
SYLLABI-BOOK MAPPING TABLE

Reporting

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INTRODUCTION

This book is designed to serve as an introductory text on the concept of 'reporting'. Reporting is a valuable topic in media studies thus requires a thorough analysis in the context of various media. Even though media as an industry is undergoing rapid changes, the basic principles of good reporting, accurate writing and ethical behaviour still hold their essence. The book emphasizes on the basic structure of news and the tools and techniques to create suitable news by incorporating fundamental news values and principles. Elaborate coverage of methods and principles of writing a news story prepare the students for a good career start in media.

This title covers the basic information about reporting techniques, qualities and traits of a successful reporter, and the possible problems faced by a reporter while developing the news story. To make things clearer for the young budding journalists, the concepts of attribution, off-the-record, embargo, pool reporting and follow-up have been discussed. These topics further elucidate the overall reporting hypotheses and principles by providing suitable links and context with real life scenarios.

Written in an instructional manual style, this book follows a simple and personalized style. Since reporting forms the fundamental base of any publication, it becomes imperative to discuss its overall aspects. Reporting covers most of the areas of our socio-economic and cultural aspects. To elaborate on the distinctive roles and responsibilities handled by the reporters in different beats, reporting for crime, health, courts, civil administration, civic society, culture, politics and education have been discussed. All this information throws light on the different angles of the profession to portray it in a unique manner.

Interviews are a very important source of first-hand information for media. The art of managing this first-hand source of information is a sophisticated one. It requires a cool and calculated approach. We have included a detailed account of the types, purposes and techniques of interviewing.

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UNIT 1 CONCEPT OF NEWS

Structure

- 1.0 Introduction
- 1.1 Unit Objectives
- 1.2 Definition of News
- 1.3 Categories of News
- 1.4 Fundamental Qualities of News
- 1.5 News Sources
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- 1.6 News Reporting
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall discuss the meaning and significance of news; how different scholars have defined it; sources of news and the structure of a news story.

It is important to know that reporting is a much coveted and sought after aspect of journalism. It is the reporter who is the known face of the newspaper or news channel. He comes in contact with people and represents their opinion. Generally, reporters are accorded a special treatment by the public and Government alike. It is the reporter who is given a ringside seat in a special enclosure along with other media persons in any event, public function or even in legislative proceedings.

This does not mean that other aspects of journalism like editing or page making are less important or command lesser respect. However, a reporter occupies a special place in the process because he goes out in the field, gathers news and submits it to the news desk for further processing. It is the reporter who deals with people outside the newspaper office; it is he who represents the paper to the people or newsmakers.

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1.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand the definition and meaning of news
- Analyse various elements that turn an event into news
- Explain the sources of news
- Elucidate the structure of news and its basic components

1.2 DEFINITION OF NEWS

Different scholars have given their own interpretations about the meaning of news. According to **John Bogart** of *New York Sun*, 'when a dog bites a man, it is not news but if a man bites a dog, it becomes news'. He pointed out that unusual events fall under the purview of the news. Similarly, William Hearst has defined news as '... what somebody somewhere is trying to suppress. Everything else is advertising'.

Walter William, who has been credited with founding the first school of journalism, defined news as, '...news in its broader sense, is that, which is of interest to the readers – the public'. According to another scholar G. Johnson, news is what interests a newsman.

The well-known publisher of *New York world* **Joseph Pulitzer**, whose name is now synonymous with a prestigious journalism award, defines news as 'original, distinctive, dramatic, romantic, thrilling, unique, curious, quaint, humorous, odd and apt to be talked about'.

The *Funk & Wagnall's Dictionary* defines news as: 'Information of a recent event, development, etc., especially as reported in a newspaper, on the radio, etc...any new or unfamiliar information.'

News is the timely report of events, facts and opinions, and interests a significant number of people. It is a new piece of information about a significant and recent event that affects the readers/audience and is of interest to them. The definition of a news item is dependent on the following:

- The size of the community (audience).
- The periodicity of the publication (daily, weekly, fortnightly, monthly, etc).
- The social character and economic strata of the community.
- The emphasis of the community (e.g. the elections to the *panchayat* in a village do not become the headline of a provincial or national newspaper).

Turner Catledge, former managing editor of *New York Times* said that news was '...anything you can find out today that you didn't know before'.

In brief, the main characteristics of news are as follows:

- It is perishable, i.e., the moment it is known to the readers, it perishes. Once known, the news loses its value and becomes a part of history.
- It is of interest to a considerably large number of people.
- It possesses an unusual nature.
- It is something that is new to the people at large.
- It is provided by a reporter; it does not exist without a reporter.

However, here one should keep it in mind that the general idea of news differs with people and situations. In a common perspective, some of the defining elements of news may vary, but their essential components are same throughout the world.

One must try to find out what exactly is the meaning of news? After reading the definitions and opinions of various scholars on the issue, it is better to ponder over the nature of news? Most of us watch television news bulletins, listen to radio news bulletins or leaf through newspapers a number of times. Why do we do this? One may say, 'to get information'. But why do we need to get information in the first place? One may feel that something is amiss. Without knowledge and information about contemporary happenings, an individual will not be able to connect with the society at economic, social and political levels. Further, one does not generally read Monday's newspaper on Friday. One may refer to an old newspaper to recheck certain information but this is rarely done on a daily basis.

To begin with, any unusual happening falls under the category of news. News is what you do not know. People turn to mass media like radio, newspaper and television to get informed about the latest happenings around the world. Without this information, one may not be able to relate and keep pace with the society. News is basically the report of facts. It is anything out of the ordinary. News is what a newsman makes it. An essential feature of news is that it is 'new'. There are no rigid rules to define news. It is unpredictable. In case of political news, prediction depends more or less on educated guesswork. Remember, the best way to learn about news and reporting is to develop an ability to analyse a news story.

A news story in a modern society reflects on various aspects of everyday life. For example, the prices of onion have skyrocketed. Why are media organizations giving so much prominence to this news? Why is it making headlines? Why is it consuming important time slots in different news channels? This is because onion is an essential commodity in kitchens throughout the country. It is also an important component in the menu of poor people. In our country a considerable percentage of population consumes raw onion as a substitute of expensive vegetables. Here, poor people cut it or crush it, put a little salt and pepper on it and eat it with bread. Given this background, skyrocketing of onion prices makes important news. It was on the issue of onion prices that a political party like Congress had dethroned Bharatiya Janata Party in 1999.

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Exercise 1

You are a regular reader of a daily newspaper which you subscribe. You may have a vague idea about the news and its elements which differentiate news from other pieces of writing.

The following news item is extracted from the front page of *Times of India*, New Delhi, Wednesday, 17 November 2010. Go through it carefully and list the reasons as to why you consider it a news item.

Del-Mum airfares jump 300%

Saurabh Sinha/TNN

New Delhi: If you are planning to fly from Delhi to Mumbai at short notice, get ready to shell out more than you would for a return ticket to, say, Dubai or Bangkok. Passengers' buying tickets on the date of travel or a day or two earlier on this sector in the past few days have seen one-way fares on full service carriers skyrocket to ₹.16,000-20,000 in economy and ₹.20,000-35,000 for business class!

While airfares across domestic networks are 15-25% higher this peak travel season, the Delhi-Mumbai sector has seen a 200-300% jump, thanks to a number of factors plaguing the two airports that together account for almost 70% of all domestic flights.

Low cost carriers are only marginally cheaper with spot or day before travel date fares (one way) ranging from ₹.13,000-17,000; some budget players, however, are charging even up to ₹.22,000. Only tickets being bought at least three or to four days before travel date on this sector begin at a slightly more normal rate of ₹.6,000 but with only a few seats available, even that gets sold out fast.

The main runway in Mumbai is closed for eight hours a day from Monday to Saturday, leading to a massive drop in capacity. With domestic travel growing in double digits post-slowdown, airlines wanted 573 daily slots from the airport there but got only 490. The peak demand season saw supply getting reduced, leading to huge fare hikes, particularly on the super-busy Delhi-Mumbai route.

Delhi is facing huge schedule uncertainties and baggage delays at IGI Airport's new T3 from where Air India, Jet and Kingfisher now operate. Catching a flight from T3 means a walk of 1-1.5 km, something that old passengers and family travellers are keen to avoid, leading to a rush for other airlines.

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Exercise 2

Scan any newspaper of the day and find out which news story appeals to you most. Then pick up your exercise notebook and try to answer the following questions:

(i) List the reasons why it appeals to you the most.

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(ii) How original is it ? Have you seen it for the first time or do you recall having read it before?

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.....

(iii) Does it stand out in the newspaper? How is it different than other news stories surrounding it?

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(iv) Do you find any element of drama in it? Do the words conjure up any moving picture before you?

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(v) Does it arouse your curiosity in any way?

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(vi) Does it thrill you in any way?

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(vii) Do you find any element of humour in it?

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1.3 CATEGORIES OF NEWS

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There are two main categories in which the news is mainly divided: hard news and soft news.

Hard news

It is mostly event-centered. It is the narration of an event. Hard news items are centered on 'what, when and why'. Consider the following news item taken from the front page of *Indian Express*, Delhi, Saturday, 20 November 2010.

Terror Probe: CBI arrests Aseemanand in Haridwar

Apurva

Jaipur, Nov. 19. In a breakthrough for investigation agencies probing terror incidents involving right wing Hindu outfits, the CBI today arrested Swami Aseemanand from an ashram in Haridwar in Uttarakhand.

Officials said Aseemanand had been in Haridwar for weeks, using forged identification papers. He is considered one of the main conspirators in the Malegaon, Mecca Masjid and Ajmer Dargah blasts cases. The Rajasthan ATS maintains it was Aseemanand's plan to target Muslim places of worship across the country.

The Uttarakhand police confirmed Aseemanand's arrest in Haridwar. "A team from the CBI was here and they have arrested Swami Aseemanand from an ashram in Haridwar. We believe they have taken him to New Delhi," a senior officer told *The Indian Express*.

Rajasthan ATS Chief Kapil Garg said a team would soon be sent to question Aseemanand in connection with the Ajmer Dargah blast case.

"He is a vital link in this investigation. We hope to question him. We have also been on his trail since the first arrest in this case in April," Garg said. He pointed out that the ATS chargesheet mentions Aseemanand as the main conspirator and ideologue behind the 2007 Ajmer Dargah blast.

Sources said Aseemanand went underground soon after the Rajasthan ATS made the first breakthrough in the case with the arrest of Devendra Gupta on April 29 in Ajmer. During the course of his interrogation, Gupta mentioned that it was Aseemanand and Sunil Joshi who had brought him into their fold and convinced him to carry out attacks in Ajmer and Mecca Masjid, the sources said.

Aseemanand remained in the Dangs in Gujarat where he was based for a few weeks after Gupta's arrest. A team from the Rajasthan ATS had been tracking Aseemanand ever since. According to the ATS, he was spotted in Gujarat a few times but then fled to South India.

"Aseemanand had sympathisers who probably sheltered him for a while. We believe he kept moving to keep his location secure. We also believe he went to certain areas in the NorthEast before settling down in Haridwar," a senior official said.

According to senior ATS officials, the plot to target Muslim places of worship was intended to "avenge" attacks against places like the Akshardham temple and Raghunath Mandir.

"We believe it was Aseemanand's plan to start the series of attacks across the country. He was not only responsible for choosing targets and making plans, but was vital in supplying logistics and financial aid to those who would execute the operation," an official said.

It is alleged that Aseemanand also harboured Sunil Joshi—prime suspect in the Ajmer blast case, he died later—and other accused in his ashram in the Dangs.

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No doubt, a daily newspaper focusses more on hard news. It is its main thrust area. The principal task of the dailies is to provide information to readers. A mere account of events however does not satisfy readers. They would like to enter beneath the upper layer of news.

Soft news

Soft news is beyond what has happened. It analyses and interprets in order to arrive at logical conclusions. This is becoming a very important segment of modern newspapers. The following is a sample of a news item that has been quoted from *Times of India*, Delhi, Friday, 26 November 2010:

From Jan 20, switch mobile operator but keep number

Times News Network

New Delhi: Exasperated with your present mobile service provider but unwilling to switch because that would mean changing your number? Soon, you'll be free to change operators at will, for a nominal transaction fee of ₹ 19. On Thursday, telecom minister Kapil Sibal launched mobile number portability (MNP) in Haryana. Nationwide implementation is expected to be completed by January 20.

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Of course, the implementation of MNP has missed many deadlines. In March 2006, TRAI had recommended that MNP be implemented by April 1, 2007. In December 2009, the government set a deadline of March 31, 2010 for its implementation, which was extended to June 30, 2010 and later to October 31, 2010.

From Friday, mobile phone customers in Haryana can port their numbers provided at least 90 days have elapsed after subscription to the service of the current provider. For change of service provider or porting, a subscriber has to send an SMS (PORT followed by the mobile number) from the number s/he wishes to be ported, to number 1900 whereby a Unique Porting Code (UPC) will be received on SMS from the current service provider. The subscriber will need to apply in the prescribed application form to the chosen new service provider quoting the UPC.

The new service provider will then take action to get the required processes completed to enable the subscriber to get connected to his network. Porting has to be completed within seven working days. Before making the porting request, subscribers will have to make sure their last bill has been paid failing which the change request will be rejected. In case of pre-paid subscribers, any balance amount left will not be carried forward when the number is transferred.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What are the factors on which news is dependent?
2. Why does news perish so fast?
3. State the features of the following:
 - a. Hard news
 - b. Soft news

Exercise 3

Take a newspaper of your choice. Now carry out the following instructions:

- List all the news items on a piece of paper and count their number.
- Categorize them as hard news or soft news.

Use the given template to carry out this exercise:

Newspaper.....

Issue Date.....

News Items	Hard / Soft News
.....
.....
.....
.....

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1.4 FUNDAMENTAL QUALITIES OF NEWS

There are certain parameters on which any news has to be tested. News have certain fundamental qualities, which are as follows:

- **Accuracy:** Accuracy is basic to any news item. It will not be an exaggeration to say that it is the backbone of any news story or news item. When a reporter fails in accuracy, s/he loses credibility. Before writing the news, it is absolutely must for a reporter to crosscheck the facts and information. S/he has to check facts, figures and names to make sure that the meaning is not changed and the statements are not quoted out of context.
- **Balance:** A news item, report or story has to be balanced and this is as important as being accurate. While writing about a controversy, both sides of the story should be given. A story may appear to be ‘imbalanced’ and thus biased, if it has too much of government views, or tends to give too much of foreign news which has little relevance to readers.
- **Objectivity:** The reporter’s opinions should not creep into the story. Only facts and other people’s opinions should be reported. The reporter should be a disinterested observer, reporting events without taking sides.
- **Clarity:** The opening sentence should be short and in active voice to the maximum extent possible. The ideal length of each paragraph may be 3–4 lines containing one-to-three small sentences to facilitate easy comprehension.
- **Impact:** Whenever a reporter does a news report, s/he should consider the impact the story will make. Will it induce some changes for the better? S/he will have to develop a ‘nose for news’, particularly news that will leave an impact.

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Exercise 4

The following news story appeared in *Indian Express*, New Delhi, Thursday, 18 November 2010. Since we have just finished a discussion on the fundamental qualities of news, now, read the news item carefully. You may have to read it more than once.

**CBI tells Govt to shunt out top NHAI officer
after ministry rejects probe**

Ritu Sarin

New Delhi, November 17. The Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH), under Kamal Nath, has refused the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) sanction to initiate an enquiry against a top official of the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) in connection with a corruption case registered six months ago in which two top NHAI officials were arrested.

CBI officials said the denial of sanction came early this month after it sent several reminders to the ministry and to the Cabinet Secretary underlining that it was Union Minister Kamal Nath who was the “competent authority” to take a final decision in the matter.

Sources have confirmed to *The Indian Express* that the CBI, after seeking legal advice, has written to the Cabinet Secretary, K.M. Chandrasekhar asking him to transfer out S I Patel, and Additional Secretary-level officer who is now posted as Member (Projects) in the NHAI.

The cabinet secretary is understood to have scheduled a review meeting with CBI officials later this week.

The case in question is a controversial award of contract in the 120 km Nagpur Betul Highway (NH 69) to a Delhi based private firm, Oriental Structural Engineers Pvt. Ltd. (OSEPL). The contract value, over an 18-year period, is ₹ 10,800 crore, and, the CBI has alleged several irregularities in the manner in which it was awarded.

It was in May this year that the CBI registered a case after it received complaints from among the 12 other bidders and put telephones of NHAI and OSPEL under surveillance. Cash totaling ₹ 1.86 crore was recovered by the CBI from NHAI officials during searches.

The CBI called it a case of criminal conspiracy and corruption in which while awarding a contract, the NHAI had tried to “eliminate all possible contenders on one pretext or another and favoured the accused company ensuring huge financial gain to it.”

Those arrested were a Chief General Manager and General Manager of the NHAI and two top OSEPL bosses, including its managing director. An analysis of evidence—including telephone transcript of conversations between the two camps and emails exchanged between NHAI and OSEPL officials—led the CBI to seek the sanction to investigate Member (Projects) Patel too.

Significantly, Patel was able to stay out of the country—he sought several extensions of his leave—all throughout the 60-day remand period of the arrested officials and returned to NHAI only after they secured bail since the CBI failed to file a chargesheet.

The CBI version is that Patel’s evidence is vital to link the pieces of evidence in this case and, therefore, its urgent reminders for immediate grant of action.

When contacted today, NHAI chairman Brajeswhar Singh told *The Indian Express* that he wasn’t aware of the final outcome of CBI’s request for sanction since it was being handled by the Ministry.

“The Ministry has asked us for comments and we gave them what was on our files. I am not aware of the nature of evidence with the CBI since they are not expected to share it with us,” he said. “Yes, the CBI recovered huge sums of money from two NHAI officials but again I am not aware if they were able to establish a nexus between the officers and the contract.”

Despite senior NHAI officials being arrested and OSEPL being made the “accused” private beneficiary, the NHAI went ahead and signed the concessional agreement—the final contractual procedure—with the same company. This was done in end August, three months after the arrest and searches. When asked about this, NHAI chief Singh said: “Technically, the contract was awarded before the CBI action. Nobody, including the CBI, had asked us to cancel the concessional agreement. Its signing was a mere formality.”

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1. Now evaluate and write your comments on the following aspects of the news item. Tick [√] for the appropriate answer and assign reasons to it.

- a) Accuracy: [] accurate
 [] somewhat accurate
 [] inaccurate

Reason
.....
- b) Balance: [] balanced
 [] somewhat balanced
 [] unbalanced

Reason
.....
- c) Objectivity [] objective
 [] somewhat objective
 [] subjective

Reason
.....

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d) Clarity [] clear
[] somewhat clear
[] unclear

Reason

e) What impact would this news item have on the readers?
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2. Why is it important for an Indian journalist to consider the possible 'impact' this news item may have on the readers?
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1.5 NEWS SOURCES

Since we have discussed several points concerning news, news stories and news reports, one question that is bound to emerge in your mind is that where does the news come from. Now we shall discuss various sources of news.

Generally, news comes from the reporter's contacts. When a reporter covers a regular beat, he visits the places that fall within his specific beat. For example, a crime reporter regularly visits police stations and police headquarters. Since he visits these places every day looking for a news story, he comes across several persons who share the information with him. They can be senior police officers, station house officers, beat officers and even constables. See these people constitute his sources of information. The beat assigned to a reporter may include politics, municipalities, municipal corporations, metropolitan councils, education, etc.

A reporter, to be successful, should have a variety of reliable and highly placed contacts which can be useful to get information. Among the news sources, some are available to all reporters, for example, public meetings, radio and television programmes, press conferences, news briefings, seminars and other functions. However, personal contacts are sources of exclusive information for a reporter. They may be in the Government, public or private sector and so on.

An important thing to remember is that some of the contacts may like to be quoted for the story as it gives them publicity. However, in case of a critical story, they may not risk their neck. In that case, the story may have to be attributed to 'sources' only. It is the responsibility of a reporter to ensure the truthfulness of a report. In such cases, it is advisable to keep some documents, audio tape or digital recorder to substantiate the story.

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A journalist chronicles daily events, places and facts before the public; s/he tries to communicate what s/he considers truth. This may not suit some individual, institution or the system all the time. Thus, there are chances of confrontation as well. In case a confrontation becomes inevitable, the reporter has to tackle the situation by using personal and professional traits. S/he should also treat his sources as 'sacred'. There may be pressure on the journalist from the Government and the judiciary at times to disclose the sources. Nonetheless, protecting one's source is a cardinal principle of journalism.

You should remember that there is no role of imagination in news as it has to come from 'somebody'. This 'somebody' is the source of news. There is no news without a 'source'. It always flows through a channel. Sometimes there may be a number of sources. Since a newspaper carries 130 to 150 stories every day, it needs to have a number of sources.

Exercise 5

After being familiar with the 'news sources' you must be clear about the variety of news sources a reporter must have at his disposal. The following exercise will give you a first-hand experience of the usages of a variety of sources in a newspaper.

- Take a newspaper and concentrate on the first page.
- Scan all the news items and find out how many and what types of sources have been used in the news items.

The format given below will come handy in completing this exercise in a more organized way.

News sources used on the front page of
on

Serial	News Items	Sources
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.....
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1.5.1 Classification of Sources

The news sources have been classified as:

1. Primary sources
2. Secondary sources
3. Tertiary sources

1. Primary sources: These include the sources which a reporter cultivates while working on a regular beat. For instance, a crime reporter develops sources in police as well as among the 'underworld' if he spends considerable

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time on that particular beat. In case of spot coverage, he has to gather most of the information on the spot. All these sources are primary sources of information.

- 2. Secondary sources:** National and international news agencies are the most important secondary sources in the newspaper industry. At this juncture, we will define a news agency.

According to UNESCO a news agency is

‘an undertaking whose principal objective, whatever its legal form, is to gather news and news material of which the sole purpose is to express or present facts, and to distribute this to, a group of news enterprises, and in exceptional circumstances to private individuals with a view to providing them with as complete and impartial a news service as possible against payment, and under condition compatible with business laws and uses’.

In simpler terms, a news agency can be defined as a professional organization that collects the content from various parts of the country or world, as the case may be, on various beats and then transmits the raw content in the form of a news story to its subscriber newspaper organizations on a regular payment basis.

In India, Press Trust of India (PTI) and United News of India (UNI) are the most prominent news agencies. They also cater the news in Hindi. UNI and PTI provide Hindi news services known as *Univarta* and *Bhasha* respectively.

Internationally, the news agencies of importance are Reuters of Britain, Associated Press (AP) and United Press International (UPI) of USA, Agence France Press (AFP) of France, Deutsche Press Agentur (DPA) of Germany, Itar Tass of Russia and Middle East News Agency (MENA) of Egypt.

- 3. Tertiary sources:** Press releases, statements and press notes are classic examples of tertiary sources. Every day in a newspaper office, a stream of such material keeps pouring in. This includes press releases by local leaders about civic problems, statements of leaders on any particular issue, or petitions by general public on lack of civic amenities in the area.

Announcement stories emanating from companies and individuals pour in bulk into newspaper offices. As one editor put it, ‘Press releases arrive as a giant snowstorm each day.’ Obviously, a newspaper can use very little information that comes into the office on a daily basis—even if it is high quality—because of space limitations.

Nonetheless, most releases are valuable for setting up a directory of potential sources. A professional release has the name and address of the PR officer and the company which can be contacted, as can be the office bearers of the divisions and other personnel mentioned in the releases. The reporter should not throw away such items without giving at least an evaluative glance.

Some small weeklies functioning with a limited staff directly use such releases. Most newspapers, however, rewrite the releases they decide to use. This is done for several reasons. Certainly, many releases are incomplete, too lengthy or too superfluous. For example, a good reporter will want the reader to know where an event will take place, a point that a release may overlook. An announcement of a campus event by a university may make sense to campus readers, but the general readers will need to know the address of the lecture hall as well.

Most standard releases have a release date, or 'embargo' line, which tells the paper when to release or print. Conventional newsrooms almost always put embargoes on stories until the time of the speech or event. For example, a national non-profit agency had prepared grandiose plans for reorganization. The board officers had heard much about the plans in a general meeting two days before the scheduled announcement in Mumbai. Reporters from New Delhi, Chandigarh and the wire services gathered for the 7 a.m. announcement breakfast. However, to their amazement, the local morning paper was already on the street with a banner headline on the story.

The difference between tertiary sources and other two types of sources should be clearly understood. In the first two, the reporter searches or looks forward to the sources of news while in tertiary sources, information comes to him on its own.

1.5.2 Other Sources of News

Apart from what has been already explained, there are some other sources of news as well, they are as follows:

Speeches

Speeches are a major source of news and every day many news items that appear in newspapers can be traced back to some speech or the other. Sometimes several speeches form part of one report. This happens in reports of seminars, symposia and legislatures. In such situations the most important speech, normally from the most important speaker, gets prominence.

While covering political party conferences and international conferences on various subjects, one has to deal with several speeches in a row. Depending on the content and the speaker, a reporter has to decide who should come first. Effort should also be made to generalize observations if possible and then mention who said what. In such cases the most important things said by different speakers should be mentioned and there should be no repetition of ideas. If there are contrary opinions expressed by different speakers they should be mentioned and then supporters of different schools of thoughts, which should be quoted. Here again repetition of ideas should be avoided.

If in a special debate in a house of Parliament, the speech of a minister of state gets prominence in case the cabinet minister of the same department does not speak. If the cabinet minister also speaks then the state minister is normally pushed out of the story. If the prime minister intervenes during the debate and says

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something on the subject even the cabinet minister is mentioned later in the body of the story. So while reporting multiple speeches the reporter must evaluate all these factors.

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Libraries

Time spent browsing in libraries can turn up prospective story ideas. You may find an author who has been so far overlooked. You may also find consumer reports which you can localize. Glance through magazine articles. They deal with the relevant themes in contemporary life, many of which you can adapt and discuss for the readers in your locality. You can also pick up a few ideas from out-of-town newspapers. Libraries not only contain resources for story research, they can also be the source of new ideas, background information, and fact verification.

Libraries also have books and reference materials. Usually, media organizations have a research and reference section where a reporter can access newspaper clippings and published material on a particular topic. Many a times, simply wading through the files, one comes across a lot of information and innovative story ideas.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

4. List at least five 'news sources' a newspaper reporter should have at his/her disposal at any time.
5. What kind of help does a digital recorder provide to a newspaper reporter?
6. Why should a reporter maintain the confidentiality of his sources?

1.6 NEWS REPORTING

We will now discuss newspaper reporting and the main components of a news report: the intro, the body and the lead. The news items appearing in newspapers are also known as news stories. Actual events may not form the basis of literary stories. However, a news story almost always stands on the basis of facts. History also stands on factual basis, but it concerns things of the past. News stories, on the other hand, are based on current events. Furthermore, a news story is generally written in the inverted pyramid style. It means the most important facts come in the beginning followed by other facts according to their significance.

A news story is never reported in a haphazard manner. There are established norms for writing a news item, news story or news report which are followed internationally. The following are the components of a news report:

- **Intro:** An intro or introduction is the opening paragraph of a news story that provides the main angle of the story. While writing the opening lines, clarity of expression should not be compromised. If the reader is forced to re-read a sentence to understand it, then it does not qualify as a good lead or intro.

• **Key:** Following is a test for elements of news and their appropriate order. It involves the four letters from the word 'news' as keys:

- N News worthiness, i.e., does the story possess news value?
- E Emphasis, i.e., does the intro include the most significant and remarkable fact?
- W The five Ws and the H, i.e., does the story possess answers to them?
- S Sources of information, i.e., are the sources of information identified in the story where it is essential?

• **Lead:** The lead should contain the essence of the story. It should give the reader an idea of what the story is about and help the copy desk to pick a suitable headline for the story. A good lead should arouse the reader's curiosity and force him to read the rest of the story. It should be precise and comprise of short, simple sentences. The lead should ideally answer the five W's: Who, What, Where, When, Why and How. As far as these Ws and H are concerned, there are no fixed rules about their inclusion in the lead or the intro. It is not necessary for a story to provide answers to all of these. However, these questions must be probed to identify the fundamental elements in a news story. Afterwards, as per the news value, the most significant element should cover the intro.

However, in many cases, depending on the dimensions of the news story, all these five W's and one H comprise two paragraphs.

• **Body:** While the lead should arouse the reader's interest, the body should sustain it. The body should flow smoothly and logically from the lead. The body should be as complete and as tight as possible and should provide all the relevant information within the shortest space possible.

1.7 NEWS VALUE

News value is determined by public interest. It differs from person to person and society to society. News value is the significance and importance of a news item. It determines how much prominence the news story should be given by the media organization. In practice, such decisions are taken by the news editor on the basis of his experience and knowledge as well as the media policy of the organization.

Following are the factors that determine, affect and influence the news value of any news story:

- (i) **Timeliness:** This is an important factor that decides the news value. If the news is not timely, it has little or no value. There is a fierce competition among newspapers to publish important events as quickly as possible. Strict watch is kept on news events till the eleventh hour, i.e., the deadline when the final pages go to print. In case something really important happens, other stories are pushed to the back pages or dropped and the important story is flashed on the front page. This is done keeping in view the reader's desire for information on the latest

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happenings. If there is any delay in the coverage of news, the reader might lose interest in the news or the news element itself might diminish.

- (ii) **Proximity:** Human beings are inclined to know about the news events as soon as possible. Things that happen at faraway places like other countries are of relatively lesser interest to people. Something happening in the locality draws more interest than something occurring in the other town or for that matter, in another country. For example, a crime incident in the city evokes more interest than something that happens in a neighbouring country.
- (iii) **Eminence:** If the focus of the news is someone of prominence like the President or the Prime Minister, the interest of the reader automatically shifts to him as compared to people of little or no eminence at all. For example, many ordinary people die in road accidents and hardly anyone bothers. Even the passerby thinks twice before stopping, particularly in metropolises. Moreover, the utterances of eminent people also make news; their speeches decide the leads of newspapers.
- (iv) **Size:** Different angles to a story decide its size. This happens particularly in crime-oriented stories. The more the angles to a story, the more will be the interest of readers in it. So at times, size also determines the news values of stories.
- (v) **News policy of the news organization:** The spectrum of coverage that a news organization decides in accordance with the readership it wants to cater news to is also an important determinant of the news value. For example, *Indian Express* enjoys a special readership because of its, what some people say, 'anti-establishment stance'.
- (vi) **Human interest:** People are always interested in knowing what is happening to other people. Something that deviates from ordinary course of life is always interesting. The uncertainty of human nature and oddity of circumstances normally contributes to such stories. For example, in 2006 a boy named Prince fell into a deep bore-well pit and this prompted the media to go after the story. Human interest is much in demand as far as news value is concerned.
- (vii) **Novelty or oddity:** Anything that is new or odd in a way adds to the value of the news. For example, in 2006 Pravin Mahajan, brother of then prominent BJP leader, shot his elder brother in his flat. It was something absolutely unusual with no other parallel in Indian politics. So it made banner headlines throughout the country.
- (viii) **Conflict:** Like creative stories, conflict plays an important role in determining news value. Conflict of any kind is news, whether it is the family squabble of Ambani brothers, agitation of Gujjars in Rajasthan to be included in the list of scheduled castes, Telangana movement in Andhra Pradesh or the scourge of Naxalites in many states of India.

1.8 NEWS STRUCTURE

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So far we have discussed a lot about news including its definition, categories, fundamental qualities, sources, reporting of news, values attached to it, etc. In this topic, we shall discuss the structure of news.

In print media, the pattern of inverted pyramid is usually followed. The Egyptian pyramid is broad at the base and is tapering at the top. Now, just imagine an inverted pyramid. The broad base of the pyramid comes up and its tapering top becomes the bottom. Or you can just imagine a square cone.

The structure of news is just like an inverted pyramid. The most important part of a news item, as we have discussed earlier, is the lead or the intro. The rest of the paragraphs are arranged in the order of diminishing importance. It means that the paragraph that follows the lead or the intro is the second most important part of the news item. The less important one will be the third paragraph and so on. This is done with a view to adjust the length of the news item in the final page. A need may arise to cut the last two paragraphs for the sake of its adjustment in the page, so the least important paragraphs can easily be chopped off.

This pyramid basically consists of three segments. The first one is called the lead or introduction (intro in newspaper parlance). Second is body and third one is conclusion.

Headline is said to be a news story in brief. The aim of headline is to give the reader a broad and overall idea about the main contents of the story. It is said that a headline should be long enough to sustain the interest of the reader.

Every news story or report should necessarily have an introduction. It is said that the first paragraph of a report or a story should answer six questions. These six questions in a lighter vein are called one husband and five wives. The one husband is How, and five wives are what, when, where, who and why. Though this is the principle, but in modern usage two or more wives can be shifted to next paragraph, even the husband as well.

The basic idea behind the intro is to catch the attention of the reader. One can call it the USP of the news story. Once it serves its purpose—attracting the reader—the body should be able to sustain that interest generated by the intro. There should be links between the introduction and the body so that the reader makes a smooth transition from the former to the latter. The body should provide all the necessary facts, details and information without being lengthy and boring. In newspapers, there is always a space constraint and often a detailed story may get only two three columns, hence brevity should be the watchword of the body.

A news item of the story should not end or taper off all of a sudden. The conclusion should not only sum up the entire news story without being repetitive but also leave the reader with some food for thought. However, the conclusion should be so formulated that if the story has to be deleted while editing due to space constraints, it does not have any significant bearing on the story.

A reporter is supposed to take care of some basic principles of writing a copy. First and foremost, it should be a neat copy with clear indication of editing symbols and marks. Even while giving fresh paragraphs and marks to show the end of the story, the editing symbols should stand out prominently so that there is no confusion at the time of carrying out the corrections.

The slug of the story should appear on each page if the story runs into more than one page. If a story continues on the second page, it should be indicated on the right hand bottom of the copy. A copy should usually be typed in double space so that there is ample space for carrying out the corrections and margins should be left at the top and bottom. An ideal sentence or a paragraph should preferably end on a page and fresh line or paragraph should begin on a new separate page.

Newsmen have to deal with a wide range of subjects. Every newsman has his unique way of presenting the story. Hence there are several means of writing leads and intros. This fact is clear to all those who carefully read newspapers. They can notice that different newspapers present the same news story in different ways. Also, a particular newspaper presents various stories in dissimilar ways. Furthermore, two reporters doing the same story write it in different ways.

Depending on different criteria, intros or leads can be classified in different ways. On the basis of number of incidents involved, the intro may be complex or simple.

- (i) **Simple lead:** It concerns a single incident. Even if the happening or event comprises several separate incidents, the intro focusses on the most significant incident. Usually, newspapers prefer simple leads. These are normally favoured because it is easy to write them clearly. In case of a complex and critical event like the armed force action in the Golden Temple, *Indian Express*, Chandigarh, came out with a simple, straightforward lead:

Express News Service

Chandigarh, April 30. The Punjab Police and paramilitary forces entered the Golden Temple complex at Amritsar this afternoon to clear it of "terrorists, separatists and anti-national elements".

- (ii) **Complex lead:** It includes more than one incident in the intro. It is generally used when a few related incidents are collectively presented in a single story. Writing this type of intro requires a lot of caution because usually it is long and sometimes very confusing.

- *Direct address lead:* It is straightforward focussing on some interesting subject or one having a universal appeal.

- *Descriptive lead:* It is also called situation or picture lead. It aims to paint a word picture of some fascinating personality, place or thing to generate suitable atmosphere for the story.

- *Parody lead:* It comprises playing with words through the use of commonly known quotations, proverbs, song titles, book titles, currently popular sayings and

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other expressions to establish instant identification with the reader. It is an attempt to add some sparkle to what otherwise would have been an outline story.

- *Staccato lead*: It involves short clipped words, sentences and phrases, which are at times separated by dashes and dots. It is disruptive and casual in nature and hence should not be brought into use if the story's facts do not justify and warrant it.

- *Interpretative leads*: These generally do not quote anybody in particular and start with a statement by the story's writer. This type of lead provides the reporter's assessment based on situational facts.

1.8.1 Body

Once the intro is written, the body of the story follows in the logical sequence of the inverted pyramid style. If the news point is controversial in nature, it is necessary to reveal the news source in the lead. The very same applies to the instances when the news story is not indisputable. However, if the fact is unchallengeable, the starting paragraph may well present the news straightaway, keeping the source to be mentioned in the next one.

In such cases, one should avoid starting the next paragraph with: 'This was announced (or stated) here today by...' It is because such a sentence coming just after the lead restricts the story's momentum. The second paragraph may proceed directly to the next significant point in the story, introducing the source in a simple way to ensure that the story moves smoothly.

To ensure accuracy and better readability, it is necessary to use appropriate words in the body of the story. The body must be succinct and should avoid verbiage. It must take into account all the material points related to the news event. If necessary, it should elaborate on the background, but should be free of the burden of dispensable details.

1.8.2 Language

Regarding the language of a news story, one should keep it in mind that it should be very simple and must be effortlessly understood by the common reader. It is preferable to use simple and direct sentences. These are more effective than long and sophisticated ones. Furthermore, the simple style facilitates translation if the copy is to be used in a sister publication in a different language. This can be a great advantage in multi-language societies like India.

It is not just sufficient to gather news. To complete the process, news has to be put across as well. Its meaning must be instantly recognizable and it should be concise. It must be realized that the readers do not possess time and inclination to look for help in dictionaries and newspapers. The common reader should be able to comprehend most of the words used in the copy. So it is needless to say that every sentence should be and concise clear.

A reporter should not try to impress the reader with his knowledge of the language. Also the reporter should not have the motive of proving the depth of his investigation. Some people use long and winding sentences comprising many dependent clauses, exclamations, quotations, interjections, allusions, metaphors, Latin terminology, etc. Such newsmen assume that the reader possesses sufficient time and knowledge.

It should be kept in mind that a short sentence is more likely to be clear. This easily communicates one's thought and the related perceptions. The simple tool of 'full stop' provides a substantial help towards clarity.

If the reporter prefixes a subsidiary clause involving one or more ideas in precedence of the key idea, it results in a long and confusing sentence. The readers face difficulties when they find a sentence opening with a subsidiary clause because there are chances that the two ideas may develop in separate directions. For clarity's sake, it should be ensured that the sentence carrying the key idea is given instant and direct identity of its own.

Nonetheless, it should not be taken to mean that newspapers are supposed to use simple sentences only. The economy of space and flow need all types of sentences to be used in the copy. For instance, it might turn out to be a wasteful exercise to introduce the subject and predicate for all ideas. Sometimes in a complex sentence, a subordinate clause expresses more precisely than a sequence of simple sentences or compound sentences connected by 'and', etc. All in all, we can say that if you have something to say then say it as clearly as possible.

Do your best to avoid jargon, unfamiliar words and unusual expressions prevailing in the fields of special knowledge. The words used should be elegant and simple. Further, to make it convenient for the readers, unfamiliar words should be explained to clear their meaning.

In cases when it is unavoidable to use these expressions, an interpretation or an explanation should accompany for the benefit of the common reader. Just to create false impressions, some media men use foreign expressions. This should be avoided. Also, keeping in mind the cultural traits prevailing among the target audience, obscene, profane or vulgar language should be avoided. Such peculiar expressions should be cut out even when the writer is using direct quotations.

Preferably, active voice sentences should be used because the expressions in passive voice leave a deadening effect. In fact, the active voice style makes the writing vigorous and economical. For example, it is advised to use 'The directors will meet next week' in place of 'A meeting will be held by directors next week'.

Generally, the grammar of the language is as much applicable to newsmen as to others for different purposes. All publications have their unique style, which make them distinguishable from others. These finer points of usage are included in the style sheet of the publication. The media men are supposed to be thoroughly conversant with the style sheet of their respective publications.

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1.9 SUMMARY

- News is the timely report of events, facts and comments that interest a significant number of people. The theory of relativity applies to the concept of what news is. News differs with people and places. What is news for one may not be the news for another.
- Some of the factors that decide newsworthiness are timeliness, proximity, conflict, prominence, government action, human interest, weather, sports and developmental activity.
- The news values differ from community to community; what is news in a literate society may be considered information in a developing country. News that is sensitive in nature should be handled carefully. A reporter should try to tell what happened exactly and should avoid sensationalism.
- There are two types of news sources. First, sources which are available to everyone. These include: public meetings, press conferences, press briefings, radio and television channels, seminars, shows, etc. Second, sources which are available only through the personal contacts of reporter. These result in exclusive stories, some attributed to people by names, others without identifying the sources. When the source is not named, extreme care should be taken to verify the story. Use the story only if you are sure of it, but protect your source at all cost.
- A news report should be accurate, balanced, objective and clear. A news report comprises of the lead or the intro and the body. The intro of the news should be such that the reader is compelled to go through the rest of the body.
- Print media follows inverted pyramid structure of the news in which paragraphs are used in accordance with diminishing importance. This is done with a view to adjusting the copy in the final pages of the newspaper. The language of the news story should be simple and easily understandable to an average reader. All efforts to flaunt ones knowledge of the English language should be avoided.

1.10 KEY TERMS

- **News:** Information about current events and developments as it is reported in the mass media
- **Cover story:** The most important article in a magazine that is featured on the front cover
- **Hard news:** News reported using merely facts and quotes with little description or opinion
- **Soft news:** News reported in a chatty, colourful style with less emphasis on straight facts and quotes

- **Spot news:** News coverage that is not planned, because it is covering an event which is still unfolding or has only very recently happened
- **Coverage:** The percentage of the public who are reached by a newspaper or radio or television station
- **Diary piece:** An article which has been scheduled to be covered, like an event which has happened and needs to be written, or a follow-up to a previous article

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1.11 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. The factors on which news is dependent are as follows:
 - (i) The size of the readers
 - (ii) The socio-economic character and background of the readers
 - (iii) The frequency of the publishing newspaper
 - (iv) The focus of attention or emphasis of the readers
2. An event becomes news when it is reported before it is known to a large number of people. With the passing of every minute, more and more people become aware of it. It loses its value as people learn about it and after a considerable period, it is no longer considered news, nor does it have any interest left. It becomes history. One can say that news is history that is created at a very fast speed.
3. (i) Hard news narrates an event or a happening. What has happened a short while ago is narrated bit by bit in hard news.
(ii) Soft news goes beyond what has happened. It analyses, interprets and draws logical conclusions.
4. The following are five news sources required by a reporter:
 - (i) Radio and TV programmes
 - (ii) News agencies
 - (iii) Press conferences
 - (iv) Seminars
 - (v) Press releases
5. A digital recorder can work as evidence when required. Besides, it is difficult for a reporter to rely on memory on an issue of vital importance. On such an occasion, a reporter can always rely on a digital recorder and verify the information. In case, a source denies a fact, the reporter may establish the truth with the help of a digital recorder.
6. The relationship between a reporter and a source is that of trust and faith. A reporter should, under any circumstances, not jeopardize this relationship or let any doubt emerge about its sanctity. He should protect his sources.

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Therefore, this special relationship between a reporter and the source is termed 'sacred'.

7. Yes. No newspaper can carry events as they are because they do not have a life of their own. Someone has to collect them, put them together and give an account of them as they happened. So, it is the journalist who gives life to an event and makes it 'the news'.
8. The reasons for the significance of these events are as follows:
 - a) The Commonwealth Games were in news for the corruption involved in their organization, so the news evokes a lot of common interest.
 - b) Taj is one of the Seven Wonders of the World and a signal-free drive to it from Delhi would generate a lot of interest.
 - c) Privilege motion is an important weapon for the opposition and is exercised in parliamentary democracy.
 - d) There is political instability in Andhra Pradesh which is an important southern state of India and Congress hopes to stem the tide by replacing Reddy.
 - e) Neera Radia episode has rocked the country recently and her links have caused embarrassment to CPM, a prominent opposition party.
 - f) China's funding of the Indian team to win water polo gold merits front page as Sino-Indian relations have, of late, taken a beating.
 - g) When the prices of food grains and vegetables are skyrocketing, the minister still refrains from a CBI probe into the causes of food price escalation.
 - h) It is a very sensitive national issue for the Indians.
 - i) Sugar is an essential commodity and a rise in its prices makes a lot of difference for the common man.

1.12 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. What is meant by the term 'news'?
2. What is the difference between soft news and hard news?
3. Write a short note on the fundamental qualities of news.
4. What do you mean by the practice of 'news reporting'?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Give a detailed description of the sources of news.
2. What is meant by news value? Explain the factors that determine news value.
3. What is news structure? Critically evaluate its different components.
4. Explain the various elements that turn an event into news.

1.13 FURTHER READING

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UNIT 2 METHODS AND PRINCIPLES OF NEWS REPORTING

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Structure

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 Unit Objectives
- 2.2 Effective Writing Skills
- 2.3 Essentials of Good Writing
- 2.4 Elements of a News Story
- 2.5 Inverted Pyramid
- 2.6 Techniques of Good News Writing
- 2.7 Accuracy and Attribution
- 2.8 Sources of Information and Ideas
- 2.9 Revise and Rewrite
- 2.10 Embargo, Off-the-record, Pool Reporting and Follow-up
 - 2.10.1 Embargo
 - 2.10.2 Off-the-Record
 - 2.10.3 Pool Reporting
 - 2.10.4 Follow-up
- 2.11 Traits of a Reporter
 - 2.11.1 Excellent News Sense; 2.11.2 Extrovert Nature
 - 2.11.3 Knack to Establish Sources and Develop Contacts
 - 2.11.4 Capacity of Neutral Observation; 2.11.5 Precision in Articulation
 - 2.11.6 Team Spirit; 2.11.7 Endurance against Pressure
- 2.12 Summary
- 2.13 Key Terms
- 2.14 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 2.15 Questions and Exercises
- 2.16 Further Reading

2.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we are going to discuss what it takes to be a good news writer and what things a news writer should keep in mind to produce a good copy. We shall revisit the topic of news story and discuss what it means. The techniques of good writing now stand on a solid academic platform. We will discuss such techniques in detail. It is evident that the success of a newspaper is mainly decided by the level of reports sent by its reporters, who capture the interesting moments unfolding in the contemporary world. They portray these stand-out events in a format that informs the readers without leaving any scope for ambiguities. To make the copy as simple as possible in the common man's words is easier said than done. In fact, writing news reports is a very specialized art defined by many general as well as media house specific style points and instructions. It is needless to say that nicely

written news reports are the building blocks to the success and popularity of a newspaper.

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2.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the methods and principles of writing a news story
- Learn the basic qualities of a successful reporter
- Evaluate different news elements
- Examine the pitfalls and problems in reporting
- Explain important concepts in the domain of news reporting

2.2 EFFECTIVE WRITING SKILLS

Eminent journalist M. V. Kamath, who held several high positions in the profession of journalism, opines that 'a good write-up is a study in effortlessness. It must flow freely. It must be knowledgeable without being pretentious, entertaining without being vulgar and informative without being newsy'. This statement summarizes the requirements of a good write-up, be it any form of writing including reportage, article, essay, comment or even editorial. In fact, this statement is the sum total of Kamat's lifetime journalistic endeavours. For those who aspire to be hotshot news reporters and make a name for themselves, it is not possible to achieve the goal unless they groom the basic skills to write a good copy by mastering the basics of news writing through repeated practice.

Before you start, the first thing to keep in mind is that nobody can become a good writer without being a good reader. The question obviously comes to your mind as to what should you read. One may suggest a novice that s/he should start reading and eventually s/he would know what to read. Since every human being is a separate individual, interests of every individual vary. Though everybody is a regular reader, the answer to the question as to what to read is not easy to answer. Most of us read every day but we are not aware of it. Don't you read newspapers? Don't you flip through the pages of magazine at a haircut saloon till your turn comes? While waiting to see someone in some office, don't you leaf through the magazines till he comes to you or you are called? So you know that consciously or unconsciously you are a reader. What you need to do is to channelize this habit of yours into a more purposeful exercise.

You must have visited a number of libraries by now and seen shelves stacked with lots of books. You must have gone through catalogues as well. However, before choosing for any kind of book, first of all you will have to ask yourself where your interests lie. If your interest is in crime fiction then there are several

choices. You can go for Sidney Sheldon, Agatha Christie or, for that matter, Earl Stanley Gardner. For those whose interest lies in Indian writers, Vikram Seth, V.S. Naipaul, Ghumpa Lahiri, Anita Desai, Chetan Bhagat and Arvind Adiga are highly recommended.

Initially you may wonder what you should read amongst on the various sources given above. Nonetheless, just read any of them and in the end you will be surprised to find that your way of thinking is changing a bit. Your approach and your imagination will be somehow different from what it used to be before you started reading. Every writer has his own style. When you start reading, you may find it a bit boring. However, as you go on, you will find yourself at an altogether new path. As the habit grows, you will gradually want to read more and more. Further, it will also be clearer to you what to read.

At this juncture your objective is to learn and you can start from anywhere to meet this purpose. It may be bedside stories or fairy tales like *Aesop's Fables*. A writer has to go through an ordeal before s/he is published and this is something which you are yet to start. If you develop yourself as a good reader, you will be able to differentiate between good and bad writing. Once you know the dos and don'ts, you will learn your first lesson—what is to be adopted and what is to be discarded. Your curiosity is bound to lead you to the betterment of your skills.

Note that this principle applies only to English; rather it applies to any language in which you want to take up writing as a profession. Remember, the basics remain the same. Language may differ but the basic concepts never change. If the classics like the works of Mirza Ghalib or plays written by Kalidasa are translated into any language, their inherent style and essence remain the same. If you go through them, their simple and attractive style is bound to captivate you. It is important to write in a simple manner and give the narration of events or the advocacy of your arguments in the simplest of manner so that readers like it immediately. As a reporter, the first reader of your piece will be the sub-editor, so try to ensure that he is required to put minimum effort to pass your copy.

So far whatever has been communicated to you is with a view to draw you to the desk. You should also remember that writing needs patience, concentration and an understanding of whom you want to cater your writing to. Who will you be writing for? Which segment of the vast readership will you be targetting? Of course, this will come later in this unit. Let us first understand what exactly writing is. It is fun, excitement and rewarding but it is definitely not easy. However, not to be too mindful of failures, just sit down and start writing.

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Exercise 1

At this point in the unit, it is advisable that you analyse yourself by trying to identify your habits as far as reading and writing are concerned.

- What do you read daily?
Regularly
Occasionally
Casually
- How much time do you spend on these?
- What do you write on
Daily
Regularly
Occasionally
- How much time do you spend on these?
- Do you write in a diary on a daily basis?
Yes [] No []
If yes, why? If no, why not?
- How many words do you write at one go?
250 []
500 []
1000 []
More than 1000 []
- Do you revise your piece?
Yes [] No []
If yes, how many times do you re-write till you are satisfied with what you have written?
.....
.....
- If no, why not?
.....
.....
- Make a list of the ways through which you think you can improve your writing.
.....
.....

2.3 ESSENTIALS OF GOOD WRITING

A good piece of written for mass media in particular has to be direct, crystal clear in meaning and crisp. It is meant to convey information, thoughts and sentiments to the reader openly in minimum possible words without any kind of exaggeration. It is writing that provides an imaginary picture through its words in which the reader fills the colours of his/her own imagination.

The words in a good piece of writing are limited—minimum to the extent possible. Crispness is the fundamental rule applied to all forms of media writing. The words—without any kind of ambiguity—are used to convey their exact meaning. Superfluous wordage has no place in media writing. Good writing is humble. It is not meant to draw attention to itself. It is devoid of the wanton display of the writer's intelligence, or, for that matter, the lack of it. In a good piece, the words speak for themselves and the reader receives the message straightway. Mind you, the people who like to read are quick to discard any superfluous writing.

Surely there are ways and means to achieve this. The writer is supposed to know his subject thoroughly and has to learn how to put the piece on paper and then rewrite it. We shall discuss these subjects one by one. The basics of all these will be explained to you but it will be you who will have get into the act of writing. It is advisable to go through William Stannard Allen's *Living English Structure* after completing this unit.

2.4 ELEMENTS OF A NEWS STORY

People working in media get a chance of expressing themselves through mass media. It is the medium through which they show their creativity to the world. Thus, it becomes essential for us to discuss the subject of news story once again so that you are able to learn how a news story forms the basis of all media writing.

The ability to write well arises only when the writer has a thorough understanding of the event in question. After this, the next challenge is to describe it to readers through writing. This means you have to understand an event before you put it in your own words. However, this alone is not enough. You will have to understand the basic structure of news along with the customs and traditions of news writing as well. Only this will complete the process of news writing and will pave the way for creative writing. You have already learnt the basics of reporting in the previous unit. Here we will briefly recollect it so that you can understand how the same principles are applicable to almost any kind of writing thus widening the scope of writing beyond mere news story.

The focus of this unit is on writing a news story. As we have learnt in the last unit, a news event is also known as a news story. Some people like to call it a news item as well. So whatever appears in a newspaper or news magazine in this form is a news story. It is absolutely imperative for the students of mass media and

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mass communication to understand this format as it is an unavoidable step towards understanding mass media. It is imperative to remember that understanding news story is the first step towards mastering mass media writing.

What exactly is news in reality? It is not just something that appears in a newspaper or is not just what you see on television. If someone assigns you the task of finding a synonym for news, what will it be? You read a newspaper or watch the news bulletin on television only to get information. You want to keep yourself up to date to what is happening around you.

A journalist is called a newsman and is required to look for information everywhere. He looks for it in verbal communication. His job is not restricted to converse with the top people only. Even when he talks to the common people, he looks for information. Whatever he does, be it travelling in train or bus, going through the press releases in his office, PR bulletins or any other such innocuous document, his main hunt is only one—information—which he intends to convey to his readers.

If you nurse an ambition to become a good writer for mass media, you have to acquire two most important tools. First of all, you will have to learn how to look for the information and gather it and then you will have to learn how to transform this information into a format that clicks with your readers.

Once you know this format, the first hurdle towards becoming a writer is crossed. The prose of a news story is simple and straightforward. It requires clear thinking and complete understanding of the event/subject as well as conciseness and precision in the use of language by the writer. This rule applies to all forms of writing for the mass media.

Here it is preferable to learn some of the points that editors consider for the selection of a story. These points are: *impact, timeliness, prominence, proximity, conflict, bizarre or unusual* and *currency*.

Impact is the effect that a story leaves on its readers. There are many events involving a few people only but their impact can influence the psyche of the masses. The price rise of any essential commodity can affect public at large and the impact of this story may lead to mass agitations throughout the country. Whatever topic you may select to write on, it will always be evaluated on its impact value. A story on the gang rape of a girl student would definitely lead to sharp reactions and agitation by the feminist groups in the city. Similarly, there would be some topics which, when appearing in the newspapers, force the government officials to reverse their decisions.

An event creates impact only when it is published at the proper time. This makes *timeliness* an important factor. The follow-up of a controversial issue is useful only when the controversy is still on. If the controversy has died down, and you are writing a follow-up, it will be like aimlessly beating about the bush.

You know that *prominence* means anything related to prominent people. It is this factor that is responsible for the growing number of *paparazzi* in the West.

The most trivial of actions by prominent people make news. It may concern prime ministers, top bureaucrats, or celebrities belonging to the sports and entertainment industry.

Proximity is decided by the distance factor. How close the event has taken place is important. Any event that occurs at home, in town, state or nation is far more important than the one that occurs thousands of kilometres away. When ten persons perish in a building collapse near your city, it makes front page item. However, the news item about 2000 persons dying in Australia in floods gets tucked away in a corner on the inside pages.

Conflict always sells; not necessarily between two countries, but even a group fight in a political party makes news. If people begin to fight in UP assembly injuring each other, it is big news. If Congress General Secretary Digvijay Singh takes a dig at Union Home Minister Chidambaram, it becomes news. Conflict has a big USP for newsmen and many of them always try to smell it. It makes an interesting story.

Even if there is a fight between two neighbours leading to the casualty ward of local hospital, it makes a worthwhile story for the local news pages of a local newspaper. So the journalists, who are assigned to cover elections, have to wade through small local newspapers. They have to look for some lead which they can develop into a big story.

It goes for *bizarre* or *unusual events* also. They always attract eyeballs. Going by the definition that we discussed in the last unit, if a dog bites a man, it is no news. However, if a man bites a dog, it is outright news. Normal hospitalization is no news but if a newlywed was brought to the hospital wrapped in a carpet along with her dog is news that gets splashed across newspaper pages throughout the country. It is bound to get a prominent display.

Currency is the sister to *timeliness*. The ongoing events that have continuity are current. These issues are not mere in the pan; they prevail over a period of time and continue to engage people through a chain of related events. For example, at this juncture, the exorbitant prices of onion is the current hot topic. Every day you read in newspapers about the measures that the Government has taken to bring the prices down. Not a day has passed when you did not read about the ongoing rates of onions.

All these points are worthy of giving you an opportunity to write a good story. The only thing you should know, at this juncture, is how to structure the story to enable the reader to access the information in the order of importance. Further it should be represented in such an interesting and arousing manner that the reader is compelled to finish it.

Here it becomes imperative to recall the proverbial one husband with five wives rule, i.e., **five W's and one H**. We have briefly discussed these in Unit 1. These five W's and one H are the basic questions that arise in any news story. A

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reader invariably seeks answers to them. We expect you to know them but in case you are unable to recall, we again briefly inform you about the rule:

Who means the doer(s) in the story, the main character(s).

What basically related to the action the story is all about.

Where means the place of action or the location of event.

When denotes the time of occurrence of the event.

Why means the reason of the event, an obvious question in a reader's mind; explanation to this is a must.

How is the modus operandi of the main character(s).

2.5 INVERTED PYRAMID

To create a news story, a reporter has to go through several stages ranging from identifying sources to gathering information. When you finish gathering the information, you have to decide on the structure of the story. It is absolutely imperative for a reporter to present information to the reader in an orderly manner so that every paragraph gradually unfolds the story. This cannot be achieved unless the story is structured properly. The structure of a story makes a subeditor, who happens to be your first reader, decide whether to accept or reject your piece from among several pieces submitted by your competitors. There are times when subeditors reject reporter's piece and prefer to use stories wired by news agencies.

Inverted pyramid happens to be the most common structure of writing a story and is the common practice prevalent in larger part of the world as far as news writing is concerned. In this structure, there is one lead or intro which marks the first paragraph of the news story and contains the most important information of the story.

The rest of the story is called the body and consists of the remaining paragraphs which go by the descending order of importance. The importance of information decreases by the paragraphs as the story unfolds. However, all the paragraphs are interconnected as if pearls in a thread. The coherence between words in general and paragraphs in particular is a must in order to hold the attention of the reader.

A lot of debates exist about the traditional inverted pyramid structure of the story. Its supporters argue that it enables the reader to get maximum information in minimum time. If you invert the pyramid better, the interest of the reader will increase. Almost all the writers of crime fiction adopt this technique. The perpetrator of the crime is exposed in the last, the mystery gets solved at the end and the reader is forced to go through the novel till the end. This makes the book unputdownable which means one s/he starts reading, the book in not to be put down till the end.

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This technique is also adopted in cinema in which many queries of the viewer are satisfied with the use of flash back. In between putting a shot of the event that takes place in the end, the cinematographer succeeds in keeping the viewer chained to his chair, who, in turn, has developed a curiosity to know how the particular event took place at all. Inverted pyramid leads the reader exactly to the same thing. It arouses the reader's curiosity and takes it to a peak and then satisfied it in the end.

In any case, today's reader is short of time. He does not have patience to wade through unimportant or less important facts to get a complete picture of the event. So a news story has to be structured in a manner that it begins in the end and ends at the beginning. This is by and large the inverted pyramid style of writing the news stories.

When you write, the first thing to be kept in mind is: Do not tax the mind of your reader. It means do not put much burden on the mind of the reader by writing complex sentences or using pompous words. The sentences should be short and to the point. Do not try to expose your knowledge of English or for that matter your vocabulary to the reader by using difficult or uncommon words. You are not to impress him but to provide him information in an interesting way. Remember, simple words convey the meaning strongly.

Like sentences, paragraphs should be short too. They should not be more than four or five lines of a printed newspaper, i.e., maximum 100 words or so. The sole idea is to provide information to the reader in an easy manner. Besides, long paragraphs should be avoided because it becomes a daunting task for the reader to go through a long paragraph because the width of a newspaper column is quite narrow. Janardan Thakur's book *All the Prime Minister's Men* is helpful to learn both these styles because it makes the art understandable at the operational level.

Stories read good when they are written in third person. The writer remains invisible in the story and first person pronouns should be used only when they are a part of any direct third party quotation. A similar suggestion is to avoid addressing the reader by second person pronoun 'you'. Further, do not preach or give your personal opinions to the reader in your story. You are supposed to only give him information about what you see and hear about a particular news event. The reader is not bothered about your feelings on that particular issue as it would definitely count as a bias. Your opinions have no meaning at all in the news story. All you are meant to do is to put raw information before the reader in the format of the news structure. Besides, dozens of news writing also advise not to distort the facts. The copy becomes flawless and is considered best when information is put across as simply as possible. The facts vividly presented in minimum of words make a copy lively indeed.

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CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What are the three most important things that one should keep in mind to become a good writer?
2. Mention some essential qualities of a good piece of writing.
3. What are the four points on which editors insist while selecting a news story?
4. What are the advantages of inverted pyramid structure? Why is it a common structure for news stories?

2.6 TECHNIQUES OF GOOD NEWS WRITING

So far you have learnt about various forms of writing. Now you know what is required to become a good news writer. You also know the basics of a good write-up. We will now explore some specificities of writing. Writing is not something that is inborn or inherent. Writing is a skill that needs development and evolution through practice.

Writing is a process. There are set rules, techniques and norms; however, you will need to add your individuality to it by developing your own style, ideas and ways. This addition will have to be done with the subject of your writing and the form of presentation. A good write-up is a combination of all these factors. This can be compared with a well-prepared and well-cooked dish in which all the ingredients, when put together, make it delicious.

Writing is an uphill task; hard work is the real sense of the term. There are no short-cuts. Many people start writing with boundless enthusiasm and quit midway. This is because writing is capable of draining you emotionally, mentally and physically. Good writing does not happen suddenly. The process of writing is usually slow, at times monotonous and often exasperating. First of all, you have to collect the facts physically by doing some research. Then you will have to look for proper words to present them before your readers. However do not get frightened or discouraged by this revelation. This is simply meant to make your stand strong when you come across a situation like this. Like any other art, it requires perseverance and persistence.

Here are some ideas for you to improve your writing. Writing is a technique comprising a step by step approach defined by some basic inviolable rules. However, all these ideas are not completely rigid rules as they vary with every piece of writing. These are just some guidelines that ensure that your writing acquires a level of standardization.

- **Simplicity:** The fact has been repeated before you a number of times that simplicity is the best way to achieve clarity. Many talented writers make a name for themselves because they are easy to understand. It is

indeed not that easy to be simple in writing. Ideas come in complex forms in our mind and it requires sheer hard work to make them tangible and crisp for the readers.

- **Simplicity of words:** It is useless to make your reader fetch a dictionary by using difficult or absolutely uncommon words. This gives the reader an additional task of finding the meanings of the words you use. Let alone getting impressed, he will drop the idea of reading your piece. So use simple words and the meaning will be conveyed. Do not try to impress the reader with your knowledge or, for that matter, your vocabulary.
- **Simple sentences:** Instead of one complex sentence with its entire main and subordinate clauses, it is far easier to write five short and simple sentences. Long sentences tend to become incoherent and the reader has to revise them repeatedly. This is also something that readers hate. So do not compel them to quit reading your piece by using long complex sentences.
- **Discard verbosity:** Many writers think that using too many words enhances their writing. However, it is just the opposite. A careful editor deletes all the extra and unnecessary wordage at the time of editing or simply 'edits it out'. The prose should be simple and straightforward. You should learn 'one word substitution' in this regard. For example, 'His handwriting was incapable of being understood' can be written as 'His handwriting was unintelligible'. This is how one word can save four words. You should learn such terms that can help you economize on words.
- **Discard jargon:** There is a set language of every person, every profession and every strata of society. This is known as jargon. Certain peculiar words, abbreviations or names are bound to become your favourites right from your childhood or early schooling days. There is hardly anything wrong with this except that only a select group of people understand jargon. For example, people working in a government office use a jargon which is full of office terminologies. People working for media use a different type of jargon. So when a person belonging to any of these groups takes up writing, the jargon invariably creeps into the writing.

As a writer for the mass media, your job is to provide information to masses at large, not just to a select group. Thus, you have to avoid jargon by all means in your writing. If at all you have to use jargon, you should explain it for your reader. Overused words, phrases or expression are also to be avoided. These are called clichés. A cliché-ridden piece is not considered as a good piece of writing. Some columnists become boring simply because they cannot avoid clichés.

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- **Do away with adjectives:** There are two enemies of good writing: adjectives and adverbs. In their place, you should construct your sentences around nouns and verbs. Adjectives, when used, dilute the message. As experts of good writing put it, you can write two sentences in place of using one adjective. In places where descriptions are clear and vivid, adjectives have no meaning. You should concentrate on the use of good active verbs which make the copy lively. It is said that verbs expand thoughts while adjectives and adverbs compress them.
- **Tie together and tighten:** In normal cases, writing is spontaneous. However, spontaneity sometimes leads to the emergence of different thoughts at the same time. So while writing these thoughts they often get intermingled and become heavy and incoherent. There should be no jumps and jolts in writing and readers should have a smooth sailing from the beginning to end. Sudden jumps jolt a reader and throw him off balance. A new piece of information or new idea should be tied to the previous one.

In a story, a new element should be linked to the element that had already been introduced. A sentence should be revised again and again till you come up with a better explanation than the one already given in the copy.

- **Be focussed:** Never repeat something which you have already said just for the sake of lengthening your copy. People avoid talkative persons. Similarly, people avoid reading roundabout expressions and too many words in any piece of writing. Clarity is important in a story and it should not be sacrificed for the sake of brevity. Come to the point quickly. Decide on the focus and weave your facts around it. This is the easiest way to stay focussed.
- **Watch out for repetition and redundancies:** These two are often repeated mistakes that writers commit. You should avoid them at all costs. Sometimes it becomes necessary to repeat facts but such cases are rare.

2.7 ACCURACY AND ATTRIBUTION

A reporter's reputation depends on the accuracy of his writings. Accuracy means exact account of the events and happenings. Besides, accuracy in language, format, style and usage in writing is also equally important. By and large, accuracy is just not a technique of writing; it is a state of mind which you should adopt as a reporter. You should double-check your facts and information before you submit them to the desk in the form of a news report.

For the sake of accuracy, you should revise your copy repeatedly and evaluate it as a detached reader. Forget that you are the writer of the copy. Read

it like an average reader, a layman and satisfy yourself that all the queries have been answered in it. Re-read your copy like a subeditor and look for snags and loopholes in it. Eliminate them one by one and submit your copy only after you are satisfied with the work.

Pay special attention to dates and identifications. If there are figures in the story, they should add up properly and places that have been specified should be correct. Do not try to befool the reader. If he writes a single letter to your editor after digging holes in your story, your credibility as a reporter will be in danger. Readers these days are very aware and write lengthy letters to point out slightest of mistakes. Once you lose your credibility, you may lose your job and your market value as well.

What really endanger the credibility of a reporter are the mistakes in spelling the names of people. This happens because many people have unfamiliar surnames and novice reporters do not take enough care to get the names right. The best way is to ask the person concerned how he wants to be identified in the report. The founder of Bahujan Samaj Party late Kanshi Ram wrote long letters to some newspaper for misspelling his name. Some newspapers wrote his name as Kashi Ram, others called him Kushi Ram. It did take some time for reporters to correctly spell his name. So do not hurt the source or quoted person or for that matter your reader by misspelling a name.

There are certain world leaders whose names are spelt differently in different countries. Many Hindi newspapers spelt the name of former US President Ronald Regan differently. Some spelt it like Ree-gan and others spelt Ray-gan. Similarly, Libyan leader Colonel Gaddafi's name is spelt as Kaddafi or Qaddafi in different countries. In such a situation, experts advise that the reporter should stick to the style book of the newspaper or publication. In case of confusion about the spelling of his name, it is preferable to ask the person concerned. If s/he is not available, it is advised to contact his/her secretary. If that is also not possible, it is suitable to check the telephone directory or Google it on the Internet.

What newsmakers and news sources dread most is to be quoted out of context. However, the shrewd newsmakers use this to backtrack after the story hits the headlines. The blame squarely falls on the reporter in most of such cases. So you should be attentive while talking to a source and keep your ears open. Try to catch the emphasis of his words, what exactly s/he wants to convey. If you are not clear, ask the question again. In any case, it is better to keep your credibility intact with a host of readers and keep your editor in good humour than bothering about the displeasure of a single person.

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is better to keep your credibility intact with a host of readers and keep your editor in good humour than bothering about the displeasure of a single person.

Sometimes a reporter faces the problem of interpreting the words of a source to his readers. Some people speak so faulty English such that the whole meaning changes. The reporter has a tough task to remember the words of the source or the newsmaker. If their language or the grammar is flawed, it is his/her job to correct it, so that others may not make fun of it. However, if you are writing a humour piece or a satire, the use of faulty grammar in an indirect quotation or paraphrase is allowed to an extent and you are free to change the words of the source's view, provided the meaning does not change.

To a story, *attribution* is as vital as *accuracy*. By describing the source of your information, you convey to the reader your story's reliability. However, after a stage, the ball is tossed in his court. It is s/he who decides whether your story is reliable or not. The final evaluation is left to him. In the end, you are spared the discomfiture of being blamed with misleading information. The reader will charge the source for handing out wrong information, not you.

An attribution bolsters trustworthiness. However, as the saying goes that too many cooks spoil the broth, similarly too much of attribution hampers the flow of the story. You should also keep in mind that as a reporter you have to maintain the balance between too much and too little of attribution as too little of it can confuse the reader. Do not get fed up with using the word 'said' as it works wonders in a story and that too in a natural way.

Categorical assertion, exclaim, relate, disclose, reveal, add, point out, explain, etc., are verbs that can be used interchangeably. Nonetheless, be cautious as each one of these verbs has a different meaning. Do not substitute them just for the sake of bringing a false variation in your copy. It can have a reverse effect instead. In case of any doubts about the meaning of any of these words, it is better to use 'said' which has a direct meaning.

Attribution conveys accuracy. Accuracy is something like building blocks of small pieces of information. You should always keep this in mind. Direct quotes from the sources add spice to it when they are properly woven in the story.

You can also ensure accuracy in your copy by cross-checking your facts. This can be done by approaching different sources for the confirmation of a single fact. If all of them tell you the same thing about the event, your job is done. You can also verify the facts in government records. This will certainly help you to grasp the facts better. The better the understanding, the better will be the presentation of your copy.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

5. Mark excessive words in following phrases:
 - a. As regards to the fact that
 - b. Donning a green coloured top

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- c. Chubby face sporting a handlebar moustache.....
 - d. The very root cause of his demise.....
 - e. In his heart of heart he knew.....
 - f. His cousin brother was on top post.....
 - g. Throughout the whole of chilling night.....
 - h. Was busy with typing
 - i. During the month of august in 2010.....
 - j. A large gathering of hoodlums.....
6. Write the techniques that are absolutely must for a good writer.
 7. Why is so much stress put on accuracy?
 8. How do quotes spruce up a copy and add to accuracy?

Exercise 2

Talk to a media person from your list of acquaintances. If there is no direct acquaintance then approach indirectly through a friend or even after searching from the media catalogues. After choosing the person, ask him about a typical day's work involving writing. Follow the given steps:

- Make a call to the media person while s/he is at work.
- Introduce yourself as someone who truly needs this type of experience by clearly stating your requirements and needs.
- Elaborate why you should pay a visit to the media person to discuss the responsibilities related to a writing job.
- Convince the media person that it will not be his/her waste of time. Emphasize that you will be writing a report based on the discussion.
- Be clear in your point that you will take just the minimum amount of time from the concerned media person's busy schedule. Once you have finished your appointment, write a report on the main work-related issues for the writing job. Categorize the report under specific heads like: requirements to become a good news reporter, challenges, pitfalls, role and responsibilities, etc.

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2.8 SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND IDEAS

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Journalism is a profession that revolves around ideas. If you nurse an ambition to become a good writer, you must be rich in ideas and should be able to generate more and more ideas that can be woven in your stories. When you start reading newspapers or newsmagazines in bulk, you will discover that every feature or article is based on a new idea. Besides, you must have known by now what is an 'exclusive' story. An exclusive story is the one that is written on a novel or off-beat idea with recent information.

New ideas do not fall in your lap. They are generated out of voracious reading. In the beginning, you may be inclined to take inspiration for your ideas from a story or a book. However, it will be a bad idea to straightway lift ideas from other sources. It is advisable to build up a habit to arrive at genuinely fresh ideas which catch the fancy of readers with their genuineness. A journalist in general and a reporter in particular has to read between the lines. There are many things that are not written, but exist and which can be developed as ideas for separate or independent stories.

Most of the writers' time is spent in looking for ideas. For this, writers, visit places, call sources and meet people. Generally, they come across an idea while talking to people or sources. You cannot write a good piece on some sketchy information. You need enough background material to weave it in your story in order to satisfy the queries of your reader. The more stories you write, the more you will know that you cannot use all the information that you have gathered. However, getting more and more information makes the task of writing the story easier.

As a reporter, you have to develop a news sense. While wading through newspapers, you can come across several stories which can be developed into articles or features. For example, if you read about inflation, you can develop an article on it through various angles. You can go into its reasons, how these reasons can be tackled or how the country dealt with it in the past. You can also write on how other countries address the problem of inflation. Again, for this you will need information as well as background material.

An important fact about ideas is that they cannot be copyrighted. Getting ideas involves a lot of reading. Ideas can suddenly strike a reporter while going through newspapers. Experts in this field are of the opinion that journalists do not READ the newspapers, they STUDY them.

As a reporter, you should be clear in your mind about what you are writing. If you are not clear about the idea, how can you expect your readers to be clear. If you have to write on a subject about which your knowledge is too little, then you will have to find out what you need to know. Idea needs a firm base of information to build upon.

Have you ever wondered about the source of information in a feature, article or news story? Personal observation, Government records and people at large contribute most of this information. Majority of information comes from personal sources. A writer spends most of his time talking to people, either personally or on phone. If you are serious about writing, you will have to meet new people regularly. Initially, you may feel that you are wasting time with him but this may give you some interesting ideas.

You will be surprised to find that most people who possess information have no problem in sharing it with you. Sometimes, clerks in an office, rather than the officer, turn out to be better sources of information. For example, instead of the Station House Officer, it could be the beat constables who may provide you with better information. Even lower staff including peons, telephone operators or ward boys can be good sources of information. However, to protect them one has to check their information with a senior official. Besides, there are no fixed rules of quoting a source in your story. A source, however, has to be protected at any cost.

You should never disclose the name of the source who has given you the information confidentially or in good faith, unless you take his prior permission to make it public. Besides, information from authorized sources goes well with the readers but the basic information or clues can be obtained from the lower staff and can be developed into complete stories.

Personal observation also proves to be a good source. You should be present at the events you are writing on. Many things are learnt by seeing and observing. For example, a reporter attended a big agriculture fair organized by the state government in the constituency of the Chief Minister himself. Reporters were taken from the state capital to the fair site. When some of the reporters observed some neglected agricultural labourers and questioned them, they were shocked to discover that they were bonded labourers on the farm of Chief Minister himself. The reporters had a field day on that occasion.

This example illustrates that sometimes your observation during a public meeting or a function may lead you to a good article, a humour piece or an offbeat story. The libraries, archives and government offices are the other areas to be tapped as the sources of information. The records of government offices make excellent sources. You must have observed that whenever the Parliament is in session, newspapers are full of informative stories. They emanate from the questions and answers by the MPs and ministers themselves. Many scandals break out of government records like skeletons tumbling out of cupboards.

You are at liberty to quote the government records liberally though you may not be at liberty to indicate the source of those documents. You may gain access to most of these records through the contacts you have built up during the course of your journey as a reporter. These records can be question and answers records of the Parliament, old press releases, papers of some famous persons, company records, museums, speeches, current books, trade journals, government bulletins

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and scientific reports. If the information is from more than one source, your story will be more credible and lively.

You should deal with your sources carefully, attribute your story to them wherever possible, give them due credit and keep cross-checking them. Try to obtain maximum information which will help you and your readers both.

2.9 REVISE AND REWRITE

A sentence, a paragraph or a piece of writing can never be perfect. Only when a reporter makes sense to the largest section of readers does he or she qualify to be a professional writer. The first draft of any writer may need a lot of tightening up, chipping and polishing. So rewrite whenever your first effort is unsatisfactory for the reader's sake.

It requires years of practice to express oneself exactly in the first draft and very few writers are capable of doing this. So writing and rewriting is a must in any news report. In fact, a reporter has to write and rewrite every sentence in the report. But this is not an easy task. During your early days, you give it to a friend to read to polish your write-up. S/he is likely to give you an opinion about it. Consider the opinion and make changes accordingly wherever necessary. This does help in the beginning, but as you go on, you have to make a habit of re-reading your own copy. Learn to be your own critic and find faults with your own draft. You may find unnecessary wordage which you will have to chip off. You may find better expressions and better words to use. You will be shocked to find many silly mistakes that have crept in your copy.

Some creative writers just write their first draft and leave it for a day or two. However, when they re-read it, they find many faults with it and correct them accordingly. It is a standard practice to forget the first draft for some time. But you cannot do this as a newspaper reporter with a pressing deadline.

There are many stages of rewriting. During the course of rewriting, you may add more information, delete the lesser important or lesser relevant facts, change or improve the language and make it more effective. With each revision, you are bound to add more 'punch' to your copy. This is because you keep asking yourself if the copy is clearer, more precise and more readable. However, you will have to be extremely critical of your own writing. It must be a good writer though it may not be fun at all.

While writing, revising and rewriting you must keep in mind the basic tools of writing. You should be aware of the basic rules of grammar and spellings. The spellings and grammar in the sentences should be thoroughly checked while revising. Though these days the task has been made easier in word processing programmes on the computers which have in-built spelling and grammar checkers.

Check again to see that expressions are not roundabout and thoughts are not intermingled. Get rid of jolts and jerks. Even small changes do wonders to the copy. A rewritten piece can make all the difference.

You may find during the course of revising the copy that certain facts are missing or there are certain gaps. You can contact your sources again to get the additional information to fill up those gaps. Had you not revised your copy, your subeditor would have pointed this out to you. May be this would have led to the rejection of your story. Now you can make the necessary changes and brighten your copy.

The rewriting has to be done at a relatively faster pace than the original writing because a reporter has to meet a deadline for filing the story. A delayed piece of writing is of no use if it misses the bus.

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2.10 EMBARGO, OFF-THE-RECORD, POOL REPORTING AND FOLLOW-UP

These are the terms which a reporter must know. Here we shall take them one by one.

2.10.1 Embargo

Many a times, during a function or in the Parliament, it is common practice that officials or ministers provide advance copies of their speeches to reporters so that the reporters can read them at length and report them accurately. This practice benefits the officials or ministers as they can hope for a better coverage and thus tempt the reporter to use its maximum material. It also becomes advantageous for the reporter to go through the full content of the speech.

However, to discourage the reporter to rush to his office with the advance copy of the speech, an embargo is put on it. The embargo clearly states the time when the text of the speech is to be released for publication. It specifies the exact time of publication. The idea is that this advance copy should be used only after the speech is delivered.

2.10.2 Off-the-Record

It is a well-known saying in journalism that in crime, science, diplomacy and politics, no reporter is fully privileged to write all he knows. In many cases of sensitive nature, many bureaucrats summon the reporters of their confidence and share all the information with him but 'off-the-record'. That means the information cannot be attributed to them.

If the reporter feels that being a part of off-the-record briefing is not in public good, he can refuse to be a part of this briefing. Many senior government officials adopt this practice, particularly when the person involved is a politician.

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2.10.3 Pool Reporting

On several occasions, it happens that only one or two reporters are invited to be present during the visit of a VIP, particularly a foreign dignitary. There is usually an unwritten agreement that the reporters thus invited will share the news with other reporters. This is known as pool reporting. As the word pool suggests, the invited reporters thus pool their information with other reporters, who, for some reasons were not invited.

2.10.4 Follow-up

Follow-up is basically further development of a story. For example, a person is arrested on the charge of robbery. So his arrest and the rest of the details would make the first story. Next day when he is presented before the judge and is remanded to police custody for a week, this becomes a follow-up story. If he spills the beans during interrogation, it becomes further follow-up. Follow-up is the chasing of the details of an earlier report.

2.11 TRAITS OF A REPORTER

A right attitude towards the profession is a must to achieve success. This often requires accuracy, objectivity, general competence, industriousness, initiative and intelligence. However, many more qualities and traits of one's personality and character can add to the profession of journalism. Following are some of these points.

2.11.1 Excellent News Sense

A reporter is the most important pillar of a newspaper organization in the domain of news operations. So as a reporter it is absolutely necessary for you to know what news is so that you can get the news. Though this age of information explosion has simplified this task to a major extent, but at the same time it has made it difficult as well. Traditionally, the sources of news vary from daily press releases or press notes; their range extends from public at large to press conferences and official spokespersons to websites, portals and blogs. So today, a reporter has to separate the grain from the chaff, differentiate between the news and the trivia and this is not possible unless s/he develops a proper news sense.

As a reporter you have to wade through all the printed material which can be simply publicity material or an advertisement in disguise. You should have a fairly good idea of what kind of readership do you have and what is their interest. This should be your guiding force while selecting the topic to write on. Even when you go for routine coverage like press conference or go through press notes, you should keep the interest of your readers in mind, though these things may not be exciting. As a reporter, you may be assigned less important matters like covering the local self-government issues like municipality or civic problems. Later you may graduate to cover more important matters.

Not that all the reporting assignments are exciting. Most of the time, you may be given the coverage of speeches, announcements and declarations by VIPs, persons in authority, politicians and political parties. Getting an exciting newsbreak will be occasional only. The routine reporting may be boring, but you should always be on the lookout for something unusual that may be hidden in ordinary things. This is not possible unless you develop a keen sense of observation. When H.D. Deve Gowda was Prime Minister of India during late nineties, the newsmen had a field day because of his habit of dozing off. Photographers are always on the lookout for an unusual picture like some participant yawning or scratching his head or slurping the tea at some important conference. So you have to be a keen observer to discover exciting stuff out of the ordinary. This sense will help you find interesting sidelights or snippets for your readers and will make you popular among them. Developing this keen sense of observation will make you alert and will enable you to discover contradictions and problems even on your daily routine beat.

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2.11.2 Extrovert Nature

A professional journalist has to be outgoing, meeting people, making their acquaintance and winning their confidence. He will have to communicate with them. For this, he will have to be extrovert and a good verbal communicator. It is the interpersonal communication between a reporter and his source that enables the reporter to go for mass communication. So if a reporter does not have good communication skills, he may not be able to get any information at all. This is the reason why introverts make poor reporters.

Readers are interested to know what is going on behind the scenes. Some newspapers have established insight teams that go for inside stories. So in an era of investigative reporting, you will have to be outgoing and extrovert with a jovial temperament.

2.11.3 Knack to Establish Sources and Develop Contacts

An extrovert nature and good communication skills are the basic necessities to establish sources and develop contacts. During the course of your routine coverage you may come across people who have lots and lots of information which you are yet to tap. Or they have contacts with other people who have the information which you can use. So you have to develop friendly relations with these people who are the potential sources of information and win their confidence and respect. This is not possible without devoting some time for them and communicating with them properly. Some of these people may voluntarily offer you the information. You may have to work upon some of them. This is particularly true when you are working on an investigative story. The potential sources may be hesitant in talking to you. They may want to come out with the information but may be afraid to do so because it may adversely affect their interests. Such individuals may be ordinary people or government officials, operatives of the underworld or anybody. Their

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jobs or their lives may be at stake. So you will have to assure them to keep their identity a secret if they so desire.

In future, the task is simplified for any reporter who wins the trust of his sources and contacts. The information and the documents come to him instead of him going to sources and contacts for information. There are cases when the photocopies of government files have come to the residence of reporters. However, to reach this stage, you will have to work really hard and devote a lot of time.

As a reporter you should be able to differentiate between genuine information and a 'plant'. Genuine information is something you look for as a reporter. You plan a story and then look for information. A 'plant' is something which somebody hands over to you to serve his/her own vested interests. Such information may comprise half-truths and even lies. So you should verify this information with the help of independent contacts.

Sometimes even ordinary sources are very valuable and important sources turn out to be useless at the right moment. So as a reporter you should evaluate your sources and maintain them accordingly. The Watergate Scandal that rocked the United States in the seventies was the result of the report done by ordinary reporters and they had acted on the tip from an ordinary source.

The ability to keep an eye on the happenings and to pursue the right sources to get the right lead works wonders for a reporter. These things do not develop overnight but take years. There are several examples to show how this combination worked and several major scandals came to light. Finally it is the persistence of a reporter on a lead that counts the most.

2.11.4 Capacity of Neutral Observation

As a reporter, you should be neutral in your approach without any prejudices or biases. It is your duty towards your reader to present the facts in an absolutely impartial manner. This is necessary to maintain the objectivity. Reporters are usually charged with mixing their own prejudices and biases in the form of comments and thus becoming subjective. As a reporter, you may have your own views but you have to take precautions to keep them away from your report. Your report should simply be a statement of facts.

To maintain the objectivity and balance, the story should be properly sourced so that your reader knows that what you are passing is simply the news and not publicity material or your own comments or opinions. Unless they want to remain anonymous, the sources must be quoted. You should ensure adequate coverage to all sides of the story in order to make it balanced. You should always keep in mind that what is fair for one group of people may be biased for another group. So you must try to ensure that both sides get an equal representation in your report.

2.11.5 Precision in Articulation

As a reporter, you may be assigned any beat. You may cover Ministry of Defence or, for that matter, Ministry of Science and Technology or Department of Atomic

Energy. These subjects are complex and specialized in nature. So the complicated issues involved in the coverage of these subjects should be simplified for the sake of common reader in a layman's language. This is not an easy task. To do this, you should be able to understand the subject yourself so that you are able to explain it to your readers in simple terms. For this, you need clarity in your expression.

Even the government press notes on such topics are beyond understanding. So your task gets multiplied. This can only be achieved by having a proper understanding of the subject. Experts in this field say that journalism is a profession of not knowing the subject, but knowing the person who knows the subject. So you should contact the expert on such topics and seek his help in understanding the subject properly before you explain it to your readers.

2.11.6 Team Spirit

Apart from the routine beats, which are looked after by individual reporters, many major stories in a newspaper organization are handled by a team comprising several reporters. We have talked about insight teams in some of the Indian newspapers in the previous sub-topics; they are attributed to the insight team of the newspaper. Many major stories are the handiwork of such teams. Even when there is a big issue before the press, a team of two or three reporters handles it. When the Parliament is in session, the reporters have to exchange notes among themselves to ensure a proper coverage of the proceedings of the house. Thus, by and large, a newspaper job is a team work and as a reporter you should be able to develop teamspirit among colleagues.

2.11.7 Endurance against Pressure

For a fair and objective reporter, pressure to keep someone's wrongdoing hidden from the public view is nothing new. History is replete with such examples. Such persons are usually quite influential. Very often they leave no stone unturned to achieve their aims. Further, they may offer bribes to keep the story hidden from the public at large. Also, there are many people in positions of power who need publicity to discharge their duties. So they seek favourable publicity and avoid unfavourable or negative publicity. If they find out some negative publicity coming their way, they can exert pressure on you through their power and clout. This pressure could be to dilute your story or kill it completely.

The more powerful press groups like Government or the advertisers can bring pressure on you through your organization itself. Some can take recourse to legal means, threats or even violence. However, there are ways of dealing with this pressure. You can fight it out; you can give in; or take preventive measures visualizing it in advance.

During emergency, many newspapers fought it out leaving their editorial space vacant. Some of them, of course, gave in, changing their editorial stance completely in support of the then Government. Even during those days, some people like Kuldip Nayar took preventive steps by filing Habeas Corpus petitions

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and taking legal recourses. In the areas suffering from militancy, many newsmen have fallen to the bullets of terrorists. They preferred to work in tight circumstances rather than succumbing to the diktats of terrorists.

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CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

9. Describe the important and credible sources of information.
10. Why should a journalist have information from more than one source?
11. What is meant by neutral observation?
12. State any three qualities which you consider essential for a reporter.

2.12 SUMMARY

- A good piece of writing written for mass media has to be direct, crystal clear in meaning and crisp. It is meant to convey information, thoughts and sentiments to the reader openly in limited words without any kind of exaggeration. The write-up provides a picture through its words in which the reader fills the colours of his/her own imagination.
- A journalist is called a newsman and he has to look for information everywhere. He looks for it in verbal communication with people. His job is not restricted to conversing with only the top people.
- Inverted pyramid is the most common structure of writing a story and is still prevalent in larger part of the world as far as news writing is concerned. In this structure, there is one lead or intro which forms the first paragraph of the news story and contains the most important information of the story.
- The ability to keep an eye on the events and to pursue the right sources to get the right lead is very important for a reporter. These things do not develop overnight but take years. There are several examples to show how this combination worked and several major scandals came to light.
- On several occasions, it happens that only one or two reporters are invited to be present during the visit of a VIP, particularly a foreign dignitary. There is usually an unwritten agreement that the reporters thus invited will share the news with other reporters. This is known as pool reporting.

2.13 KEY TERMS

- **In-depth reporting:** Coverage that goes into a lot of detail and has been well researched
- **Pool:** A small group of reporters who have personal access to an event or source, who distribute their reports to the wider media

- **Embargo:** A request not to release material until a particular time or date
- **Follow-up:** A news story that has been spotted in another newspaper or in other media and investigated further
- **Off-the-record:** Comments made off-the-record are not intended to be published or used by a journalist but only for background or further investigation, protecting the source
- **Attribution:** A credit for the original source of a piece of news, quote or photograph
- **Newsgathering:** The system by which news is obtained from sources, interviewees, observation, news agencies, etc.
- **Newsgroup:** A news discussion group on the Internet
- **Jargon:** Terms that are only used in one specialist area such as a profession, and are not widely understood outside that

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2.14 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. The three qualities of a good writer are as follows:
 - Reading
 - Writing
 - Rewriting
2. The qualities of a good write-up are as follows:
 - Focused
 - Modest in approach
 - To the point
 - Written in a simple language
 - Clear
3. The four points to be taken into account when selecting a news story are as follows:
 - **Impact:** The influence or the consequence that a story has on its readers is known as impact. The editors usually foresee which items have greater impact on large number of readers. The impact is directly proportional to the news value.
 - **Timeliness:** Newness and freshness are essential for a news story. Unknown information attracts a lot of readers as the news becomes stale with the passage of time.
 - **Conflict:** It has a consequence on political, economic and social aspects of the society. It has great attraction and always succeeds in catching the attention of the people.

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- Prominence: People of prominence always make news to the extent that in the West *paparazzi* risk their lives to get the news. Information on all prominent people has a definite news value.
4. Inverted pyramid structure summarizes the news in the first paragraph itself and gives the conclusion as well. In subsequent paragraphs, it tapers down to less important paragraphs while expanding on the first one which is usually called the lead or the intro. It is the human nature to know what exactly happened first of all and then go through the details. Readers prefer this. The pyramid structure is a traditional one and helps the newspaper to use it in a creative manner.
Its advantages are as follows:
 - i) It saves the reader's time who is in a hurry to get the information and may not be interested in reading the whole story.
 - ii) It fulfills the basic information requirements of a reader.
 - iii) It also arouses the curiosity of the reader to move deeper in the story and read.
 5.
 - a. in fact
 - b. donning a green top
 - c. handlebar moustache on a chubby face
 - d. the cause of his demise
 - e. he knew in his heart
 - f. his cousin was on top post
 - g. throughout the chilling night
 - h. was busy typing
 - i. during august 2010
 - j. a gathering of hoodlums
 6. The techniques of good writing are as follows:
 - (i) Sentences should be simple.
 - (ii) Avoid adjectives and adverbs and use nouns and verbs instead
 - (iii) Do away with jargon and technical words
 - (iv) Use maximum simple words
 7. The principal responsibility of press is to disseminate information among the members of general public. Since press is considered as the fourth pillar of democracy, correct and accurate information helps in creating a more rational, educated and advanced society. Accurate information is disseminated by the newspaper helps in building its credibility. This credibility is the most vital element of a newspaper. Once a newspaper loses it, it loses everything. So the stakes are high and therefore so much of stress is put on accuracy.
 8. For a news story, quotes are an indication of its accuracy. They help journalists to be accurate and factual. They bring actual words of the speakers

or persons concerned to the readers and thus arouse interest. However, like too many cooks spoiling the broth, too many quotes spoil a story as well. They clutter the copy and create confusion. So a proper balance has to be maintained in the copy.

9. A reporter requires many different sources for his stories. People, records and personal observations are the basic sources. As far as the category 'People' is concerned, it comprises secretaries of important officials and persons. It also includes their lower level staff including peons, clerks, receptionists, drivers, servants or attendants which may be cultivated for information.
10. Since cross-checking is absolutely must for a reporter, it cannot be done if the information is received from a single source. So a reporter has to possess a variety of sources with which he can cross-check the information received from a source.
11. Neutral observation means a detached observation in which the reporter observes a news event without any personal involvement like a third party. This is must to maintain objectivity which is an important requisite of news. Besides, the reporter should also present all the sides of a picture in his story so that the reader gets a complete view of what happened.
12. A reporter should have a well-guided news sense, good command over the language and a deep understanding of laws governing the press in the country concerned.

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2.15 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write short notes on 'Accuracy' and 'Attribution' in writing standard news items.
2. What is pool reporting?
3. What is meant by embargo in the field of journalism?
4. Give a brief note on the 'follow-up' in the domain of news.
5. What is meant by the expression 'off-the-record' in journalistic lingo?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Explain the elements of a news story.
2. Discuss the process of getting ideas and cultivating sources of information.
3. Critically evaluate the importance of revision and rewriting in making a standard copy.
4. Explain the basic traits of a successful reporter.

2.16 FURTHER READING

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UNIT 3 DIFFERENT DOMAINS OF REPORTING

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Structure

- 3.0 Introduction
- 3.1 Unit Objectives
- 3.2 Crime Reporting
 - 3.2.1 Ingredients of a Crime Story
 - 3.2.2 Classification of Crime Cases
- 3.3 Crime as News
 - 3.3.1 Fires
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 - 3.4.1 Court Reporters and Legal Correspondents
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 - 3.4.3 Sources of News in Legal Reporting
 - 3.4.4 Contempt of Court
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- 3.6 Civil Administration Reporting
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- 3.7 Civic Affairs Reporting
- 3.8 Culture Reporting
- 3.9 Education Reporting
- 3.10 Political Reporting
- 3.11 Summary
- 3.12 Key Terms
- 3.13 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 3.14 Questions and Exercises
- 3.15 Further Reading

3.0 INTRODUCTION

In the earlier units, we dealt with different aspects of news. In this unit we shall discuss different types of reporting. In fact, these are known as the 'beats' of a reporter. A reporter's beat is the area which is assigned to him for reporting. The term 'beat' has been defined as 'the exclusive territory assigned to a reporter or a series of places visited by a reporter to gather news'. Or you can call it as 'a particular subject or area covered by a reporter for gathering news'. Police, courts, municipal corporation, collector's office, hospitals, university campuses, etc., are the examples of beats.

In crime reporting we shall learn how a reporter should take very systematic and calculated steps to present the facts. In court reporting we shall discuss the legal aspects a reporter should be aware of and the main features of court reporting.

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Apart from this, the areas of health, civil administration, civic affairs, culture and education are very critical for our social systems. Reporting about these important issues definitely helps in improving the situation at many levels. Hence it is befitting in the scheme of things to discuss these interesting and challenging aspects of reporting.

3.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand different aspects of reporting for various areas
- Explain the basic features of reporting for crime, courts, health, civil administration, civic society, culture, political and education beats
- Discuss the precautionary measures to be taken while reporting on very critical issues

3.2 CRIME REPORTING

What constitutes crime? The dictionary meaning says crime is 'a wrong act that is against the law' or 'a violation of law' and it is also defined as an act or omission punishable by law.

Crime is an important beat in big, medium and small newspapers because it is the inseparable part of city coverage. The reason is that people take considerable interest in them. Sex and crime have the highest rating points in media in terms of sale. The mass media cannot afford to paddle sex for the fear of moral police in India, but they do carry crime stories to a considerable extent. Crime stories are widely read and add to the circulation of a newspaper and establish its credibility as well.

Crime is the dark side of human society and is associated with negative manifestations of human nature and behaviour. Despite its dark connotations it holds a tremendous attraction for the common man and that is why stories related to crime are taken very seriously by the readers. Like other news stories, it is imperative for a newspaper to inform its readers about the incidents of crime that are happening in the city, state, country or the world. Crime reporting is one of highly responsible and a specialized job, though mostly it is assigned to a junior reporter or a cub reporter.

Fortunately, the police beat is considered as the best training ground for future investigative and diplomatic correspondents. As Richard Critchfield writes in *The Indian Reporter's Guide*,

'While speech reporting trains the ear and sports reporting the eye, crime coverage gives the new reporter a broad range of events on which to exercise his talents, usually providing action stories with narrative as well as human drama.'

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The point can be driven home with the help of an example. The crime reporter of a local newspaper got a tip-off that two children aged 12 and 8 years, respectively, had drowned in a pond. The police simply registered a case of accident. When the reporter visited the accident spot, he spoke to several people some of whom claimed to be the eyewitnesses. There was so much variation in their statements that he began to suspect a foul play. Then he asked for a long bamboo which he inserted in the pond and was shocked to discover that the pond was only three feet deep! Autopsy report of the children indicated that there was mud in the nails of deceased children. When he reported the matter in his newspaper in all its sordid details, the police had to change the case from accident to murder.

Crime stories seem to be more of a staple diet in evening papers than the morning dailies. At any given day, you find screaming headlines in evening papers selling at traffic intersections or outside local train stations or metro stations. Since evening papers are published mostly from the major cities, it is easy to infer that the crime is largely urban in nature and is of major interest to urbanites. During the yesteryears, dacoity in Chambal area constituted a major part of crime stories throughout the country and you know very well that it is a rural crime.

3.2.1 Ingredients of a Crime Story

How does one report crime cases? Here a partial list of questions to be asked by a reporter is given:

Casualties: Was anyone killed? If so, how? Similarly, was anyone injured? How? What were the weapons used? What happened to the dead? Was a well-known person killed?

Property Loss: What was the value of property lost or damaged? What exactly was stolen, defaced or destroyed?

Method of Crime: How was the crime committed? What weapons, if any, were used? How were the victims treated by the criminals? Was this a repetition of any similar crime?

Motive: What moved the criminal to commit the crime? What did the victims report? What did the police or other witnesses have to say?

Arrest: State the names of arrested people, along with their age and occupation. What formal charge was preferred? How did the police apprehend the criminals? Where were they taken to?

Clues: Did the criminal leave behind him any clues? What clues did the witnesses provide? What clues are the police investigating? Is a description of the criminals available?

3.2.2 Classification of Crime Cases

A crime reporter has to build-up good contacts in police. Besides he should have a good knowledge of relevant sections of IPC that the police commonly uses

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against the accused persons. Some of the more common crimes may be classified as follows:¹

- (1) 'Abetment' means assisting and aiding, facilitating or instigating a crime. Usually, the punishment in this case is the same as for the offence itself.
- (2) When there is an agreement between two or more individuals to commit an offence, it counts as a criminal conspiracy. It involves some action besides the agreement in pursuance of the plan by one or more parties to the scheme.
- (3) Offences against the state comprise anti-national activities like sedition and assaulting state officers among others.
- (4) Offences concerned with the navy and army comprise desertion, mutiny, giving shelter to a deserter, insubordination and pretending to be a military personnel.
- (5) Offences which spoil the social order and public tranquility are rioting and arson, taking part in an unlawful gathering, hiring and encouraging people to get involved in an unlawful assembly, attacking public servants and abetting animosity between classes or communities.
- (6) Offences concerned with public servants include corruption, illegal financial indulgence and impersonating as a public servant. Other offences that can find a public servant in the dock are: noncompliance with law with an intention to cause some fraud, forging incorrect documents, buying property illegally or getting involved in unethical trade.
- (7) In the domain of elections the offences comprise false statements, bribery and not keeping election accounts.
- (8) Showing contempt for the lawful exercise of powers by the public servants, for example, absconding to escape a summon.
- (9) Rape is an offence by a man with his own wife aged below 12 years and in any other case involving unnatural sexual offences against the consent of a woman.
- (10) Following are the offences against property:
 - (a) Theft: If an individual, having an intention to dishonestly grab any movable property, takes its possession from the legal owner without his consent, it comprises a theft.
 - (b) Extortion: It involves blackmailing to obtain illegal compensation.
 - (c) Offences related to dacoity and robbery involve simple robbery, robbery on a highway at night or becoming the member of a gang involved in the act of committing theft and dacoity.
 - (d) The act of criminal misappropriation of property.
 - (e) A servant, clerk, banker, merchant or agent indulging in criminal breach of trust.

¹ Sharma, Seema. 2005. *Journalism Reporting*. New Delhi: Anmol Publications.

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- (f) Getting possession of stolen property or becoming a part of a scheme meant to conceal or dispose it.
 - (g) The acts of cheating through impersonation or fraudulently inducing delivery of property or by changing or destroying a security possessing some monetary value.
 - (h) Falsified concealment or removal of property or executing a false deed.
 - (i) The acts of mischief resulting in damage to a sum of fifty rupees or more, or through indulging in purposeless maiming or killing an animal of value, or causing obstruction to a public drainage resulting in reduction of water supply to farm lands, destroying bridges and public roads, damaging landmarks, mischief through explosives and fire, etc.
 - (j) The illegal and immoral acts counting as criminal trespass, e.g. lurking with an intention to intimidate or in pursuance of any other illegal scheme, trespassing a house at night or deceitfully breaking open any closed container or any other vessel containing property.
 - (k) The acts of offences related to documents and trade or property marks, e.g. forgery and counterfeiting plates or seals with an intention to effectuate a forgery, destroying or defacing a document of will, falsification and manipulation of accounts. It further involves the use of fake trademarks and counterfeiting the national currency.
- (11) Following are the acts of offences concerned with human body:
- (a) The offences that affect life:
 - (i) Committing a murder or putting up an attempt to commit a murder.
 - (ii) An act born of negligence but which may cause death, with or without the real intention of committing it.
 - (iii) Causing injury or death through a blind, rash or negligent act.
 - (iv) An offence amounting to abetment of suicide by insane, child, idiot, intoxicated, delirious person or someone not in his proper frame of mind.
 - (v) Attempt to commit suicide.
 - (b) Offences related to injuring unborn children, causing miscarriages, abandoning infants and cover up a newborn's birth by secretly disposing the dead body.
 - (c) Offences related to intentionally injuring someone with dangerous weapons or drugs, wrongful confinement through assault and criminal force to stop a public servant from performing his duties, outrage a woman's modesty, dishonour a person, etc.
 - (d) Offences related to kidnapping, abduction, slavery and forced labour:
 - (i) Kidnapping with the intention to get ransom.
 - (ii) Abducting someone with the motive to kill.

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- (iii) Kidnapping a woman to force her into marriage or ruining her modesty.
 - (iv) The evil practices of procuring a minor girl or importation of girl from a foreign country, buying and getting possession of a minor for prostitution.
 - (v) Kidnapping an individual with an intention to slavery or hurt. It also involves abducting a child to grab its property.
- (12) Giving false evidence and committing offences against public justice system such as destroying documents, providing false evidence, sheltering capital offenders, resisting lawful apprehension and questioning, insulting public servants performing their judicial duties, etc.
- (13) There are certain offences concerning coins, currency and government stamps. These comprise forgery, counterfeiting, possessing counterfeit money and fabricated stamps, etc.
- (14) Offences in the area of weights and measures involve the deceitful use of false tools and instruments for the purpose of weighing and measuring. It further involves the manufacture of such instruments.
- (15) The law mentions certain offences that affect the public health, convenience, safety, morals and decency. These comprise intentionally spreading diseases, adulterating eatables and medicine, hampering public water supplies, careless driving on public roads to put human life at risk, using fire and explosives to harm human life and property, not taking sufficient measures to avert possible dangers by the fall of a building over which the individual possesses the right to renovation and repair, engaging in a public nuisance, selling obscene books and literature, vulgar songs or running unauthorized lottery office.
- (16) The law provides for certain cognizable offences concerning religion. These include damaging or defiling a religious place, spitefully insulting the religious beliefs of a community, disturbing a religious gathering or congregation, disturbing a funeral procession with wrong intentions, hurting religious feelings through verbal or behavioural gestures.
- (17) There are certain punishable offences related to the institution of marriage. For example, by deceit a man may cause a woman, not his legal wife, to think that he will marry her and share an accommodation with her on the basis of this false belief. Further, it is counted as adultery, an offence, if somebody entices a married woman with criminal intent.
- (18) Defamation is an offence. It is prohibited to sell the printed matter which is defamatory by nature.
- (19) Insult, criminal intimidation and irritations like spreading a false rumour with the intention of disturbing public peace, or coercion through unidentified communication, or making an individual believe that he will become an object of divine anger, or insulting the modesty of a woman through behaviour and words, or visiting a public place while drunk thus causing annoyance to fellow human beings.

This is a pretty exhaustive list of criminal acts and a reporter covering crime must familiarize himself with it. It is equally important that he is familiar with the processes of dispensation of justice.

Apart from this, a crime reporter should have a sharp news sense, a nose for news and he should be able to separate chaff from the grain, i.e. the truth from lies. Besides, he must follow the code of ethics and should be as objective as humanly possible and refrain from cheap gimmicks and sensationalism. Further, reports that glorify the activities of criminals should be discouraged and sensationalism should be boycotted at any given point of time. The standards of decency and good taste should be maintained.

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3.3 CRIME AS NEWS

The crime news comprises many types. It may range from rape, kidnapping, blackmail, fraud, burglaries, robberies, accidents, fires and murders.

3.3.1 Fires

Fires are common occurrences throughout India. The number of fire incidents mysteriously goes up during summers, particularly in slums. While reporting a fire incident, the reporter should take care to get the essential elements like number of persons killed or injured, the quantum of damage to the property, the loss of valuables, etc. He should also find out the response time of the fire brigade and the swiftness of firefighting operations and the adequacy of water supply. He should talk to eyewitnesses and look for some act of bravery or cowardice.

The following is a sample.

Four major fire incidents in Delhi²

New Delhi Apr 2.

Four major fire incidents were reported from the national capital today; including one at former Union minister Ram Vilas Paswan's residence and another at the Income Tax office. Four persons, including a three-year-old girl, were injured and two expensive cars and various items in a saree shop were gutted in the incidents, fire brigade and police officials said. The incidents came a day after Comptroller and auditor general (CAG) pointed out in its performance audit of the fire brigade that fire safety and prevention measures were not adequately enforced in many buildings in the capital. A fire broke out in Mr. Paswan's 12 Janpath residence here this afternoon, in which two expensive cars were gutted. The blaze

² 'Four major fire incidents in Delhi.' *Daily News & Analysis*. April 2, 2010.

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was reported from the garage at around 3:15 pm and three fire tenders were rushed to the spot to douse the flames, fire brigade officials said. They said the fire broke out in the fibre sheet apparently due to a short circuit. Two cars—an Audi and a Honda Accord—were gutted in the incident but no one was injured. The LJP chief was in Patna when the incident took place. Last year on May 13, a fire broke out in the same house due to a short circuit in which several household items, including cupboards, antique statues, sofa sets and chairs were destroyed. Another incident was reported from Income Tax Office here in which a labourer suffered minor burn injuries. Seven labourers were trapped inside the fourth floor of the building at ITO crossing after the fire broke out when they were engaged in woodwork there. Sixteen fire tenders were rushed to douse the flames and the labourers were rescued, fire officials said, adding one of them received minor injuries. The reason behind the fire is yet to be ascertained. In the third incident, a fire broke out in a shop in a busy market in central Delhi but no one was injured. The blaze was reported from the saree shop on Ajmal Khan Road in Karol Bagh at around 2 pm. Eight fire tenders were rushed to the spot to douse the flames. The fire broke out due to an electrical short-circuit. The officials said no one was injured in the incident and they were ascertaining the loss. In the fourth incident, a three-year-old girl and her parents were injured when a fire broke out in a slum cluster in south Delhi's Kishangarh early this morning. The three were identified as Pappu and Seema, both 26, and their three-year-old daughter Priyanka. They were rushed to Safdarjung hospital where they were undergoing treatment. "The fire may have been caused because of a carelessly thrown bidi...but we are yet to ascertain the cause," officials said. PTI SJY

3.3.2 Homicide

Murders, being sensational in nature, carry more news value. So they are considered more important in crime reporting. The more high profile and sensational a murder is, the more space it will get in the newspapers and will be splashed with prominence. Murders like Shivani Bhatnagar murder, or, for that matter, murder of Jessica Lal that even inspired a movie hogged headlines for weeks to come. Arushi murder case is still in the news even after the CBI recommended its closure. For reporting a murder case, the reporter should ideally conduct his/her own investigations. This is possible to some extent in small towns and state capitals, but in metropolitan cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata or Chennai, the press depends on police for information and normally there is a big time gap between their own investigations and the police version. Ideally, a crime reporter should rush to the scene of crime as soon as possible after receiving the tip-off from his/her sources and gather all the relevant facts. The dependence of press on police in such serious matters like

murder always hampers the search for the truth. If you can groom yourself to investigate the murders independently, your investigative skills will sharpen and the experience of reporting crimes like murder will be a thrilling and exciting one. Besides, you will also be able to see for yourself, how attempts are made to hush up such cases. The experience will be useful for you in the due course of your career.

The following is a sample.

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Teenage girl taken to Dwarka apartment, killed; one arrested³

Shalini Narayan New Delhi, November 18. A man was arrested for murdering a 16-year-old girl at his rented apartment in Dwarka early on Saturday morning. The victim, a resident of West Delhi's Vikaspuri area, was reported missing on Thursday, when she didn't return from her tuition class. According to the police, the victim and the accused were well-acquainted. According to the police, the victim, a resident of Hastasal village in Vikaspuri had left for her tuition class at 3.30 pm on Thursday. At 6.30 pm, she reportedly told a friend of hers to go home, stating that she would come home later by bus. But the girl never returned." She left with the accused to his rented apartment in Dwarka," said a senior police officer. The accused, identified as Om Yadav (28), a construction material vendor residing in Vikaspuri, allegedly took the girl to his Janata flat no 1481 in Sector 16, Dwarka. Meanwhile, the family—clueless about the victim's whereabouts—registered a case of kidnapping with the Vikaspuri police station the following day. The victim's elder sister reportedly told the police that she received a call from an unknown number around 8.46 am on Friday. "It was my sister. All she said was didi, and started crying," she mentioned in an FIR. Investigators are currently trying to identify the source of the call. People residing in the victim's neighbourhood disclosed that the girl and the accused had been seen together on several occasions. Yadav was detained for questioning, following which he disclosed that he had rented an apartment in Dwarka 15 days ago. Deputy Commissioner of Police (West) V Renganathan said, "We found the victim's body with her throat slit at the apartment this morning. Her body has been taken for a post-mortem examination." When Newslime reached the flat, located in pocket B of Dwarka, it was found locked. However, through an open window of the one-bedroom apartment, one could see a single bed, a television set placed in a corner, bottles of water and soft drinks arranged a top a small

³ 'Govt hospitals to get corporate makeover: DL.' *Times of India*, December 4, 2010.

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refrigerator. In the backyard, the police found four bottles of Corex cough syrup and a few used contraceptives.” We are waiting for the medical examination report to check if the victim was raped or not,” the officer said, adding that a dagger has been recovered. The accused has admitted his guilt, the police said, adding that nobody else was involved in the crime. Renganathan said, “We have arrested the accused. Earlier, we had filed a case of kidnapping under Section 363 of the IPC. Now we have registered a case under Section 302 of the IPC (murder).” The victim, a class XI student, was living with her parents and two siblings in Vikipuri. Her father was a hawaldar in the Army. Caution, however, should be taken and the reporter has to refrain from leveling uncorroborated statements against one party or the other. There are always vested interests out to take the reporter for a ride. So a crime reporter has to get his/her facts right by talking to the IO (Investigating Officer) and the eyewitnesses or relatives of the victim(s) and s/he should do proper cross-checking before including any fact in his/her report.

3.3.3 Accidents

Newspapers report cases of accidents on the basis of police bulletins or information given by the police spokesman only. Reporters are sent only to cover major cases of accidents like building collapse or landslide. However, our suggestion is that as a crime reporter you should rush to the scene of a major accident to give authenticity to the story. The following is a story from the *Indian Express* of 16 November 2010.

30 killed, dozens injured as building collapses in East Delhi⁴ **Express News Service New Delhi, November 15.**

At least 30 people were killed and nearly 50 others injured when a four-storey residential building collapsed in east Delhi tonight, police and hospital authorities said.

Some 60 people were rescued from the building in Lalita Park area of Laxmi Nagar, but scores of others are still feared to be trapped, a senior police official said.

Doctors and officials at Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Hospital and Lal Bahadur Shastri Hospital said 13 dead people were brought to the two centres.

RA Gautam, Medical Superintendent of LBS, said 20 injured were brought to the hospital, of which four are in a critical condition.

⁴ ‘Doors for talks with extremists must be kept open: Sonia.’ *Indian Express*, December 19, 2010.

Fire brigade, police and MCD officials were engaged in the rescue operation and removal of debris with the help of local residents.

Finance Minister A K Walia, who rushed to the spot, said the foundation of the old building could have weakened due to the heavy rains in the Monsoon season when water of the Yamuna river flooded the area. Locals said some water was still there in the basement of the building. Some eyewitnesses also claimed that construction of an extra floor was going on when the incident took place. Many of the injured were labourers." Such a large building just went down in minutes," an eyewitness said. People gathered in large numbers in the area. Locals complained that initially there were no power and no cranes to help in the rescue efforts. Ambulances and PCR jeeps were seen rushing the injured persons to hospitals. For a better understanding of the subject, the same accident we are producing from *Times of India*, 15 November 2010.

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Exercise 1

Read the story thoroughly and identify the important points.

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3.4 COURT REPORTING

There are courts of law in most of the Indian cities. They exist even in small towns. In any democratic country that abides by law, there are several courts with different jurisdictions. In places where there are few courts, new ones are being established. You may wonder why it matters. How a large number of courts are related to court reporting? Well, it does have a bearing on it. Earlier what mattered in India were only the criminal cases and newsworthy hearings and orders of high courts and the Supreme Court. It was for the simple reason that no newspaper could afford covering all the courts during the initial days. However, in the age of judicial activism and public interest litigation, the coverage of courts has definitely gone up in the newspapers. The newspapers have no option but to turn a blind eye towards civil courts where endless number of cases are pending which keep lying dusting for years together. Youngsters file the cases and they grow older, in some

cases litigants have passed away but the cases are yet to be resolved. So it is obvious that when even the litigants lose the interest, we cannot expect more from the readers?

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3.4.1 Court Reporters and Legal Correspondents

These days almost all the newspapers that matter have full-time correspondents for their court beat. Normally, these are law graduates who have fair knowledge of law and legal proceedings. In case of papers coming out of state capitals, normally stringers do the job of reporting court cases. In many cases, these stringers are professional advocates. Correspondents in the districts and smaller towns—commonly called mofussil correspondents in newspaper parlance—also cover court stories in their respective areas. Stringer means a part-time reporter and these part timers belong to other professions like teaching, law or in some cases business too. In some cases, the regular staff reporters visit the court and cover important cases.

3.4.2 Hierarchy, Procedures and Jurisdictions of Courts

According to the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 (Chapter 2, Constitution of Criminal Courts and Offices), in India there are following classes of criminal courts. We shall begin from the lowest:

Magistrates of the Third Class: He may pass a sentence of imprisonment not exceeding one month and a fine not exceeding ₹ 50.

Magistrates of the Second Class: He may pass a sentence of imprisonment not exceeding 6 months, including solitary confinement and a fine not exceeding ₹ 200.

Presidency Magistrates and Magistrates of the First Class: He may pass a sentence of imprisonment not exceeding two years, including solitary confinement and a fine not exceeding ₹ 1,000.

Courts of Session (Sessions Judge or Additional Sessions Judge): He may pass any sentence, but a death sentence is subject to confirmation by the High Court.

High Courts: They may pass any sentence, authorized by law. Above all of them, of course, is the Supreme Court of India.

When a person is arrested and charged with crime, he is first taken to the police station where he is held until he is produced before a magistrate. Arrests may be made with or without a warrant, depending on the crime. For example, if someone is accused of buying or selling of any person as a slave, IPC 370 lays down that he may not be arrested without warrant but if the crime is habitually dealing in slavery, IPC 371 permits arrest without a warrant.

A warrant is a written authorization from a magistrate to the police giving them the right to carry out an arrest.

An offence can be either *cognizable* or *non-cognizable*. In the case of the former no warrant is necessary. In the latter case, a warrant will be necessary.

There is a further classification of cases. *Warrant cases* (for offences punishable with death or imprisonment or a term exceeding a year) and *summons cases* (for offences punishable with imprisonment for a term not exceeding one year and fine).

Arrest: If a person complains against another demanding the latter's arrest he must affirm under oath that he has reasonable grounds for belief in the guilt of the accused. A *search warrant* permits the search of a premise where there is reason to believe that the evidence of a crime may be found. However, in certain specific circumstances, the police have the power to search without a warrant.

A person has a constitutional right to be brought into court promptly to be confronted with the charges against him. S/he cannot be held in custody for longer than 24 hours without a special order from a Magistrate (who can authorize the detention of the accused for not more than 15 days at a time).

Information relating to the commission of a cognizable offence if made by a witness or informant is recorded in writing, read over to the informant, signed by him and entered into a book. This is called *First Information Report*. Anyone acquainted with the circumstances of a case and whose statements are recorded by the police becomes *witness* for the prosecution.

An *investigation* is carried out by the police starting with their first knowledge of an offence committed; this can go on until the police officer is satisfied that he has all the information necessary to form an opinion as to whether the offence has been committed or not.

An *inquiry* is begun after the police officer has sent the case to a Magistrate. If no *prima facie* (on the face of it) case is made out, the Magistrate dismisses the complaint and discharges the accused. If on the contrary, the Magistrate is satisfied that a *prima facie* case has been made out, he frames a *charge*. He may then *try* the case himself or *commit it for trial* to the session court.

In his *charge sheet* or *completion report* that a police officer submits to the Magistrate he must state (a) the names of the parties (b) the nature of the crime (c) the names of persons who are acquainted with the criminal case and (d) whether the accused has been sent into custody or released on his bond with or without sureties. This is the *final report* of the police officer after the completion of his investigation.

A police officer making an investigation has the following duties to perform on a day-to-day basis:

- (1) He must set forth the time when the information reached him.
- (2) He must lay down the time when he began and closed his investigation.
- (3) He must name the places he has visited.
- (4) He must record the circumstances.

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In a summons case, the accused appears before a Magistrate. He is told the particulars of the offence charged against him and is asked to explain the cause why he should not be convicted. In case the accused *admits* the offence, his admission is recorded in his own words. He may be convicted, if he fails to show sufficient cause or convince the court of his innocence.

If the Magistrate does not convict the accused or the accused *does not admit* the offence, the Magistrate shall *hear* the complaint (if any) except where the complaint has been brought by the court itself. The Magistrate will then take *evidence* produced by the parties or *examine* the accused and if he finds the accused not guilty, he shall *acquit* him. If he finds the accused guilty, he shall pass sentence on him provided he does not ask a higher court for an enhanced sentence, or release the prisoner on probation with an admonition. The Magistrate's finding *is not limited* by the offence specified in the complaint or summons.

If the complainant fails to appear, the Magistrate shall acquit the accused unless he adjourns the hearing of the case to another day. However, the complainant may, before the final order is passed, withdraw the complaint with the permission of the Magistrate in which case the Magistrate then acquits the accused.

In a case not instituted upon a complaint, any Magistrate with the sanction of a District Magistrate may stop proceedings at any stage without pronouncing a judgement and release the accused.

Trials of Warrant Cases: In these cases the Magistrate hears the accused and the evidence produced for his prosecution. If the Magistrate finds no case can be formulated against the accused, he discharges him. If he decides there is ground for presuming the accused has committed an offence, he will frame in writing a charge against the accused. This shall be read to the accused who is asked to plead guilty or not guilty and whether he has any defense to make.

If the accused pleads guilty, he may be convicted by the Magistrate. If he refuses to plead or does not plead, he is asked to state whether he wishes to cross-examine any of the witnesses for the prosecution already examined. Thus the accused is called upon to enter on his defense and produce evidence. If the accused is found not guilty, he is acquitted. In the opposite scenario, the case is referred to the Court of Sessions to try the accused for a sentence legally matching with the offence.

Trials before High Court and Court of Sessions: In the High Court all trials are by jury, though in the Court of Sessions the jury may be substituted by the assessors. The accused is brought before the court, the charge is read and explained to him and he is asked whether he pleads guilty or claims to be tried.

If he pleads guilty, the plea is recorded and the accused can be convicted. If he refuses to plead or does not plead guilty or claims to be tried, the Court shall *choose jurors*. These are chosen by lot and their number is nine. A juror may be objected to by either the prosecutor or the accused, though the Judge's decision is final. In the High Court, the judge is bound by the unanimous verdict of the jury. In

the Court of Sessions, the Judge, if he disagrees with the unanimous verdict, can submit the matter to the High Court, giving the grounds of his disagreement.

3.4.3 Sources of News in Legal Reporting

As we have discussed in the last units that the success of a reporter in any kind of coverage depends on his/her contacts and sources. The capability of accessing the records is also equally important. So these parameters of success are applicable to court reporting as well. For a court reporter or a legal correspondent, the key source to be cultivated is the clerk of the court, who is responsible for maintaining the court records. It is he who makes the copies of court proceedings available for a fee. Checking and re-checking of records is of primary concern for a court reporter and that is an uphill task for him without inside help. Besides, the reporter can also contact the judge in case the case is too high profile. Though judges are hardly the sources of news, yet some of them are definitely publicity minded. Further, the court reporter should also be in contact with the lawyers who are dealing with the case. In case, there are different lawyers in a single case, the reporter should strike a balance between them and get the important information from them. However, care should be taken to get a source which is as impartial as possible. The reporter should be able to jot down notes in a crowded courtroom. In many cases, it becomes difficult to get a seat in the court room. Besides, he should be fast in reporting to his newspaper as those who work for afternoon papers or news agencies have to be faster. In many cases, they are required to give updates even when the court proceedings are going on. Following is a sample.

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This story has been quoted from *Indian Express*, New Delhi Edition, dated 16 November 2010.

Darbari, Mohindroo remanded in police custody for six days Utkarsh Anand & Neeraj Chauhan

New Delhi, November 16. A day after the CBI arrested former Commonwealth Games officials T S Darbari and Sanjay Mohindroo for allegedly subjecting investigators probing the Queen's Baton Relay to "evasive and non-cooperative behaviour", a Delhi court, on Tuesday, allowed the agency to keep them in custody for interrogation over a period of six days."

The order of custodial interrogation is justified in the given circumstances... Both the accused, who were arrested only yesterday, are in custody. Further custodial interrogation is required to unearth the conspiracy to ascertain the involvement of other co-accused, and find out how the ill-gotten money was used by them. They have been remanded in police custody till November 22," Special CBI Judge A S Yadav said.

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The CBI had sought seven days' police custody for Darbari, former Joint Director General, and Sanjay Mahendroo, former Deputy Director General of the Organising Committee (OC), alleging that the duo had to be arrested as they remained evasive and non-cooperative during questioning. The application stated that "volumes of incriminating documents were recovered from their residential premises, besides the OC's office." Investigating Officer M R Kadole further told the court that Darbari and Mohindroo had to be interrogated together to uncover their alleged collusion with UK-based AM Films, AM Cars and Van Hire Ltd. Its owner, Ashish Patel, is the alleged beneficiary of the fraud, amounting to 1.46 lakh pounds. The FIRs registered by the CBI have also identified OC Director Raj Singh, Patel and unknown committee officials as the accused, under charges of cheating, forgery and criminal conspiracy, besides provisions of the Prevention of Corruption Act. Countering the allegations, the counsels for Darbari and Mohindroo submitted that the duo had always co-operated in the probe. "The CBI had been interrogating him (Darbari) from 7.30 am to 11 pm on Monday, and his house was also thoroughly searched. Whatever documents they wanted to recover, they have already got. Hence, custodial interrogation in the case — based completely on documentary evidence — was unnecessary," Deepak Dhingra, Darbari's counsel, said. Darbari, however, claimed that he was not a part of the tendering process for the relay and had nothing to do with any financial transactions. "Thirteen members of the OC were involved in awarding the contract, and I was never one of them. Moreover, an empowered committee headed by M Jayachandran (sacked OC official) was constituted to award the contract," Darbari told the judge. Mahendroo's counsel raised a similar plea. To an application seeking medical care during custody, the court strongly objected to Darbari's demands for his own food and clothes.

Exercise 2

Visit any lawyer's office that you have befriended or cultivated as a source. Request him for one of his briefs to study. Go through the brief and note your observation in the space given below:

- a) The year of the court case.....
- b) The case was filed in the court on.....
- c) The number of judges on the bench.....
- d) The case no. is
- e) The case is referred to as.....versus.....

f) The defendant had a lawyer to argue the case for the defence.
() Yes () No

(g) Main points agreed and discussed.

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3.4.4 Contempt of Court

A slight twist—voluntary or involuntary—can result in contempt of court which is a serious offence on the part of a reporter. So you should take utmost precaution to avoid any contempt of court. You can easily trace the law relating to contempt of court from the Contempt of Court Act, 1971 and some other case laws. Contempt can be a civil or criminal offence.

Civil Contempt

Civil contempt signifies willful disobedience to any judgement, decree, direction, order or other process of a court, of willful breach of an undertaking given by a person to a court. If there is ignorance of the court order leading to unintentional breach, there will be no civil contempt.

Criminal Contempt

Criminal contempt is applicable when a piece of writing or publishing of any material that scandalizes or brings down the authority of a court; or interferes or prejudices with the due course of judicial proceedings.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. In which areas, should the court reporter have proper knowledge and information?
2. State two qualities that a court reporter should adopt in his writing style?
3. Give one example of an eventuality that could be considered as civil contempt of court.
4. Give one example of an eventuality that could be considered as criminal contempt of court.

3.5 HEALTHCARE REPORTING

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In India, with the boom in healthcare sector, the health beat has acquired considerable importance and become a full-fledged beat. The preventive measures to check the spread of diseases, issues related to public health at large, availability of doctors and medicines in the hospitals, all these issues fall under the jurisdiction of this beat. A health reporter has to keep an eye on all these issues and report the developments accordingly to the newspaper.

As far as sources in the health beat are concerned, the reporter has to maintain contacts with hospital staff and doctors. Sometimes when a VIP patient is admitted to the hospital, this beat assumes added importance as we have discussed in the last units that the people of prominence have considerable news value.

A health beat reporter has to keep moving in hospitals and keep himself abreast of developments. He should also have a rapport with the important patients and staff members. In case any news breaks out, he must be in a position to know the vital facts related to the incident. In majority of cases, victims of crime also land up in hospitals and that is where health and hospital reporter takes over from the crime reporter.

Since the hospitals are usually run by the health department of the respective state governments, the job of a health reporter further extends to keep in touch with the bigwigs of this department as well. He has to be aware of the major policy decisions taken by this department and for this he has to be on good terms with the biggest policy maker—the health minister. Following is a sample story.

Govt hospitals to get corporate makeover: DL⁵

HYDERABAD: Health minister D L Ravindra Reddy on Friday said government hospitals will be upgraded on par with corporate hospitals to provide medical facilities to patients under the Arogyasri scheme.

Talking to the media soon after taking charge, the minister said poor infrastructure and medical facilities in government hospitals had forced the government to allow corporate hospitals to provide treatment to patients under the scheme. This had given scope for criticism that the scheme was launched to help corporate hospitals, he said.

Listing out his plan of action to erase this “misconception”, Reddy said that the department would take up a 15-day ‘Arogya Bata’ from January to create awareness among people about the medical

⁵ ‘Sonia had close association with Quattrocchi: Advani.’ *Times of India*. January 9, 2011.

facilities in government hospitals. All district hospitals would get high end medical equipment, he said.

Ravindra Reddy said secondary healthcare will be provided in all primary health care centres (PHCs) in a phased manner. ₹ 450 crore was allocated to establish 500 sub-health centres, 114 new PHCs, 100 community health and cluster offices in the villages in a year.

He observed that the state was allocating 1.1 per cent of total GDP for medical and healthcare as against the 6% recommended by the Planning Commission. Reddy said doctor posts, 405 in AP Vidya Vidhana Parishad (APVVP), 989 in Directorate of Health and 435 in medical education and 2,351 staff nurse posts in government hospitals will be filled during this financial year.

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3.6 CIVIL ADMINISTRATION REPORTING

Civil administration basically means the governance at the district headquarters or divisional headquarters. A reporter whose beat is civil administration has basically to report on the functioning of the Government at district or divisional levels. That means functioning of the Collectorate which is a revenue-minting machinery of the state government. The in-charge of this revenue-yielding unit of the state government is the Collector or the District Magistrate who is a representative of the state government responsible for running the district.

The office of a Collector or District Magistrate has several departments looked after by deputy collectors, *tehsildars* and *naib* (deputy) *tehsildars*. Often the district is divided into different tehsils. The revenue thus collected goes to the treasury of the state government. Together the Collector and the Superintendent of Police (SP) form a team that looks after the law and order of the district.

A reporter that is assigned the civil administration beat has to maintain contact with all the revenue authorities of the district. They are his sources of information. He has to keep an eye on the activities of civil authorities in the district, on development (or backwardness) issues and ensure a free and fair reporting of these matters to his readers, he has to oversee the civil order. However, reporting civil administration does not involve covering just tranquil issues. It includes civil disorder as well.

3.6.1 Reporting Civil Disorder

As a reporter, you have to be cautious when reporting on a communally sensitive matter. The simple reason behind this is that India is a country with pluralistic religious and social diversities and various linguistic groups. To be biased towards

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a particular faith, linguistic or social group would be unethical. You will have to use your discretion with due respect for everyone.

The right or wrong depends upon the circumstances and a host of other things. What one group may consider right, the other group may consider wrong. The concerned communities may have a conflicting stand about a single issue. Kashmir still happens to be a communal tinderbox. So the news organizations have to be extremely careful about reporting the events of communal nature.

When the militancy was at its peak in Punjab during the early eighties, reportedly a number of massacres of innocent people took place. In one case, the terrorists stopped a bus of Haryana Roadways, singled out passengers belonging to a particular community and opened indiscriminate fire on them. However, the papers did not mention the community in their reports.

The same procedure is followed while reporting communal riots. The idea behind this is to prevent any further tension building up between the communities. This is the reason why places of worship affected in riots are not referred by their names.

3.7 CIVIC AFFAIRS REPORTING

The reporter assigned to local bodies such as a municipal corporation or urban authority is responsible for reporting the meetings of civic bodies. His job also includes analysis and reporting on matters of local administration, such as development plans, housing schemes, road, water, slum and sanitation schemes. What really make stories in this beat are inefficiency, maladministration and corruption which are rampant in local bodies. The public looks up to them for getting unbiased information.

In smaller towns, it is the municipality that deserves the media attention for the coverage of local affairs. In district headquarters and state capitals it is the municipal corporation that should be the focus of media. In bigger cities like Delhi and Mumbai, it is the metropolitan council as well as greater municipal corporations that must be in the priority list of the reporter. In Delhi, there are Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) and New Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC) which serve as the news sources for civic affairs matters. There are a lot of stories that are available in civic affairs beat. Such beats are known as 'newsy' beats as they are full of news stories.

The civic affair reporting is a good training ground for those reporters who later develop their skills in legislature reporting. The coverage of meetings of local municipal corporation enables the reporters to cover the proceedings of state assembly or Parliament. Following is a sample story.

Debt-ridden, dengue-hit MCD had a tough year

The Times of India News Service

New Delhi, Dec 29. Year 2010 brought some successes and lots of miseries to the Municipal Corporation of Delhi. The civic agency's work largely involved Games related projects, including streetscaping, streetlighting and creating parking space near JN Stadium, but it failed to complete the projects on time.

Some work like the Chandni Chowk redevelopment project was not taken up at all while at least three projects — upgrade of streetlights, Kushak Nullah bus parking bay and road underpass at Sewa Nagar — came under the CVC scanner. MCD workers were also deployed to carry out some last-minute damage control by cleaning up the Games Village following criticism by athletes over sanitation standards — mentioned by the ruling BJP several times to claim credit for the “good work” done. Rising incidence of dengue ahead of the Games also gave MCD a tough time.

MCD completed the construction of its much-awaited new headquarters at the city's tallest building, named Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Civic Centre. The ‘green building’ will house all offices and wings of MCD. The 28-storey, 112m-tall building was inaugurated on April 22 by Union home minister P Chidambaram but the civic agency has been unable to shift all its offices there.

The Games projects and failure to tap more revenue sources made it difficult for MCD to release arrears of the sixth pay panel on time to most of its employees or make payment to contractors. The contractors staged a tool-down strike, which was withdrawn only after MCD released a part of their payment. Sanitation workers also held protests demanding timely wages.

In MCD's 2011-12 budget unveiled in December, municipal commissioner K S Mehra proposed a 5% hike in property tax citing the ₹ 2,800-crore debt. BJP, the ruling party in MCD House, and opposition Congress said they would oppose this.

Towards the year-end, the corporation faced criticism over its failure to check unauthorized construction after a multi-storey building with two illegal floors collapsed in east Delhi killing 71 people. MCD conducted a survey in the area and issued notices to 638 buildings while some were demolished. Four officials of the civic body were suspended after an internal vigilance probe into the building collapse.

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3.8 CULTURE REPORTING

Every town, city or metro in India possesses a cultural life of its own. There are theatres, cultural activities and functions. Different activities related to art and culture are organized in every city. There is a dedicated audience for such activities. Many people want to update themselves about the events and happenings on the cultural front. This is the reason why art and culture is a full-fledged beat in a newspaper.

The reporter who is assigned this beat must have a good knowledge of these activities. For example, if he has to report on a play that is being staged in the city, he should know the inside out of elements that constitute a drama. In many cases, the reporters go through the script in advance and then evaluate the performance of the actors whether they did justice to their roles or not. Same is applicable in case of dance performances and music. The reporters that have a background in art and culture are usually assigned this beat.

3.9 EDUCATION REPORTING

The education beat has assumed considerable importance presently. It has all the possibilities of giving good stories to a reporter. With the rapid expansion in the education sector—government education department, scientific and research institutes, universities, academic and other learned bodies and school system—education is now an important beat that has considerable interest for the readers. Since half of Indian population comprises youngsters, their educational institutions have acquired possibilities of giving good news stories. Usually, the students and teachers organization always come up with their set of issues and problems leading to discussions, protests and agitations. Research studies and their results, conducted in various subjects by the departments in universities, are a potential source of a number of news items. Parents also want the problems like increase in school fees and improving quality of education to be highlighted in the newspapers.

What is expected of the reporter working on this beat is to be alert and aware of the developments in this sector. In many cases, students or student leaders are appointed stringers who cover the campuses and get published in the newspapers. Following is a sample story.

HRD ministry to give UGC event a miss

Akshaya Mukul

Times News Network

New Delhi, November 13. Despite the University Grants Commission's contention that everything is hunky dory with the ongoing conference of vice-chancellors – jointly organised with the

Association of Indian Universities (AIU) – the HRD ministry will give the event a miss.

Two senior officials – higher education secretary Vibha Puri Das and joint secretary Amit Khare – who were to speak at the event have decided to play truant.

Sources said, the secretary is very upset with the news of a grant of ₹ 1 crore to a private institution for the event from non-plan fund. The ministry is likely to seek explanation from the UGC. “Expenditure from non-plan fund is scrutinised by the expenditure department of the finance ministry,” a source said.

The UGC, on its part, clarified that the event is organised with the AIU to avoid duplication of efforts on higher education. According to the UGC, all financial rules and austerity norms of government have been followed.

The UGC claimed that in the past, too, it has given a grant of more than ₹ 1 crore for academic activity without specifying the exact nature for which the sum was sanctioned.

The UGC maintained that ₹ 13 crore was given to the North-East Hill University, Shillong, to organise the Indian Science Congress and ₹ 5 crore to the Punjab University for an international conference. The UGC said on number of occasions it has given financial assistance to private deemed universities for “such type of academic activities”. For instance, funds have been disbursed to the Kalinga Institute of Information Technology, Bhubaneswar and SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Chennai, even though the UGC did not specify academic activities.

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3.10 POLITICAL REPORTING

Political reporting is considered to be one of the most important beats in a newspaper. It includes reporting activities, conferences and events concerning political parties. Major political parties at the national level and even in the states, generally have party spokespersons who regularly brief reporters about the point of view of the party on issues of the moment. Mind you, it is absolutely imperative for the political parties to remain alive in the newspapers. So they keep doing something or the other to make their presence felt in the mass media.

In any news organization, political reporting is considered very important. Particularly in India, reporting politics has been a major focus of the press—a

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legacy from the pre-independence period. Please remember that press in India has a history of being a participant in the freedom struggle.

As a political correspondent or political reporter you should know the leaders of major political parties; it will be your job to know them inside out. You will also have access to the ministers and senior politicians. You would not only be reporting political events but in several cases analyzing and anticipating them as well. In this era of coalition politics, even the regional parties are playing an important role at the national level. Hence political reporting from state capitals has become equally important.

However, here is a major pitfall. As a political correspondent, the distance between the reporter and the politician gets minimized. When Rajiv Gandhi was the Prime Minister, the well known journalist M.J. Akbar had become friendly with him. It was because both of them belonged to the same age group. Besides, when Akbar interviewed Rajiv Gandhi for his newspaper, *The Telegraph*, he was impressed with Rajiv and what many people say took a 'personal liking for the young Prime Minister'. Critics point out that due to this personal factor even a journalist of this calibre lost his objectivity and impartiality. Later, during 1989 parliamentary elections, which proved Rajiv Gandhi's Waterloo, Akbar even fought election from Bihar on a Congress seat.

Political reporting sometimes tends to take the shape of political activism. Several journalists tend to become closely associated with a particular political party so much so that their vision becomes blurred. Their writings become persuasions primarily based on self-interest.

On the eve of elections, the parties hold press conferences to release their manifestos, explain their policies and strategies for the election. Ever since electoral politics has assumed prominence, political reporting has come into its own. The party manifestoes arrive with a bang comprising best possible postulate on social justice, fighting communalism, rural development, health, education, in short issues which would go down well with the electorate. The very same are publicized through various means such as press conferences, distribution through organized outlets throughout the country and election speeches. This takes the shape of unpaid political advertisement.

A reporter must not be seen as being the part of a political propaganda of a particular party. To keep the sanctity of his profession his name should not come to be closely associated with a particular party.

Political reporting is the most complex of genres of reporting, requiring the journalist to go for detailed preparation and deep understanding of parties and personalities, socio-economic factors and their interplay. The dependable rule for the reporter in all events is to be non-partisan and to guard himself against being drawn into controversy.

While covering a national meeting of a political party, the reporter will have to explain not only what decisions are reached at the meeting but also whether

they represent any variation from the party's past policy, what effect these decisions are likely to have on the party's future and their likely impact on other parties. The reporter must be dispassionate and strictly adhere to the rules of objectivity without attempting to project his own preferences.

A senior journalist S. Nihal Singh says:

It is not a reporter's job to further his own political philosophy or bias by tilting to one party or politician or the other. It is his job to assess a situation as objectively as he can, draw his conclusions from a rigorous examination of the often contradictory assertions he has gathered and, based upon his experience and study and present an honest picture of the trend.

The most difficult aspect of political reporting is to strike a balance in a reporters' relationship with a politician. By the nature of his job, he must cultivate acquaintances with politicians and be privy to their confidences. Politicians, on the other hand, naturally try to further their own or their parties' interests and are not too scrupulous about the methods of achieving their objectives. Following is a sample of political reporting.

Doors for talks with extremists must be kept open: Sonia⁶

Voicing concern over spiraling extremist violence, Congress chief Sonia Gandhi on Sunday said while such elements need to be combated, the doors for dialogue must remain open and the prospect of "political accommodation" should be kept alive.

She also made it clear that the efforts of forces operating from across the border to spread terror in the country would be fought with determination including in Jammu and Kashmir, where the government has appointed interlocutors to give "new energy and focus" to the political process.

"We are confronted with terrorist groups in Jammu and Kashmir. In a number of states, Naxalites are using violent methods to undermine the basis of the democratic system. In parts of northeast, militant groups disturb peace," the Congress President said addressing the party plenary in Burari here.

While these elements have to be combated with "all the means at our command, the door of dialogue has to be kept open and the prospect of political accommodation kept alive in the troubled spots," Gandhi said.

⁶ 'Doors for talks with extremists must be kept open: Sonia.' *Indian Express*, December 19, 2010.

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In J&K, there was a need to address “the alienation of the whole new generation of youth that has known nothing but conflict”. At the same time, Gandhi said security forces were facing a difficult situation with courage and fortitude.

“The political process must get new energy and focus. That is what our government has sought to do by appointing interlocutors,” she said.

Citing the recent bomb blast in Varanasi, Gandhi said this has reminded that the vigil cannot be relaxed. “Let there be absolutely no doubt about our determination to confront those elements and organisations who operate from across the border to spread terror, to destroy our social fabric and weaken us economically”.

In the Naxal-affected areas, the Congress President emphasised the need to resolve issues of daily concern to tribal communities, particularly the loss of land and livelihood and the absence of even the minimum basic services.

“This must go on hand-in-hand with upgrading police capabilities and effectiveness,” she said.

Sonia had close association with Quattrocchi: Advani⁷

Veteran BJP leader said Congress president Sonia Gandhi had a close association with Italian businessman Ottavio Quattrocchi, who was a ‘regular’ at her house.

“Congress president Sonia Gandhi had close association with Quattrocchi, who was a regular at her house. Though I am not making an allegation against any person, but people should know the details as our image has been internationally tarnished (due to Bofors pay-off scam),” Advani told an NDA rally at the conclusion of the BJP national executive meet.

“It is common knowledge that the Bofors issue was suppressed by the government. Even the Income Tax Tribunal had pointed out Quattrocchi had taken commission from Bofors and be taxed accordingly, but the CBI suppressed it,” Advani alleged.

“Our image has been tarnished. I appeal to the Prime Minister to either protest or order further investigation,” he said.

⁷ ‘Sonia had close association with Quattrocchi: Advani.’ *Times of India*. January 9, 2011.

On corruption in Congress-ruled Assam, Advani said he was told by rights activist Akhil Gogoi that Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi had acquired five houses in the USA. "If this is wrong, Gogoi should take action and if he does not, then the public has full right to accept that this a fact."

On the illegal migration to Assam, he demanded the Congress government to implement in letter and spirit the Supreme Court directive that illegal influx should be viewed as aggression on the country.

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CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

5. How would you, as a responsible reporter, seek to restore peace in times of communal tension?
6. Why is political reporting considered as one of the most important beats in newspaper industry?
7. Why has education reporting acquired importance of late?

3.11 SUMMARY

- News gathering is the core of reporting. A report is a news item which gives information about something that has just happened. Every reporter is allotted a beat which is the area that is assigned to him for reporting, i.e., a particular subject or area covered by a reporter for gathering news.
- We have discussed in the last unit that proximity to the place of occurrence of news has a good news value. So in almost all the newspapers the news belonging to the city of the place of newspaper's publication is very important. In a city, there are various beats for a local reporter. For example, he may have to cover local crime. For this, he will have to be in touch with police officers and other characters alike.
- To be successful a reporter will have to build up a chain of informers on the basis of his beat which may be police, court, hospitals, civil administration, civic bodies and civic authorities, or, for that matter, education or even politics.
- A reporter will have to be on constant surveillance of his beat, so that he never misses a single story. A miss is considered bad for the reputation of a reporter and is considered his inefficiency.

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3.12 KEY TERMS

- **Police reporter:** A journalist who is assigned to cover news about crime and police work
- **Cover:** To have the job of reporting on an event or a particular class of events for a newspaper or a broadcasting company
- **Blanket coverage:** Advertising to the general public with no particular target audience in mind
- **Court circular:** A report of the official duties of a country's monarch and other members of the royal family, published in a national newspaper
- **Legal:** To send a story to a lawyer to check that it is safe to publish it
- **Civil society:** The institutions, social relationships and organizations that function under the rule of the state but are not necessarily aligned with it

3.13 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. A court reporter must be familiar with court jurisdictions, legal procedures and the jargon. He should pay special attention to the jargon because he will have to interpret this jargon for his readers. Besides, he should also be adept at procuring the information from a variety of sources in and around the court which he should be able to translate into news. He should also know the limit of his writing so that he doesn't involve himself in contempt of court.
2. The reporter must write the comments and statements made in the courts in the inverted commas. That means *quote* and *unquote*. No defendant should be addressed as the guilty one. In case of matters that are sub-judice, the term 'allegedly' or 'reportedly' should be used.
3. Failure of a defendant to comply with a court's order to pay a punitive sum of money towards a fine.
4. A news item casting aspersions, by implication, on the character of a sitting judge in the court.
5. As a reporter you must be aware of the urgent necessity of restoring peace. You should carefully choose your words while reporting the communal conflict. You will have to be discreet in phrasing the reports. In case a temple has been defaced by people belonging to a particular community, you will have to write a 'place of worship' in place of 'temple'. You will talk to some secular people in the area and highlight their impartial comments.
6. Political reporting is considered to be one of the most important beats in a newspaper. It includes reporting activities, conferences and events

concerning political parties. Major political parties at the national level and even in the states have party spokespersons who regularly brief reporters about the point of view of the party on critical issues of the moment.

7. The education beat has assumed considerable importance today. It has all the possibilities of giving good stories to a reporter. With the rapid expansion in the education sector—government education department, scientific and research institutes, universities, academic and other learned bodies and school system—education is now an important beat that has considerable interest for the readers.

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3.14 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on crime reporting.
2. What are the special precautions taken by court reporters?
3. Give the sources of news in legal reporting.
4. What is contempt of court?
5. What is the difference between healthcare reporting and civil administration reporting?
6. Write a brief note on culture reporting.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Give a classification of the crime cases. Also provide the ingredients of a crime story.
2. Critically evaluate different aspects of court reporting.
3. Examine the important issues related to civic affairs reporting.
4. 'Education reporting is emerging as a very influential domain in the reporting scenario.' Elaborate.
5. How can political reporting be a double-edged weapon? Discuss.

3.15 FURTHER READING

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UNIT 4 INTERVIEWING

Structure

- 4.0 Introduction
- 4.1 Unit Objectives
- 4.2 Significance of an Interview
 - 4.2.1 Categories of an Interview
 - 4.2.2 Types of Interview
- 4.3 Preparation for an Interview
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- 4.13 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 4.14 Questions and Exercises
- 4.15 Further Reading

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4.0 INTRODUCTION

So far we have discussed various aspects of reporting like news, news values and others. We have also discussed the qualities that a reporter is required to possess to succeed in the profession.

In this unit we shall discuss the subject of interviews. An interview is a very authentic way of gathering facts, figures and opinions on various issues from the person concerned. We shall discuss the importance of interviews in reporting. We will also discuss the skills that are required to master the art of conducting an interview. Conducting an interview is just involves walking on dangerous grounds. Utmost care needs to be taken to wade through the critical time spent in talking to an important person. It is a great duty to help the truth come out of the mouth of

someone who really matters. We will also discuss two types of specialized reporting: interpretative reporting and investigative reporting.

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4.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand the role and significance of the art of interviewing
- Know the types and categories of interviews
- Discuss the skills and techniques required for conducting a successful interview
- Explain different parameters of interpretative and investigative reporting

4.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF AN INTERVIEW

An interview is very important for media as it gives the real insight into a persona. In fact, an interviewer presents an interviewee before his readers in totality. Besides, an interview is considered as the best way of gathering information for the media. An interview is a very special input for a newspaper. It is equally so for the electronic media as well. An interview can be the basis of an article, a feature or a commentary. Further, the excerpts from an interview can be used to substantiate an argument or a point in an article.

4.2.1 Categories of an Interview

Interviews can be classified into the following categories:

- **On-the-record interviews:** Such interviews are directly attributed to the interviewee. In these interviews the interviewees are not supposed to hide anything from the interviewer. Normally these interviews are issue based. The entire interview in verbatim or its excerpts can be used anytime. Further, part of the interview can be saved to be used at some later stage.
- **Off-the-record interviews:** In these interviews the interviewee parts with the information, but refuses to be attributed it to him. The interviewer is also barred from identifying the interviewee. In such cases, the interviewee's identity is concealed by terming him as a 'source'. Or his designation is revealed 'requesting anonymity' or 'on the condition of not being named'. In certain cases, vague indications regarding his designation like 'highly placed sources' is given.

It may also be possible that an interview can be both—on the record or off the record. Some of the information given by the interviewee can be attributed to him and the other one—usually of sensitive nature—can be attributed to a source.

Presumably you must have written a lot of things in your life, be it a letter, an application, an article or a poem. In accordance with human nature—the quest for

perfection—you may not have been satisfied with the first draft of whatever you have produced. Subsequently, you must have attempted rewriting it by changing sentences, adding or deleting paragraphs or using synonyms of some of the words which might have been repetitive or monotonous. The process might go on two, three, four or more times till you are satisfied with what you have written.

One can think of this as a preliminary stage. To interview someone is also like doing some original work in which you are credited with creating something. An interview is meant to draw out some original information from a creditable source. To accomplish this significant task, it is essential that you do your homework right. An interview makes a certain impact only if it is conducted after proper preparation.

It is no secret that a five-minute speech on radio requires a preparation of five hours. So a proper preparation is an absolutely unavoidable task.

4.2.2 Types of Interview

An interview is an open-ended dialogue and discussion between two or more persons for a specific purpose. Based on the purpose, the interview may be classified as a personality interview, news interview, business interview, job interview, exit interview, exploratory interview, investigative interview, quantitative interview (sample survey) and so on.

- **Personality interview:** It is designed to focus on the intellectual, artistic and emotional life of a celebrity, whom people crave to know more about. His/her deep conviction, personality traits, accomplishments and failures, and private life are the readers' curiosity shop. It is impolite to dominate or intimidate the interviewee who should be in limelight and if as an interviewer you try to proclaim your smartness to the whole world, you will end up doing only that—and not your job. A warm and sympathetic understanding of the interviewee really facilitates the process of conducting a good interview.
- **News interview:** It is meant to dig out news from a person often unwilling to part with it. It could be a state secret, a department programme being finalized, or something someone is trying to hide to save embarrassment for oneself or others. What everyone would gladly talk about is not news but publicity. News, like gold, lies buried deep, mixed with sand and rock. Spotting it and refining it is the fine art of journalism.
- **Business interview:** Business information of really significant nature comes out from the mouths of business executives, probably over a multi-course dinner accompanied by scotch. The media person has no business in such interviews, except when they become major corporate news like mergers and takeovers.
- **Job interview:** It is planned to select the right candidate for the right job.
- **Exit interview:** It is meant to make pleasant the unpleasant task of the retrenchment of an employee or a group of employees.

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- **Exploratory interview:** It is normally conducted by investigative agencies like the CBI or the police crime branch, with or without the use of torture. An investigative journalist conducting an investigative interview has no power to force someone to come out with the truth. He has to adopt the psychological techniques of coaxing, cajoling, laying traps or outwitting.
- **Quantitative interview:** It is conducted by market and opinion research organizations and the media takes cognizance of it when it makes news, e.g. popularity or pre-poll survey. Some media textbooks broadly divide interviews into the qualitative and quantitative types; and what is not quantitative becomes qualitative.

Exercise I

Read the below given interview and note down your observations.

‘I still think it was a historic blunder. Because such an opportunity (to become PM) does not come often’

Jyoti Basu, last of the long marchers in Indian politics, in an interview with *The Indian Express* Editor-in-Chief Shekhar Gupta on NDTV 24×7’s Walk the Talk. Excerpts: (IE, May 3, 2004)

- **Shekhar Gupta: My guest today is the last of the long marchers in our politics, in fact, perhaps the last of the great Communists or comrades anywhere in the world. Welcome to Walk the Talk.**

Nobody knows Indian politics better than you. You’ve been in public life for 64 years now? So today, forget exit polls, forget opinion polls, do you see a Congress-led coalition in power, three weeks from now?

Jyoti Basu: That is what we are hoping for, we are working for. But it doesn’t depend on us only, but the smaller parties, and mainly on the Congress. But one good thing has happened. We’ve been telling the Congress that you can’t have a single party majority, ever. At least in the near future, we don’t see any possibility. So you must think about a coalition, which they refused last time when the BJP lost by one vote. And now it seems they’ve changed.

- **Shekhar Gupta: So now Indian politics is finding a direction. This is a BJP-led coalition versus a Cong-led coalition?**

Jyoti Basu: That’s right, correct.

- **Shekhar Gupta: And that will be the direction for some time now?**

Jyoti Basu: Some time now. That’s right.

- **Shekhar Gupta: Do you see some atonement, some prayashchit or some introspection, in the Congress party for what mistakes you think they’ve made?**

Jyoti Basu: In the economic sphere, they made a lot of mistakes. And it is Dr. Manmohan Singh who was the Finance Minister. He started this, blindly

accepting World Bank policies and IMF policies... We didn't like that. And, of course, I asked him once. He said but in my time not a single public sector undertaking was sold. Now they've modified it a bit. I see in the programme. But it will be a common minimum programme (for a coalition), it cannot be their programme.

- **Shekhar Gupta: But that is the other issue: the issue of economic reforms. Now just the exit polls have seen the markets dropping and stock markets falling. There is a lot of anxiety about economic reform and the direction of India's economy. Would you say that this is an undue concern?**

Jyoti Basu: No, no, this is very much... people are concerned with the economy. And learning from the past mistakes, the mistakes of the BJP government and all that, we should work out a programme where we can stand on our own feet but also get technology, finance and other things from outside, but we must be selective. Not blindly accept whatever these people are saying. It is they who are responsible — the World Bank and IMF — for the downfall of the South-East Asian economy, which is gathering strength now. But that went down. Indonesia went down. And there's a book written by the chief economic advisor to the World Bank...

- **Shekhar Gupta: (Joseph) Stiglitz?**

Jyoti Basu: Stiglitz. I read that, it's wonderful.

- **Shekhar Gupta: 'Globalisation and its Discontents'...**

Jyoti Basu: Yes. He says it's not working, particularly.

- **Shekhar Gupta: What you are saying is that reform or globalisation or free markets may by themselves not be bad but you have to be sensible in the way you implement those policies.**

Jyoti Basu: Absolutely.

- **Shekhar Gupta: And to that extent, are you happy with the way your successor is doing?**

Jyoti Basu: He has also invited foreigners here. When I was the chief minister, I went abroad four or five times to address industrialists there and talk about our economic situation. And some result was there... Philips, the Siemens and some others came. Then petrochemicals...

- **Shekhar Gupta: So, you don't see MNCs by themselves as a bad thing?**

Jyoti Basu: No, this is capitalist globalisation, you see. It helps only a few. I find he writes, Stiglitz, that even in America, the numbers of poor people have grown.

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- **Shekhar Gupta: But when your government here or your successor invites MNCs, or gets Japanese investment, Mitsubishi...or gets DFID money to close down loss-making companies, is that a good thing or a bad thing?**

Jyoti Basu: No, no, Mitsubishi was already there. During my time, they came. When Haldia Petrochemical (came up), I had to wait 13 years to get permission from the Central Government. Rajiv was there, he went along with me and then laid the foundation stone. So this is just one example. In Salt Lake, where you are questioning me, Bidhan Nagar we call it, there is the electronic sector where 17,000 boys and girls are working everyday. And Indira Gandhi, having promised to help me, did not help me. We helped ourselves.

- **Shekhar Gupta: But the kind of reform that your successor is now doing, you see that as good reform?**

Jyoti Basu: Of course. That is within our policy. In 1994, I placed on the floor of the Assembly our industrial policy as asked by the...

- **Shekhar Gupta: Would you say that the argument in Indian politics today is not whether there should be reform or not but what kind or direction of reform should take place?**

Jyoti Basu: Reform has to be there, there is no doubt about that. But the point is you must not forget 70 per cent of the people in the villages.

- **Shekhar Gupta: Your own CM in the state is selling a lot of public sector industries. In fact, he is selling a lot of public sector industries with the DFID money.**

Jyoti Basu: Yes, that's right. With British aid. They have earlier also helped us in education.

- **Shekhar Gupta: So you approve of that?**

Jyoti Basu: I have no objection. No conditionality should be there. And they come every year to see what is happening, on the ground.

- **Shekhar Gupta: So you don't mind investment...**

Jyoti Basu: If there are mutual interests, I don't mind.

- **Shekhar Gupta: The question that I know you expect to be asked every time somebody speaks with you. The division in your party and what you described as the 'historic blunder'.**

Jyoti Basu: Yes, I still think it was a historic blunder. Why historic? Because such an opportunity does not come. History does not give such opportunity. Knowing who I am — a Marxist, a Communist, in the party here, for so many years I've been in politics, they invited me because they had no other prime minister in view. So we thought that even if we last for one

year in that coalition with myself as the prime minister and our party joining it, then people would understand backward sections. In many places, they don't even know what we are all about.

- **Shekhar Gupta: Tell me, one last word. The other senior politician in our system besides you is Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee. You've known him for a long time. What is your view on him?**

Jyoti Basu: I know all of them. Advani, I know. V.P. Singh sent me to him before the break-up of the government (saying) please prevent him from this rath yatra. I went to his house, I sat there, argued with him. He would not agree. And again, he's started this rath yatra. And thousands were killed at that time.

- **Shekhar Gupta: But you've said uncomplimentary things about him. I think you've called the BJP barbarians and you said you will never speak with Mr Advani again.**

Jyoti Basu: Yes, yes. But he asked me. After a meeting here four years back, he called me to Raj Bhawan (and said) that 'I told the crowd that I'll ask you why you call us barbarians and uncivilised'. I said I am naming nobody but three of your ministers were there when Babri Masjid was being brought down. And I'm talking about what you've done. That time, the Christian killings had not started. Later on, that happened.

- **Shekhar Gupta: And you call Mr Vajpayee a mask in the context of Gujarat. But overall, what's your view on him, as a person, politician, statesman?**

Jyoti Basu: As a person, he's quite a gentleman. An educated person, all that I knew for a long time. And when he was, I think, foreign minister, that time also he behaved. But he himself says he's RSS. He depends on the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the Bajrang Dal. But that mask has now fallen, fortunately, before the elections. I am happy about that.

- **Shekhar Gupta: Well, Mr. Basu, I know you are beaming. I think you are looking at very interesting politics in the weeks to come. And I know no opportunity is ever lost forever. I know you are around. And you never know what may happen. Well, we are optimistic (laughs).**

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4.3 PREPARATION FOR AN INTERVIEW

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First of all, it is an absolute must for you to know your subject in totality. Your interviewee may be a VIP, a senior bureaucrat, an eminent artist from the world of art and culture or an entrepreneur from the corporate sector. Sometimes it may just be an ordinary citizen. The first step in preparing yourself for the interview is to read all the available material about the person. This will enable you to find out what you exactly want from him. For this, you should also have all the published material on the interviewee. Using all the sources you must try to get information like his personal details, hobbies, interests, etc. This will help you to build an instant rapport with him/her. After this positive start, rest of the job will become easier for you.

4.3.1 Research

You will have to research your subject matter thoroughly. It is as important as researching the interviewee himself. It is possible that the subject on which you have to conduct the interview may be such that you neither have any interest in it, nor adequate knowledge about it. So you will have to acquire the basic or important information through books, newspapers, journals and magazines articles. Only then you will be more comfortable in interviewing him thus ensuring that your venture becomes successful. For example, if you are required to interview a minister, you should know more about his department and ministry, the laws that govern his ministry, his rapport with his bureaucrats, how his decisions have affected people at large, etc. This will help you extract the required information. You must know your subject matter as well as the person whom you intend to talk to about the subject matter. The more the information with you, the more you will be in a position to engage him at a level where the real things come out of the veil.

4.3.2 Modus Operandi

You should establish contact with the interviewee much ahead of the interview. Either you meet him in person or call him on phone. In case your interviewee is a VIP, you might have to penetrate through a layer of his personal staff or his family members. These are known as 'protectors of the interviewee'.

So, first of all you have to gain the confidence of the protector. To get to your subject matter or the person, you should leave no stone unturned in order to defeat all the barriers erected by the protectors.

4.3.3 Outcome of the Interview

If the first step in the preparation is to establish contact and gain confidence, the most important part is to decide what you want to get out of the interview. It could be the substantiation of an important fact, or contradiction of something, or maybe you want the interviewee's views on some important issue that is currently in news.

It is possible that the interview may lead you to a different direction. The whole controversy may take a new turn or the interviewee may drop subtle hints towards something which could be of vital importance. You should think it over repeatedly and be prepared of such a possibility.

4.3.4 Cautiousness

It is absolutely unavoidable to deeply study the individual you plan to interview. For example, suppose the person in question—your interviewee—is particularly fond of chewing tobacco. When you go to interview him, it will be fatal to talk about how you hate tobacco or how dirty the habit is. As the interviewer, you cannot afford to convey your general dislike about tobacco—neither through words, nor through body language.

Always remember that the information you seek to extract from the interview will have nothing to do with your dislike for the person. However, if you committed the fatal mistake of beginning at the wrong note, the person may remain uncommunicative through the rest of the interview just to express his/her reaction. While dealing with people you will have to pay attention to such insignificant but minute matters. This really helps in conducting the interview smoothly. If you are able to strike a personal chord at the beginning, you will sail through the interview smoothly.

4.3.5 Physical Preparation

Physical preparation of the interview assumes equal significance at par with the mental preparation or homework. If the interview is for the print media or radio, your tape recorder or digital recorder should be ready. There should be a complete set of spare batteries and spare tapes if you are using a tape recorder. If you are using a digital recorder, it should be tried and tested long before the event. If the interview is going on at its peak and you suddenly run out of batteries or tapes, then you are done for. Some radio organizations use mini discs for the sake of quality digital broadcast recording. In such cases you should properly test your mini disc recorder and microphone in advance so that nothing goes wrong at the time of recording. In case of slightest of doubt, you should change the equipment and start testing a new one.

In the electronic media, there are two ways of interviewing. First, you can conduct the interview at the interviewee's place. This is particularly useful when you want to catch the interviewee in action. For example, you can interview a sculptor at his workshop; that way you will be able to show him in action to your viewers. You will need a lapel mike here to interview him as its recording quality is remarkable. Second, you can conduct the interview in your studio where all the equipments are usually available along with complete sound proofing. In many cases, the settings are also pre-arranged in the studio.

In radio and TV interviews, it is important for the interviewer and interviewee to discuss what they respectively want out of it. As a normal course of practice, a mini interview is held until a few seconds before the recording devices are switched on.

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4.4 HOW TO LAND AN INTERVIEW

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Getting somebody to agree for an interview is considered difficult because newsmen are usually regarded with suspicion. There are ample examples where politicians have blamed the media for being misquoted or quoted out of context. Media persons often get the blame for distorting the facts. So it is no more an easy task to get an interview.

The interviewer has to use his imagination to overcome this handicap. The interviewer hangs between two competing factors. One, it is his job to do the interview that is at stake. Two, he legally cannot force anybody into talking. So it becomes an uphill task and, at times, very frustrating.

Remember that a reporter would, in most cases, need to get information, facts and opinions from the interviewee. Therefore, it is very important that one's participation in the interview is secondary. One must let the interviewee do most of the talking.

A number of skills and techniques have been prescribed to make this happen smoothly so that you get your feet inside long before the door is slammed. These skills are listed here:

- (i) Approach directly: Call up and tell the interviewee what you want.
- (ii) In many cases, a secretary or some other staff tries to scuttle your approach while the real interviewee remains totally unaware of this. So you should be able to recognize and convince this middleman and try to be friendly with him. What you should keep in mind that this is just the habit of the secretaries to impose their importance by saying that their boss has no time. So if you are friendly with the secretary, you will overcome the obstacle.
- (iii) When repeated failure stares at you, find out the person's hide-out and try your luck by straightaway walking in with an overdose of apology. One should never forget that humility really pays. Even such transgressions come to be pardoned if you carry yourself with humility.
- (iv) It pays to use Himalayan patience by just sitting in and waiting till the subject of interview shows up in spite of secretaries and protectors saying that 'the boss has no time to see you'. If you keep waiting in his office for the time till he shows up, he is bound to be impressed with your determination.
- (v) Take a book to read along with lunch or dinner packet with you to underline your resolve.
- (vi) The moment you get a glimpse of the reluctant interviewee, make your appeal as quickly and strongly as possible. For example, you can say, 'We have some information that you are to be shifted from your department/office' or something which will capture the attention of the object of your interview.

- (vii) It really helps to be courteous and polite. Tell the interviewee that there are two sides of every story and you want to know his side of the story. Thus, you arouse the interviewee's curiosity and attention. He may not know what the other side of the story is. S/he may want you to tell the other side.

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Exercise 2

A. Since you have got some idea about the necessary skills needed to conduct a successful interview, arrange an interview with your best friend. Now using those skills conduct the actual interview.

B. You are not fully satisfied with the interview which you conducted with your best friend? Why? Go through the interview again and identify the points and make a list of them.

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4.5 DO's AND DON'Ts FOR AN INTERVIEW

- (i) Punctuality is very important. In most of the cases, interviewees have a pressing schedule and they squeeze some time out for the interview. Besides, your punctuality shows the importance of the interviewee and that he has not been taken lightly. You must be ready in time to start the interview. Being punctual is good in most cases, for one has to do things like setting up the camera, or recording devices before the interview. One should arrive at least 30 minutes in advance so that you can have a good start.
- (ii) Keep mentioning your reasons for being there. Unless you are working on something very sensitive, if you do not outline your reasons, it may create problems.
- (iii) Begin the interview with a general question. This puts the interviewee at ease and enables you to collect your thoughts. It also helps to receive information you may not have anticipated and to chart out your course of action—a correct direction that the interview should take.
- (iv) Let the interviewee speak, even if what he is talking sounds a bit irrelevant to you. Make him relax. Do not interrupt. Do not make him uncomfortable

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in the beginning. It may prove counterproductive. An interviewee kept at complete ease can be an asset.

- (v) Allow him to go to at length on his favourite topic/achievement/escapade/fete. This will give you bits of information. You can always edit the irrelevant facts. Express your inquisitiveness, even enthusiasm about his achievements. This will loosen him up and he will be willing to come to the subject you want to discuss at length.
- (vi) Nod, grunt and chuckle in between. Show him that you are attentive.
- (vii) Stay on your subject.
- (viii) Keep egging him onto talk more. Most of the time only his voice should be heard. The interviewee should do most of the talking. This makes the person feel good and wise.
- (ix) Let the interview go on till you have the basics—how does he spell his name, official title, age, etc. even if you know these things. Preferably get these details from his staff and then get it confirmed by him.
- (x) The interviewer should show understanding and be sensitive. S/he will remember that you were nice to him. Make the interviewee feel important. Relax and double check the contents. Keep the interviewee at ease.
- (xi) Send and receive messages accurately. Choose words that the interviewee will understand. Avoid showing your knowledge of the subject. Use simple words.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. The editor of a local daily has interviewed you for a job. Everything went well. He wants to try you out for an interview and at the same time he also wants to see your writing skill. So he asks you to interview a friend about his early childhood memories and the atmosphere in which he has grown up. How would you prepare for this interview? List the steps and then prepare a flow chart.
2. What are the most important things needed to be kept in mind for an interview?
3. We have discussed in the above sub-topic that the interviewer should begin the interview with a question of general nature. Can you think of any other reason than the one we have given you? Can you think of any other opening question? Give your reasons in three lines.
4. What is the use of note-taking during an interview? How does it help the interviewer?

4.6 INTERVIEW: AN EXAMPLE OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Interview is a good example of the interviewee's interpersonal communication skills. It requires that s/he must not only be knowledgeable about the subject matter of the interview but must also be a good communicator. All the capabilities of interpersonal communication have to be exhibited in an interview. In a face to face meeting, the emphasis is on both the verbal and non-verbal communication. However, in a telephonic interview, the tone and inflexion given to the words are emphasized. We shall now discuss the salient points to be kept in mind when conducting an interview in person.

Many times you may not get time to plan or rehearse the interview before it actually takes place. There are, of course, a few fundamental rules for any interview. Preparing oneself to interview a personality, a celebrity or even the person-on-the-street, is actually an on-going long term process. This is because one must be a well-rounded interviewer, skilled in the art of handling a variety of topics and areas as well as a range of idiosyncrasies that are inherent in people in general. The interviewer must be prepared for any turn of events and still be able to take it all in his stride with equanimity. You cannot acquire these skills overnight but you must nurture them over a period of time. A great deal of deep study of persons and happenings is necessary. The would-be interviewer must yearn to learn.

4.6.1 Editing the Interview

As a reporter, you must remember two basic factors. First, all interviews are subject to editing. So it is always better to get more information than you can use. The information that you need to strengthen an argument or to refute another or to make a point, can be used at the appropriate point. The rest can be stored for use in future.

Second, you should not use any statement made in the interview out of context. For example, if any clash happens in Kashmir and you are interviewing a Government official who stresses that there were no human rights violations in that particular clash, you cannot use this statement to show that there were never any human violations in any clash that occurred in Kashmir.

4.7 THINGS TO MIND DURING AN INTERVIEW

Conducting interviews is a sophisticated thing. It requires many things to keep in mind while talking to an established personality.

4.7.1 Sensitivity

The way you deal with interviewees can differ, depending on whether they are public or private individuals. Since, public officials are used to deal with the media,

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you can always expect them to communicate with you regarding some issue. Further, private individuals normally do not deal with the media, so you are required to show more sensitivity while interviewing them. Sometimes a public official comes out with a controversial quote; however, his position and authority defend him to an extent in such cases. However, if a private individual does the same, you are supposed to recall him that it is going to be published and also ensure that the source is going to stand by the statement. Even though many reporters are of the opinion that once they have acknowledged themselves to be members of the media, the responsibilities in the interview become an open-ended game. Normally, the reporters showing extra sensitivity are able to draw out more information from the interviewee.

All interviewees, public or private, want to be portrayed well in the media. Many sources, especially public officials, may try to manipulate reporters by revealing only such information that furthers their cause. As a result, reporters need to be aware of the source's bias and ask probing questions that go beyond what the source wants to reveal. It is also crucial to check the information and seek alternative point of view.

4.7.2 Pros and Cons of Tape/Digital Recorder

A tape recorder is not a substitute for good notes. Tapes can break, and machines can fail you when you need them most. They can inhibit a source as well. They can also prevent you from taking good notes if you rely on them too much. Further, tape recorders cannot pick up observations—a smile, a nervous tic, an interviewee's appearance and mannerisms.

As more online news organizations add audio or video to their websites, reporters will need to tape interviews, meetings, speeches and other events to provide sound bites. With the growth of media websites, reporters are expected to provide information in many forms of delivery.

In addition, if you want to get the exact wordings or quotes, or if you are interviewing someone about a controversial subject, a tape recorder is beneficial. However, you will have to play back the entire tape and transcribe it before you write your story. That is too time-consuming. The tape has to be scanned first to find out what exactly you want to carry in the interview.

Some etiquette has to be followed before you begin taping your interview. Start it with basic introductions—who you are and why you are there—and some opening conversation. To put the interviewee at ease, you might ask a question or two before you ask the interviewee if he or she would object to the tape recorder. Then if s/he agrees to allow the recorder, don't place the machine directly in front of her or his face. Put it off to the side of the desk or table where it is not intrusive.

If it has to be a telephone interview, the most ethical approach is to let the interviewee know that you are recording it on tape, except in a few situations.

Most editors consider the use of deception or other undercover technique a last resort.

4.7.3 Listening Tips

As a reporter, developing the listening skills is equally important. They are as follows:

- (i) *Focus on 'here' and 'now'*: You have to focus on what the source is telling at present, instead of what you are going to ask next. One of the major obstacles to good listening is poor concentration caused by worrying about what you will say instead of focussing on what the interview is saying. Definitely the next question is going to be better if you focused on the answer to your last question.
- (ii) *Practice conversational listening*: The next question should be based on the last sentence or thought expressed by the interviewee. It should come as naturally as if you are having a conversation with your friend. If you want to move to another topic, you can do so either with a transition—onto another subject—or just asking the question. However, if you are really paying attention, the sequence of your questions is going to be in parallel with the interviewee's thought pattern.
- (iii) *Practice critical listening*: While hearing, the interviewer must assess what the interviewee is saying. Listening should come at many levels, e.g. one level for facts, another for attractive quotes and still another level for substantiation and elaboration. You have to evaluate whether the source is making a point clearly with sufficient arguments to support it. Whether you are able to understand the points? In case you are not able to understand his take on the subject, you are supposed to ask the source to elaborate, repeat or define the meaning. If you listen for meaning, you can direct the interview instead of letting the source control it.
- (iv) *Be quiet*: One must have a definite answer to the question, 'Whose interview is it anyway?' One must not try to impress the source with his knowledge. The interviewer can't quote himself. So it is better to let the source explain his point, even if you clearly understand it. It is always better to get the information in the interviewee's words.
- (v) *Be responsive*: It is advisable to make frequent eye contact so that the interviewee is aware of your attentive listening. One is supposed to nod, smile and say yes, speak softly 'uh-huh' or even try to look confused to egg him onto further elaborate on the topic. Through behaviour and expressions one must try to let the source know that he is getting attention. In case you are not able to understand something, politely say so. 'Why, How? I don't understand' and 'Please explain' are good follow-up reporting questions based on good listening.
- (vi) *Listen for what is not said*: The interviewee might try to avoid a topic? Just try to find out who or what isn't the interviewee talking about—a family

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member (in a personal profile), a close official, a crucial part of his or her background? It is necessary because sometimes the omitted things are more revealing and important than what is expressed.

- (vii) *Listen with your eyes*: One should try to find out what kind of body language the Interviewee is displaying? Is the interviewee fidgeting or showing signs of nervousness at some point in the interview? Is the Interviewee smiling, frowning or exhibiting discomfort when you ask certain questions? Are these the telltale signs that the interviewee may be lying or withholding information? Observation can be a good listening tool.
- (viii) *Be polite*: Sometimes the interviewee may start rambling or giving irrelevant information. Under such cases don't interrupt him. It is better to wait for the interviewee to pause for a brief moment; only then one should go for changing the subject.
- (ix) *Block out personal intrusions*: There can be circumstances when you had a bad day, your car broke down, you failed a test or you have some emotional concerns. Make a willful effort to block out these personal thoughts. They intrude on your concentration while you are trying to listen. Your problems will still be there when the interview is over. The interviewee will not.
- (x) *Develop listening curiosity*: It is better not to go to the interview with a rigidly defined set of questions. Although you may start with prepared questions, allow yourself to be surprised when the interview goes in another direction and follow the course if it is interesting. Listen for what you want to know and what you didn't expect to know.

4.7.4 Taking Notes

Detail differentiates good and bad notes. Detailed notes give you this advantage: when you begin writing your story, you may need more information than you anticipated during the reporting process.

At what moments you take notes can be as important as how you take them. Note-taking can make some interviewees nervous. If you are dealing with people who are not accustomed to being interviewed, start your interview slowly by asking a few non-threatening questions. After you have established some rapport with the interviewee, take out your notebook.

Here are some tips to help you take good notes:

- (i) *Be prepared*: One should bring extra pens or pencils. You may run out of ink, or your pencils may break. In addition, take both pens and pencils. If you do an interview in the rain, you may find pencils handy.
- (ii) *Concentrate*: In case you come to hear an interesting quote, it should be written immediately. Focus on what the source is talking about and just block out everything else till you have finished writing the quote. Even if you are concentrating on a previous thought, you will still hear

what is being said. So if the person says something better than the last quote, you can switch your concentration to the new information. Thinking of your next question while you are trying to write down a complete quote will interfere with your concentration.

- (iii) *Use key words:* If your source is speaking a direct quote, it is better to jot down key words only to recall facts and statements later. A sound memory really helps because the extent of notes comes down.
- (iv) *Develop shorthand:* One must abbreviate as many words as possible. The word *government* might become *govt* and *you* could be abbreviated as *u*. Some type of shorthand is especially important when you are trying to write complete quotes.
- (v) *Slow the pace:* If you are required to take notes for a quote, it is advisable to slow down the interview's pace. It can be done by pausing before starting the next question so that you get time to finish writing the quote. If you find that you are required to pause for too long, put up a question that does not need a crucial answer. Or you can even ask the source to further elaborate on the previous statement. If your source is not speaking too fast, politely ask him or her to slow down.
- (vi) *Request repetition:* Do not be afraid to ask your interviewee to repeat a quote or fact that you missed. Although the quote may not be worded exactly as before, it will be close enough. In fact, the repeated statement may be even better. Usually, when people get a chance to think and reflect a bit, they express things more clear manner.
- (vii) *Make eye contact:* One should not keep his eyes glued to the notes. The interviewer must ensure that he frequently looks at the interviewee even during taking notes. It is better to practice note-taking without looking at the notebook.
- (viii) *Mark your margins or notebook covers:* When you hear something that prompts another question in your mind—a fact you want to check or the name of another source you want to contact—jot it in the margin as soon as you think of it. Don't depend on your memory to think of it later. Some reporters use the covers of their notebooks to write questions that come to mind during the interview so that they can find them easily without flipping through notebook pages. Furthermore, don't forget to take notes on your observations, either in the margins or elsewhere.
- (ix) *Verify vital information:* Make sure you get the exact spelling of your interviewee's name and his or her title during or at the end of the interview. Don't go by a nameplate on a door or desk. That could be a nickname. Ask the interviewee the name he or she prefers to use, and ask for the spelling even if you are sure of it. A simple name could be spelled differently. If you get this information at the end of your interview, you could also ask for a home telephone number and an e-mail address at this time.

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- (x) *Double check*: If your interviewee says s/he has three main points or reasons for running for office, make sure you get all three. Write three reasons in the margin, number them as you hear them and check before you conclude the interview.
- (xi) *Be open-minded*: You may have one idea for the story when you begin taking notes. However, don't limit your notes to one concept. Your story angle could change any time during the interview. You can't always envision how you will write the story. When you do, you may be sorry you didn't take better notes, especially if you decide to change the focus during the writing process.
- (xii) *Use a symbol system*: In order to save time while writing the story—while you are taking notes—put some symbol or a star over the information or quotes that are important. Develop your own system.
- (xiii) *Stand and deliver*: Practice taking notes while you are standing. You will not have luxury of sit-down reporting, especially at the scene of fires, accidents, disasters and most the other breaking news stories.
- (xiv) *Save your notes*: You should save your notes before and after the story is published. How long you should save them is debatable. Lawyers disagree whether notes are helpful or harmful in court cases if you are sued for libel or any other reasons. However, most editors advise saving the notes at least for a few weeks after the story is published, in case any questions about it arise. For this reason it is helpful to date your notebooks.
- (xv) *Transcribe notes only for major stories*: Should one transcribe his notes in the computer before writing a story? Definitely not, if you are on deadline. Some reporters find it helpful to rewrite their notes before they write a major story because it refreshes their memory, especially if a story involves many sources and may be written over a period of days. If you haven't mastered the art of writing clear notes, it may also help you to transcribe your notes immediately after your interviews.

4.8 TIPS FOR INTERVIEWERS

Here are some tips to help you become a good interviewer. However, before you even start, consider your mission. You are a reporter, not a stenographer who just receives information and transcribes it. A reporter is supposed to evaluate the information for its fairness, accuracy, potential and newsworthiness to create a readable story. During the reporting process, you will look for facts, good quotes, substantiation and answers to the five W's—who, what, when, where and why—and also 'how' and 'so what'. One question should lead to another until you have the information you need.

An interview with one source is just the beginning of reporting for most stories. For credibility and fairness, you need other sources—human and written—for differing points of view and accuracy checks.

4.8.1 Framing of Questions for an Interview

Interview questions can be classified as two types: close-ended and open-ended. You need both types.

Close-ended questions are designed to elicit brief, specific answers that are factual. They are good for getting basic information, such as name and title, yes or no answers and answers to some of the who, where, when questions. For example, close-ended questions are: How long have you worked here? Who was at the meeting? How many people were at the rally? When did the accident occur?

Open-ended questions are designed to elicit quotes, elaboration or longer responses. The questions that will elicit the most quotes and anecdotes are:

- What (What happened? What is your reaction? What do you mean by that? Can you elaborate?)
- Why (Why did you do that....? Why do you believe...?)
- How (How did something happen? How did you accomplish that?)
- Give me an example (a follow-up question to explain how the interviewee felt, thought, acted in a specific situation)

Keep your questions brief. A long lead-in question can confuse the interviewee. Slow the pace between questions so that you can take notes. Ask unimportant questions or ask for elaboration while you are writing down quotes.

Remember to be responsive—smile, nod or react appropriately—and make eye contact frequently during the interview.

At the beginning of their careers, the reporters usually worry that they may look dumb and dull to the interviewees. However, one has no reason to worry about what he/she doesn't know. The interviewer is there to learn and listen; not to become an expert in the field. The most important thing is to get the most appropriate information from the interviewee. In fact, acting dumb can get you an advantage. Even if you know the answer to a question, you should ask it anyway, so that you can get the information in the interviewee's words. If you think a question is too simple, you might apologize for not knowing more about the subject. You might say, 'I am sorry I don't understand this. Could you explain so I can write it clearly for my readers?' Most sources/interviewees enjoy taking the teaching role or showing off what they know.

Acting dumb does not mean forgetting about the preliminary background work. It is dumb if you can't tell your readers something because you were afraid to ask. It is better to feel dumb during the interview than afterwards, when you read it in a newspaper.

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Given below are some suggestions to hold the interview and some questions to be asked. However, all of these techniques and questions do not apply to all the stories

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- (i) *Start out by using icebreakers*: Introduce yourself and briefly state your purpose. Be friendly. Establish rapport with some general conversation. Don't pull out your notebook immediately or switch on your recorder. Try to sit at an angle to your source so that you are not staring directly at her or him in a confrontational manner. A desk might serve as a barrier and provide enough distance so that you don't appear threatening.

Observe the surroundings. Do you notice something you can mention as an icebreaker, a way to establish rapport? Don't be artificial. If an official has a picture of his family on his desk, don't get overly familiar. Use good judgement, then explain a little more about what you are seeking in your story.

- (ii) *Put your questions in nonthreatening order*: You should put your questions in such a way that the interviewee or the source should not feel threatened. Nonetheless, all this depends on how much time do you have at your disposal. However, if you have only five minutes for the job, you may have to ask your toughest question first or whichever one will yield you the most crucial information for your story.
- (iii) *Ask the basic questions*: The most basic things to find out are: who, what, when, where, why and how. Afterwards add the 'so what' element as well. It is necessary to ask the significance of the main issue. Ask the question, 'Who will be affected and how?' In fact, this question will provide the information for the 'impact and scope paragraphs'.
- (iv) *Ask follow-up questions*: These are the questions that will give you quotes and anecdotes. It is better to use a conversational style. The interview must flow naturally. As the source answers the questions, the interviewer must follow the thought patterns through asking how and why and questioning the source to elaborate with examples. It helps to frame the next question on the basis of information available from the key words in the previous answer. If you are required to change the subject, do it by asking some unrelated question or using a transitional talk such as: 'Moving onto another topic...' or 'It will be befitting to go back to something you told earlier. Could you please elaborate....?' The use of follow-up questions is very convenient to move from general to specific. If the source /interviewee makes a vague statement, ask for specific examples.

You may have a long list of questions, but don't let the interviewee see them. A long list can make him watch the clock. An enthusiastic cub reporter took out a press release during an interview. When the interviewee saw it, he told him to use the comments in the release and

terminated the interview. It would be better to write your questions on the front or back of your notebook so that you can refer to them easily without turning pages frequently.

- (v) *Control the interview:* There might be instances when the source rambles or prolongs his answers. If you want to shift the interview in another direction, it is advisable not to interrupt. The reporter should wait for a natural pause and ask the next question. It is done by using follow-up question method.
- (vi) *Repeat questions:* You've asked an important or sensitive question, and the source/interviewee has given you an evasive or incomplete answer. Even a request to elaborate does not produce a satisfactory response. What course of action you should adopt? The best plan is to leave the question and proceed with the interview. Once you are through with some other points, it is better to repeat the very same question whose answer you really need. However, this time it should be stated in a different manner. In fact, a source may recall more on the second occasion when the question is repeated.
- (vii) *Ask background questions:* Knowing the historical background of the issue is really helpful. For example, it really helps to know how and when the problem or programme started and why.
- (viii) *Ask about development:* Go from the present to the past and to the future. What are the current concerns and developments? How did the issue evolve? What is likely to happen in the future? The answer to the question regarding future developments may provide you with a good ending for your story. In some cases, it may give you a lead and a new focus for your story as well. The next step is often the most newsworthy angle. Many newspapers prefer this approach, which is called 'advancing the story'.
- (ix) *Construct a chronology:* This tip is somewhat related to the previous point. If suitable, the reporter must ask such questions that may establish a series of events. It is appropriate to develop the story in chronological order. However, you must understand the order of events.
- (x) *Role play:* Visualize yourself in the reader's place, and try to assess how you will use the information available. Suppose you need to apply for a loan, then you have to find out what are the steps that need to be taken and where to go to avail the same?
- (xi) *Ask about pros and cons:* The interviewer should ask the source to dwell on both sides of the issue. Who agrees or disagrees with her or his point of view? What are her or his responses to the opposition?
- (xii) *Ask for definitions:* Your job is to translate jargon for readers. So always get your source to define any bureaucratic or technical terms in language that you and your readers will understand. Don't accept or write any information that you can't explain. To clarify, you might

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restate the information in your own words and ask the source if you have the correct interpretation. For example, you might ask, 'Do you mean that...?' or 'Are you saying that...?'

- (xiii) *Verify*: Ask questions even if you know the answers. You need to quote or attribute information to your source, not yourself.

Always check the spelling of your source's name—first and last names and middle initial. Check the person's title and the dates of crucial events. Check the accuracy of the information on a resume or press release. You don't have to repeat everything, but you should ask the source if the information released is correct. Then ask some questions that expand on the basic information. Also remember that if the source tells you something about another person, you must check it with that person.

- (xiv) *Use the silent treatment*: One should take a pause for a moment between questions. This is done to allow the source to elaborate on the issue. If the pause seems uncomfortable, the source may break the silence first. One reporter was writing the profile of a nun. He asked her if she missed having a sex life and how she coped without one. She gave a brief, expected answer that she had made a conscious choice of abstinence when she took vows of celibacy. The reporter was disappointed with the answer. He said nothing. Both were slightly uncomfortable. Then she broke the silence and began elaborating about how difficult celibacy was for her at times. Sometimes the best follow-up question is no question!

- (xv) *Use the 'blame others' technique*: When you have to ask tough questions, blame someone else. 'Your opponent says you cheated on your income taxes. How would you respond to that?'

Reporters and editors have mixed feelings about warning the source that a tough question is coming. Don't do it, they say, in confrontational interviews when you are trying to get the source reveal information that could be controversial in nature. It puts the source on notice and gives him or her a few seconds to become defensive and evasive. However, do warn the source or apologize if it is going to be a tough, emotional question, especially if you are interviewing grieving people.

- (xvi) *Handle emotional questions with tact*: Emotional questions will be difficult. Ask your source/interviewee to recall how he or she was thinking or feeling at the time some serious incident happened. 'Were you frightened when the train lost power? What were you thinking at that time?' Also it is better to avoid insensitive questions. There is a saying in journalism that there are no stupid questions, only stupid answers. That's not exactly true. 'How do you feel about death of your three children?' is not only a stupid question, it is insensitive as well. Instead of asking such emotionally loaded question, ask the person

to recall specific memories about his or her children, or ask how s/he is coping with such a tragedy.

- (xvii) *Ask summary questions:* Restate information or ask the source to clarify the key points he or she is making. For example: 'Of all the goals you have expressed, which would you say are the most important to you?' or 'What do you think are three major issues you face?'
- (xviii) *Use the 'matchmaker' technique:* Ask if anyone else is involved in the issue or if there are other people the source would suggest you to get in touch with. Remember that you will want more than only one source for your story so that you can strive for fairness and balance.
- (xix) *Ask free-choice questions:* One should ask the interviewee if there is anything special he or she may have to add to the information provided so far.
- (xx) *End on a positive note:* When you have finished the interview, politely thank your source. Also seek the permission to call back if there be any need for further questions. At this point, you could also ask for a home telephone number or another way to reach the source, such as mobile number.

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4.9 INTERPRETATIVE REPORTING

The term interpretative reporting means that the reporter seeks to find the implications of an event. S/he puts the event in the perspective and tries to bring the story in the stream of events. S/he explains, interprets and analyses the event, which goes beyond the stereotype of his duty as a reporter.

As the word 'interpretative' suggests, facts and interpretation are stitched together in this kind of reporting. It leaves a wide scope for the facts to be interpreted in accordance with the perception of the reporter. It digs deeper into the reasons and meanings of a development.

It is the interpretative reporter's task to give the information along with an interpretation of its significance. He has to seek shelter in his knowledge and experience to give the reader an idea of the background of an event and explain the consequences it could lead to. Apart from his own knowledge and research in the subject, he often has to seek the opinions of specialists to incorporate in his story. Interpretative reporting goes behind the news, brings out the hidden significance of an event and separates truth from falsehood.

Curtis D. MacDougall was the first person to give important inputs to interpretative reporting in the USA. He writes in his book *Interpretative Reporting* that the First World War took Americans by surprise. They were totally in the dark about its causes. This brought changes in the style of reporting. The result was that when in 1939 the Second World War broke out, a considerable majority of the Americans expected it or least knew it was possible.

MacDougall says that a successful journalist is usually more than a thoroughly educated person. He knows that a news item is not an isolated incident but it links an entire chain of important events.

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With his reading of different subjects including history, economics, sociology, political science and other academic streams, an interpretative reporter presents a report which benefits the reader thus enabling him to visualize the shape of things to come. An interpretative reporter should leave no stone unturned to avoid prejudices and stereotyped attitudes, which would bias his perception of human affairs. Following is a sample story.

Bill on corruption likely in Budget session: Moily

Express News Service

Mumbai, January 22.

Battling a string of scams, the UPA government is likely to introduce a bill in the Budget session of Parliament to rein in corruption.

“We are bringing a separate bill on corruption in accordance with the UN convention,” Law Minister M Veerappa Moily told reporters here.

He said the government intended to bring the legislation in the next session itself. “In that direction, we are proceeding,” he said.

“We have agreed to the convention but it was not ratified. The NDA government did not take any stand. Now, a couple of days back, a Group of Ministers (GoM) considered the UN convention and mooted the ratification. Thereafter, we will be bound by it,” he said.

Maintaining that the government would like to fast-track corruption cases, Moily said the GoM is expected to submit its report to the prime minister within 60 days.

On black money stashed abroad, Moily said, “You know there are treaties between countries. They are done mutually by each country. We have to abide by the treaty. The Finance Minister has made it clear that this is meant for evasion of tax...only to the extent of taxation. Disclosure of names, unfortunately, the treaty doesn’t permit.

“We don’t want to hide anything. But the question is, there are certain binding principles of the treaty which inhibit us from disclosing it (the names),” he said.

Chill to spill over into the Budget session?

Times News Network

NEW DELHI: Parliament's budget session will begin on February 21 and end on April 21, an official announcement said on Monday, even as indications emerge that it could be stormy.

The Lok Sabha secretariat said in a statement that the seventh session of the 15th Lok Sabha will begin on February 21 and carry on until April 21 "subject to exigencies of government business". The President will address both houses of Parliament on February 21 at 11 am. The House will adjourn on March 16 to meet again on April 4.

Indications emerging from various quarters indicate that the budget session too may not witness much peaceful proceedings. The opposition and ruling front continue their stand-off over the demand for a Joint Parliamentary Committee to investigate the 2G scam, which pushed the winter session into turmoil.

The opposition continues with its demand for a JPC, while the government believes that the Public Accounts Committee headed by senior BJP leader Murli Manohar Joshi is sufficiently empowered to look at all aspects of allegations. The prime minister has formally offered to appear before PAC, comprising of members from both sides, for questioning on the allocation of 2G spectrum at throwaway prices by then telecom minister A Raja.

Clear indications are emerging that fresh trouble could break out for the government during the coming session. The Comptroller and Auditor General is now running against time to complete its report on the Commonwealth Games and activities surrounding it. The audit covers Organising Committee for the games, Delhi government, sports ministry, CPWD, DDA and others. While CAG officials maintain a steady silence, indications emerging from various departments show that the final audit report could be a ringing indictment of all the departments over the way they went about spending hundreds of thousands of crores.

Most departments have replied to the CAG memos that have raised questions over the way contracts were awarded, tenders violated and firms favoured. The misdeeds of the OC are mostly well known

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and CAG has graphically captured outrageous acts such as the exaggerated overlays contract, if the memos are anything to go by. But what is not so well known is the severe audit indictment of central agencies such as CPWD besides the sports ministry and Delhi government.

Indications are that the CAG would try and be ready with the final report in time for placing it before Parliament during the budget session. If the report is tabled as projected then the government would have another front to fight on.

4.10 INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING

The work of a newspaper reporter always involves certain amount of investigation, enquiry or examination of facts and details. He has to explore and get into various aspects of an incident or occurrence. More often than not, reporting and researching become synonymous.

William Randolph Hearst has defined investigative journalism as 'a news is what somebody, somewhere is trying to suppress. Everything else is advertising'.

However, the job of an investigative reporter is to dig deeply beyond the facts stated in the hard news. Many journalism students like you have an ambition to become 'investigative' reporters. An 'investigative' journalist sees himself as the conscience of the society, pursuing corruption in high places without fear or favour. In his book *Press and Law*, Justice A.N. Grover has quoted from the forward of *Investigative Reporting* by Clark R. Mollevhogg. According to the forward, investigative reporting has three elements:

- It has to be the original work of reporter. Under no circumstances should it be of others.
- The subject of the reporting should be such that it is of importance for the readers to know or affects all of them in some way or other.
- There must not be any attempt made to hide the truth from people.

Investigative reporting has grown by leaps and bounds in Western countries. In India, it is still in the womb. Most Indian newspapers despite having all the resources to their disposal do not spare the manpower and spend money for a first-rate investigative job.

Attempts at investigative reporting, to quote an eminent Indian editor, are like drilling for oil. A fair amount of effort gets wasted and it has to be taken into stride. However, when finally the oil is extracted and made marketable, the sense of achievement is usually more than any other sector of journalistic enterprise.

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The best example of investigative reporting is the Watergate scandal of the seventies. Such was the impact of the scandal when it appeared in black golden print that it led to the disgrace and downfall of the then U.S. President Richard Nixon. The two young reporters of *The Washington Post*, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, started digging into the arrest of four men for a burglary at Watergate, the Democratic Party's national headquarters on 17 June 1972. They had no idea that their inquiry would lead to such an expose of events with devastating impact.

The duo kept their investigation to the highest standards of professional journalism. The reporters did not start gunning for Nixon from the beginning. They merely pursued the burglary attempt and only later came up with startling facts linking the White House with it. 'We did not go after the President, we went after the story,' they explained.

In India, investigative reporting started making a mark after the end of the Internal Emergency in 1977, particularly through the reports published in the *Indian Express*. Since then investigative reporters have brought to light a number of scandals—the Bhagalpur blinding incident by the police, Kamala case, A.R. Antulay's private trusts, Kuo Oil deal, the securities scam involving Indian and foreign banks and stock brokers, etc. An enterprising reporter Ashwini Sarin once got himself arrested so that he could give a first-hand account of life in Delhi's Tihar jail.

With successive governments increasingly becoming secretive and corruption spreading its tentacles far and wide, the need for investigative reporting cannot be overemphasized. Yet we must remember that investigative reporting is not everybody's cup of tea. It requires hard and sustained work. The investigative reporter should be a combination of a crusader, super-detective and blood hound. He should have the necessary courage, integrity, time and finance to carry out his work.

The best kind of investigative reporting is that which keeps the public interest in mind. It may highlight an injustice, expose corrupt practices or unmask dishonest politicians and bureaucrats.

Experience has shown that unless an investigative reporter or a crusading reporter gets the support of judiciary, the executive or legislature cannot bring his reports to logical ends. The Bhagalpur blinding report would have ended like any other report if public interest litigation would not have been filed against the police. In the USA, the Watergate stories would not have produced any result if they had not received the support of legislature which threatened the impeachment of President Richard Nixon.

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CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

5. Why are some people opposed to the concept of investigative reporting?
6. Name the US and Indian newspapers which gave a big thrust to investigative reporting in their respective countries.
7. Can an investigative reporter be objective?
 Yes No
8. Can an investigative reporter be interpretative?
 Yes No

4.11 SUMMARY

- Interviewing is one of the key inputs in reporting for the media, both print and electronics. It can be on-the-record and off-the-record.
- Interviewing is aimed at eliciting specific information. It is not a fishing expedition where you get what you net.
- There should be a detailed preparation for the interview. Research on the person and the issues involved, and the physical preparation like audio-video recording, etc. is half the battle won.
- It pays to discuss with the interviewee what you want from the interview and what use you want to make to the information.
- It is the proper tactic to make the interviewee do most of the talking. The interviewer should be a good listener most of the time but skillfully direct an interview to the area about which he wants to discuss.
- The personal credibility of the interviewer should be appreciated. That is, the interviewer should be sure that confidences will be kept and only that information will be published which is meant to be published.
- The interviewer must take notes of import points and questions. This will help the interviewer from making any distortion.

4.12 KEY TERMS

- **Cross-check:** To verify a statement made by one source from another independent source
- **Editing:** Deciding which parts of an interview should or should not be used
- **Equanimity:** Evenness of temper; composure
- **Idiosyncrasies:** Modes of behaviour peculiar to a person(s)

- **Interview:** A face to face or telephonic conversation between a reporter wanting information on a particular issue and a person who can give it
- **Interviewee:** The person from whom the information is sought by a reporter through an interview
- **Interviewer:** The reporter or media person seeking information through an interview
- **Pedantic:** Flaunting bookish learning or technical knowledge

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4.13 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. Dates, facts, figures of important landmarks in the life of an individual (birth, schooling, college and further studies, marriage, family, background, other details of achievements and highpoints in life).
 - Friend, philosopher and guide
 - Life's philosophy
 - Aptitudes
 - Reasons for Success (Hard work, inspiration, enterprise)
 - Principles/Guiding factors to motivate (advise)
 - Conclusion with probing questions on future plans
2. The most important things needed for an interview are:
 - Call up and tell him directly what you want.
 - Approach the 'protector' first and convince him/her to reach the interviewee.
 - Turn up at the office and express the urgency of the interview.
 - Wait and insist on the interview to show your determination.
 - Shoot the questions impromptu and invite replies.
 - Courteously request the person for his/her viewpoint.
3. Reasons for opening an interview with a broad question can be as follows:
 - Make the interviewee comfortable to enable him to answer the first question at ease; this will set the trend for the rest of the interview.
 - To help lead the readers/viewers into the substance of the interview, to elicit a general statement which attracts and holds the attention of the target audience.

Besides, this is an accepted method for taking the audience from known to unknown.
4. In case the recording equipment develops a snag, note-taking comes handy. Otherwise, the whole interview could be spoiled. Besides, this also helps concentrate on the answers of the interviewee and is a sure-shot step against any kind of distortion.

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5. The opposition to the concept of investigative reporting is because of the fact that such reporting does involve some kind of investigation into critical issues and may give rise to a trail of unexpected events.
6. *Washington Post* and *Indian Express*
7. Yes
8. Yes

4.14 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. What are the categories of interviews?
2. Why is it important to prepare for an interview?
3. What are the physical parameters of preparing for an interview?
4. Write a short note on the art of interviewing from the angle of interpersonal communication skills.
5. Provide a brief overview of note-taking tips for a prospective interviewer.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Critically evaluate different tools to conduct a successful interview.
2. Explain the techniques of convincing a prominent personality for an interview.
3. Write a detailed note on what to do and not to do for a successful interview.
4. Elaborate on the things to be kept in mind during an interview.
5. What is interpretative reporting? Write a detailed note on its role and significance.
6. Describe the art and techniques of investigative reporting.

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