. Any inexperienced media writer puts faith in every word, but the shrewd and experienced ones consider

their steps. Ask yourself. Does the source have a reputation or accuracy? Can the information be verified by some other means? If you doubt the truthfulness of an item, discard it.

In addition to checking the reliability of the sources, consider carefully how you plan to use the information. Make sure that your use of quotations and statistics harmonies with the context from which they are taken. In an effort to write forcefully, be careful that “some people” does not become “the majority of people”, that “many people” does not become “everyone” and that “in some cases” does not become “always”. Overstating matters or exaggerating reports involving number, extent, or seriousness raises questions of credibility. When you are consistently accurate in what you write you will come to be known as a person who respects truth. Emphasizing accuracy in media writing cannot be overstressed. From the agenda setting function of the media, it is very clear that the media project issues that the public discusses down the line and that such discussions and exposure enables them to form an opinion about topical issues. And these public opinions are one of the force shaping our world today. It therefore follows that if the media presents wrong information to the public, the public will all programmes based on such public opinion will be a fiasco.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:1**

Explain very clearly why accuracy is important in media writing.

3:2 Being informative to your readers.

To make your write-up informative to your reader, you need to do more than write on a worthwhile subject. Ask yourself: why does the reader need to hear this subject? What am I going to write that will make the readers feel that they really benefited from the story? This brings to the fore, the issue of newsworthiness of subject. Not all worthwhile write-ups are actually newsworthy. If you simply write

on what people already know, you will not likely hold their attention very long. In media writing, sometimes your starting point may be what you think the people don't know or what you think the people should know. Since you are not writing for a specialist or specific audience but rather a generic public, it means writing in such a way that you sound intelligent to the young ones and less boring to the adult, readable to women and acceptable to the man. You can achieve these sometimes, through your choice of subject and words. You can combine being concrete in style with story format. Adjust the pace of your writing according to what your readers know. Your writing will be up if you include some details that are likely familiar to most and your level of writing should be low when presenting ideas that may be new to the majority of your readers so that they can grasp these clearly. Impart knowledge in a way that stimulates thinking and that leaves your readers with the feeling that they learned something worthwhile.

Being informative does not always mean having something new to write about or discovering a new dimension to a topical issue. Some experienced media writers have a way of stating certain familiar truths with such simplicity that many readers will fully understand them for the first time. In the field of media writing, it is not enough to mention a news item but illustrate it by relating it to background information and projecting it into the future. This will truly be informative to your reading public. Similarly, when mentioning some detail about natural law or about plant or animal life, your goal should not be to present some fascinating scientific fact that the objective should be combined evidence from nature with realities to show that there is a thing don't just happen in life. This will help the reader to see matters from the fresh perspective.

Writing on a subject can be challenging. But to be effective, you need to learn how to do this successfully. How can it be done?

Research will help. Instead of simply including in your write up facts that readily come to mind, use the research tools like the reference materials and interview people. Have in mind your objective that you strive to achieve. In your research you may find that a little-known historical event is directly related to your subject. Or you might come across recent statement in the news that will illustrate the point that you are making. As you examine the material, stimulate your own thinking by asking such question that are fundamental to mass communication – what? Why? When? Where? Who? and How? How should this affect a person’s life? What example demonstrates the benefit of applying it. Depending on the material you are discussing, you might; when did this occur? You might even enliven your write up by asking and answering some of such questions when you are writing a media piece. Writing on a familiar subject may become more informative if you break the text down, isolating portions that relate to the theme of your pieced and then explain these. Consider the possibilities divers opinion. For instance, what is justice? Whose slandered of justice is being written about? How would you illustrate what is meant by to exercise justice, or to love kindness? What is modesty? How would you apply the interest in the case of elderly reader? The material you will actually use, of course, should be determined by such factors as your theme, your objective, your audience and the space and time available to publish and write. Your readers may find it informative if you simply reason on an issue. Sometimes it is enlightening to point out the context of an occurrence, the circumstances that surrounded the writing, and the identity of the source. This is what is called background and following up in media writing.

Comparisons can help make you sound more informative to your readers. You might contrast a popular view with what the current view is. Or you might compare two parallel issues. Are there differences, similarities? If yes, why? What do we learn from them? Your doing this can give your readers a fresh perspective on the subject. If you are assigned to write on some aspects of your national life,

you might enrich your piece by starting with an overview. Discuss what is to be done, why it needs to be done, and how it relates to our over all goal as a people. Then explain where, when, and how to do the work.

You readers will especially benefit if you help them to see how the information in your piece applies to their lives. As you gather material for your write-up, think about situations in life that your readers are facing. Avoid generalization. Write on specific attitudes and actions above suggestions to a piece you are two of the above gain experience, apply more of them. In time you will find that the reader will look forward to your piece, being confident that they will read something will ready benefit them.

### **Self assessment exercise 3**

List and discuss how a write-up can be made more informative.

#### 3.3 Being Understandable to Others.

When you write, do more than present information. Endeavour to make what you write understandable to your readers. For many of us in the media, communication is first and foremost seeking to understand, then to be understood. You cannot communicate by writing if no one will read your words or understand them. Written communication is most effective when the writer has good writing skills and the readers, good reading skills. Of the two skills, the one you can guarantee as a writer is the writing skill. You can use your expertise in writing to ameliorate the short falls in the reading skill of your readers. Suppose, for example, that you write a clear, step-by-step description of an event. No matter how clear that message is, some information will be lost if the reader does not focus full attention on the message or does not understand some of the words. In many jobs, writing is a supporting skill, but in mass communication, writing is the primary skill. Writing via some form of electronic communication, is increasingly becoming

popular. There are many facets to understandable writing. Some of them are covered in the preceding unit. In this section, we are going to discuss a few additional points.

Simple words: simplicity of style is nobody's birth right. Simple words and short sentences are powerful tools of communication, pieces that can be understood by people no matter who they are and where they live. The concepts may be new to them, yet they can understand what you write because you dealt with matters of concern to all of us or your writing is interesting and understandable. Expressing yourself in down-to-earth language can win you the hearts and minds of readers. Your main objectives should be to express thoughts in a clear, understandable way. Even when you are working on deep and complex matters simplicity of style can help make it easier to understand. How can simplicity be achieved? Do not overwhelm your reader with unnecessary details. Organize your material so that it complements your main points. Select your key points carefully. Rather than rushing from one point to another exhaust your point well. Do not bury a good thought in a multitude of words. In applying these principles, do not try to explain all the details. Help your readers understand clearly the principal ideas. In order to present materials in a simple manner, good preparation is needed. You must clearly understand your subject yourself if you are going to make it understandable to others. When you really understand something, you will be able to express it to your readers.

Sometimes making things understandable requires that you explain the meaning of terms that are unfamiliar to your readers. Do not overestimate the knowledge of your audience, but do not underestimate their intelligence. As a result of your coverage of different professions and their activities, you may use some terms that sound strange to your readers. Without some explanation, those who are not associated with the profession will not understand. Modern-day reader and media

audience frequently need help to understand write ups and other media presentation that include statistics or custom an traditions. A budget figure of so much millions may mean little to an average man or woman in the street unless your interpret it in learns of familiar land marks that he/she is conversant with.

To make a matter clear to your readers, more may be needed than the correct definition of a certain term. Take time to explain and apply your story to your readers. Even if your explanations are clear, other factors may influence whether they understand or not. Such factors like tribe, religion, gender etc. may constitute a barrier to them getting the sense of what is written.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:3**

Assume you had an interview session with a lawyer, engineer, doctor and a hair dresser, explain at least five terms in each profession to your readers.

#### 3.4 Learning to Write for the Media.

The ability to write correct English free of errors of grammar, punctuation and spelling is only the beginning of learning to write for the media.

These are the elementary of the game, but in themselves, they will not make a writer. More than knowledge of the rules of driving will in themselves make a first class driver. As a young writer, your first concern must be to acquire a wide and accurate vocabulary. Words are the tools of this trade, and the more words you know and can use correctly and effectively the better media writer you will be.

Notice the three salient points from the above sentence:

- ❖ The number of words known;
- ❖ The exactness with which they have been mastered
- ❖ The ability to use them with effect

The man or woman who seeks to put his ideas across to others by means of words through the media must make every effort consciously to widen his/her stock of words. Paradoxically enough, the man or woman with the widest command of words is he or she who can express his or her thoughts most briefly. No fumbling, no beating about the bush for him or her – always exactly the one right word in the right place. As potential media writer, we can increase our vocabulary in various ways. The best way is by wide and constant reading. Unconsciously, we assimilate new words, gathering their meaning from the context. But this process can be speed up by deliberate effort; looking up in a dictionary as we indicated in the preceding unit, and noting each new word as we come across it in reading, in conversation or while watching television. Never let a new word pass you by. Have a dictionary always at hand and use it; like the pen, it is one of the media writers best friend.

Browse the dictionary, too, now and then, turning the pages at random and gathering and thing of interest that catches your eye. You will find there is a vast deal of interest to be found in words – their origin and history, the changes they have gone through and so on.

But it is not sufficient to know a large number of words in a vague and general way. Words are precision instrument to be used with exactness. If words are used loosely your meaning as a writer will not be conveyed clearly to the reader and so what is written fails its purpose. English is one of the richest languages in the world, with a word for every idea. But if you throw words about recklessly you not only blunt your own meaning, but you are also helping to spoil the priceless heritage of the English Language of which, as a professional writer, you are one of the natural custodians. It does not matter what others do, your business is to learn the proper meaning borne by each word and see that you use the word with that meaning only.

Notice that we have to consider not only the meaning of a word but also its usage. That is why the Oxford English Dictionary adds to its definition of each word a phrase or two using the word correctly. You will find that many apparent synonyms (words of similar meaning) are not always interchangeable; we use one or other according to the setting. Thus 'friendly' and 'amicable' both have the same meaning but their usage is very different as you will see if you try to put each with a sentence.

Furthermore, you must master the art of using words with the maximum of effect. Here brevity is most important. As a general rule, what is said most briefly is said most effectively of course, brevity is not the whole of the story? It will not do to use just any words so long as you use only a few of them. Words must be selected, weighed, set one against the other. Some words have richer and deeper associations than others. For instance 'house' and 'home'; 'infant', and 'baby'; and so on. You can evoke or conjure up all that store of latent emotions by the use of a word in just the right place, especially if it is allowed to stand among active words.

And so to the next point about words, merely knowing words in your head is not enough. It is not until you have actually used a word that you really make it your own. Words by themselves, although interesting enough at times are dead. They come to life only when they are set with others to the task of expressing living thoughts and ideas. So whenever you learn a new word, seek the first opportunity to make use of it in speech or writing.

Besides taking care with the choice of words, you must also give thought to their order and arrangement. A word will often carry a different weight and importance according to its position. The beginning and the end of a sentence are position of special emphasis. The normal order of words in English is subject, verb and object

(SVO), with the words, phrases and clauses dependent on them placed as close as possible to the words they qualify eg she bought a red car. Much can be done in making writing more effective by a variation in the length and construction of sentence. A series of short, crisp sentences indicate rapid action of tense excitement; the slowly unfolding sentence gives depth and dignity; the loosely constructed sentence is informal are conventional; the 'periodic' sentence, working slowly up to its climax, holds the reader's attention and carries conviction. Every piece of writing, whether it is an 1000-pages novels or a short news story, must have a unity of its own. It must have one central theme in which everything in the particular piece of writing is directly connected (newspaper). The fact remains that the custom has become establish and whatever a young reporter like you may do in your literary attempt, you will be far from popular with the sub-editors if you insists on turning in a copy which does not follow the house style of your medium. The whole problem of style in writing for the media is an exceedingly difficult one. The contemptuous term 'journalize' is often used to describe much of the writing in our daily media. Those who claim to be arbiters of 'good' style condemn the media writers for their frequently use of such phrases as 'to sustain an injury' 'allayed', in well-informed circles' 'lost his life' etc.

Setting aside the special legal and other difficulties under which a journalist works, what is 'good' style after all? If it is the use of language which conveys the writers meaning clearly is grammatically accurate, and is appropriate to the subject molder, then has the current media style gone so very far astray? Faults of grammar and the incorrect use of words if journalist themselves is bad, although through carelessness or haste, they may be guilty of these at times. On the question of appropriateness, it will usually be found that style used in our daily media steers a middle course between the flippantly conventional on the one side and the solemnly formed and the deliberately literacy on the other. The result may not always be a choice example of line English, but it is a product well adjusted to its

task of presenting the day-to-day news to the not too well educated general reader. Appropriateness must always be the ultimate criterion of style, and the English of our media, judged by this standard, cannot be called ‘bad’ English, no matter how unsuitable it may be for other uses. This view may be of some comfort to you as a young journalist, when you will be writing against the clock on the noisy office or out ‘on the job’ when you fall back on the stereotyped phrase and the lackeyed expression. But it is not to say that you must be content to have this one style only at your command. You will not always, perhaps, be a general reporter. The day may come when you will blossom forth as a sports writer, a dramatic critic, a book reviewer or a leader writer. Then you will find that have more time and space and occasion for the exercise of your own style. And ‘personal’ styles are not born in a day, nor are they achieved without labour.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:4**

What is meant by “appropriateness of style” in writing? And how can you justify the media style?

### 3.5 Writing Errors

Nothing is more destructive of self-confidence in a writer than uncertainty in the command of correct English or rather languages to be caught out in a serious grammatical or spelling error leads to the loss of confidence of the reader as well. The journalist in particular simply cannot afford to make him or her self ridiculous in the eyes of educated readers by such blunders as wrong agreements, unrelated participles or mixed metaphors. On the other hand, those who feel that they fall short on this respect – through some gap in their earlier education, perhaps – are often apt to overestimate the importance of knowledge of formal grammar. Much of the grammar taught in our ‘grammar’ schools is irrelevant to the needs of daily life and to the needs of the journalist. However, it will not be out of place for an intending media writer like you to embark on a thorough going course of English

grammar; it will do you no harm. Meanwhile we are proffering a somewhat practical approach. The mistakes people make in English tend to repeat themselves within well-defined limits. It is possible, therefore, to make of common errors and to concentrate on this acquiring by the way sufficient theoretical knowledge of formal grammar and the like to recognize and avoid pit-falls. In this way, the tricky words, phrases and constructions become so familiar that, when about to use them, we pause and proceed with caution. In this sub-unit we set out a list of some of the commoner of these errors in grammar and style. If you master the errors dealt with below, you should be able to sit down to your laptop or computer reasonably free from the nagging uncertainty as to the correctness of your English and the galling necessity of having to satisfying your sub editor.

- Common Errors in Grammar

1. A verb agrees with its subject in number. E.g. the entire factory with all the furniture, stores plant and equipment, 'was' destroyed in the fire.
2. A collective noun is usually singular but can be treated as plural when the group concerned is thought of as only loosely connected. E.g. The jury 'was' unanimous
3. The words each, every, either, neither, and any are all singular, and must be followed by singular verbs and pronouns in agreement. E.g. any of these people is capable of having committed the offence (not are).
4. The demonstratives this, that, these, those must agree in number with the nouns they qualify. E.g. we do not care for this sort of people (not these).
5. Nominative pronouns (I, thou, he, she, we, they, who) must be used for the subject to a verb. E.g. He is well known to my employer and me' (not I). This is the person who we thought was to blame (Not whom) since the pronoun is the subject to 'was to blame'.
6. Parts of the verb 'to be' are followed by the nominative case. E.g. He declared that it was I that was at fault (not me)

7. The two persons or thing compared by them are in the same case. E.g. no one is more welcome than we such gathering (not us).
8. The infinitive should be split. E.g. it is not uncommon for a man to deliberately mislead the court (The infinitive 'to mislead' has been split).
9. The comparative form of the adjective is used for two, the superlative for more than two. E.g. she accused her husband of spending the larger share of their joint income. (Not largest).
10. The conjunction 'as' and not the adjective 'like' is used to join two statements. E.g. He behaved on this occasion as he has always done in the past (not like).
11. A noun is 'done to', a verb is 'owing to' E.g. The wall is believed to have collapsed 'owing to' the weight of the timber nailed against it. (Not done to).
12. The past tense of the verb 'to be' and 'to lay' should not be confused e.g He was said to have lain there for three hours without being discovered (Not laid)
13. Shell should follow the pronoun 'I' and 'we'. Other pronouns are followed by will and would. E.g. we shall be obliged of you will....
14. The double negative should be avoided. E.g. we shall not be surprised if this new scheme does not fail as the earlier one did (does not fail should be replaced by fails).

- Common Errors in style, Diction and Word Order

1. The Rule of Proximity. What belongs together in the sentence should be placed together. E.g. she made a great impression by her performance on the audience (place 'on the audience' after impression).
2. Care should be taken with the placing of only, not only, but also, rather... then, both.... And, either.... Or, neither..... nor e.g. He not only took the

- bank-notes but also the raw cash. (Place ‘not only’ after ‘took’) he neither wanted one thing nor the other. (Place neither after ‘wanted’).
3. Redundancy. This is a major offence in journalism. Some form of redundancy is;
    - Repetition of the same idea in different words. E.g. it was decided that entries for this event should be restricted to club members only and that competitors from outside should not be allowed to compete is it.
    - The use of unnecessary qualifying phrases which deaden the style and clog the meaning. E.g. ‘We want to see established an international order by Obama based upon mutual understanding and mutual confidence and we cannot build such an order unless it confirms to certain principles which are essential to the establishment of confidence and trust’.
  4. Notes on diction and style.
    - Never use long word when a short one will do as well,
    - Do not throw words about loosely. Find the word which means exactly what you wish to say.
  5. Euphony. Your writing should flow smoothly and sound well. Avoid unintentional rhymes and monotony in sentence-construction and a shambling discordant style.

### **Self assessment exercises 3.5**

Re-write the following sentence in briefer form; she was convicted in respect of the murder of her husband at the last year party.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Journalism exerts a lot of influence on the society through the use of words effectively. It is not a profession you can practice outside the glare of society. The ‘would be’ journalist must therefore be mentally prepared to be able to develop and use the various skills needed to be successful as a journalist. It is not therefore

out of place that this unit concentrated on the skills and practice writers for the mass media must develop and use in order to live up to societal expectation.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit we have been able to emphasize the need for accuracy statement and the need to understand your reader before writing, how to sound informative to your reader and of come the common errors in grammar, diction and style.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

Clearly discuss the concept of style in media writing.

## **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING**

Kenyon, A, ed. (1979). *Entry into Journalism*. New York: Medolloni Press

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## **MODULE 2**

### **UNIT 1: WRITING FOR THE ON-LINE JOURNALISM**

#### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Development of Computer Assisted Reporting (CAR)
  - 3.2 Computers and Journalism
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- 4.0 Conclusion
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- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

#### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The face of the mass media is in fact changing globally. There has been a great surge in the introduction of new and better information tools, which are increasingly complementing and in some cases replacing older traditional tools of mass information processing, storage and retrieval.

News writing and delivering for the mass media has moved from the era of writing on scrolls with feathers to an era of pressing buttons which Ukaonu (2006:95) described as the age of electronic press.

Writing on this new technology, Odion (2008:81) described it as e-journalism. According to him, the internet, blogs and search engines are the new tools of computer assisted media-related reporting.

This unit will examine the general history of computer assisted reporting by tracing its beginning from the early computing era in the USA to the introducing of mainframe computer to the modern system used today. Ultimately, this unit will demonstrate that the introduction of computer in the newsroom has been a by boost to media writers effort to overcome the tyranny of deadline.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

On completion of this unit, you are expected to understand the following

- i. The development of computer and computer assisted reporting
- ii. Computers and journalism
- iii. What computer assistance entails in reporting in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 The development of computer-assisted reporting

If you were to walk into a newsroom today, you would likely find reporters, editors and other media writers busily hunched over computers working on stories. But how are these media people using these computers. Are they simply, using them for word processing or for something else? Since computers entered the scene, reporters have been taking advantage of them. It is therefore important for you to be intimated on how and when computers enter the newsroom and how computers have assisted reporters in the writing assignments. Research has shown that the introduction of computers in the newsroom was an individual-driven phenomenon Cox (200.30) that has only spread to the general population of practicing journalists all over the world.

The concept of computer-assisted reporting (CAR) is a broad one. It encompasses as Garrison (1998) explains anything that used computers to aid in the news gathering process. It involves online research and database journalism.

The introduction of computing in the newsroom goes back to very early computing devices that were around since prehistoric times. But the first significant computing device came in the late 1880's with an invention by Herman Hollerith.

Hollerith can perhaps be considered the founder of modern computing with his invention of the punched card. The punched card was an index card divided into quarter-inch square. Each opening represented binary information: a hole in the square means 'YES' and no hole means 'NO', the name of the machine was Tabulator (major 1991). Hollerith sold his Tabulating machine company and in 1924 its name was changed to international Business machine (IBM) (Bashe et al 1986).

The next advance in computing came in 1956 when Howard Aiken developed the mark1 computer at Harvard (Cohan, 1999). Prior to the 1940s the word 'computer' referred to a person who performed calculations. By the 1940's the term began to refer to a machine that perform computations. By the end of the World War II, the notion of electronic the science that concerns itself with the behaviour of electronics in various kinds of substance and environment – was developing. For the period following the 1940's, Meyer (1991) identifies three stages in computing machinery. The first wave included those that use vacuum tubes. The second wave used transistors such as IBM 7090.the final wave used integrated circuits such as in the IBM 360 series. Through all these stages it was not easy to use computer, for information gathering, processing and transmission. This is where Grace M. Hopper made contributions. Her greatest, perhaps was the invention of the first assembly language in 1952. Hoppers invention led to the concept of compilers, which were designed to use assembly language, on different machines. (Basehe et al, 1986).

### **Self assignment exercise 3:1**

Make a list of those involved in the development of the computing machine and what they did.

#### 3.2 Computers and Journalism

According to Birkhilf (1980), by the mid 1950s the United States entered a new age in computing with the extensive introduction of computing in business and industry. Special computer languages were developed and computers began to be used in various areas. But it wasn't until the 1952 presidential election that the age of computer-assisted news reporting began. The candidates were Eisenhower and Stevenson. The election was predicted to be a close one and was monitored closely by Walter Cronkite, then the Washington correspondent for CBS news. The computer was employed to predict the outcome of the election based on early returns. Despite the widespread thought that the election would be close, early prediction by the computers said that Eisenhower would win by a landslide. Officials at CBS were reluctant to broadcast such seemingly impossible prediction so they stalled for hours. When they finally broadcast the predictions, they were ridiculed for having refused to believe the computer. The age of computer-assisted reporting was born during this election. Not an election has passed since 1952 in the US that computers have not been used to predict outcomes.

Following the 1952 election, the introduction of computers into newsroom proceeded in what Reavy (1996) categories as three overlapping phrases. These three phrases were business, production and information. University of North Caroline professor Philip Meyer can be credited as one of the innovators of computer assisted reporting in the third phase with his coverage of the Detroit riot in 1967 (Meyer, 1999). He conducted inducted a survey among Africa-American during the Detroit riots and used an IBM 350 mainframe to analyze survey data (Reavy, 196). The analysis revealed that contrary to the assumed hypothesis,

people who had attended college were equally likely to participate in riot, as were high school dropouts. The story won him a Pulitzer Prize and signaled the beginning of a new era in computer-assisted reporting. The year after Meyer's innovating advances, Jones of the Miami Herald used a COBOL, program to analyze the same crime records in the Dade convert criminal justice system. The analysis entitled "A scientific look at Dade crime" turned out to be the first journalistic use of computers to analyze government records, and become the start of public series journalism which has become 'a mainstay of everyday reporting in advanced nation's (Meyer 1998) Meyer further developed advances in the use of social science methodology in journalism which he called precision journalism or scientific journalism. He says that in the 1970 journalism started to become scientific in two ways. First, vast amount of information started to become available to journalism because of the introduction of computers. The second way had to do with circulation. Because newspaper circulation did not stay on the same level as growths in households, publishers started taking more note of the market place and what made readers more likely to buy particular newspapers and how the media can be brought easily to the people.

Exposure of journalism to computer identifies the following steps when using data for media writing (Meyer, 1991).

- Collection of data: This shows that first and foremost news stories are actual occurrence and not fabrications.
- Storage of data: This means that there is a data bank where newsworthy stories and pictures can be posted by various journalists globally.
- Retrieval of data: you must be able to retrieve the data stored not only by yourself, but also of those stored by others.
- Analysis of Date: Bulky information can be broken down in bit in search for pattern. With a large amount of data, you must be able to reduce it.

- Communication of data: You must be able to communicate the data as fast as clear as possible.

In terms of the use of computers in the newsroom, the acquisition followed several stages. First individual reporters and writers bought their own computers. Later organizations purchased them. Initially microcomputers were primarily used for word processing instead of typewriters. But newspapers gradually began to supply computers for their reporters. One of the earliest purposes was to connect to online database that aided the development of stories.

By the 1980s, newsroom began to rely on database in several ways. First newsrooms began to store old clips in computer libraries. Then they used commercial database for background information in their stories. Also some newsrooms that developed databases for specific topics used computers to analyze records. In the middle of the 1980s computers were being used in many places to assist in investigative reporting. One major advance came from Jaspin (1999) who used computers tapes to carryout investigative stories in the US that led t government policy reforms.

A review of CAR stories in the 1980s in America would not be complete without mentoring Bill Dedman's Pulitzer Prize effort, at the "Atlanta Journal and Constitution." In 1989 he produced a series of stories. "The Colour of Money", which revealed racist policies in lending of Atlanta-area financial institutions. Another advance in computer assisted reporting occurred in 1989 with the founding of the National Institute or computer. Assisted reporting formed by the organization of investigative reporters and Editors in conjunction with the University of Missouri school of journalism originally called Missouri Institute for Computer Assisted Reporting. Its objective was to train journalists "in the practical skills of finding, prying loose, and analyzing electronic information"

(Anonymous, 1999). By the early 1990s, stories created by using computers were too numerous to outline. But what did computer –assisted reporting involve? Houston (1996) identifies three basic tools for computer-assisted reporting. These are spreadsheet, database managers and on-line resources. Spreadsheets are used to analyze numbers whereas database managers are useful for organizing sources. On-line resources include electronic mail, discussing groups, database libraries and bulletin boards.

### **Self Assessment exercise 3.2**

Identify and discuss the steps in the application of computer to media writing?

### 3.3 Forces Driving ‘Car’-Online Journalism

After having examined how computers entered the newsroom, from primitive devices to the modern equipment we now have questions arise as to what extent computer are used today in the newsroom.

By the late 1980, more people had PCs (personal computers) in their newsroom and they started to use a spreadsheet for various statistics for various sorts of small-scale stories Mellnick (1989) in the U.S. In 1990 also in the US, the newsroom started using the software package to analyze large data files. Further application followed when reporters started using computer mapping and searchable database on the internet. By creating a database on the internet, media consumers will be able to determine if their social circumstances are comparable to what is obtainable somewhere else. It is no longer news that a modern media writer must be a highly computer literate person who can manipulate the computer to assess, access and transmit information both nationally and internationally. It is important in this era of globalization when no part of the world, could afford to close its eyes to what is happening in other parts of the world. Reporters also use Microsoft Excel, Access to create database. According to Philips, (1999)

newspapers can use mapping software to keep track of ongoing activities or monitor any activity or event. Also a relational software called 'paradox' can be used to analyze where people moving into the country or state were coming from.

Zapenski (1999), associate editor for the *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*, described some of the latest advances in newspapering. He states that primarily the biggest change has been having information on the web at your fingertips that you couldn't have gotten before or would have taken hours or day to track down. He also says that e-mail has brought many changes into the newsroom whereas before the introduction of this technology interviews had to be conducted by phone or in person, now you can just exchange e-mail. It is easier to set up apartment.

Various media organization across the world have integrated computers in the newsroom and have become adept at computers-assisted reporting. Now that CAR techniques have become more widespread, that has been a shift. There was a period when it was a few journalists in the newsroom who are interested in investigative reporting.

Discussing the concept of CAR in Nigeria Odion (2008:81) in an article entitled E-Journalism stated that the internet, blogs and search engines are the new tools of computer application in journalism. When the United States Congress for instance released the 'Starr report' on the web making it instantly available to the public, the Scenario changed. The people do not need the journalists to digest the material before telling them.

With online journalism we can create interactivity between journalist and audience that is hard to come by while using traditional media, which is mostly one-sided. A good example is the letters to the editor, e-mail, etc online editions which has erased the period of waiting patiently before the letter is published. An online

editor can post the letters written minutes of receiving it and the audience has the ability to comment on it as soon as the letter is received. These activities create far more interaction between audience and reporter than ever before. You the writer must always keep in mind the audience when writing. With an online edition, the writer can be contracted to justify his/her decision or the choice of words almost immediately (Odion 2008).

Furthermore, online writing allows you the use of images, video, and audio they may not have been privy to in the traditional media writing. Online media also allows a person to browse at their own leisure, to decide what they want to read and when they want to read it. Unlike television and radio that have background noise online enables the writer and the reader to concentrate more at the click of a button.

The internet allows news and information to come at a tremendous dispatch, limited only by the election or the electromagnetic wave (Odion 2008). Blogging according to Odion has taken over the mainstream of the media by storm. This technique can be used by a media writer as a diary of sort, shared with family and friends, but blogs can also be used as tools by journalists to improve on their writing and research skills. Blogs combined with search engines like goggle or Excite, have a way of attracting new audiences. As blogging becomes more and more popular blogs are appearing prominent at the list of search engines due to the high traffic on them. Blogs are not only a means of acquiring information they are also a means of disseminating information between and among interested recipients. They are not meant to be taken as the gospel truths, they are simply a forum for discussion. (Osborn, 2001).

A good example of e-journalism is the programme “BBC world-have your say” it is a news programme where listeners set agenda on topical issues and join the

global conversation on them. Through this medium, listeners have opportunity to participate through phone calls that are aired right away; text messages, e-mail etc, comments are posted on blogs. The advantage of using blogging in media writing is the opportunity for immediate feedback. This enhances the quality, of presentation and conditions subsequent presentation.

In investigating how computer-assisted reporting spread, it is important to note that it would not have come about unless the solid background of reporting skills was already in place. As Meyer, (1999) explain, the reporting preceded the technology. Millson (1999) is in agreement with Meyer. “It is very much a movement from the down up by individual reporter who learn these techniques because they think it will make them better”.

Though new advances in computing have evolved, they haven't completely eliminated underlying reporting skills, which are still necessary to put together a good story. The movement toward computer-assisted reporting was reporter driven-technology is not good unless it is applied. (Houstron 1999). You have to have a story idea the skill and the interest in order for the technology to be mobilized. It's reporters and stories that drove computer-assisted reporting.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:3.**

Critique the assertion that computer-assisted reporting has obliterated the traditional skills.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

The internet is the in-thing right now in most professions, journalism and mass communication inclusive. The internet possess a wide opportunity for journalists and media writers to post stories, pictures and even voiced materials. One cannot only post information but can also receive. Writing for on-line journalism poses

some challenges to the modern media writer in terms of information gathering, processing and dissemination.

Furthermore, the ability of the internet to be almost everywhere at the same time demands that the reporter or the media writer redoubles his/her speed. The global village nature of the world is becoming more and more apt as advancement in information technology increases.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

On-line or e-journalism has become a reality you need to face as a media writer. In this unit, we have tried to discuss the concept on-line journalism by discussing the development of computers and its inception into the newsroom; we also tried to look into the forces behind the computer assisted reporting and other related concepts.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

Clearly explain the concept of on-line journalism and identify the forces of on-line journalism and identify the forces driving computer assisted reporting?

## **7.0 PREFERENCES/FURTHER READING**

Millson, Doug (2004). *On-line Journalism*. San Francisco, CA: Macmillan .

Odion, A. E. (2008). *Role of e-Journalism in Nigeria Democracy*. Ibadan: Stirling.  
Horden.

## **MODULE 2**

### **UNIT 2: LAW AND ETHNICS OF MEDIA WRITING**

#### **CONTENT**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Contents
  - 3.1 Libel and Slander
  - 3.2 Contempt of Court
  - 3.3 Invasion of Privacy
  - 3.4 Other Reportorial Dangers
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

#### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Media writing is meant for 100% consumption by the public. The media globally are seen as the source of information and enlightenment. There is no stratum of the society that media writings do not affect. The media therefore possess the resource to make a piece of information public knowledge, that is why the media play a very decisive role in public opinion formation. And how far an individual, organization and State can go depends on the state of public opinion towards it. The media have the power to make or mar, depending on the tilt of the media writers pen. Since the media can use its resources to build or destroy, the essence of this unit is to make sure that the media writer is abreast with the legal requirements and responsibilities so that he/she does not use his/her pen to destroy the society. The presence of some legal provision in media writing generally is not necessarily an affront to press freedom as some are wont to believe but rather it

is an attempt to ensure that a media writer enjoys his freedom to write within the gambit of the law of the land. For as it is popularly said, absolute power or freedom corrupts absolutely or leads to irresponsibility. Without an orderly society, the media writer just like any other person will find it difficult to function effectively.

Every media writer should know that under the Laws and Court rulings of the state he/she has certain privileges but at the same time he/she is subject to certain legal restrictions. Mass communication laws grew as a hodgepodge of state statutes and courting opinions as newspapers expanded from 2 page sheets into great metropolitan dailies. They developed as a patchwork system and they are still evolving. The entry of radio and Television as news media added another dimension. All countries today have statutes and court rulings designed to protect the individual from the media and at the same time make it possible for media writers to report honestly and accurately. Every media writer who is wise will know the Laws and judicial rulings of the country in which his medium is located. But for the purpose of guiding students using this module some generalization may be made.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

After completing this unit, you should be able to understand.

- Libel and Slander
- Contempt of court
- Invasion of privacy
- Other Reportorial Dangers (ORD)

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 Libel and Slander

Defamatory words are those which detracts from an individual's reputation or hold him up to contempt, scorn or hatred. Defamation laws, as developed and applied globally apply to written and spoken words. If the defamation is spoken, it is slander, if the defamation is written, it is libel. However, the basic protection for the individual and the basic privileges of the newsmen are much the same under libel and slander. The philosophy of both is to protect the individual from unwarranted defamation. Generally, the defamation is not considered unwarranted if it is true; if it is privileged, or if it is fair comment. Because of this similarity between libel and slander laws, we include here a synopsis of the two.

- Two classifications of libel. Cases of libel are generally classified as follows.

\* False published statements, which, upon their face, bring hatred, contempt, or ridicule upon another (generally known as libel per se)

\* False published statements of all other kinds resulting in actual injury to another.

- Any statement which falsely accuses a person of suffering from some contagious disease like leprosy, HIV/AIDS and the like. The theory of the law is that statements such as this tend to exclude the person named from the society of his friends and neighbours or to disgrace him.

- Any statement which falsely accuses a person of want of capacity or fitness to conduct his business or profession. The libelous material must, of course, affect the person named in a trade or profession in which he is actually engaged. For instance, to write that a politician is not competent to engage in the practice of law would not be libelous.

- Any statement which falsely accuses a person of the commission of a crime involving moral turpitude or making such person liable of a punishment infamous in character. To write that one is a murderer,

rapist, arsonist, etc will give rise to a cause of action, even without any proof of damage on the part of the one named.

- Any false statement which upon its face brings disgrace or ridicule upon the party accused. An example would be a false published write-up imputing unchastely of any kind to any woman married or single.
- In cases of libel per quod, false published statements which are libelous include all other false publications not referred to or addressed in libel per se which result in actual injury to the plaintiff. Under libel per quod, the false material arrived at by recording between the lines. The recovery in such cases therefore must be based upon specific proof of actual damage beyond reasonable doubts.

Whether libel per se or per quod, the following can be invoked as a defence:

- \* Truth
- \* Fair Comment
- \* Privilege

Truth as a defence: The best defence you have against libel suit is that the statement complained of is true. Therefore, the best and usually the one safeguard is to make certain before publication that any potentially libelous statements made is true and can be proved to be true. It is a fact that a true statement published by a newspaper about a person which tends to bring him into hatred, contempt or ridicule which was published with malicious intent in fact would be held to be libelous but practical purposes, it is usually difficult for a plaintiff to prove such malicious intent if the story has any news value at all.

- Fair comment as a defence: Every one has the right by law to criticize or comment, both by spoken and written word, on matters of public interest and general concern, provided such statements are made fairly and with an honest purpose in view. This liberty of criticism cannot be used indiscriminately and incorrectly to accuse public officials or candidates for office of criminal acts, nor does this rule allow a media writer to use this protection as a cloak to attack falsely the character of public persons.

The right of a media writer to comment and criticize is greater than that of any private individual. The difference lies in the fact that a media writer has come to criticize or comment upon the acts of public officials more frequently than do private individuals, and also in the fact that their statement gain wider criticism, attention and circulation than those of any private individual. A media writer can criticize books, plays, moving pictures, and public exhibitions of all sorts. He cannot, however, follow the author of a book into his private life and criticize his actions in his private capacity.

It should be further noted that true criticism does not impute dishonourable motives to the one criticized except in rare instances where justice absolutely requires such statement and then only on the clearest proof. The theory of fair comment is that the public should have the benefits of unhampered discussion of matters which are public comment. However, the public does not benefit from malicious or unfair comments although the matter discussed may be of public interest.

The elements of fair comment as a defence for libel include the following:

- \* The statement or comment must be on a matter of public interest.
- \* The statement or comment must be fair.
- \* The statement or comment must not be malicious

- \* The statement or comment must, in fact be commend and not an allegation of fact.

A media writer has the right to comment or criticize the proven acts of a public man, but has no right to accuse him of particular acts of misconduct which are not true.

- Privilege as a defence: A privilege statement may be defined as a statement which contains matter which would be libelous but for the occasion on which it is made. The law knows two kinds of privileged statements viz. absolute and conditional.

Cases of absolute privilege have no special interest here in as much as writers can never avail themselves of such a defence. In such cases no remedy can be had by the person attacked or defamed as for example, where any statement is made by a judge, party or witness to the course of legal proceeding where the statement is relevant to the case.

Statements although, otherwise libelous are conditionally privileged where facts exists or are reasonably believed to exist, which cast on the writer of the statement the duty to tell the pubic certain facts and the writer proceeds in good faith to do so. A newspaper has a “conditional” privilege to publish a fair and accurate report of legal or legislative proceedings, provided the subject matter is fit for publication even though the matter published is false and defamatory. It must be made clear, however, that the statement is a report of the proceedings and the writer must be certain that the reports are fair, impartial and accurate. In general, this conditional, privilege applies to all proceedings in which judicial action is involved from preliminary hearing; before a Justice of the Peace (JP) to arguments in the Supreme Court, and applies to a multitude of quasi-judicial proceedings, such as investigations in legislative communities.

Suits for slander of title should be distinguished from libel suits. In a suit for the slander of title, the plaintiff must prove that the false statement was made the

defendant regarding his title to property whereby the plaintiff was prevented from making a sale which he had in prospect or lost customers, or was damaged in some way. For example, where a false statement is made as to a person's title to real property or as to the quality or value of the plaintiff's property in actions for slander of title, however, the plaintiff must always prove actual damages.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:1**

Distinguish between libel and slander and what are possible defences a media writer has over them.

3.2 Contempt of Court. The contempt of court came with the same philosophy behind the enactment of sedition which were off shots of the divine right of kings. This is so because it is believed that the judges represent the king and the king should not be criticized. The Law of contempt was put in place also to show that the Court and Judges are not pipsqueaks (Okonkwo 1990:12). Globally, activist frown upon contempt of court because the Judges are the prosecutors/accusers and at the same time the appellants. In such a situation it is assumed that the accused has no chance at all. In Nigeria according to section 1333 of the Criminal Code, it is state that:

- a. Any person who while a judicial proceeding is pending makes use of any speech or writing, misrepresenting such proceeding.
- b. Publishes a report of the evidence taken in private or
- c. Commits any other act of disrespect to any person before whom the proceeding is being had or taken is guilty of a simple offence and liable for imprisonment for three months.

To some critics, these provisions will discourage investigative reporting. But on the other hand, the courts are saying that they don't want Newspaper or media trial. These are designed to ensure that the accused gets a fair trial. For instance during the time or reign of the Benin City based criminal was on, with all the

adheres newspaper and media publication, it will be very impossible for a Judge to say that Anini is not guilty. Such reports and action that will belittle the stature and public image of the courts, is not acceptable at all as the court will not want to be projected as an organization that can be predicted or preempted.

- Types of Contempt

Contempt is of two kinds viz civil and criminal contempt

Civil Contempt is that type of punishment which is given to protect the right of the parties involved in a legal dispute or cause before the court e.g. from failure or refusal to obey a court order such punishment is imposed until the person purges himself of the contempt.

Criminal Contempt. It is punishment imposed to protect the court itself from against a wrong.

a. Direct criminal contempt. It is contempt done in facie curiae before the court physically present in court or around the court house and the Judge gives a summary judgment.

b. Indirect contempt is sometimes called constructive contempt is when a newspaper or media comments on a case pending in a court and the Judge can issue a bench warrant to arrest the erring reporter as a way of saying that the said report is disturbing him from doing his judicial work. One of the reasons behind the concept of contempt of court is to ensure fair trial for the accused by checkmating excessive publicity of the case. The court however, achieve this by adopting other strategies different from contempt of court. And it includes the following:

- \* Change of trial venue. That is physically moving the court from where it has been sitting to another place.
- \* Change of Venire: That is selection of a totally new set of juries who do not know anything about the case before.

- \* Sequestration: This is the exclusion of the jury members from contact with the public until the case is over.
- \* Voir Dire: That is before choosing a juror, you will ask question of whether they know about the case ab initio to avoid prejudice.
- \* Continuance: Is a method used by the court to let the dust settle. Judges practice this a lot even in other cases to allow temper to cool down. That is deliberate postponement of hearing dates.
- \* Admonishing of the jury: Where the Judge charge them not to discuss whatever they heard in the case with any person.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:2**

Reconcile the conflict between fair trial and freedom of the press.

3.3 Invasion of Privacy: In 1890 two young American Lawyers wrote an article for the Harvard Law Review in which they attempted to establish a common law right to privacy – the right to be left alone. They deplored the yellow journalism of their time and argued that persons should have legal recourse if they were victims of gossip from journalistic overstepping of the obvious bounds of property and decency, and pandering to idle or prurient curiosity.

Despite its wide spread application, the concept of invasion of privacy lack precise definition. Notwithstanding, it is generally agreed that anyone who cuts public attention, such as a politician or entertainer sacrifices much or most of his/her privacy.

After a study of how much of a celebrity's private life is legitimate to publicize as distinguished from his/her professional life has been put as 80%-20%. It is not surprising in these computerized days with being the subject of many dossiers, that the media should be the object of complaint and legal action when someone feels

there has been an invasion of privacy through unjustified disclosure of facts of his/her private life by physical intrusion or trespass in the course of newsgathering, by infringement of one's right to advertise his/her own talent or by being placed in a false light. A reporter who is wiretapped the line of a minister nominee or secretly enter his hotel room in the process of he keeps mistress have invaded his privacy despite the fact that the information he gathered has societal benefit.

Invasion of privacy can take the following form – firstly it can be inform of expropriation of one's name, picture for commercial purpose without one's consent.

Secondly, it can take the form of intrusion upon someone's solitude. Man has a right of freedom of conscience. He needs protection around his home and the dignity of the individual.

Also it can be inform of public expose or disclosure of embarrassing private facts not necessarily defamatory. It occurs in cases of under age.

Furthermore it can take the form of a publication of false information about a person or putting a person in false light. The condition for suit against invasion of privacy state that the matter published must be offensive to a reasonable person and that the publisher was at fault maliciously. However, media writer can hide under the newsworthiness and prominence of certain individual or the place the news event took place. For instance, when Prince Charles was photographed in Bikin with Camilla his mistress. He sued and lost based on these grounds.

Finally, it is important to say that right is not applicable to candidates for public office, public officials, actors, authors, criminals, or the like since by their own

actions they have invited public interest in themselves and in their affairs. Damages for an unwarranted invasion of a person's privacy may be recovered for mere mental distress.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:3**

State and discuss the conditionality for suing for invasion of privacy.

#### 3.4 Other Reportorial Dangers (ORD)

The media, like Rousseau's man, is born free but everywhere in chains. Journalism is one of the professions that has the most legal and ethical restraints to its practice. This may be as a result of the fact that media news is strictly public oriented. Apart from the constitutional constraint, like libel sedition, etc, the media writer should be wise enough to master the following danger:

- \* Carelessness dangers: This is for the purpose of re-emphasis of well-established legal principles governing libel actions rather than an attempt to state anything new. A fearless and outspoken newspaper of course, avoids libel suits. Anyone who feels or imagines that he has a grievance against a newspaper account of a publication which wound his pride or prinks his vanity or exposes a moral infirmity, may bring a suit and will find no great difficulty in securing the services of a Lawyer. 100 frequently, legally maintainable libel suits result from slipshod and careless reporting and from a too eager assumptions of the guilt of the person written up.
- \* Quotation Dangers: Particular care should be taken in publishing quotations. Since the fact a person is quoted accurately is not in itself a defence if the statement quoted contains untrue facts with reference to a third person. The truth of a publication is generally a defense to a libel suit unless the publication is made maliciously. It would be very difficult to prove that a truthful publication made by a newspaper in the ordinary

cause of its business was made maliciously. Whether or not a publication is truthful is determined by a jury. This rule, however, does not create much difficulty because substantial evidence of the truth of a publication usually deprives the plaintiff in a libel suit of the sympathy which a jury might otherwise entertain for him, and where such substantial evidence is produced, the verdict is generally for the defendant. If detectives, policemen and other Law Enforcement operatives, outside a judicial proceedings state their conclusion to a reporter and such statements are not true, it is no defense in a libel suit for the newspaper to show that it relied upon these statements. Such a showing can only go to show the good fiat of the newspaper in making the publication. But where the statement are made by such officers acting as witnesses in a judicial hearing, a newspaper commit no libel giving a fair and accurate report of the statement so made. In giving a fair and accurate report, a reporter is permitted only to tell verbatim what a witness said or to give a correct and uncoloured summary of his testimony. He must not interject his own comments or opinions or conclusion.

- \* Public proceedings: Impartial reports of proceedings before public and legislative bodies or before courts of Law are privileged. This privilege includes the right to publish the whole or part of bills, reports, resolutions, petitions, affidavits, the issuing of warrants and accounts of arrests. A newspaper ordinarily cannot refuse to print, upon request, a reasonable explanation or contradiction by the party involved, or the determination of any suit or action.

A qualification is to be noted as to the right to publish pleadings and affidavits filed in court. Under the common Law, that is, the Law which has grown up to the course of time independently of statutes, it is libelous to publish the contents of pleadings and affidavits filed in court has taken some action with reference to them. But the statues in most of the States now

permit the publication of their contents even though no judicial action has been taken.

- \* General Rules to avoid suits.
- i. In a write-up, the story should not be coloured by the enthusiasm or opinions of the reporter.
- ii. The statement of police or other informants made outside of court must be taken with caution and where the story is of a defamatory kind, must be verified so far as practicable.
- iii. The truth is a defense, but good intention in reporting an untruth is not.
- Iv. A retraction is not a defense. It serves only to lessen damages and to deprive the plaintiff of the recovery of punitive damages. Punitive damages is an amount assessed by way of punishment; and goes beyond the mere actual loss suffered by the plaintiff.
- v. Safe reporting sticks to the facts, are not to some by stander's opinion of what might be the truth if the facts were known.

Our Federal Constitution preserves the right freely to publish and to make comments, but wary reporter, copy reader, re-write man and editor should always keep in mind that published statement must be truthful and also that published comments must be fair, unbiased, uncoloured and fully supported by the facts.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:4**

Avoiding suits in media writing is possible. Discuss.

### 3.5 Reportorial Ethnics:

By virtue of your Academic training, you will be made aware of the importance of stereotypes, taboos, superstition and other factors in influencing attitudes and opinions of media writers. As a student journalist, you are encouraged to be as

open-minded and objective as it is humanly possible to be and to be aware of any emotional obstacles to overcome in seeking the truth and to understand the behaviour of others. We should not allow prejudices to colour our stories. Most media organization can be conservative as expressed in their editorial policies. Sometimes, this plays out in the type of story they choose to cover or left. A professional journalist becomes more liberal as he/she gets exposure through assignment. It is possible to maintain, one's integrity even on a medium whose policies are personally repugnant. The time to say 'no' to what you don't believe when asked to is on the first occasion. You must guard against conflict of interest by avoiding Controversial community issues. As journalist, our responsibility is to be dispassionate and fair in covering public issue. Our role is to report and not to participate in those issues in order to maintain our neutrality. The public's right to know of events of public importance and interest is the overriding mission of the mass media. The purpose of distributing news and enlightened opinion is to serve the general welfare. Journalists who use their profession, status as representative of the public for selfish or other unworthy motives violate a high trust.

Furthermore, freedom of the press is to regarded as our in alienable right as a people in a free society. It carried with it the freedom and the responsibility to discuss, question and challenge action and utterances of our government and of our public and private institution.

Journalists must be free of obligation to any interest other than the public's right to know the truth. They must ensure:

- Confidentiality of source
- Be of ware of gifts and favours
- Shun moonlighting and political involvement
- Verify all private sources.

Good faith with the public is the foundation of all worthy journalism. Hence,

- Truth is our ultimate goal
- Objectivity in reporting the news is another goal.
- There are no excuses for inaccuracy or lack of thoroughness.
- Headlines should be fully warranted by the content of the article.
- Sound practice makes clear distinction between news reports and expression of opinion.
- Your opinions and interpretations should be labeled as such.

Another important reportorial ethic is fair play.

- ▶ Journalists at all times will show respect for the dignity, privacy, rights and well being of people encountered in the course of gathering and processing the news.
- ▶ Guard against invading a person's right of privacy.
- ▶ The media should not pander to morbid curiosity about details of vice and crime.
- ▶ It is the duty of news media to make prompt and complete correction of their errors.
- ▶ Journalist should be accountable to the public for their reports and the public should be encouraged to voice its grievances against the media.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:5**

Identify and discuss some of the ethnic issues a Nigerian media writer must guard against.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Every media writer should have some methods of preventing libelous matter from getting into your write-up. To a great extent, publishing the truth can offer the writer some measure of protection from litigation. However, due to the hurriedness with which media information is gathered, processed and transmitted, chances are the errors are bound to be part of media presentations. A legally minded media writer no matter how pressured, will try to avoid errors. Your duty as a media writer is write and publish to enlighten the media public. This duty comes with some obligation. The common Law practice which this country inherited from our colonial masters protects both private and public citizens. The watch word for you then is carefulness and caution.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

The law and ethics of media writing which is the subject matter of this unit provides some explanations on how you can write without being sued or perish. It is not aimed at making you a pocket lawyer but to make you write without running foul of the Law. The Unit started with the law of libel and slander; contempt of court, invasion of privacy and other Reportorial Dangers (ORD).

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

Trial by newspaper has been upon by legal experts as aiding miscarriage of justice. What is it and how has the courts try to manage it.

## **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING**

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## **MODULE 2**

### **UNIT 3: CORRESPONDENT REPORTING**

#### **CONTENT**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Definition and Qualification of a Correspondent
  - 3.2 The Staff Correspondent
  - 3.3 Foreign Correspondent
  - 3.4 Gallery/Lobby Correspondent
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

#### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Not all reporters and writers work actually in a media organization's office under the direct instructions and control of the news editor. Throughout the country and beyond there is a network of local and foreign correspondents, whole-time or part-time staff collecting and transmitting news and other publicity materials from their own particular area to the headquarters. Correspondent reporting is a field of modern media writing that offers an unlimited opportunity to a writer that is willing and able to explore his/her creative and journalistic ingenuity.

#### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

On completion of this unit, the student should be able to understand the following:

- i. Who is a correspondent and how to qualify for the job

- ii. Who is a staff correspondent
- iii. Foreign correspondent reporting
- iv. Gallery/lobby correspondent reporting

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Definition and qualification of a correspondent

A correspondent is a staff of a media organization who is working as a full time staff or a freelancer outside the domain of the organization. A correspondent resides and operates from a different city or country from the media organization cited. Out there, the correspondent plans and manages his/her time to ensure that the area of coverage is adequately covered and information transmitted home on a regular basis. However, the word has acquired a modern connotation that shows that it is now used for reporting/writers who operate from the headquarters or home office everyday. An example is when media organization make reference to their correspondent in government, etc.

The operational qualification of a correspondent differs a little bit based on the designation the correspondent carries. Apart from those situational qualifications, a correspondent must first and foremost be a honoured journalist or media writer who has the necessary qualities like nose for news, eyes everywhere, ability to smell a rat, and the necessary speed and be willing to work under pressure.

#### **Self assessment exercise 3:1**

What are the differences between a correspondent and a routine reporter?

#### 3.2 The Staff Correspondent

Staff correspondence falls into three groups, although in many ways their work runs on similar line. There are the local representatives of the News Agencies such as AP (Associated Press), the staff correspondents of the great national

dailies, and the district representatives maintained in outlying areas by the larger provincial daily and evening papers.

The first qualification for the staff correspondent in any of these groups is that you should know his/her district. Just as a reporter actually in the newspaper office may become a specialist on sports, or theatre, so the staff correspondent must become something of an authority on your own area. All aspects of its life and culture, its industry, its local politics, its history, the nature and aspirations and weaknesses of its inhabitants must be familiar to you. You must make it your business to get to know all the people in the area likely to be news sources. Whenever and wherever a news story breaks in your district you must know immediately where and from whom you are likely to draw the information you will need.

The staff correspondent, more than any other type of reporter, must have a keenly developed sense of news values. Almost anything happening locally is of interest to local people, if only for the fact that they know the place and perhaps even the people concerned. But the staff correspondent is writing for readers most of whom have no particular interest in your district. You must be constantly asking yourself "Would my friends be interested to read about this if it had happened in a district far away from my own?" If the answer is 'yes' then the story is worth sending in. You must have, too, what is often called the nose for news. The big story is rare, and you must go out looking for the story, which has the unusual twist, the human appetite. What was said in the preceding units about the gift for seeing the news story behind the apparently commonplace happening is particularly applicable to the staff correspondent.

You must be a person, too, of initiative and self reliance. For you there can be no walking into the office at the beginning of a set turn of duty, glancing at the Duty

Book and going off obediently go carry out the assignment for the day allotted to you by the news editor. You must fix your own times and scheme of work, decide which likely avenues you will follow up and which you will leave alone. You must resist the temptation to take life too gently and to allow the late start in the morning and the afternoon or evening off to become the rule instead of the exceptions.

You must be a good mixer, able to work easily with others. It is manifestly impossible for one man, covering an area of any size, to be present at every function and follow up every incident in his area. You must rely on a system of cooperation and pooling with other correspondents in the area. This does not mean that you may never go out to secure an exclusive story or scoop, but in the day-to-day business of reporting local events you must be prepared to give and take.

You must be something of a judge of character, too, for to you will be left the task of appointing deputies and local agents who will act for you on occasion or tip you off when a story is likely to break in some part of your district. There must be reliable people for their failure may bring upon you a rebuke from your central office that you were the only paper or medium which did not carry a particular local story.

Finally, you must be prompt, accurate and concise in your transmission of news to the central office. Today the telephone has almost entirely replaced almost everything as a means of transmitting news and on this enables the local correspondent to keep in constant and direct touch with your medium or agency, which you must always do. It is not always easy for the central office to check or confirm information sent in by local agents, so that they require from their staff correspondents a high degree of accuracy. This local person must be prepared to

do for himself/herself much of the work of both reporter and sub-editor. Conciseness of style is important not only because it saves the time, but also because it keeps down the very heavy item of costs.

In Part One of this course, we made mention of the news agencies. In addition to the functions mentioned, the Agency correspondent has a number of special considerations to bear in mind. The first of these is speed. Almost continuously, one or other of the scores of medium served by your Agency is giving to press or on air. This means that at the first inkling of a good story breaking in your area and you must tip off the central office right away. Accuracy is more than ever important in Agency work. Messages coming from the great News Agencies have an almost mystical prestige in most media offices, so that a chief sub-editor will often prefer to use an Agency story rather than one from his/her medium's own correspondent. This reputation for accuracy is jealously guarded by the Agencies and they require the very greatest care from their local correspondents. Whether an Agency, or local or staff, the core duty of a correspondent is to feed his/her medium with constant current information from the district.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:2**

In what ways does the work of the staff correspondent differ from that of the general reporter.?

### 3.3 The Foreign Correspondent

Our discussion on this section will centre on what your opportunities, qualification and kind of training you need to function effectively as a foreign correspondent.

- Opportunities: The life and work of the foreign correspondent have a strong appeal for most young men and women in journalism. To cover the world, from USA, London, Moscow, Rome, to send back dispatches under date lines from far away places with strange sounding names, is the secret dream

of many a cub-reporter/writer. And there is more scope today than ever in this branch of media writing for the young man or woman with the right training and qualifications. There is a growing tendency among all the mediums worth their salt to maintain a strong correspondent in foreign capitals and to rely on them more than the News Agencies. Chief among the reason for this is the ever-growing globalization, so that what goes on in the remotest part of the world may become at any moment of major importance to the man in the street of Lagos Glasgow or Moscow. Again, small countries, of minor importance in themselves, loom larger in the world news when they pass within the orbit of some greater power to whom they are la pawn in the global game of power politics. To leave it to the agencies is felt by many papers to be inadequate. When an up-to-date, exclusive and colourful news coverage may be required at any moment, it pays to have a staff person on.

Yet another factor is the increased interest in acquaintance with distant lands displayed by the average reader today. It may still be true that we are more concerned with what we are to have for dinner than with an earthquake which has killed thousands on the other side of the globe, but travel books, the radio and other media have made out-of-the-way places more real to us today than before. The work of the foreign correspondent is however, something much wider than the mere reporting of events. You must give your readers at home a complete background service, explaining and interpreting the news, providing eye-witness descriptions and transmitting informative articles periodically. Every country has its own manners and customs, its own outstanding geographical and natural features, all of which will provide rich opportunities for the alert of the media writer on the look-out for the story that is different.

- ▲ Qualities of the Foreign Correspondent. To be with the media writer who wishes to make a success as an ‘Ambassador of the Press’ must

be a first-rate general reporter – you must have the nose for news and a keenly developed sense of news values, you must be a good listener possessing the knack of getting other people to favour you with their confidence, you must be a good mixer-able to be ‘all things to all men’.

You will need too-perhaps more than any other type of reporter, a balanced judgment, for you must constantly be sifting truth from propaganda – that sticky entanglement which besets the path of the seeker after facts in the international field. Particularly difficult to handle is the modern technique of what has been called ‘propaganda by conference’ (Candlin,1990:106) where the journalist must decide how much publicity you will give to speech designed for the ears of a listening world, rather than to further the deliberations of a particular assembly. It is also a job, too, calling for infinite patience and guile, not only to getting stories, but in getting them back to the office. Many tales are told of the extra-ordinary ingenuity displayed by foreign correspondents in overcoming difficulties of censorship and communication in transmitting their stories. Due to the numerous hazards serving in troubled capitals and places of war, demands risk-taking ability from the foreign correspondent. Many of them have been killed, arrested and jailed for doing their duty. And despite all these, the professional journalistic spirits of these correspondents have not been broken.

- ▲ Training: The beginner to journalism who in spite of what has been said, is still determined to make accreditation as a foreign correspondent his/her aim, must begin by tackling the problem of language. You should know at least two, apart from your own which those two are will depend, of course, on the part of the world where he is particularly anxious to serve. For European

correspondents, French, German, Russia are popular languages to master. It must be remembered that to know a language, in the sense that a foreign correspondent must know, it means a great deal more than a nodding acquaintance with a grammar and the ability to pick one's way through a selected text or two. It means to be able to write the language fluently to be able to take down speeches in shorthand, to follow conversations through the distorting medium of the telephone, and the like.

The would-be foreign representative must study world geography and be steeped in modern history and current affairs, beside making a special study of the history, manners, customs, political system etc of those countries where you hope to work or working. If you are to write authoritatively on foreign affairs you must yourself be something of an authority. But first and foremost, you must remain a reporter, seeking and reporting news. You have had, therefore, a thorough all-round training as a media writer. For news is unpredictable. A big story may break anywhere at any time. It will often happen to the foreign correspondent that you are the only representative of your medium of the entire media world.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:3**

Why do many media organizations maintain their own reporters abroad in addition to taking wire services?

#### **3.4 Gallery / lobby correspondents**

In Britain, the press Gallery is a long narrow 'box' in which verbatim writers may take notes of what is being said by members on the floor of the House below. But in its wider sense it is something much more than this. It is a complex but extraordinarily well-organized system by which the public in every part of the

whole world is kept informed almost hour by hour of what is going on at Westminster or National Assembly in case of Nigeria. There are two groups of journalist working in the Gallery – representatives of the press Association and representatives of individual daily and evening newspaper at home and overseas.

The Press Association people work on a Rota system, each doing a ‘take’ of fifteen minutes in the early part of each day’s sitting, but later in the evening, when the edition times for the various papers taking their service approach, the length of each ‘take’ is reduced first to ten minutes and later to five. As each man/woman completes his/her term of duty in the ‘box’, your note is read back over the private wire to the press association office, and sent out to subscribers as part of the general news service.

The representative in the Gallery of the individual newspaper works in very much the same way, except that they tend to concentrate more on those matters of parliamentary business which are likely to be of special interest to their paper’s readers. You keep a strict eye on the clock, for you have to bear in mind that your copy must reach the office with sufficient time for it to be ‘made up’ to catch the edition accredited newspaper or press association representatives have a Gallery ticket and the press are admitted to the House each day immediately after the speaker’s chaplain has read prayers. Each person is provided with a copy of the order paper containing details of the day’s business. Printed copies of answers to questions are also ‘sent up’ to the press about half an hour after question time. There are no written rules for the guidance of Gallery representatives, but the newcomer learns that there are some things he/she must not do. You must move to and from your place quietly, remembering always that has a share to contribute to the good order and dignity of the House.

The term lobby correspondent is giving place today to the name 'political correspondent'. The lobby person is the aristocrat among political journalists. He/she has no ticket to the house, but his name is submitted by his/her medium to the sergeant-at Arms for approval. Your primary duty as a political correspondent is to comment and interpret events in parliament to the mass of newspaper or media consumers outside. It is your business to know the views and intentions of government and opposition leaders, to forecast events, to explain and pass judgment on proposed legislation, and to keep the public informed generally on the political issues of the day. You are like a sounding board of public opinion to whom politician may turn when they wish to gauge the probable reception of some proposed measure. 'Try it on the lobby' is a common saying, and many an embryo Bill has been severely modified or dropped altogether as a result of this solitary process. The large number of media writers in the lobby now form a very influential body working in close touch with the leading political figures on both sides of the divided. It is through the lobby that news of great national events is release to the general public. For example, news of the surrender of Germany in 1945 was released to the general public through the lobby Britain. Lobby correspondents are often possession of State secrets known to very few, and it is a matter of pride to them that this confidence is never abused. Naturally, such great privileges carry with them great responsibilities. Every lobby correspondent is keenly aware not only of the importance of the part he/she plays in the national and international life, but also of the high standards of sound judgment, fair – mindedness, and personal integrity for which it calls. As with Gallery, there are no written rules of conduct for the lobby correspondent, but again there are unwritten rules which you must obey. For example, you must not approach a member in conversation with another member, nor must you break into a conversation between a member and a fellow correspondent. You must be discrete and unobtrusive in behaviour and dress. And, above all, you must be

tactful – quick to appreciate where you may press your enquires and where it would be wiser to remain silent.

#### **Self assessment exercise 3:4**

The lobby correspondent is regarded as a person of considerable importance. Why is this?

#### 3.5 Pros and Cons

To sum up the advantages and disadvantages of the area correspondent 's job compared with that of the general reporter working from a central media office, there is, on the credit side, a great independence, a freedom from directional supervision, the opportunity for using personal working day as one wishes, there is especially in the case of the staff correspondent of a national paper a somewhat higher status and often salary also. On the other hand, your hours are less regular since you must be on call day and night; you bear a great measure of responsibility; you must have sufficient strength of character to resist the temptation to idleness and to overcome the sense of frustration and disappointment which comes from the 'spiking' by your paper of so many apparently first-rate stories.

This is a job for the journalist of some years standing. Although some provincial or regional papers are in the habit of giving an area to a promising junior, for the sake of experience, it is much better for the beginner to work in an office where the paper is usually being printed downstream or at the adjacent office, so that you may gain your experience to close contact with the realities of newspaper or media productions.

#### **Self assessment exercise 3:5**

What are the advantages and disadvantages of working away from the central office?

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION

The life and work of a correspondent have a strong appeal for most young men and women in media writing and journalism. And there are more opportunities and scope today than ever in this branch of the journalism profession for the young man or woman with the right training and qualification. This is emphasized because a correspondent is a general reporter plus. Not all reporters and writers work actually in newspaper offices under the direct instructions and control of the news editor at the home office. Throughout the world, there is a network of correspondents, whole-time or part-time, collecting and transmitting news and articles from their own particular area to the central office. The job of a correspondent has been made much easier with the high level of communication technology (IT) that made it easier to gather, process and transmit information around the globe in a jiffy. With the world going global everyday, opportunities exist for a young media writer as a foreign staff or political correspondent.

#### 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt:

- \* Who a correspondent is and how to train and qualify as one.
- \* The types of correspondents in media writing/practice viz. staff, foreign or political correspondent.
- \* The demerits and merits of working as a correspondent.

#### 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

“Ambassadors of the Press”. Discuss the appropriateness of this title as applied to correspondents.

## 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Candlin, Frank (1990). *Teach Yourself Journalism*. London: The English Universities press.

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## **MODULE 2**

### **UNIT 4: PRESENTING THE NEWS**

#### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Learning Presentation
  - 3.2 Some methods of presentation
  - 3.3 The place of Description
  - 3.4 Suspense
  - 3.5 Preparing copy
  - 3.6 Putting the newscast together
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 Reference/Further Reading

#### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

All media writers are much in the position of salesmen offering their wares and services to the prospective customers being liken here as sub or news editors, editors, and ultimately the reading or viewing/listening public. Not only must they have something good to offer but they must present it in an attractive and acceptable form. It is true that an outstanding good story will be used by a ‘sub’ even if he/she has to re-write it from beginning to end, but often the decision as to whether a particular item goes into the paper or the cast depends upon the way in which the reporter has written it. As we said in Part One of this course, both what to say and how it is said are very important in media writing.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

On completion of this unit, you are expected to be conversant with the following:

- i. Learning / knowing presentation
- ii. Methods of presentation
- iii. The place of description
- iv. The Art of suspense
- v. Preparing copy
- vi. Putting the newscast together

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 Learning Presentation

There are many different ways of presenting a story, but the art can only be learned by practice – it is a case of ‘Teach Yourself’ or ‘how-to-do-it’. The beginner should set himself/herself the task of studying actual news stories, particularly those in the type of paper or medium for which you write or hopes to write. Make a collection of writings and classify them for subject matter, for treatment, for method of introduction, for length. Ask yourself why the writer has written up each story in the particular way he/she has, and when you feel sufficiently sure of yourself, see whether you can suggest a better. Every time, in your study of models, you think you have found an original method of treatment, try your own hand at a similar story treated in the same way. Do not become discouraged if at first you find that the easy ‘just right’ style which the experienced journalist seems to adopt so readily for each occasion eludes you. You are apprenticing yourself to a highly skilled, art which cannot be learned in a day and you will require patience, diligence and dogged perseverance if you are to succeed.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:1**

How should the beginner set about learning presentation?

### 3.2 Some methods of presentation

The two commonest methods of presenting a news story are the direct narrative method – straight reporting and the more oblique method in which the story is told from a particular angle or slant to give it additional interest or a more personal appeal. As a general rule, the former method is preferred where the facts have sufficient news value in themselves, the oblique method being reserved for those stories which depend for their interest on the way they are viewed or reported.

Straight news stories – small fires, police court cases without outstanding features, accidents not amounting to ‘disasters’, and the like – are usually reported factually in two or three paragraphs at the most, the first packing is answers to the questions who? When? Where? What? How? The second giving any further details the story is worth and the third working in a personal statement from an eyewitness or someone else directly concerned. Such straight reporting is the bread and butter of the general media writers’ daily job and must be thoroughly mastered. Get the facts – all the facts, get a statement and turn in a story that will require the minimum of “subbing” – without the ability to do these things, you will never make a first class media writer, however brilliant you may be in other directions. It will sometimes happen, however, as we saw in Part One that the man with a keen eye for news values will see a story in what appears to be a common place incident or situation, not in itself worth reporting, the story lines not in the event itself but in some circumstance or people connected with it. Thus a police court conviction for some petty crime may be worthless to the reporter on its own merit but may form the basis of a usable story if the convicted man has an outstanding war record or attributed his downfall to some unusual cause, or if the Judge or Magistrate made some pronouncement of startling or general interest. Street accidents, public meetings, local government activities visits of celebrities or heads of governments, public entertainments and exhibitions, and the thousand and one incidents of everyday life in a town or city can provide material for ‘slant’ reporting of this

kind. The story will be written from the angle which gives it interest and will begin with the particular incident, person or aspect on which the writer wishes to concentrate the readers' attention. The following news stores illustrate the two methods, the first straight, the second angle reporting.

Kicker- Meter Adjustment

Rider - Petrol Station operator fired

(For selling petrol above pump price and illegal adjustment of his meter, a petrol dealer, of Mission Road Benin City, was fined N1m by Stipendiary Magistrate Mr. Kolawole today. For the prosecution, it was stated that a petroleum monitoring team inspected the station meter and discovered that the operator adjusted the meter to under sell to unsuspecting motorists. He said that he only engaged a meter engineer to rectify a fault in the meter without knowing the engineer tempered with the reading system". I have gained nothing financially. All I got is a bad reputation' he said. 'I can see your difficulties, but the public must be protected' said the magistrate).

-30-

Here the writer and the sub-editor have decided that the incident itself, and the matter of public interest involved, made it worth including, but there is nothing in the story of any personal or human appeal. It receives, therefore, a plain, factual treatment.

#### KNOCK-OUT HALTS HER WEDDING

(Thirty-two-year old Chemist man was in intensive ward at UBTH last night instead of on his honeymoon; wondering what happened after his stag-party. Instead of a wife he had a suspected fracture of the skull and a blank memory about the night before. Police said; "we suspected he was attacked by somebody".

His childhood sweetheart, Twenty-four year old Eki of Uselu shell, put on her rust-shaded going-away costume to visit him in hospital. She had to explain to five disappointed bridesmaids in pale blue gowns and complete with victorious posies that the wedding was off. The same thing was said to sixty guests who had assembled at St. Paul's Church, Airport road. Doctors allowed Eki to sit for a few moments with her bridegroom-to-have-been.

'But he could not tell her what happened between leaving his stag-party and being found unconscious near his home at Ugbowo.

Eki removed one worry from her sweetheart's mind – she is still ready to marry him as soon as he is better. "I haven't asked him to refrain from having a bachelor's party next time but I don't think he will have one" she said. Police are still enquiring into the attack) -  
30-

This is an example of angle reporting. To have reported the story as a mere factual record of events would have been to miss its salient feature – the unusual human interest

### **Self assessment exercise 3:2**

Distinguish carefully between 'Straight' and 'Angle' reporting. Make a list of five stories that might lead themselves to angle reporting.

### 3.3 The place of Description

The first lesson the young man or woman who comes into journalism with a reputation from school for being a 'good at English' has to learn is the difference between a newspaper report and a school essay. Those flowers of literary elegance so carefully fostered by his or her teachers (with one eye on academic examinations) have very largely to be abandoned for the time being in favour of something a little more utilitarian. If less ornamented. This is not to say that in

newspaper or media writing; there is no place for a command of good and effective English. The place is there, but it must never be an end in itself not must it get in the way of the reporter's chief job, which is to present the news. The powerful word and the vivid, telling phrase can lift the dull, factual report out of the rut and give it life and individuality. The reader is not distracted by the excellence of the style from the matter in hand but is enabled to grasp that matter more readily and go appropriate more clearly what actually happened. In reporting some great public event, the journalist will find ample scope for his/her sense of language and style in his/her sketches of the background, the people and the scene before him/her. As with so much in media work, it is a matter of judgment, of casting about for the most economical and effective way of doing the job in hand at the moment, it is a suiting of the style to the needs of the occasion.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:3**

What is the place of descriptive writing in modern media writing.

#### 3.4 Suspense

While the usual method in news story writing is to give the salient facts in the first paragraph, followed by such details as the sub-editor is prepared or has space or time, to include, it is sometimes justifiable, for the sake of securing an element of surprise, to reverse the order. This is particularly so with the news sketch which is often dealt with as a good raconteur brings out his best story – keeping the point or sting for the tail. The general effect is to arouse the interest of the reader by means of suspense. But this method may only be adopted when the story depends for its interest on the surprising ending rather than on the straight news value of the incidents recorded. The following is an example of the use of this device:

Sixty-eight year old Bimbo Kayode returned to his home at Plymoth Street, off 'Goodwill' Benin City last night knowing there was no supper for him

and feeling a little guilty about it. It should have included chipped plantain. But the plantain wife Janet had bought had been ‘stolen’ from the kitchen table earlier in the day by husband Kayode himself. When his wife went to prepare his supper, they had gone. Admitting the theft and placating Janet last night, Kayode explained the plantain had....). The broadcast media appear to make better use of suspense in her presentation. In creative media writing mainly, suspense is one of the arts of the trade. In regular radio and television news presentations, suspense is used when putting the newscast together to ensure that listeners and viewers do not leave until the end of the presentation. Usually they will mention the most ear-scratching item in the highlight and delay them until at the end of the newscast. Suspense writing in media has close line with the presentation method we mentioned in part one of this course. Pyramid style of presentation.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:4**

List and discuss the demerits and merits of suspense in media writing and presentation.

#### 3.5 Preparing copy

Materials handed in by the writer are known as ‘copy’. It will be either written on sheets torn from a pad of copy paper or typed. Presently most correspondents hand in their copy on-line (e-copy). Written copy should be easily legible and wide margins should be left blank at the top and on the left hand side. The name of the writer should appear in the top right-hand corner of the first page and each subsequent sheet should carry a “catchline” on the top, followed by a page number. Thus, if the report deals with an airplane disaster the catchline might appear as “Air Crash – 1” “Air crash – 2” and so on. Each page should end with a completed sentence, so that the report can be divided conveniently into ‘takes’ for the compositors.

Copy should be broken up into paragraphs and each paragraph should be clearly marked with the paragraph sign ‘L’. The end of the report should be indicated by the word END or by the sign – 30 – or #. Any corrections or alteration should be made in the conventional manner used by proof readers. Typed copy should be treated in the same way double spacing being used to leave room for ‘subbing’. Copy should be typed whenever this is practicable, on account of its easier legibility. Care and neatness in the preparation of copy are not necessarily the distinguishing marks of a good media writer, but these qualities are most helpful to colleagues both on the “subs” table and in the composing room. Since speed in writing or typing copy is often of great importance, it is customary to use observations whenever possible to enable you beat the deadline. For instance, the deadline for the tomorrow edition of a newspaper is 1pm of today. The following abbreviations are in common use and are generally recognized in media writing.

Abt.	About	gt	great
Aftn	afternoon	impt	important
Agn	again	mbr	member
Amg	among	opn	opinion
Amt	amount	opp	opportunity
Arrd	arrived	objh	objective
Bec	because	pitf	plaintiff
Bef	before	qn	question
Bn	been	qrs	quarters
Brot	brought	spkr	speaker
b/w	between	th	that
cte	committee	vy	very
dfdt	defendant	wh	which
fr	from	yesty	yesterday
govt	government	ur	your

The beginner will be in a better position to appreciate the importance of care in the presentation of copy if he/she makes himself or herself familiar from the start with what happens to his copy after it has left his hand.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:5**

Write a note on the correct way to set out written or typed copy for the press.

#### 3.6 Putting the newscast together

One of the grand, old pioneers of radio news, the late Paul White used to tell journalism students that putting together a newscast involves the little Red School House formula of ‘reading’ ‘riting’ and ‘rithmetic’, Wimer, (1970:85) Here is how the formula applies to the three basic steps of putting news together into a smooth flowing continuity through and details.

- \* **Reading:** Read all the news copy available, local and wire and place different stories in different baskets or piles according to your own classification. You may want to use such categories as local, national and international or subject based like politics, Economics, Religion, Gender, etc; Just stack the stories by classifications which will help you evaluate the news and decide what to put on the air.

- \* **‘Rithmetic’:** You know how much copy you need to fill the airtime. After deciding what stories you are going to use, assign number of typed lines to each item so that the total of your cast will exactly fill the available time. Include opening and closings, commercials and station identification.

- \* **‘Retin’:** Write and edit the news to the number of lines assigned each item. Arrange the items in the order they will be put in the air. Classify if possible write transitions or coupling pins between item where appropriate. Then edit your total cast down to the exact number of lines required to fill the airtime.

This is a simplified version of what's involved in putting a newscast together. With this mechanical formula, of course, go such imaginable as news judgment, background knowledge, local situation and station policy. But if you follow this basic procedure you will avoid, getting tangled in yards and yards of copy and making hasty last-minute judgments. Here is an example of how one can apply these basic steps to putting together a 10 minute news cast which went on air.

Editing a 10 minute Newscast: Going by NTA and accepted practice standard it is a policy to provide announcers and newscasters with an average of 16 typed lines of copy for each minute on the air or an average of 150 words. You should also know that opening and closing the news programme require 5 lines. So here is the beginning of your 'rthmetic'

10 minutes at 16 lines each minute	-	160 lines
Less opening and closing	-	5 lines
Total for news	-	155 lines

With that total of 155 lines in mind, you read all the available news copy. You piled it according to categories. Then you select items for the newscast:

1 <sup>st</sup> Nig Sat I Launch	-	National
April General Election	-	National
ASUU strike	-	National
9/11 Anniversary	-	International
Petroleum Subsidy	-	National
Gani's burial	-	National
Beautification of Edo State	-	Local
Global Corn League	-	National
FIFA World Cup – S.A 2010	-	International
Weather Report	-	National/International

Timing the Item: From the 155 lines available for news you budget the time to the eleven items. Aiming at the 155 total and evaluating the news on the basis of your judgment and experience, you assign to each of the 11 items the following number of lines:

1 <sup>st</sup> Nig Sat I Launch	-	National – 16 lines
April general Election	-	National – 15 lines
ASUU strike	-	National – 15 lines
9/11 Anniversary	-	International – 10 lines
Petroleum Subsidy	-	National – 15 lines
Gani’s burial	-	National – 10 lines
Beautification of Edo State	-	Local – 13 lines
New Face of Imo State	-	Local – 15 lines
Global Corn League	-	National – 15 lines
FIFA World Cup – S.A 2010	-	International – 16 lines
Weather Report	-	National/International – 10 lines

You missed your 155 lines objective by 4 lines but you can decide to go ahead and write the news according to the schedule, insert transitions, and then edit the whole cast.

Arranging the Stories: Next you tackle the problem of arranging of the stories. We decided the Sat I launch story was the lead, the top story and the latest breaking story of the day. You can now arrange the item, with the national coming first, followed by local item, then international sports and finally weather report.

The next step was for you to read through your cast to decide where transitions could be appropriately used to help move the listener from one story to another. You can write in 4 lines of transition. With the necessary phone calls made and

items ready, you are now ready for the air. During the casting, any important breaking can be ad-ebbed by the newscaster.

It is important we rap up this section a word on sign language. It has become widely used and universal in broadcasting world. It is used when the newscaster is before a life mike and cannot indulge in conversation. By signals, the editors or engineer coaches him/her.

The signs below are some of the popular ones. Although there may be a slight variations depending on locality.

<b>Message</b>	<b>Signal</b>
1. Watch me for cue	point to one of your eyes with an index finger.
2. You are on the air	point an index finger direct at Newscaster
3. Slow down	Draw hand apart slowly as Though stretching something
4. Speed up	point an index finger at the Newscaster and rotate hand clockwise rapidly.
5. Everything OK	Form circle with index finger and thumb, other fingers extended.
6. Two minuets left	hold up 2 fingers
7. Speak louder	move hands up, palms up
8. Speak softer	move hands down, palm down
9. Move back from mike	move hand away from face palm out.
10. Move closer to mike	move hand toward face, palm in

11. You are off the air

Draw an index finger across  
throat as though cutting it.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:6**

List and discuss the variables for selecting and classifying news items?

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION

It is true that an outstanding story cannot be ignored by the sub-editors. However, packaging and presentation play an important role in popularizing the story before the media public. It is no longer enough to have something to write but equally important if not more, is how to write it. As we saw in the examples contained in this unit, the slant you give a story will determine its acceptance. The slant can be a function of certain variables like organizational policy or house style, environment, the law and other similar variables. Whatever yardstick used, the aim of presentation is to ensure maximum acceptance and comprehensibility.

#### 5.0 SUMMARY

Media writing and presentation can be fun if the writer knows what to do and how to do it. In this unit, we have tried to ensure these by exposing you on how to learn presentation, the various methods of presentation, the place of description in presentation, suspense; preparing copy and how to put a newscast together for the broadcast media and with a word on sign and language in Radio/TV.

#### 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT (TMA)

Carefully distinguish between “Straight and angle reporting with two examples each.

#### 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Candlin, Frank (1990). *Teach Yourself Journalism*.

Hyde, S.W. (1992). *Television and Radio Announcing*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. New York: Prentice Hall.

Wimer, A et al. (1986). *Radio and TV News Editing and Writing*. Ames, Iowa: Brown Company.

## **MODULE 2**

### **UNIT 5: LEADS AND CAPTIONS**

#### **CONTENT**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1
  - 3.2
  - 3.3
  - 3.4
  - 3.5
  - 3.6
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 Reference/Further Reading

#### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Any media writer wondering on how to get the most attention from mass media audiences must pay special and concentrated attention to leads and captions. They act as the mirror or benchmark with which the media public measure which story to attend to, how to attend to it, and when to attend to it. There is substantial research that suggests they provide the information from which audiences draw their conclusion about the story itself.

#### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, the student is expected to:

- \* Define leads and captions

- \* Explain leads as story pattern
- \* Identify types of print news leads
- \* Identify the guidelines for print news leads – print and broadcast
- \* Explain Broadcast leads and types
- \* Understand principles of art with or without story.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Definition of lead and caption.

Many students and professional writers consider leads the most difficult part of a story to write. Actually that is mostly apprehension resulting from an acute awareness of the significance of the lead in the story. This apprehension is however natural because the beginning or commencement of most ventures in life is the most difficult. In his book “Interpretative Reporting”, Curtis MacDougal says that the first and most important step in media writing is the selection of the lead. That requires the exercise of editorial judgment to determine what angle or phase of the total information available is to receive emphasis. The entire tone of a news story is determined by the feature which is emphasized in the lead, often in the first sentence or even the first clause or phrase of the first sentence. According to Clyde Bedell in his book “How to write, the lead must incite the as fast as possible at the start of the copy. And don’t allow them to get away, say something intriguing or arresting to capture their thought and take it aloft. Another scholar referred to the lead as the ‘point of contact’ and advised that we start with something in the reader’s stream of thought. All these assertions point to three basic facts concerning the lead:

The lead is the first sentence or paragraph of the news story – in print and broadcast. Don’t confuse broadcast story leads with leads in the sentence or phrase that provides a transition from one news item to the next. Lead can also refer to the first story in a newscast or the main story in a newspaper section or in

a magazine. Reporters and media writers will sometimes say they have a lead on an important story. They don't mean that they have written the first paragraph – they have a tip about a potential story.

Captions, the copy that goes with an illustration – photograph, graphics, Artworks, etc, are also called cut-lines. More than ever before, the reading public are paying more attention to captions as they get busier and busier with other things calling for their attention at the same time. They won't get to anything else in your story if you don't capture their attention with the lead. Captions for pictures that go with stories give you another chance to draw readers that no accompanying story. These are used not only to liven up the look of a printed page but to pull the reader into the page so that other items have a better chance of being read.

- \* It must attract attention
- \* It must hold the attention and induce further reading or listening.
- \* It must set the tone and/or angle of the piece of writing.

You as the writer, have to make those determinations, based on the audience – what they already know about the information, the importance of the information to them, the timeliness of the information in terms of delivery to them, the outcome or the significance of the information to them. You know this instinctively, but as a writer you have to practice it consciously.

Captions are written words placed over or under a photograph or art work to identify it. They can also be called outline.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:1**

Identify and discuss how a lead perform the three important function discussed here.

### 3.2 Leads as Story Patterns

The lead is more than a hook to capture the attention of your audiences, though, and it's more than their news digest; it is your story theme and format. The lead is supposed to answer the major questions of a story, Who, What, When, Where, Why and How. The order in which you introduce those elements indicates their significance. That ordering of significance provide you with a pattern for the development of the story; the inverted pyramid style. While the structure is not followed slavishly, and shouldn't be, it exists because it is useful. It summaries for the audience the most important elements in the story. It also makes it easy for copy editors cutting stories hurriedly to fit a layout. They expect to be able to cut from the bottom up and still preserve the meet of the story. Some texts and professionals still say the lead of a write up should give all the important elements (5ws & H) in the first sentence. The approach to news-writing was the brain child of the telegraphic era, when correspondents sent their dispatches back to their newspapers by telegraph. The telegraph lines were frequently cut during transmission as we experience network problem in our mobile phones today. So, reporters developed the technique of getting all the crucial facts across as quickly as possible. Details came later, if the lines were still open. News transmission lines are very stable today. Trying to include all of the significance facts in the lead usually results in a long, hard-to-read sentence. It's better to write a shorter sentence that identifies the single most important points of the story, leaving the less critical details for later. The lead, then, can refer to the first paragraph, which might contain only one sentence but could have two or three. In feature stories, the lead may be several paragraphs long. For straight new stories, it is convenient to think of the lead as just the first sentence and start a new paragraph after that. Although experience and structure of a write-up can make writers to adopt any suitable format. Determining which of the six critical elements to use in the lead

is a challenge. For instance, when a local man kills a monster terrorizing the community, the ‘what’ comes first, when prominent people are involved, the ‘who’ comes first and when man landed and walked on the moon, the ‘where’ comes first. ‘How’ leads are sometimes a challenge to writers since that aspect of a story is generally more complex. A story’s ‘why’ is also complex and seldom the most important element, but it can be. Fortunately, the most important elements of a story is often the most interesting one. The writer must just make sure that the most important elements are presented in an interesting way. Let us compare the two lead structures below.

1. Traditional inverted pyramid

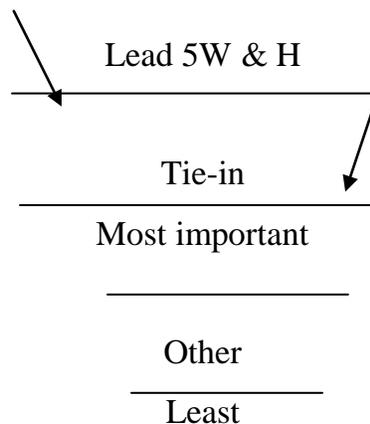
LEAD: Who, What, When, Where, Why, How 16-25 words.

TIE-IN: One sentence connecting one element of the lead to the body.

BODY: Development of most important elements of WWWWWH.

Further development of most important element other elements.

The least important facts of the story – nothing new is introduced.



2. Modified Pyramid

LEAD: Major theme, could be significance of event, rather than fact.

May be two sentences

May not include all 5Ws & H

TIE-IN The leftovers of the 5W & H not mentioned in lead.

- 1<sup>st</sup> Graph: Explication of Lead – incident, quote, meaning or background of event – how something came to be.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Graphs: Additional information about most important fact of lead. Something to give credibility or significance to lead information.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Graphs: Secondary theme or supporting documentation for lead.
- 4<sup>th</sup> Graphs: Any other details in order of significance to lead.

### LEAD

Documentation or Explication = Background or History

Elaboration of lead

Secondary Theme

Or

Supporting facts, Quotes

Least significant

Details

The first one gave the most important point of the story, but it doesn't sound very interesting, hence the modification in the second one.

Readers want to know what is special about a story, what makes it worth reading. The writer should ask. How is this event different from other events like it? What set it apart? Is it the first time something like this has happened? Was more money spent on this than on any other such projects? Whatever is unique, out of the ordinary even bizarre should be in the lead. Public relations writers particularly strive for this in their copy because they know the lead must sell the story to the editor.

The Lead must not mislead. In their zeal to attract attention, some writers go overboard. You should emphasize what's interesting, but not at the expense of accuracy.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:2**

Carefully analysis the traditional pyramid and the modified one.

### 3.3 Types of Print news Lead

The following types of Leads are some of the most common found in the print media.

- \* Summary – generally used for straight news stories. e.g. “five students and two faculty members of NOUN were honoured Sunday night at this year’s Education Ministers awards night in Abuja.”
- \* Contrast – Provides insight and sets the tone for the story. e.g. When Bob joined the NOUN Faculty, little did he know he will soon become the Head of Department in his former university of Benin.
- \* Question – a way to get readers involved. Will the students vote affect council election? Not if students are not registered to cast their ballots.
- \* Direct address uses personal pronoun, “YOU” to involve reader immediately.  
“You wouldn’t expect to be held up by a snake-totting robber, would you?” That’s exactly what happened to a convenience store clerk who was confronted by two teen-agers carrying a three foot-long snake.

- \* Background: Sets the scene for the action to be told “Canteen lines are short this week as fasting students contribute their meal money to the international Hunger Week Fund”.
- \* Picture or description: A way to stimulate reader’s interest in the storyline. “Sitting in the dom window, the tiny calico cat looked almost like a stiffed toy.
- \* Quotation: A common feature lead, and often a speech story lead. “My plane is taking off without me” shouted a student pilot to his instructors as he dashed down the runway.
- \* Freak – whimsical feature leads that might begin with the lyrics of a song, a poem or something unusual.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:3**

With concrete examples discuss at least five types of lead.

#### 3.4 Guidelines for print/broadcast news leads

Certain principles can help guide writers in framing their leads properly.

- ▲ Be brief: The lead should be direct and to the point. You can give the details in subsequent paragraphs. The length of a Lead has been a controversial question. One may be tempted to say the shorter the better but not all short leads are readable and not all long leads are bad. Leads on Associated Press stories average about 25 words. Wire services or e-services writer long or leads because some subscribers may want to use only the lead on first tow paragraphs of a story. Use as many words as you need to convey the main point and get the reader’s attention. Just make sure each of those words is really needed.
- ▲ Identify the news. The lead must give the most newsworthy of the specific points, it must answer the reader’s question, what is the

news in this story? The writer has to be specific in handling question and quotation lead. Although they can attract attention, they can also be pointless. The lead should give answers so don't pose a question unless it is the major problem or quandary of the story. And the lead should give answers to the question clearly, concisely and directly as well as explain why it is at the core of the story. Rarely does anyone speak well enough to provide a suitable quotation that is precisely the key elements of a story. Unless the quote captures the gist of the story, don't use it just to be different. E.g. What State is the most likely venue for the 2009 Peoples Democratic Party's (PDP) convention?

From all indications it will be Cross River State. The first sentence is a waste of space. Come right out with a positive statement. All sings point to Cross River State as the likely venue for the 2009 PDP convention.

- ▲ Give proper attribution. The desire for brevity sometimes causes writers to drop an attribution from a lead. Thus a story occasionally begins something like this.

- The United States must immediately stop sending foreign aid to nations in Africa, South America, Europe and Far East.

That is the opinion of Joe Baldin, Vice President of Thells. Without attribution, the sentence reads as though the information is factual. Whenever the lead is a matter of opinion, attribution is essential. Naming the information source is often necessary so that readers can judge how much credence to give it. For instance, if a speaker declares that coffee drinking does not present a danger to pregnant women, attribution in the lead is essential – it makes a big difference whether the speaker is a coffee industry executive or the State Director of Public Health.

- ▲ Be timely. Deciding what the news is in a story is a matter of judgment involving a consideration of all the characteristics of news discussed in part one. One of the most important characteristics of media writing is the time element, and it is more acute in broadcasting than print. This also is the element that news editors say is most ignored by public relations writers trying to get their news releases placed. Because the time element is so crucial, it is frequently included in the lead – especially if the time is today. The AP stylebook says to use “today, this morning, this afternoon, tonight”, etc is appropriate in stories for afternoon papers in other cases use the day of the week. “Yesterday” is considered taboo by many editors especially in the lead. It calls attention to the staleness of the news. According to AP, it should be used only indirect quotation or in phrases where it refers to the general part. E.g. yesterday when men were men. Sometimes you will have to write about an event that occurred several days ago. (A particular problem on weekly and semiweekly papers). In this case, the lead must rely on some interesting angle. Another approach to the second-day lead is to emphasize some details not reported in earlier account. When reports of the atomic bomb explosion at Hiroshima appeared in a Los Angeles newspaper two days after the event, the lead was built on a detail not available in the first account. E.g.
- ▲ Getting started. Beginning writers who have difficulty ordering the items for a lead might benefit from making a physical list of the who, what, when, where, why and how and assigning priorities to them. Then start to structure a lead from the principal elements.

WHO: National Chairman ASUU

WHAT: Nation-wide strike

WHEN: Goes into effect immediately

WHERE: All Nigerian universities campus

WHY: Government failure to sign agreement

HOW: National Executive Council Meeting (NEC)

### **Self assessment exercise 3:4**

Pick a story from the National dailies and analysis the lead in the priorities the elements occurred.

### 3.5 Broadcast Leads and types

After working for years on the newspaper wire of UPI, Charles Collingwood was hired by CBS to write for CBS radio. After his study of the environmental factor, he said that radio formula is to write short, vivid declarative sentences, using dependent clauses only to vary the pace or for ornamentation. The lead sentence is as important in a broadcast news story as it is in a print story. Its primary purpose is to catch the listener's attention. A good broadcast doesn't contain all of the facts of the Ws & H, it may contain only one or two at most. Still that doesn't mean the broadcast lead doesn't convey information. Many broadcast leads are as informative as they are catchy. Catchy doesn't mean that broadcast style is headline style, except in the headline segments of newscasts. Some authorities insist on never using the past tense in a broadcast news lead. The philosophy behind this rule is that broadcast news is immediate, or can be. Almost all broadcast news can be delivered to an audience at about the same time the event is happening. And these authorities maintain that any story can be updated to the present in the lead. If parliament passed a bill yesterday raising taxes, the broadcast lead might be "your taxes will soon be going up". The present perfect tense is a good one for broadcast news-writers to use in leads, for it implies some immediacy, even though the action occurred in the past. Thus, you would write "has been" instead of "was" "have been" instead of "were" and so on. If someone asks you "where have you been? You could answer "Oh I was in Abuja last

month”. But if you reply, “Oh I have been to Abuja” it sounds like you just got back this morning. The best rule for writing broadcast lead that convey a sense of immediacy is – Get a current angle. If a fire destroyed an important market last night, call the fire department and find out what is happening today – right now. Is the cause of the fire known? Are the fire fighters still at the scene? Is arson suspected? Will the owners rebuild/ if you do that, you have the basis for an updated story and a new lead. Broadcasters update leads constantly during the day – at least on the hour, so the story sounds fresh. The trouble with that practical is that the genuine emphasis of the story can become distorted unintentionally. You have to rewrite while remaining faithful to the original story if you have no new information to add.

Here are a few general categories of lead used at all TV and radio stations. A particular type of story might dictate which type is to be used, but often it is at the writer’s discretion.

- Traditional leads. Traditional leads are also called hard-news lead or main point lead. An example. Comrade Oshiomole announced this morning he will not seek a second term of office.

A lead like this is certainly hard news, and it is certainly the main point of the story to follow, which will probably tell a little about why he made this decision, what he plans to do next, when he will begin to do it and so on.

- Angle Leads: Often broadcast news-writers look for an unusual angle to catch the listener’s attention. There are several ways to do this.

Try leading with a question.

Do you own a 2009 Kia motor car? If you do, then it may be recalled.

There is a good chance in the audience own such a car and will listen up.

But don’t get cute or overdo it. Don’t write a lead like.

Do you have AIDS? If you have, here is some medical news for you. That is going too far, be sure to say within the bounds of taste.

- Umbrella Lead. Umbrella, or comprehensive lead occur in some complex stories. They are also used to tie together two or more stories of the same type. Here is an example. There was some good news and some bad news on the stock exchange today.

The story went on to say that while the all shares index increased slightly in the past month, the inflation rate was up.

- Throw away Leads. This type seems to be a favourite of many broadcast news-writers. It often doesn't give much information at all, but its effective in getting attention. "Welfare recipients got some good news today" is a throw away lead.

The best way to begin is to imagine that you are trying to tell the story to a friend who is hurrying to catch a bus that's ready to pull away. Say the words aloud to see whether they sound right. Write them. Be sure you have used personal pronouns and contractions. See whether you can say the same thing in half the words. Start getting rid of all clauses. If it is still too long, start looking at phrases you can delete. Now read it aloud. Try to imagine you are hearing it from the first time. Would you know what it meant, or is something essential missing? To practice, tape your copy and listen to it an hour or so after you have written it. How does it sound coming to you on the tape recorder? If your copy passes these tests, let someone else read it. If you get a puzzled look, start over. You don't have a lead yet.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:5**

Contrast broadcast lead with print lead.

## 3.6 Captions

Some photojournalists are under the misconception that they don't have to deal with the written word. But the photographer must take down the basic Who, What, Where and When about the photos, because he or she may be the only representative of the news organization on the scene. For a story, a photographer may work with the reporter, but he or she cannot depend on the reporter's getting the caption information even then. The photojournalist, still camera or TV, has to think in two dimensions – words and pictures.

For wild arts or arts without stories, the caption writer has a special responsibility to tell the reader enough. If it is a seasonal picture, such as children enjoying a sprinkler on the first official day of summer, explaining the photo sometimes seems to detract from it. But the children and the location should be identified, and the readers may need to be reminded that it is the first official day of summer, which is why the picture is there.

Sometimes a picture will be on a page alone but isn't really wild art. The story it accompanies is somewhere else in the newspaper. This is quite common with special events, like the opening ceremony of the World Cup or inauguration of the President. Most paper will feature the picture in the front page with the story following somewhere. The questions to ask about writing any caption are: How much space is there? How much explanation does the art need? What are all the facts – who, what, when, where, why and how? Getting good facts and photos means you can pull facts from a story, write them into a caption and let the picture and caption tell the portion, thus the story can be shorter. Or you can use the caption and picture to emphasize some element in the story, which will also carry the same information, written in a different way. Still another option is to use the photo and its caption as a sidebar, something that relates to the story but functions better as its own unit, rather than integrated into the story.

The important point to remember in writing captions is to be sure the tone of the copy is appropriate for the picture. As with leads, resist being gimmicky or cute. Public relations people often are the suppliers of information for captions. They often furnish photographs suitable for wild arts as well. The photo must be of especially high quality, because the photo editor will approve them. Be sure the suggested caption is attached with rubber cement not tape or clips, that the photo itself has identification on the back in the border of the print.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:6**

Find captions for both wild art and art that goes with a story. How are they different?

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Leads are essential part of media writing. Both in print and broadcast it is an important aspect of any write up. Traditionally, the leads are expected to address the fundamental questions in media writings. It will be unthinkable to package a piece for the mass media without diligently taking care of the lead. The importance of the lead in media is underscored by the nature of media consumers. They are usually distracted by one thing or another while exposing themselves to the media - print and broadcast. It is therefore necessary that the lead must pull them from what is occupying. The lead must be attractive enough to do this. And captions are now a very important aspect of media writing because it is now impossible to publish or broadcast without pictures and art works. These picture or arts can come in different form. However, their ability to communicate all depends on the captions which must be written by the media writer.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

When writing leads for print and broadcast, keep it catchy and current, brief and specific. Be sure to use attribution and watch questions and quote leads to be sure you get the gist of the story and always identify the stories.

When writing captions, tell the reader why the art is there and what it means. Keep the tone of the caption appropriate to the art. When art appears with a story, use the caption to add information or to emphasize, not merely to repeat.

#### 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT (TMA)

Find examples of the different types of leads from a local newspaper. Identify good and bad leads. What makes the good ones work? Can you make the bad ones better.

#### 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Edwards, B and J.M. Patterson (2005). *Writing News for Broadcast*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. New York: St. Martins.

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## **MODULE 3**

### **UNIT 1: COMEDY WRITING**

#### **CONTENT**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Contents
  - 3.1 Introduction/Definition of Basic Concepts
  - 3.2 The art of being funny
  - 3.3 Anatomy of a Joke
  - 3.4 Comedy Style
  - 3.5 The Dos and Don'ts
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Mark Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

#### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Comedy has emerged as one of the major menus of contemporary media. There is hardly any broadcasting outfit that does not offer its viewers and listeners one form of comedy or the other. Furthermore, comedy has become a staple for social and entertainment engagement. It has therefore become necessary for media writers to be exposed to these new art in this unit.

#### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

On completion of this Unit, you are expected to understand the following:

- i. Basic definition of concept
- ii. The art of being funny
- iii. The anatomy of a joke
- iv. Comedy Style

v. The Dos and Don'ts of comedy writing

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENTS

#### 3.1 Introduction/Definition of Basic Concept

Comedy and jokes will be used interchangeably in this piece for the purpose of convenience. Comedy has become an important aspect of our broadcast media writing. In Nigeria, comedy and comedians have emerged forcefully into the national life of the nation that comedians are now invited to state banquets and similar State functions. I therefore believe that it will not be out of place to sensitize you on this fact is a growing aspect of writing for the media comedy. Today the largest, most active and usually best paying market for humour, are in the theatrical, motion picture and television. Like in most broadcasting writings and presentations, comedy writing and presentation started in radio as jokes. Writing jokes is an acquired skill. That is to say that good comedy writers are made not born. It is good to be funny as a comedy writing but you need the motivation of lifter to make a career in it. Comedy writing is not an exact science. It's not like learning to fly. Before we disarm the principles of comedy, it is important to give a definition of comedy.

What is comedy? According to *Webster Dictionary*, comedy is an aspect of drama dealing with the lighter side of life, ending happily or treating its subject humorously.

We will discuss the principles of comedy, the raw materials of comedy, the construction of comedy, the varieties of comedy, the use of comedy.

Anybody can write comedy, but unless you have the equipment and the motivation, you probably shouldn't try to do either for a living. Writing, like almost anything else in life, is never as bad as you felt or as good as you deemed.

According to Saks (1985: 7), there are no rules for comedy writing, only techniques. Techniques or rules are simply methods that past practitioners have found efficacious. It is helpful to learn these techniques, but once you have learnt them, you are at liberty to ignore them, change them or best of all, make up your own. The final criterion is telling a story well. Modern man walks a very narrow ridge between boredom and hysteria. It is the comedian's function to help him forget his fear and anxiety. Man is the only one of God's creation who feels guilt and is aware of his own morality; he is also the only one who can laugh, an accomplishment probably given to him so that he can deal with the first two. A humorist according to Saks is one who has a compulsive preference for the shorts odds, and has decided to use humour to protect himself from the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. One who has the unselfish attitude of a child and uses the God-given right to make a spectacle of himself.

The clown hides behind a painted face, the comic in baggy pants, the jester in a fool's cap, but the writer won't come out on the stage at all. He slips the words under the door, listen to them, read through a keyhole and cries silently when they are misquoted.

To write comedy requires a combination of arrogance and humility. The need for arrogance is obvious to believe that you can hold the attention of stranger much less make them laugh shows a self confidence that defies logic. Humility is essential if you are ever going to improve, to realize how easy it is to fail, and more importantly, to accept that people who may wear wring-up shoes, drink soda pop with stick, and answer quizzes in magazines to find out if they're good hearers, will and should be the final undisputed judges on whether you are bringing it off.

One of the important functions of humour is to get people to listen. That is why the after-dinner speaker likes to start with “A funny thing happened every way over here tonight...” And just watch those pot bellies stuffed with fried chicken and pounded yam, perk up. That is why it is used to sell something, instincts or win your vote. Before you can get people to pay attention, or follow instruction, or hear your side of it, or buy something, you have got to get them to listen. So be sure a funny thing happens on your way over... In a proper or humour free quotes a W. fisher as saying “wit a playful judgment”, Humour is defined as a perception of the incongruous. That is - pick a good story, tell it well, and get it out into the market place.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:1**

Discuss the basic strategies of humour writing

#### 3.2 The Art of being funny

Comedy is not a counterpart of drama, it is a subdivision. It is simply the mood and attitude you have decided on to tell your story. And what is that mood? It is the titled look, the unorthodox angle, the unexpected point of view, the outrageous comments, the irrelevant posture, and above all, thinking as well as feeling. If you can put misfortune in the proper perspective, we can use humour to show foolishness of our anxieties, the absurdity of our anger, and we make the unbearable bearable. Horace Walpole once said, “The world is a comedy to those that think, a tragedy to those that feel”.

The attitude and mood of comedy is the decision to disavow the heat and pain of living. We use it because we are too big to any but not mature enough to dismiss it. There is nothing inherently funny about a beautiful day, a good meal, unless it rain or you have no money to pay the bill. That still isn't comedy but you are getting closer. Now you have got the materials of conflict and misfortune to work

with. You have got to get more tragic before you get to funny. Now you step back, look at it from the vantage point of another place, and trim line, other eyes and get it into the only perspective that can make it tolerable in this unmanageable, unpredictable world of ours. That is the attitude that makes for comedy.

There are sinful comedies about death, terminal illness, infidelity, physical handicaps and ugliness because the writer says them that way. To some psychiatrists, humour is hostile, but as a writer, I would rather say that all humour has conflict. Check this out. You will find that anything humourous, if not always hostile, is without fail, based on conflict. Sometimes undisguised, unadorned, unabashed hostility is funny. Humour is not necessarily witty and wit isn't always humourous.

Charlie Chaplin's comedy was almost entirely physical for the obvious reason that it was mostly sight humour. What goes unnoticed, however, is that it was usually violent. The beginning of American humour was steeped in violence, the bladder pounding, the comic took in burlesque, the pratfall, the seltzer bottle, the pie in the face, the 'pow' of the comic strips. Later the talkies come and comedy became more erudite and verbal, but still retained its appetite for violence. In Nigeria comedy started purely as a funny sunny side of life in local language mainly in Yoruba. Later it incorporates Pidgin English with the 'masquerade' and when Chief Zebudaya was highly predominant and with his 'bad English'. A critical analysis of these will show some element of conflict. Later the comedy went scientific as the modern 'big boys' arrived on the scene with the Ali Babas and others.

One of the most potent manifestations of hostility is humiliation. Wits humiliate: Comics allow themselves to be humiliated. Which is why you may admire the wit but you are more at ease with the comic. If you want to be the life of the party,

drop your trousers, spill wine over yourself, tell them how you can't make it with the opposite sex, how terrible your spouse treats you, etc, and they will not only laugh but they will love you for it. Also another of our unattractive traits we like to sweep under the rug called human nature is that we usually enjoy the discomfort of others. Hostility is usually acceptable if it is witty, obscenity is tolerated only if it is witty. Weakness is adored if it is witty. Even ignorance is attractive if it is witty. As a matter of fact, a good rule of thumb is that you can do or say anything if you can get a laugh while you are doing or saying it. Humour is as real as honest, as human as suffering. In Nigeria ethnic idiosyncrasies are usually subject of humour. Other groups that served as the built of comedy included the short, the obese, the impotent, the stupid, the ugly, etc. Ridicule is a powerful weapon when used insensitively it is often cruel. When used against injustice it can bring the malefactor to his knees quicker than physical force. Complete nonsense is always pleasurable, but is usually disdained by adults as immature. It takes a secure adult to laugh at it and courage of heroic proportions to perform it. Anything pretentious or hypocritical is fertile ground for humour. Humour is a great weapon, certainly, but how do you create comedy out of such disagreeable subjects as prejudice, bigotry, persecution, hypocrisy, injustice, etc

First you got their attention. Start by choosing a provocative subject. This is very important to a writer. As important as the farmer picking the right soil for his crop. A provocative subject is one that is compelling, within the realm of your audiences' experiences or pertaining to their fears and dreams. In short, one that will pique their interest. It is also usually one that is familiar and controversial. Army humour is almost always directed towards the ranking superior. Students gibe about teachers. It should be apparent to you as a prospective comedy writer that to find something tragic about an incident, situation or person, you must feel concerned. What is not so apparent is that to find something humorous or comic in an incident, situation or person, you must feel equally concerned. Humour is

used for feelings that are too deep for tears. It can bring to light things that can hurt as well as delight and once they are brought to light, they never seem to hurt as much. Comedy is no more superficial, trivial, or ineffectual than tragedy. Certain things, places, names are funny. Usually because of identification, context, sound or sometimes for reasons lost in the mists of creation. As a writer, you should try to reach as broad an audience as possible.

### **Self assessment exercise 3**

List and discuss the things that can be classified as funny

#### 3.3 Anatomy of a Joke

Jokes are almost always made of, by, and for the oppressed. That funny, perfectly fashioned joke your friend told you last time did not come into existence full blown, like Adam in the Garden of Eden. Instead, it followed Darwin's theory of natural selection. It might have as simply a playful judgment of something incongruous. If it had merit, it was repeated. Each interpretation was slightly different. The embellishments that improved the story were kept in the next interpretation, those that didn't atrophied and dropped off. The result is that carefully honed, economically worded, well-made joke you heard last time. Analyzing to see what makes something funny can be likened to pulling off the petals of a rose to find out what makes it beautiful. But to the writer of comedy such experiments may be of benefit. The ingredients of comedy are not necessarily in the order of importance, simplicity, clarity, relevance, exaggeration, surprise, irrelevance, incongruity, identification, precision, and by all means rhythm. We are aware of the importance of timing in humour, but sometimes unaware that it is only part of the overall use of rhythm. Good prose has a subtle rhythm, especially in dialogue. In writing humour, good prose is not only essential, but perhaps as necessary as it is in all writing for the media. The difference between the rhythm in other form of prose and the rhythm in comedy is

like the difference between the motor in an automobile and a single-engine airplane. They are basically similar, but if the motor fails in your car, you get a lift or walk home, if it fails in your plane, you crash. Achieving rhythm in humour writing according to experts can only be arrived at through ‘feel’ an instinctive facility mastered only through experience. As a creative comedy writer, you learn through experience, but you will get a quicker and more accurate feel by reading your lines aloud. For example “Who was that Lady I saw you with last night?”

“That was nobody. That was my wife.” You can feel the easy, smooth rhythm. Granted, economy and precision are also evident here, but all are used to help make the rhythm. There is no magic formula to attain it. Just put in a pinch of this and that and keep tasting until it is just right, the writer of a comedy line keeps saying it over and over until it has a smooth easy rhythm. Clarity and simplicity are again, desirable in all writing, but necessary in comedy. They are crucial ingredients because in comedy you must have your audiences’ undivided attention. If they puzzle over a word or thought ever so slightly, if they are distracted by an unnecessary word or phrase, you lose their concentration and the temperamental comedy disappears in a huff. Comedy is delicate but when nurtured and handled properly, can have the grace of a rapier and the power of a cannonball. Saks, (1985:32). The best comedy has precision, which. Put simply, is the exact word in its proper place. It is highly desirable and usually on short supply, but it can be learned. It takes patience, an extensive vocabulary, plus the above mentioned characteristics.

Identification is also a valuable tool in comedy. Used by writers in the sense of ‘to identify with’, identification means the listener or reader can relate to your characters. When your audience can identify with the character, then everything that happens to the character happens to them, and you the writer, have that omnipotent influence on the mood of others that all artists dream of. Close to

identification are the qualities of the familiar and recognizable, comfortable and friendly elements that can make laughter so much more readily forthcoming. An experienced comedy writer will often research that specific places and name, buzz words that will get the reactions of recognition. The closer you can get to universal emotions or problem, the better chance you have to win identification. You do a wonderful work as a comedy writer by bringing up problems that relate to her readers. If for instance, a reader has a problem of garbage in his home; his interest sharpens at the mere mention of the problem of carrying out the garbage.

Misfortune, fear, prejudice, pomposity, inadequacy and conceit are the fertile soils out of which we cultivate comedy, identification, exaggeration, incongruity, irrelevance, and surprise, it's most potent fertilizers.

Exaggeration and incongruity are first cousins, and by their very nature lend themselves to humour. We are charmed at the precise of the elephant who falls in love with the sparrow, and intrigued by the man who hasn't spoken to his wife for forty years. Our audience and readers not only allow exaggeration, they welcome it. In comedy writing, there is much less danger in going too far than there is in not going far enough.

Surprise is vital in the storytelling art. If we knew exactly what was coming, we wouldn't have to read, watch or listen. And comedy, from the two-line joke to the feature picture is, as we have pointed out before and will probably point out again, storytelling. Except that in comedy the surprise is sharper and quicker. You must go from what audiences/ readers know to something they didn't expect, and point out a resolution they never thought of. You can assume that unless you tell them something they don't expect, you can never get the spontaneous laugh, chuckle, or even bemused smile you are paid to deliver. A strong ally to surprise in comedy is misdirection. You achieve misdirection by establishing the familiar, pointing

toward the predictable and then opening the trapdoor. If it is done with dexterity, and without cheating, your audience will be as charmed as children seeing magic, delighted at being fooled and climb out of, the trapdoor with smiles on their faces.

In creating the humorous line or situation, you first establish an identifiable situation. You will then do well to try to think of the obvious and predictable answer your reader/audience expects in order to be sure not to give it to them. You may even go so far as to leave false clues to lead the audience astray. Then with that obvious, predictable answer as a springboard, you can use incongruity, exaggeration, irrelevance to get your laugh.

Defence, respect and reverence are antidotes to humour. You will have great trouble being funny if you are influenced by any of those characteristics. Comedy, by its definition is irrelevant, disrespectful and defers to no person or institution. Politeness is also inhibiting to comedy.

Irreverence entails fearlessness and resistance to conformity, two very productive qualities in writing funny lines. Humour itself is a trampling over boundary lines, rebellion against social standards and usually takes an adversary position.

All comedy, as all drama, has conflict and is based on the three act construction strategy. Describing the 3-act construction strategy, Cohan cited by Saks (1985:35) said that in the first act you get your hero up a tree; the second act you throw rocks at him; third act you let him down. In a nutshell, it means – Situation, development resolution.

The first act or straight line as it's called in comedy establishes the situation and characters. And the second act – the development. Then the third act – better known as the punch line. It is the resolution, basically the same in comedy as it is

in any form of writing. It only differs in mood and attitude. This is where you earn your pay as a comedy writer.

Whether it is a joke, a monologue, a newspaper column, a screen play, or a book, the basic comedy construction for the third act is the same – the unorthodox point of view, the unexpected denouement.

Let us illustrate with an example

First act	–	situation – three hunters went hunting with their dogs.
Second act		Development – suddenly the first dog started chasing. After a while the other two dogs join. And a long while, the two dogs stopped.
Third act		Resolution – why did our dog stopped and your own continued? Queried the two hunters and he answered ‘because it was my dog that saw the rabbit.

It is important to advise that you don’t go on after the punch line. Comedy writers call it – going past the post office. Dramatic writers call it anticlimactic. Furthermore, the three-act construction was just put forth for purposes of analysis. It would be counter productive for you as a writer while trying to create the funny line or situation, to inhibit the creative flow by consciously conforming to the rules of construction and techniques. The most difficult and effectual way to write a joke or a story, play, novel is to try to provide a third act for a prefabricated first and second acts. The most desirable and successful way is for you the writer to provide all three acts. That is when you can pick a situation and characters that are appealing to you, provide them with an identifiable problem and resolve it in an amusing way (Saks, 1985:40).

### **Self assessment exercise 3:3**

Write an explanatory note to distinguish the following (i) Jokes (ii) Comedy (iii) Comic (iv) Humour

#### 3.4 Comedy Style

In comedy writing, style can be called the personality of your writing and like your own personality, it becomes awkward and dishonest if you are self-conscious about it. If you force it, it becomes stilted; if you are artificial, you lack style. If you write as clearly and honestly as you can, you can't help having style. Showing off, cheating, one upmanship is poor style in any communication through the media. Comedy writing at its best will not only entertain, but by exposing our common vulnerabilities, get us to acknowledge those feelings, and so, bring us back into the company of man. In comedy writing, honesty is more than a virtue, it is an indispensable ingredient. It will win you the loyalty of your audience/readers. Working on comedy, you may be tempted by a funny line you know is untrue to the premise or character. A good writer resists the temptation. It is at this point the issue of relevance comes in. If you use an irrelevant line just because it is funny, it is dishonest writing, and you won't go to the comedy writer's heaven where the punch line always gets a laugh. Relevancy means relating to the present characters and situations. Humour hasn't the time to be hypocritical, it hasn't the patience to be polite, it hasn't the tolerance to be timid. Drama can be 70 or 60 percent effective and successful. Humour needs 100 percent effectiveness or it lies there in ignoble defeat. If it doesn't work perfectly in every respect, if either timing or tone is one iota off, what is expected, if they have to listen to information they've already heard, they will get restless. In comedy, you must give them information they don't have or an experience they don't anticipate. That is what makes it a creative writing. There are thousands of ways to do a script and many of them are right. And no one is exactly like you.

No one feels exactly as you do. If you write with integrity, nothing will be exactly like comedy, written with graceful ease is always readable, usually simple and most always honest.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:3**

Discuss the importance of honesty and originality in comedy writing

#### 3.5 The Dos and Don'ts of Comedy Writing

According to Saks (1985:59), the following are the ten commandments of comedy writing.

- Thou shalt be brief. Brevity has been said to be the soul of wit. In modern media writings, brief is highly mentioned because the modern media consumer does not have all the time in the world to be exposed to the media.
- Thou shalt be simple – Just like in broadcasting simplicity is a function of the oral nature of the medium and due to the impatient nature of the human ear. Simplicity helps in the transmission and at the reception.
- Thou shalt be clear: Clarity is a virtue that cannot be compromised in media writing and presentations. It helps your audience/readers in the comprehension of the lines.
- Thou shalt be bold: Without boldness, it will be very difficult if not impossible to write and present comedy. It is the boldness that makes you say what ordinary people may consider embarrassing.
- Thou shalt be Relevant: Comedy is expected to provide escape for the audience. And it's ability to provide that depends on how relevant it is within the context of the audience.
- Thou shalt be Recognizable: The audience or reader must not need the help of a third party to download or pick point what is being talked about.

- Thou shalt be Controversial: It is the controversial nature of comedy that make it interesting and attention holding on the audience wants to know how the controversy is resolved.
- Thou shalt be Unpredictable: Surprise is a strong element in comedies. Suspending the audience on what the next act is what makes comedy worthwhile.
- Thou shalt be Original: There is not art where originality is highly needed than in comedy. Originality does not only mean you have to be yourselves but also you mustn't imitate. Nothing is as irritating to the audience as an old joke or comedy that have been before.
- Thou shalt be Salable: This means that the writer must be market minded. This makes you to slant your writing to the market or target audience. As a comedy writer, you think beyond the amusement and laughter of the audience to their purse.
- These are the shalts you should aspire to put them into good measure. The continuation of the commandment is now a list of 'Shalt Nots'.
- Thou shalt not honour thy mother or father or nay other of thy predecessors. That is the issue of sacred cow does not apply in comedy. It is an ocean wave nobody is free.
- Thou shalt not be courteous, reverent or obedient.
- Thou shalt not have a false straight line.
- Thou shalt not go past the punch line
- Thou shalt not explain
- Thou shalt not apologize
- Thou shalt not be innocuous
- Thou shalt not conform
- Thou shalt not be tentative
- Thou shalt not be untimely

Below are the seven deadly sins of comedy writing.

- Timidity
- Deference
- Obscurity
- Pomposity
- Blandness
- Bad Timing
- Imitation

Strangely, cruelty and viciousness are not among these, because things that are cruel and vicious to some are funny to others, and vice versa. Humour is democratic but not always fair. Also not coincidentally, you may note that all the above sins are themselves nice, big, fat targets for humour.

The four essential tips to writing comedy are:

- Pick something readily identifiable
- Zero in on the conflict
- Take an unconventional point of view
- Surprise us.

Finally, the following are the indispensable attributes of the comedy writer.

- Motivation
- Courage
- High tolerance to suffering

### **Self assessment exercise 3:5**

List five dos and 5 don'ts of comedy writing and explain them.

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION.

One of the cordial functions of the mass media is the provision of entertainment to the public. This entertainment function is fast taking a crucial position as society the society appears to be worked up to political, religious and economic pressures.

A lot of people are relying on the media for materials that will put them in a lighter mood. Comedy and comedy writing has emerged as a serious beat in mass communication. The drive now is for media writers to eject some element of comedy in their media writing no matter how serious the subject matter might be. The massive crowd that grace comedy presentations is a strong testimony that the world is clamouring for media presentation that will put them in the lighter mood.

#### 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we looked into the concept of comedy writing as an aspect of media writing. The major sub unit in this are:- basic definitions , the art of being funny; anatomy of a joke; comedy style and the do's and don'ts of comedy writing.

#### 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Write an explanatory note to distinguish the following i) Jokes ii) Comedy iii) Comic. Discuss the writing style appropriate for them.

#### 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Bogges, L. ( ). *How to Write Short Stories that Sell*. Ohio: Penguin.

Rouverol, .J. (2000). *Writing for the Soap*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Saks,. S (1999). *The Craft of Comedy Writing*. Ohio: Writers Digest Books

## **MODULE 3**

### **UNIT 2: BOOK REVIEWING**

#### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Functions of the Reviewer
  - 3.2 Preparation and Training
  - 3.3 Methods of Reviewing
  - 3.4 Technical Reviewing
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Market Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

#### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Book Reviewing is an aspect of creative writing that deals with previewing books as a way of whetting the reading interest of the public. It has become one of the regular media menu that a sizable number of readers look forward to in their favourite dailies. To some people, it is a kind of arm-chair journalism when compared to the hurly-burly of information gathering and processing of a typical journalist. However, what the book reviewer gains by way of serene environment, he loses by the level of head cracking and creativity involved in book reviewing. It is an aspect of journalism that is highly needed in the Nigerian environment where reading culture is very poor. It is believed that when professionally handled, it can go a long way in encouraging people to read books and drive away the high level of ignorance among the public. This unit presented all it will take to be effective in book reviewing.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

On completion of this unit, you should be able to:

- i. Explain what book reviewing is
- ii. List the functions of a book reviewer
- iii. Acquire basic skills in book reviewing
- iv. Identify the various methods of reviewing
- v. carry out a review of technical books.

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 The Function of the Reviewer

Of all forms of specialized and creative journalism, book reviewing may appear at first sight the easiest and the least exacting. The reviewer ensconces himself/herself in an armchair before a pile of new novels in their attractive dust jackets and a pad on his/her knee and is ready to begin a pleasant day's work. At least, this is the picture which floats before the eyes of many a young, hardworking journalist waiting in the cold to have yet another door slammed in their faces. There is, of course, a great deal more in the business of reviewing than this, as we shall see. But first it may be helpful to enquire what the aim is and function of the reviewer, how far the contribution he/she makes is of value and what is his/her place in the community of media writing.

The reviewer of books for the media has a number of functions to perform. The relative importance of these functions will always remain a matter of debate on which there can perhaps be no final judgment. We suggest that the foremost function of the reviewer is to keep the reading public informed about new books; provides in other words, an information service which selects form and supplements, the publishers' announcements. He/she tells his/her readers something about the subject matter of those books which he/she thinks important enough to find a place in his/her column.

His/her second function is to give an assessment of the value or quality of the books he/she reviews, to pass judgment on them. This, again, is part of the service he offers towards helping his/her readers in their choice of books.

Finally his/her contributions to the pages of the newspaper or periodical in which his/her reviews appear have an independent value and purpose of their own, albeit but a secondary one, and this quite apart from the books which form their subject matter. For many people enjoy reading about books as well as reading the books themselves. They will enjoy a well-written column of book reviews, whether or not they wish to be helped in their choice of books. To this extent, the reviewer can himself be a creative literary artist. We shall return to these various functions of viewer in a later paragraph.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:1**

What in your views is the true function of the reviewer

### 3.2 Preparation and Training

No man will make a successful book reviewer who is not himself possessed by a deep and lasting love of books and reading. If the sight of a parcel of books fresh from the publisher does not give you a new thrill each time one is placed on his desk, if your first instinct on entering a room is not to move over to the book shelves to see what they contain, if you have never browsed in a library the whole afternoon, losing all count of time. If all books and authors are more or less alike to you so that you have no favourite and no part aversion, then you will never make a book reviewer, and had better turn your attention elsewhere.

But a mere liking for books and reading is not enough. It must be supported by wide knowledge, zealous application and self discipline. For he who would become an authority on books must do more than follow his own tastes and fancies in his

choice of reading. You must cover the widest possible field – the classics as well as the moderns, non-fictions as well as fiction, poetry and drama as well as prose. You must know a good deal about the background to books, as well as knowing the books themselves. The great movements and periods, the fashions and tendencies in literary history must be familiar to you, as must be the lives, the aims, the distinctive styles of the outstanding writers of every age. You should know, too, something of the literature of other nations besides your own, if only to provide yourself with standards of comparisons.

From knowledge comes taste – a cultivated discernment that can distinguish good from bad, supreme artistry from the merely competent, true inspiration from the bogus, the derived and the afflicted. Mere dilettante undirected, miscellaneous reading will never yield this ripe and balanced judgment. It comes only from study and thought and from careful meditation on what has been read.

Although the methods of study that the book reviewer follows may be very similar to those of the academic student, your objective is very different. You must never lose sight of the fact that you are addressing yourself not to the highly cultivated and selective tastes of a university examining board, but to the man or woman in the street, the general reader. The reviewer must beware lest, in developing your own taste and widening your knowledge you “lose the common touch”.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:2**

What are the qualities and qualifications which make for success in this field?

### **3:3 Method of Reviewing:**

Each reviewer will develop his/her own technique in carrying out your task, but it is possible to lay down some useful lines of approach for the guidance of the

beginner. We concentrate here on fictions, although we shall have something to say on the reviewing of books other than fiction.

The question is often asked “Should a reviewer read the whole of a book he is going to review?” The answer is ‘yes’ and ‘no’. You will read through the whole or the greater part of the book, but your method of reading is not the same as that of the man or woman who picks up a book to read as a pleasant, leisure time occupation. You will read rapidly and with concentration, devouring the pages, taking whole paragraphs at a glance, skipping others altogether. You will be able to do this firstly because you must have read so many similar books and then sorted out and meditated over your impressions, until you have learnt to meet the author half-way, or even be one or two jumps ahead of the author; secondly, because you do not read with a vague acquiescence, ready to take whatever the author chooses to give you, but with direction and purpose, looking for certain specific qualities and rejecting or by-passing what does not seem to offer the material for which you are seeking.

The elements which go the making of a novel are:

- \* Plot
- \* Character
- \* Background
- \* Style

The reviewer sets himself or herself to examine the novel from all of these view points. You are constantly asking yourself questions as you read. Of the plot you ask: Is it convincing and well worked out? Does it hold the reader’s interest to the end? Does the writer play fair with the reader? Could this really happen? Of the character you asks: Are they real people in whom we can believe? Is their behaviour consistent? Do they develop? Are they alive, or mere puppets or

shallows? Are they sufficiently diversified? Of the background you asks: Does its atmosphere tone with the story? Is it authentic? Is it sketched in? and of the style you asks: Is it easy to read? Is it vivid and preserved? Does it harmonise with the subject matter? Is it over-mannered, and end in itself?

We do not wish to imply that the reviewer has a list of such questions beside him/her against which you places mark for each book you read. You may not even frame questions consciously in the form in which some of them are set out here. But some such standards must apply if he is to fulfill your function of trained informant and critic. It must be remembered, too, that there is something in every book which is more than the answer to such piece-meal enquires. Every book worth reading has a spirit, a unity, a life of its own, which is far greater than the sum of its parts. And this spirit, this unity, this individual life, the reviewer must strive to catch to crystallize in words and pass on to his readers.

One of the problems the reviewer has to face is keeping the public informed about newly published books is how much he should reveal of the subject matter – especially of a work of fiction. To give, for example, the solution of a detective novel would be to spoil the book for the reader. On the other hand, it may be difficult for the reviewer to convince others that a book is worth reading without discussing some the adventures or happenings it describes. A review must be an invitation or a warning to the intending reader not a substitute for the book itself.

In the same way, quoting from a book under review requires discretion. Nothing is more annoying to a reader than to find, when he comes to the high peak of a book that he has already read the passage in a review. Quotations which are used to illustrate the style or to make a point in the author's own words, must be selected so that they do not thus spoil the reader's pleasure in reading the book itself. Books continue to pour from the press in bewildering numbers and variety.

The reviewer with but scanty newspaper or magazine space at his/her disposal is constantly faced with the problem of selection - which books shall he/she review and which shall he/her perforce ignore.

“Choose the best”, is the obvious answer, but the solution is not quite so simple. The best certainly, but of what kind? Where there is space to review three or four books only, at the most, what kind of book is the reviewer to choose? It is here that you must be quite clear in your own mind as to your primary function. Is your task to inform, to educate or to entertain your readers – or perhaps is it to flatter them with the confidence of a mature and cultivated mind? On the answer you find for yourself to this question of primary function will depend on his customary selection of books to be reviewed. We venture to repeat that although all these different functions – even the last – play their part in the contribution the reviewer offers to journalism and media writing, it is the first which predominates: your first duty is to tell the public what they want to know about new books.

That being so, the reviewer must be particularly on his/her guard against following his/her own whims and fancies, riding his/her own pet hobby-horses and beating his own favourite drum. Your reading public is probably large and varied, their collective taste is catholic, they enjoy light as well as serious reading; the money they have to spend on books is limited and it is the reviewer’s task to see that they are helped to spend their money in a way which they will find to the best advantage. You will wary, therefore, the type of book you review. You will be prepared to treat seriously and on its merits any book which is good if its kind, if its kind is likely to appeal to a substantial number of its readers. There is no question here of pandering to popular taste – the supposition that popular taste is deplorably low is an exploded fallacy held now only by a few intellectual snobs and out-of-touch sub-editors or publishers.

The principles which will guide the reviewer in passing judgment on and assessing the value of a book are closely allied to those which determine his/her selection of books to be reviewed. Again believe is not so much concerned with his/her own or any absolute standards, as with deciding how far a particular book is good, mediocre or bad in its own class. You will never condemn a book for not being what it never set out to be, or an author for not doing what he/she never professed to do. You will, however, pass judgment on a biography which leaves no vivid picture of its subject in the readers' mind on a detective story, which does not grip and hold the readers' attention on a romantic novel which fails to stir the emotions, on a so-called humorous book which has failed to make him laugh. For that, primarily, is what his readers pay him/her to tell them. Any literary theories he/she may hold or any social contacts he or she may enjoy with the author concerned are of very secondary interest to the readers.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:3**

Should a reviewer read through the whole of a book he/she is assessing? Give reason for your answer.

#### 3.4 Technical Reviewing

As word on the reviewing of technical and scientific books for the trade and learned periodical media. By technical we mean those specialized and professional trades that require some professional jargons in their write-up. Tackling the review of these is in the hands of staff man and woman, although some journals do pass over their reviewing to outside contributors.

One of the chief qualifications here is to be something of a recognized expert in the subject concerned. It is not always a very profitable activity, however, its chief attractions for the outside specialist lies in the fact that part- and in some cases the whole of the remuneration consists in keeping for one's own use the

book reviewed. It is thus possible for the expert to build up, at the cost of the time taken to write the reviews an up-to-date collection of books in his own particular subject. Such a collection may serve as a valuable source of facts and ideas to the writer of specialist articles.

As a technical reviewer, you should know that one of your responsibilities is to tone down to the understanding of the common reader those professional jargon and terms. Since the reader terms as you, it will be a great service to bring such term down to their knowledge level.

The hallmark of technical reviewing is not how high sounding the words are but how comprehensible and understandable they are to any average reader. A technical reviewer is not out to impress reader with trade term for to communicate. In this era of information explosion and nerve cracking specialization and discussion, technical reviewing is very important to checkmate ignorance in the face of intellectual advancement.

#### **Self assessment exercise 3:4**

What considerations should a reviewer keep in mind when quoting from technical journals?

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

There is a great deal in the business of reviewing in modern media writing. There appears to be wide range of ignorance despite information explosion. The job of a reviewer is therefore, very important to background knowledge for better understanding to the media consumers. It is equally important to note that majority of Nigerians have poor reading culture. Despite the fact that we are not advocating reviewing as alternative to actual reading of the book, but in the absence of not reading at all, the reviewed version appear to be half bread that is

better than none. But on a more serious note, the hallmark of reviewing is to whet the appetite of the readers. It is a kind of herald or forerunner for the actual book. The relationship between reviewing a book and actual reading of the book is like the relationship between the print media and the broadcast media. When the latter arrived, people thought it passed a death sentence on the former due to its fast and quick pace. However, their sketchy nature of news presentation actually instigates the media courage to go for the newspaper and magazine for further information.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

Book reviewing is one aspect of media creative writing needed in modern journalism to encourage scholarship and book reading as a way of checkmating ignorance in society. There are many technical fictions, non-fiction and scholarly books in circulation that need to be reviewed for the people. In this unit, we have tried to examine the various functions a book reviewer performs in terms of informing, educating or entertaining the readers. We are presented materials on the necessary preparation and training needed to function effectively as a book reviewer and of course the various methods for reviewing was extensively discussed and also there is a note on technical review and the general conclusion that book review is not an alternative to actual reading of a book but rather an appetizer to reading it.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

Do you consider the degree reader's interest justifies the inclusion of book reviews in a daily paper?

## **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING**

Candlin, Frank (1990). *Teach Yourself Journalism*. London: English University Press.

McDougal, Curtis (1992). *Interpretative and Investigative Reporting*. New York:

Macmillan.

Kingsley Manual of Journalism (1990) (Cassette)

## **MODULE 3**

### **UNIT 3: SPECIALIZATION**

#### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 The need for Specialization
  - 3.2 How to Become a Specialist
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- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

#### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Specialization has become the in-thing in contemporary media writing. The complicated and complex nature of our modern world calls for expert approach by the media if they must continue to function as sources of further education, information and enlightenment and entertainment. The media operate in a common market where all shreds of opinion must have opportunity to be expressed. However, the generic approach to some of the technical issues written about in the media may not provide the reading public the needed additional information that a modern media consumer needs. This has underscored the need for more specialist approach.

#### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this study unit, you should be able to:

- i. Understand the reason behind specialization in modern media writing.
- ii. Be knowledgeable on how to specialize
- iii. Be exposed to some of the important specialist areas in media writing.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 The need for Specialization

We live in age of specialization. So complicated has modern life become and so wide is the range of interest open to us that no man today can hope “to take all knowledge for the province”. This is particularly true of media writing and journalism unless one is prepared to specialize, one can never hope to go very far in the profession.

A newspaper or magazine at the present day may expect to number among its readers those who have more than a nodding acquaintance with every conceivable topic of human interest. It cannot afford, therefore, to make mistakes or to print or air matter written by one who is not himself or herself something of an expert on the subject of which he/she is treating. Hence newspapers and magazine carry a staff of specialists who have made a detailed study of their subjects and on whom the editors can rely for authoritative and up-to-the minute information.

Every young journalist, at the outset of his/her career, will do well to look around for a field or fields in which he intends to specialize. In making this choice, he will naturally consult his own already developed interests and inclinations, and if he decides to specialize in more than one direction he will do well to choose somewhat diverse subject so that he may avoid that over-specialization, the one-track mind, which is the enemy to balanced living and thinking. This is not to say that specialization in itself will make a good journalist or media writer. Before

now the best of all foundations here is a thorough training as a general reporter. From such a training comes the knowledge and experience of what newspapers want and how to present this. It is true that some writers are brought into the media as experts in their chosen fields, but such people have much to learn when they get there, and the chances are that they will be of little use except on their special subject. And these are many fields in which media outfits cannot afford or do not find it worth while to employ a whole time specialist. The most useful man or woman in any office is the one who is a well trained all-round journalist, but who can on occasion turn out a well informed story or article on some specialized topic.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:1**

Why is it advisable for a working journalist to specialize in at least one direction?

#### 3.2 How to Become a Specialist

Having decided on the particular direction or directions in which he proposes to specialize (and some of the popular ones are indicated below), how does the beginner set about his/her task?

He must read up the subject of his/her choice. This does not mean glancing through a couple of text books or even digesting one particular manual in detail. It means years of patient and assiduous study, reading, annotating, comparing all the available literature on every conceivable aspect of the subject. That is the foundation. There is no short cut to specialization; without these years of hard and patient toil, no matter what your specialty may be, from motoring to agriculture, from economics to sports, you can never hope to be at home with your subject, sure of your ground, able to speak with authority because you 'know'. And without these things you will never arrive as an accredited specialist. You may last for a while, but sooner or later you will be caught out, your thin, inadequate

armour will be pierced, your flimsy house of cards will collapse, and you will be exposed for what you are a false and a shame. And journalism is a comparatively small world and editors have long memories.

We do not wish to suggest that you should never cover a story or write an article on your chosen subject until you have mastered every aspect of the matter and become a thorough expert. There is every reason why a young reporter should let his/her news editor know of any particular materials he/she is following up. Quite often, especially on a weekly or provincial daily, a writer who knows something about a particular topic is much more useful than one who knows nothing at all and to be given assignments bearing upon him/her chosen field can be the best of experience for the would-be specialist. But he must tread warily in print until he is thoroughly sure of his ground.

Nor is reading the whole story. The specialist in journalism may, from time to time, be required to write on what is already known and familiar about his subject (and he/she must certainly be aware of all there is to know about this), but more often, he/she will have to deal with what is new-fresh discoveries, inventions and developments. It is such matters that will usually have brought his/her subject into the news. And books are seldom of use here, it is people that become more important. The journalist who aspires to be a specialist, therefore, must get to know as many as he/she can of the people who are outstanding in his/her chosen field – locally if he/she is operating at the regional level or nationally. For if he/she is to write with authority on new developments, he/she must have access to those who are responsible for, or in close touch with these developments. The role of the detached spectator may be very well for the philosopher, but it is of little use to the journalist. He must be in the swim, in the thick of things, inside information is what he needs and it is this for which his reader looks. It is because trained writers have learned this art of making contacts, of getting people to talk,

of becoming good listeners, that they make the best specialists in journalism – this and the fact that they know how to explain and “put across” technical or specialized information in a way that is intelligible to the man or woman in the street.

The training of the specialist, therefore, is not something which can ever be completed once and for all. He/she must be constantly keeping abreast of his/her subject, studying the relevant journals and periodicals, attending conferences, meeting, social occasion, public performances, sporting events, as the case may be, mixing with and talking to those who are the acknowledged experts on his/her subject, reading all the latest books, using his/her own judgment and forming his/her own ideas. In time, he or she may find that instead of his/her consulting others; other people are consulting him/her. And that begin to happen, he or she will have arrived as an expert in his own right.

A young writer entering journalism thorough a local weekly, will begin his/her career as a specialist by following an intensive course of private study, as we have suggested and by getting to know all the people in his/her neighbourhood who have any special knowledge or experience of his/her chosen field. After a while, you will make your interest known to your editor and ask to be given relevant assignments; if and when they occur. Soon you will begin to form ideas of your own on subject. It is at this stage that you may try your hand at a modest article or two for the profession or magazine press catering for your special interest. Linage work for the provincial or even the national dailies offers another opening. When you feel that the time has come for you to leave your ‘nursery’ for wider fields, you will mention when applying for another post that you have specialized in a certain direction, having ready a neatly compiled cutting books of work you have already done in that field. You will of course, continue to extend your knowledge of the subject by studying and by making the fullest use of the wider contacts

provided by your new post. And then, as the time approaches for your next move, you will have to decide whether your future is to be in a general journalism practice with your specialization as a side-line, or whether you will go all out as a full-time specialist, either on a print or broadcast media.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:2**

How would a beginner set about developing his/her special interest

#### 3.3 Some Specialist Fields

There are some forms of specialization which are so important and make such heavy demands on those who follow them that they came to occupy the greater part of your working life. We shall deal separately with some of these which is by no means, exhaustive. You are advised to choose any one specialty training in addition to more general practice.

- \* Sports: Every medium sets out to meet the information demand of its consumers. They must do this or perish, for if the consumer does not get what he/she wants from one medium he/she will go else where. The media are one of the professions that is highly deregulated and de-monopolized (Njoku, 2004:16). One of the most insistent demands made by consumers today is for full, accurate and up-to-the minute information on sports and sporting events. No medium can survive for long that neglect this demand. It follows that there is a wide field for you as a recruit if you are interested in sport and wishes to specialize in sports writing. Although you must not go into specialization too early.

As a sport writer, you have two jobs – commenting on form and the background to sports, news, and the reporting of actual sporting events. And it is wiser and more creative not to confine to one type of sport alone.

Commentary on form before hand, is always a hazardous business. None of us has the gift of prophecy. Fortune plays old tricks, and the best of judges are all too often mocked by events. The only safe rule is to form an honest opinion based on knowledge and common sense and then give it, what it is worth. If you tell your reader the facts behind your opinion, he or she is free to follow you or make up his/her own mind. Nor can he or she complain if you are proved wrong. Covering sporting events falls into three parts: Preliminary arrangements. Recording events getting the copy back to the paper. A creative sports writer must remember that the majority of his/her readers are unable to be present; they have to be content to see the event through his/her eyes. And he must also help those present to recall and remember what they saw in the excitement of the moment in the hearts of noisy crowd.

Of a sports specialist writer: The four outstanding qualities called for are: **accuracy, power of observation, fair mindedness, and a gift for the vivid telling phrase.**

Another important aspect of creative sports writing is style. There was a time when sports writers felt that the only way they were doing their job properly was by adopting a jargon almost unintelligible to all but the initiated, enthusiast. A football was a 'sphere' a goal forward "found the net" and a bet "the willow" and so on. And of course, slovenly, inaccurate English is no longer tolerated on the sports pages of modern sports pages and sports programmes on air.

- \* Business. In contemporary times, the global emphasis in news values has shifted largely from the political and international to the problem of economics and industry, finance and stocks. And just because such topics have not in themselves a glamour, an emotional appeal, a human interest,

there is all the greater demand for the informed journalist who can interpret these often arid subjects and make them intelligible so that “the wayfaring man or woman, though a fool shall not err therein, Candlin, (1990:89). To any serious minded young media writer who has something of a head for figures and a ready grasp of ideas we would commend business specialty as a goal worth considering. The basis here must be a sound grasp of pure and applied economics, the economic, global finance flow and great world economics. A careful study of the structure of industry in the various ‘G-Groups in the advanced countries at the present day with the labour, manpower and organizational problems involved, a knowledge of the global trade and commerce, banking system and international exchange and currency problems, and, in addition, more than a nodding acquaintance with statistics and statistical method.

- \* Science: Today, science is everywhere, impinging upon our daily lives at every turn. Each week brings its new discovery, its new invention, its application of already acquired knowledge to hitherto unsuspected uses. And the average citizen, with little time or inclination to study text books or the proceedings of learned societies relies on the daily media to keep informed and abreast of the latest development. Simply written in non-technical language as such popular interpretations are, they must yet be accurate and authoritative. Here, then, is a rich and wide opportunity for the journalist with a scientific bent seeking a direction in which to specialize. Many sub-divisions may be noted here, each capable of a lifetime’s study. Engineering, radio and television, aviation, weather, astronomy, medicine, space travel as well as physics and chemistry are a few branches in which most of the media look for specialist contributions. In many of these, the media maintain full-time staff writers; others look to accredited experts. Work in some of these fields can offer very attractive opportunities. The motoring an aviation expert, for example, who has a

natural bent for mechanics, will find contacts with the industry and with the latest developments a constant source of interest and enjoyment.

- \* The Drama: Dramatic and theatrical criticism offers particular attractions to the journalist with literary leaning. Although in general practice of journalism, it is a highly specialized branch of journalism, the beginner in the provinces can usually obtain plenty of training and experience covering the local shows for your medium. Some of the things we said in the preceding unit concerning book reviewing applies equally to the dramatic critic. It is an objective estimate of the merits of the play or theatrical performance under review rather than the personal views or principles of the critic that the average reader looks for. A thorough knowledge of the development of Nigeria and global drama, particularly during the past few decades, and some acquaintance with continental work are a necessary foundation for the dramatic critic. But it must always be remembered that the home of the drama is not the study but the theatre. It is from years of persistent, varied and purposeful play-going that the true dramatic critic is born.

Closely related to drama is the film. There again the foundation for success for the specialist is knowledge, tempered by judgment. But the critic of the films, where the resulting arts product is based as much on the work of the technician as on that of the writer and actor, requires a much greater degree of technical knowledge than does his colleagues of the theatrical column. The technique of acting has long ago been established and the limitations of the theatre recognized, but the film critic must keep constantly abreast of new developments. Cinema is still in the experimental stage and the film critic finds himself dealing as often with new or improved methods as with artistic excellence or acting ability.

The attraction – the glamour” of the film world is one of its most carefully fostered assets and many a young journalist sees himself or herself as a budding star. Before coming to a decision, however, we advise the aspirant in this field of specialization to try a little experiment. When you can find the time, go to see three different film shows a day for a whole week, making careful notes on the merits and demerits of each picture you see. Imagine that routine multiplied by the fifty weeks of the year and then ask yourself if you still want to be a professional film critic.

\* Fine Arts: There is ample room, too, even in these days when sport and the various branches of science occupy so much of the average man’s time and attention, for the journalist who specializes in music, painting, architecture, photography or in those thousand and one fields of connoisseurship which are represented in the exhibition and the show-room.

Not only are regular events to write about, calling for a specialized knowledge of this or that among the fine arts, but such are the vagaries of the unpredictable thing called news that no news editor can say at what moment he may need an established expert on the most abstruse of topics to write up the background to some story. A valuable gem is stolen, an old master slashed in a public gallery, a Jacobean mansion destroyed by fire, a Benin art treasure dup up on a clearance site – the demand for authoritative background information is constant and the ‘library’ will not always be able to turn out what is required.

\* The countryside: There is a wide scope indeed for the specialist. Under this heading may be included agriculture, forestry, gardening, fruit growing, horticulture and land scoping, bee-keeping, poultry, dogs, fishing and such country sports as shooting and hunting and wrestling. The young media writer who wishes to follow up one or more of these lines of specialization must have first, a genuine love for and understanding of the

countryside. You need not necessarily be a village born and bred, but you must be able to get on with village folk, to win their confidence and respect. Above all, you must be thorough and conscientious, knowing your subject first hand. It is in these fields, perhaps, that mere book learning is of the least value. The specialist must be prepared to read up his/her subject, but it is only by direct contact and personal experience that he learns to write with authority and conviction. You must always convey the impression. You must be a countryman or woman, turned journalist, not a journalist posing as a country man or woman. These fields have the merit, too of supporting a very wide range of specialized periodicals where the well-informed contributor with ideas may find many a market for special articles or news paragraphs.

- The Armed Forces: Having fought is second “war to end war”, this unhappy world of ours has little prospect of slackening in the foreseeable future. In such an atmosphere, news affecting the armed forces and other law enforcement operatives both of our own and other lands, must remain matters of the deepest public concern. The journalist, therefore, who specializes as a naval, military, air, or public correspondent may expect to find an abundance of grist to his mill. This has proved a field which has appealed to the many ex-service men returning or entering the profession with that sense of the ‘lost years’ upon them, who be a sound naval type or to have once worn a handle-bar moustache is not, in itself, sufficient qualification to offer advance on the dispositions of the fleet or to comment on aircraft construction policy at the ministry. Although the ex-service journalist might bring a keen interest and some knowledge and understanding to his/her chosen line, you had to be prepared to widen, deepen and mature this by long and patient study before he stepped forward as the expert and the critic.

You must be conversant with the various deregulations or ranks in the service and their comparative equivalent.

Health and population

The Environment

Science/Technology/Telecommunication

- \* Miscellaneous: In addition to the well-trodden paths mentioned in this unit and elsewhere, there are many by-ways which the young journalist seeking a direction for specialization might consider. And wherever there is a subject in which some people are interested, there is an opening for the specialist writer. The law, archaeology, ecclesiastical affairs, animals and the zoo, anthropology, book, collecting, local history, etc, the possibilities are endless. But whatever the form of specialization chosen, the would-be specialist must set himself or herself to master all these is to be known about the subject chosen and then to keep constantly abreast of new development as soon as and indeed, before they become generally known. For the two cardinal sins for the specialist in journalism are to be inaccurate or to be out of date.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:3**

What scope is there for specialization in any particular field in which you yourself are interested?

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

It is not only in journalism and media writing that general practice is gradually being overtaken by specialist practice. Other professions like law, medicine are also becoming specialist oriented. And the more the society goes departmental, the more the need for specialized writing. The level of advancement and

discovery is so rapid now that a lot of complicated and complex issues need background for proper comprehension and assimilation. This underscores the importance of the specialist in the present day media world. According to R.L.S.(Royal Library Service) as cited by Candlin (1990:94), “The world is so full of a number of things, that we should all be as happy as kings”. All that is demanded of a would be specialist is the ability to make sacrifices and go the extra mile in using his/her biro to fashion out a career for himself/herself and make some peoples day. As a Specialist there is the need for excellent spirit to be efficient and effective in one’s chosen area and there is no limit to which the areas that one can specialize. It is important to warn that specialization does not mean one-track mindedness but rather an ability to aspire to know more about something so that one can write or talk intelligently about it. It is not the same thing as dogmatism which does not give room for growth and advancement.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

We are living in a specialization age. So complicated has modern life become and so wide is the range of interest open to specialization. The need for specialization in our world cannot be over emphasized and setting out to be a specialist demands some line of action and progressive training. Also in this unit is some selected specialty areas were discussed. Included in this selective treatment are sports, countryside, business, science, drama, film, fine arts, etc. this is by no means an exhaustive list.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Describe the tasks and duties of any one type of specialist mentioned in this unit.

## 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Candlin, Frank (1990). Teach Yourself Journalism. London: The English Universities Press.

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## **MODULE 3 UNIT 4**

### **INTERVIEWING**

#### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 How to plan the interview
  - 3.2 Conducting an interview
  - 3.3 Tackling the problem of Note taking and information gathering
  - 3.4 Handling unwilling interviewee
  - 3.5 Types of interview
  - 3.6. Presenting interview material in print
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  - 3.8 Handling off-the-Record and confidential information
  - 3.9 Getting the picture
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
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#### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Interviews are media staples. Successful interviewing – the art of making personal contact with individuals and drawing from them the information you require – is a highly skilled art, and one which every journalist or media writer must master. For the very essence of your job is to collect information and present it to your readers, preferably with the addition of some human interest. The question and answer story appears in magazines and newspapers and its broadcast version is the

talk show. The person who generally gets credit for popularizing this method of media writing is Horace Greeley, Newsom, (1998:195). What Greeley popularized was the substantially verbatim question and answer format. But most interview stories are not written that way today. But the idea of talking to important people and reporting what they say has remained.

## 2.0. OBJECTIVES

On completion of this study unit, you are expected to be knowledgeable about the following:

- i. How to plan the interview
- ii. Know how to conduct an interview
- iii. How to tackle the problem of note taking and getting information.
- iv. How to handle unwilling interviewees
- v. Types of interview
- vi. Know how to present the information for print
- vii. Know how to conduct interview for broadcast media
- viii. Know how to handle information given in confidence
- ix. Getting the picture.

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1. Planning the Interview

It seems common sense that before calling on someone from whom you require information, you should have a clear idea of exactly what you want to know. But it is surprising how many beginners go along to an interview with only the vaguest idea of their subject and relying entirely on the inspiration of the moment to carry them through. And all too often the inspiration fails to materialize. The more experienced media writer do not only think out carefully the lines he/she wants the interview to follow but you even frame specific question before hand in the way you think most likely to elicit the facts or opinions you seek. It is a sound plan to

decide what sort of response on the part of your interviewee would make the best story and then to frame your questions towards that end. Your preparatory planning should focus on the following areas.

- Concerning your interviewee: It is often an advantage to know as much as possible before hand about the person to be interviewed. The details of his or her career – home and social background, education, working life, interests and hobbies, views and religious or political associations – are all worth knowing. Some knowledge often stands the reporter in good stead during an interview by helping you to win your interviewee’s interest and attention and to avoid accidentally arousing antagonism.
- Concerning the topic/subject: Be sure the subject to be discussed is of interest or importance. Although a dull guest can make even the most exciting subject boring, your interview will benefit if the topic itself is truly interesting or important. Try and limit the topic so you can cover it very well.
- Concerning your appearance: Your manners and dressing should be strictly formal. A quiet and business-like manner and appearance are more likely to inspire confidence and elicit confidences – than a bumptious attitude or exotic attire. The less you obtrude yourself into the picture the more likely you catch a reflection of the genuine views and personality of the interviewee. Generally speaking, it is appropriate to determine during planning the selection of a good interviewee. This selection depends on the type of story you’re writing. For a new interview you must talk to people who have special knowledge about the subject, or holds a position of power or influence related to the subject some critical considerations in choosing your interview subjects are their accessibility, especially within the time frame needed to meet your deadline, and their willingness to talk on the topic you have chosen, their veracity, not only their personal reliability to tell the truth but also their knowledge about the topic that would make what

they say likely to be accurate. As we said you must research your topic so that you don't frame common place questions on the person to be interviewed. In researching, read authoritative publications until you are able to talk with others, and then get an angle you hadn't thought of. Keep a list of questions you have about the subject, conflicting information and anything you don't understand. Organize your list of questions so that they follow in a logical sequence.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:1**

What preparations should the journalist make before an interview?

#### 3.2 Conducting the Interview

A quiet and business-like manner and appearance as we said before are more likely to inspire confidence and make the day for you. The less you stay at the background, the better for the interview session. The method of approach and the tone to be adopted will depend very much upon the occasion and the person being interviewed. It is part of a newspaperman's training, as we have seen to know how to be 'all things to all men'. But the two general principles apply to all interviews – that you must think out the interview in detail beforehand and you must know as much as you can about the person you are going to question. Questioning is an art that you must master. The interviewer should frame the question in such a way as to make the minimum demand on the person answering. General questions such as "what do you think about so and so? Or Have you anything interesting you can tell about so and so? Are unlikely to produce much of value since they throw the onus of thought and selection on the person questioned; and the source may not retort, 'what exactly do you want to know? The first point then, is to ask specific questions leading to the information you require. You should know what answers to expect before you ask the questions. If the interviewee is given wrong answers, you can sometimes conclude that he or she

doesn't know much about the subject or is lying. But the source may know more than the sources you consulted and the sources are wrong. Give the interviewee the opportunity to explain why he or she is right and other sources are wrong then judge the validity of the explanation. After all, the source is the latest source of information on the subject as far as you are concerned. It is part of your professional responsibility to observe the following conduct during the interview session:

- Make your guest feel at home by introducing him/her when necessary.
- Be Tenacious: Do not be put off by evasive answers. Keep probing until you see that you cannot get any further. Then drop the line of questioning and turn to something else.
- Listen attentively to your guest's replies and respond with appropriate interest.
- Do not interrupt with meaningless comments like "I see" "oh yes" etc.
- Keep cool and discuss the matter with the interviewee, remember he/she is the star or expert.
- Remember you are in charge and don't lose control of the whole show.
- At the conclusion of the interview, thank your source warmly but briefly.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:2**

What method can the interviewer use in eliciting information from the interviewee?

#### 3.3. Note taking/Information Gathering

The popular view of the reporter/writer, as a person in a shabby raincoat and a battered shoe, standing in front of his/her victim, notebook and pencil in hand, is no longer an accurate picture – if it ever was one. The modern wise reporter keep their notebook well out of sight, at least in the early stage of an interview, for many people are put off in it. Technological advancement has also contributed in hiding the notebook further as reporters now use midgets and even handsets. Nevertheless, the possession of a shorthand notebook over a conversation has many advantages to the reporter/writer. It enables you to quote vital statements in direct speech; it gives life and colour to his narrative; it ensures accuracy, since the least of memories are not entirely to be trusted; finally, it is some protection against accusations of misstatement and misrepresentation when midget is not available or save the labour of transcriptions. The reporter has to use his/her technical ingenuity to know when the notebook should surface with disturbing the interview already on the way. Once the notebook has been casually introduced, you can continue to make unobtrusive notes from time to time. The shorthand mentioned here should not be taken literally because many journalism schools have stopped teaching it. But a professional writer must have his/her own shorthand self developed and applied.

Good writers work hard to develop interviewing skills as they do to develop writing skills. When a topic is awkward, the interviewee difficult or the situation a crisis, strong interviewing skills are essential. In your information gathering effort, the following fundamentals always apply.

- Get the person's name and title if you have not gotten it in advance or at least confirm it. Then get other routine information before you launch the tough questions. These routine questions will help to build rapport with your interviewee and to develop a sense of trust.

- Get facts straight by asking for a chronological development. You might accomplish that with a series of questions along these lines, like when did...? Let's just start from the very beginning... etc.
- Use a tape recorder. Your foremost concern should be accuracy, and to quote completely accurately without showing down pace is almost impossible without a tape. Some print writers snob it for the very reason of extra listening and transcription. But the interview session is worth it, then is sacrifice is equally worth it. Tape recorder should not be a substitute for note-taking. Machines are made and can disappoint anytime so placing so much trust on them can be disastrous.
- Use additional sources for personality interviews where the interviewee is the subject as well as the source. Talk to everyday contacts that person has – family, friends, associates at work.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:3**

When, if at all, should a journalist take notes during an interview? What are the advantages of taking notes?

#### **3.4 Handling unwilling Interviewees:**

Persistence is an essential quality in a news man. You must not be easily put off by secretaries and others whose job it is to see you do not reach your goal. You must, however, remember that those whom you wish to interview may have perfectly good reasons for not giving you that time sometimes, because their time is really of great value. You must be prepared to fall in with their wishes as to time and place and when a busy man or woman often give you five minutes, you must so plan the interview that five minutes is sufficient.

In persuading unwilling interviewees to talk to the media, it is often a sound plan to intimate them that it is to their advantage to do so, since they have the opportunity of presenting the facts as they see them. Many people while preferring that a story should not appear at all, would sooner have it reported from their view point than from someone else's. Another method of securing a story is to suggest that it would save trouble to give the facts to the press straightaway to avoid being pestered for days or weeks. Indeed, on this whole question of persuading unwilling people to talk, the journalist is much in the position of a salesman breaking down sales resistance and the beginner might do well to study something of the psychology of salesmanship.

When all efforts to secure a statement or even an interview have failed, the usual practice is to fall back on what is called the 'negative story'. In skilled hands the method can be very effective and be given all the appearance of positive news. Thus a story headlined "Sexual harassment" might begin – 'The Dean of Faculty of Arts and Education (FAE) today – refused to make any comment on the incident of sexual abuse which is alleged to have occurred at Oxborn College last Monday'. It is not known yet whether a formal inquiry will be held into the incident by the college authorities, but it is understood that for the moment the Dean is continuing his duties at the school..."

Most experienced interviewers develop their own style. Conversational, dynamic, impersonal, correct and so on. However, they also respond to their subjects. The response should be an intellectual one, but emotional elements are difficult to put aside. The interviewer has to maintain control of the interview. Sometimes that is easy. Some people are easy to talk to because they like people and like to talk. Some sources such as PR people, public officials and celebrities, are used to being interviewed, and their skill may make the interview go smoothly. But sometime you must interview people who rarely speak in public, people who are by nature

reserved, people who distrust anyone who is going to record or write about what they say. Special interviewing tactics can get these people talk according to Newsom, (1998:202)

- The 'play it dumb' routine. People may be reluctant to talk because they have something to hide, but ordinarily reluctance is just shyness. Frequently you can get such people to talk by acting dumb and helpless by asking for explanation on what the source know too much about and you too little.
- The 'play it smart' routine: Often sources think the person asking the question is too ignorant of something like technical material to get it right. In this situation, you must show that you have done some research by asking a sophisticate question. If the source discovers that you can converse intelligently on the subject, he or she is likely to open up to answer your questions.
- The 'it's in your best interest' routine. There are several ways to play the game. "It is going to look bad if I have to say you refused to comment". Lines like this is a threat and can turn things around when the source is made to see that he/she stands to gain by opening up and everything to loose by keeping dumb. Or you can use other system pressure agents to get the source talking.
- The this edge of the wedge: Especially when the story is controversial, sources might not want to talk. But if you can get them started, they might not stop. Probing for elusive facts from reluctant source is not as common as being overwhelmed with unimportant, uninteresting information. Experienced sources know how to say a great deal without revealing much. Picking at small threads until a story begins to unravel is a skill developed by practice.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:4**

What is a ‘negative story’? When can this device be used?

### 3.5 Types of Interviews:

We recognize interviews to range from that question and answers session with newsmakers to the conversation between a programme host or hostess and a guest. The difference is in technique and techniques are determined by purpose. In the years before, Greeley, the interview story has developed into several types.

- The routine/News interview involves gathering information about news events, or issues from someone in a position to know something about them. As with basic news, this type of interview emphasizes currency and timeliness.
- The personality interview records a conversation with celebrities – movie stars, sports figures, politicians. For instance, interviewing sports figures can be in form of pre-game and post-game. While the personality interview focuses on the individual, the news interview emphasis information the person gives.
- The symposium interview entails talking to several people on the same topic to get a variety of view points. The most common type of symposium interview is the person-in-the-street” approach, where various people are asked their views on something in the news. Sometimes the peopled questioned are chosen simply because they are available and willing. Another name for this type of interview is the ‘VOX POP’

Writing on the typology of interviewing, Colburn, cited in MacDougal (1990:31) gave the following factual interview, Explanatory, Justifying, Leading, hypothetical, Alternative and coordinating. This classification he said is based on purpose.

### **Self assessment exercise 3.5**

Discuss the assertion that the dividing line of the types of interviewing is not water tight.

### 3.6 Presenting the information in print.

Two problems face the writer. What to do with all of that quoted material and how to explain the nature of the question that provoked the response. The famous Horace Greeley 1859 debut was like a transcript of a tape questions followed by answers format. Today most interviews packaged for the print media are not written in this format, except in some magazines. Most interviews are either structured like news stories or like feature stories. Even when an interview story is written like other news stories, with a lead that tells the most important point, development and elaboration of the main point, and so on, some special rules apply.

- Make sure the lead isolates a specific point. Your interview probably covered a wide range of topics, and you have collections of quotes around these topics. Mentioning all of these topics in the lead is usually a mistake. Choose one that is the most interesting or important and introduce the other matters further down. Try to relate them to the main topic so the story doesn't appear to be segmented.
- Structure the story in order of importance. Rarely is it a good idea to present the points in the order they came up in the interview. The most important thing may have been mentioned near the end of the interview, but they belong at the beginning of the story. In writing the interview story, you will group related subject matter together. In moving parts of the interview around, though, you must be careful not to strip a remark of its context or to juxtapose elements in ways that distort the discussion.

- Indicate the occasion of the interview. Generally, an interview story is written for a reason. It might be that an important person had come to town. In any event, the story should indicate why the person was interviewed or the circumstances of the interview. For example: Video games are replacing drugs as an addiction for teenagers, says sociologist Joseph Omoru. Omoru, a Professor of Sociology at Protea University was in Benin Tuesday for the annual convention of...
- Include the qualifications of the speaker: Part of showing why someone was interviewed is giving that person's qualification to speak on the subject. In the hypothetical example above, the next paragraph might say something like this: "Omoru has conducted several studies of teen-agers' recreational habit, including a study on video games published in learned professional journals abroad.
- Quotation: A central part of structuring the interview story is incorporating direct quotation. Some beginning writers just string them together. A *Q* & *A* format minus the *Q*. But ordinarily that's not a very good idea. Your job as a media writer is to distill the information collected in the interview and present it to the reader clearly and concisely. Rarely are the interviewee's exact words the clearest and most concise way to present the information. The role of quotes is to lend authority to points, to provide support for them and to capture the flavour of the person who was the source of the information. We also use them in print to break up the monotony of an otherwise dry, straight forward account. Choose quotes for their drama or expressiveness; in all cases, you need to look for that strong opening or supporting quote to give focus to the story.
- Showing the responses to questions. Beginning writers seem to have difficulty obeying the edict to keep self out of the story while

showing how quotes, or even topics, came to be. You can state in the story that a quote came from an interview or from other sources. The news peg or the reason for the story is usually clear – the publication of a book or some research breakthrough, the release of film or recording.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:6**

Find a Q & A format interview in any Daily or magazine and rewrite the interview as a newspaper story, crafting an appropriate lead.

### 3.7 Packaging Interviews in Broadcast Media.

In addition to facing all the challenges of an interview who is preparing an interview for print presentation, broadcasters have some particular concerns.

- ▲ **Equipment:** Radio reporters go everywhere with their audiocassette tape recorders. TV writers with their cameras and videotape recorders often in large van called ENG/S – Electronic News Gathering. The primary goal in radio and TV news is to capture the story on tape. So it is critical that you keep your equipment in perfect operating order at all times. News directors and producers will never accept the excuse that your batteries are dead. Broadcast reporters often carry spare batteries and even spare parts, just in case.
- ▲ **Preparation:** Because broadcast newsrooms have fewer reports than newspapers do, the broadcast reporter often has far less time than a newspaper reporter to research and prepare for each interview. It is imperative for the broadcast journalist to read widely to keep on top of events as well as trends. As the interviewer, you still have to think through the questions to be asked. You have to remember the focus of the interview and not let the interviewee get too far afield. Listen

carefully to the responses, the audience and the interviewee will notice if you are preoccupied with the next question you are going to ask. If you establish a conversation between the two of you, the person forgets the equipment and the audience and talk. Part of your preparation is how to handle those that get scared off by the sight of audiotape recorder and the TV cameras and those who seek out the broadcast reporter just to hear themselves talk on radio or see themselves on TV. Both types require careful handling.

Editing tape for radio and TV requires many of the same skills as writing the interview story for print. You need good opening, transitional and concluding quotes. You still have to weave these into the fabric of a story, but you will write less copy than the print writer. Suppose an interview with a source runs five minutes, perhaps only 30 seconds of it will be used on radio, about a minute or so on TV. Writers and tape editors must decide which cut or cuts to pull from that five minutes interview to use in the newscast. This is not always an easy process. Broadcast writers, reporters, producers and editors face this process with speeches, meetings and news conferences, stories.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:7**

Why is it necessary to write less in broadcasting?

#### **3.8 Handling confidential and off-the-record information.**

Some writers have a policy of never permitting an interviewee to go off the record. This reduces the risk of confusing what is on and off the record in a story. However, sometimes permitting an interviewee to tell you something off the record or in confidence can help to make the exchange more robust and put the story in better perspective. Occasionally you can talk the person into going on the

record with it if you can negotiate how it will be presented. If you get permission to use the material without attribution, you should check claims of fact with at least one other source. Off the record interviews are common with government officials who don't always want the public to know what they think. Writers can get used that way. Nevertheless reporters often accept off-the-record information when the story is important to the public and they can't get it any other way. Some top bureaucrats will grant interview only if identification is vague as in "war in the Niger Delta is likely" said a high ranking government official" who asked not to be mentioned. As a young writer, you often ask whether you can use information given to you in confidence. The answer to the question is 'NO'. Apart from the moral question, which is a matter the individual journalist's own conscience, there are a number of other issues here to be considered.

To begin with, the journalist, even the reporter in CNN – moves in a comparatively small world, and a breach of confidence will effectually close one corner of that world to him for ever as a source of information. The professional journalists depends on very largely for his/her success on a reputation for trustworthiness and integrity built up over a long period; such a reputation can be very quickly destroyed by yielding to the temptation which comes to every reporter by using information given to you in confidence. There is, too, the wider issue of the honour of the journalistic profession in building up a standard of conduct and a reputation which is worthy to stand beside those, for example in Nigeria news sources are afraid to leak confidential information to the media because they know that to date, no Nigerian media person has betrayed the ethical principles of confidentiality of source. A wise journalist will get over the difficulty in one of a number of ways. You may endeavour to persuade your informant not to put a bar on publication since it is in the public interest that the facts he is disclosing should be made known, you may make it quite clear at the beginning that what is said may be published, and then rely on your skill in

questioning and the general techniques of eliciting information to produce what you want to know. If the interviewee then tells you more than he/she intended, the interviewee may later curse his/her own folly but he/she can not impugn the journalist's integrity. Finally, if a potential informant refuses adamantly to come across with the information if it is for publication, the reporter will do well to refuse to pledge himself/herself and seek the information elsewhere. It may well be that, although he has not been told what you want to know, you have picked up a hint or two on where next to turn for the information. Often a contact, perhaps a person holding a position of trust, will give information or express an opinion to a journalist known to him on condition that the source of the information shall not be revealed. So important are such anonymous contacts that journalists have developed what amounts to a professional ethic that under no circumstances, even though ordered to do so by a court of law, should a journalist divulge the source of confidential information without his informant's consent. This principle became one of the most controversial issues during the proceedings of the Oputa Panel of enquiring.

Self assessment exercise 3:8

Should a journalist ever make use of information given in confidence? Justify your position.

### 3.9 Getting a Picture.

'It's the picture that makes the story' is a familiar enough saying in the journalistic world. Every experienced reporter knows that wherever he/she goes out on anything which promises to provide material for a picture you should take a photographer along with you. The appeal to the eye is still the strongest of all appeals, and while the public are often skeptical of what they read in the news columns and believe that 'the camera cannot lie' is still very widely held despite computer and its magic. Currently we have portable, easy to operate camera that

still take pictures that the writer can operate himself or herself. We now have some digital camera that does not use film and even handsets. All these make it easier for the writers to capture momentous pictures that will accompany stories. In some instances, where, for example, you are interviewing the relatives and friends of a deceased or missing person, getting a picture may be a little bit dicey if the relatives feel any intrusion on private grief. In that case you must avoid them. You can, however, often possibly secure a photograph from a work-mate, or a print from a local photographer. Although experience has shown that in most cases the relatives of the missing person willingly make the picture available to the media.

When a person is reluctant to allow a press photograph to be taken, similar methods of persuasion may be tried to those used with people unwilling to talk. In the last resort, the photographer may have to fall back on patience and a degree of guile, taking his opportunity for getting a picture when it presents itself.

The place of pictures in packaging information for the mass media cannot be overstressed. It is unthinkable to open the pages of modern newspapers and magazines without seeing pictures. Such pictures are necessary to authenticate the stories and help in page make-up and planning. For an interview material of the Q&A format, the photo journalism pictures that are action packed are necessary while for other stories, both photo-journalism-pictures and studio-based-pictures are needed to adorn the pages.

### **Self assessment exercise 3:9**

How does a picture add to the value of a story? What difficulties is the photographer likely to meet in obtaining pictures?

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Successful interviewing – the art of making personal contact with individuals are drawing from them the information you require – is a highly media writing skilled art, and one which every journalist must master. For the very essence a media writer’s job is to gather information from source, process the information by making it comprehensible to the media public and transmission of the processed information within the coverage area. Interviewing is central to media writing because the root of all journalism principle of – being informed to inform is predicated in the ability to elicit needed information from whoever has it. And this involves a question and answer exchange. Most times, when a child is very inquisitive and asks so many questions, adults will retort whether the child wants to be a journalist. Craftsmanship in interviewing does not start and end with asking question for answers, but rather depends much on the indispensable but often overlooked skill of listening. Listening is a skill every media writer must aspire to develop or acquire for without it you face information drought and with it you become an information merchant.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

Interviews can be categorized based on purpose for carrying it out. You need to choose a topic that people need to know about or are interested in and select an interviewee that is popular during the planning stages. During interview for all media requires masters of certain skills research the subject and your interviewee etc. When interviewing people who are reluctant to talk to the media, you must attempt to get information by the most appropriate strategy like playing the dumb, etc. In writing the interview story, make sure the lead isolates a specific point, structure the story in order of importance, indicate occasion of interview. Problem in presenting the information in the print include finding effective ways to pull together all of the topics and to use quotes. When information can be obtained in other way, allow some off-the-record and uphold it. Because equipment is a

fundamental part of the broadcast interview, you have to be sure that everything is working well. And when necessary, as always is, obtain picture to back up.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

Choose a current news topic and ask 10 other students for their opinion. Record their responses and write a symposium interview copy. Then list the weaknesses and strength of this method.

## **7.0. REFERENCE/FURTHER READING**

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