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Basic Principles of News Writing

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News writing is not a gift bestowed upon a select few by the nature and not others. It is a scientific-art which can be learned by persistent and diligent practice. The skills to become a writer can be acquired by writing only.

News writing is an ongoing process. It follows certain predefined methods and has a definite structure but, an accomplished and competent journalist inculcates his own distinctive writing style in the news in order to carve a niche for himself in the journalistic world.

There are certain guiding principles of good news writing. Although not carved in stone; these principles are followed by news correspondents world over in order to maintain structural uniformity with the global standards of news writing. Efficacious news writing demands physical, mental and emotional hard work. It is not a skill that can be developed overnight. It is very slow, time consuming and tortuous process. An aspiring reporter should not get bogged down by the exacting nature of the news writing process. Instead, she should assiduously try to learn the skills required for the process. Good news writing skills are a result of tirelessly incessant





and stoical efforts of a reporter who is willing to put in the extra hours. Few basic principles of news writing are described below but, it must be kept in mind that these are only directive in nature and cannot be considered as the ultimate truth. To assert that the entire news writing process is dependent upon these principles only would be impertinent.

i. Use simple words and simple sentences: Principles of simplicity and unembellishedness are the best tools to achieve clarity. Simplicity of style should definitely prove

very useful for the students of journalism as well as the beginners in the field of journalism. It is a general misconception among many people that ostentatious and esoteric vocabulary is synonymous with good writing. Such pretentious and sophisticated writing style does nothing but alienate the readers. It is much better to write five simple sentences using simple words instead of a long complex sentence adorned with difficult words. Therefore, news writing should be done in simplest possible manner. Complex words and sentences bewilder the readers.

ii. Minimum words should be used: Quite an astonishing number of journalists use much more words than necessary in their reports. “Ram and Shyam indulged in an acrimonious battle today.” This sentence may be simply written as “Ram and Shyam had a fight today.” Simple and unadorned writing has no substitute. A good news writer should always refrain from using flowery language. Superciliousness and vanity are best avoided while writing news.

iii. Use of jargon, argot and registers should be avoided: Every sociological unit or group has its own specific terminology that can be comprehended only by the members of that particular group. For example, only a cricket player or cricket enthusiast can understand the meaning of mid-wicket or googly and not a tennis player. Therefore, such functional registers and technical jargon remains limited to the group to which it belongs. Typically, a good news writer should refrain from using them because their comprehensibility is limited

and a common reader finds them very exacting and cumbersome. If their use becomes absolutely unavoidable then the reporter must also explain them in simple words for the benefit of general readers. A good news writer should endeavour to disseminate his/her message among various target groups in an unobstructed manner. That is, good news should have the quality of universal comprehensibility. Platitudes and clichés should be consciously avoided as news containing these is considered of poor quality.

iv. Avoid adjectives and adverbs: Use of adjectives and adverbs is unwarranted in news writing. A competent journalist should try to weave his/her story around verbs and nouns. Use of adjectives usually diminishes the effectiveness of a correspondent’s message. Point to be noted here is that the use of adjective and adverbs limits our thought process whereas, use of verbs is synonymous with extensiveness of our thought process. Use of verbs augments writing skills of a journalist.

v. Coherence and Continuity: It is a well known maxim that a good writing is like good stitching. If a cloth is not stitched properly it would feel awkward while wearing. Similarly, if a good thought is not written in a proper manner it would become uninteresting and cumbersome for the readers. It would show a lack of coherence and hence, attractiveness. Good journalists should diligently follow mental discipline and meticulously peruse copy of their write up to expurgate any inadvertent mistakes from it; otherwise their news will be rejected by the readers. Only the quality of a journalist’s writing and not his/her reputation holds any importance for the readers.

vi. Repetition should be avoided: Neither data nor facts should be repeated in news because they obfuscate its real purpose.

vii. Superfluous words should be avoided: Redundant words should not be given space in news copy. Journalists should try to inculcate spoken language rather than excessively formal language in the news copy. This would help them in establishing direct communication with their audiences. Words which are not used in day to day conversation



should be kept out of news writing. Use of foreign words and phrases should also be avoided.

viii. Objectivity: If news is not objective and has a specific purpose then it is not news at all. Objectivity is the soul of news writing.

ix. Clarity: Anything written in news should be clear. News writing is not literary writing in which writer has freedom to use as many words possible in order to develop the plot. Journalists have an obligation to convey their messages in 'minimum possible time' (in case of electronic media) and in 'minimum possible space' (in case of print media) to the target groups. Lack of clarity in news would simply translate into lack of audiences.



If the above mentioned principles of news writing are assiduously followed by the practitioners of journalism; there is no doubt that they will be able to achieve their objectives. But this requires perseverance and incessant hard work. If you are willing to put in the efforts; the success will be yours.

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