



e content

General Principles of Editing

Prof. Mukul Srivastava

Head

Department of Journalism & Mass Communication

University of Lucknow Lucknow (India)

sri.mukul@gmail.com

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCdkxo7fhISE8kzyKolTL8IQ>

<http://mukulmedia.blogspot.com/>

www.mukulmedia.com

<http://www.lkouniv.ac.in/>

General Principles of Editing

13

sri.mukul@gmail.com, <http://mukulmedia.blogspot.com/>

A large number of news stories come daily in the office of a newspaper. These news stories originate from various different sources. News copy is written by different persons. Some among them are quite competent and skillful whereas others are not. Basically, news correspondents are also news writers. More often than not they are required to compile and write news copy in considerable haste. In such circumstances, it is natural that some mistakes inadvertently creep in to their reports.



Editing

Editing refers to the process that precedes the publication of any news story. In this process, first all news stories are collected and then sorted according to their importance. These sorted news stories, articles and other stories are then purged of any grammatical, linguistic or semantic errors and organized according to the space available in the newspaper. Thus, editing in the context of news means necessary pruning and trimming of any news story to make it suitable for publication. As in the process of tailoring clothes are cut and trimmed in order to make them wearable similarly in the process of

editing, news is cut and trimmed as per the requirements in order to make it readable.

Principles of News Editing

1. Proximity: If 45 people die in an accident in Bangladesh and 5 people die in an accident on that very day in Lucknow then the accident that occurred in Lucknow will be given much more importance in the news-papers published from Lucknow as compared to the accident that took place in Bangladesh even though the number of casualties was much higher there, because of its proximity to the readers of Lucknow.

2. Timeliness: Importance of timeliness in keeping any news story fresh must be acknowledged properly while editing. For instance, while writing about issues like Bofors Scam, etc. we will have to remind the readers about its historical background as well as about different equation that are likely to get formed in the future.

3. Prominence: If Amitabh Bacchan visits Lucknow or the vice-chancellor of the University of Lucknow gets injured while playing cricket then they are bound to get media attention as both these events are related to prominent personalities and therefore, have prominence. Thus, if any such news story features among various stories received during a day then, it will certainly get published.

4. Impact: News should comprise events that affect the lives of people in one way or another. For instance, questions such as, “What would be the effect of implementing the report given by the Sixth Pay Commission?”, “What would be the result of providing ration to poor people at half-price?”, “How would public react to pollution, health problems, increasing prices of cooking gas and passing of Railway Budget?”, “What would be the supposed consequences of public’s reaction?”, etc. determine the criteria for selection of news.

5. Human Interest: News should cater to the interests of the public. News stories like politics, inflation, arrival of comets on earth, etc. that appeal to human interests and captivate their imagination should necessarily get space in newspapers.

The Process of Editing

Typically any news report should be perused thrice. First time to understand it, second time to edit it and finally, to ascertain that there is no inadvertent mistake remaining in the news. If after going through all the above steps there is no mistake remaining in the story then it may be considered to be edited and ready for publication. In this process you should pay attention to language, grammar and clarity of

thoughts.

Structure of News

News is divided into two parts. The first paragraph is known as ‘intro’, ‘lead’ or ‘introduction’ and the second paragraph is known as ‘body’ or ‘remaining news’. An intro gives a succinct account of an event. In the body, the news is elaborated and described in detail. In any news, lead or intro should be given greatest importance as they are the most important component of any news story. In other words, lead is the most important part of any news story as it is the quality of a lead that determines whether a news story would be read completely by the readers or would get just a cursory glance from them. Generally, a lead should not exceed 100 words and a body should contain all the pertinent details. Events should be described sequentially and in chronological order.

Style of News Writing

Traditionally, news is written in inverted pyramid style. That is, the most important information should be given in the intro or the first paragraph whereas the details should be provided in the body. Basically, questions pertaining to what, when and where are answered in the first paragraph and the questions regarding who, why and how can be described in the following paragraphs. The inverted pyramid style of news writing is employed in following manner:

1. If there is paucity of space then a news story can be pruned at the base as it contains the least important information.
2. Readers generally are forced to skip a lot of information provided in any news due to haste. More often than not readers read first few paragraphs of any news while the later paragraphs get skipped. Since the most important information is contained in opening paragraphs of various news stories written in inverted pyramid style; readers get the important information and only comparatively less important information is left out of their purview.
3. Sub-editors determine the headline of any news story based on its first few paragraphs. Thus, the important information of any news story is given in the first paragraph itself.
4. Also, sub-editors can remove later paragraphs of any news story written in inverted pyramid style without many problems as they contain the least important information and add some new and more pertinent paragraphs containing comparatively more important information.

The paragraph containing summary of the news should be removed and placed alongside the auxiliary news to confirm their conformity. If two news stories are in different styles then they should be coordinated. Now the first paragraph should be looked at. If it is concomitant to the lead then it is perfectly alright but if any anomalies are found then it should be written again. The third paragraph should be able to portray the development of the lead and the second paragraph. This helps in giving direction to the news and making it easier for the readers to read the news. If a direct quotation is used in the news then its authenticity and accuracy must be checked thoroughly and if that quotation represents a thought then it should be ascertained that the thought is not prejudiced.

Rewriting

During the process of editing, sub-editors should endeavour to rectify grammatical, factual or linguistic errors in a news story while retaining its originality as far as possible. But sometimes they have to rewrite the story. If the opening paragraph is confusing and there is no mutual coordination among the news then they have to be rewritten so that they can attain clarity. Sometimes a report gives complete information but is unable to convey the information in a proper manner. This frequently happens in case of press conferences and while reporting accidents. In such cases also, the news has to be rewritten by sub-editors.

Headline Editing

Readers decide to read or to skip news stories after reading their headlines. Thus, if an excellently written and edited story or news does not get a good headline then it would not get attention of the readers and consequently fail to achieve its objective. Therefore, headlines sell news. Size of headlines depicts its importance and prominence. That is, larger headlines signify greater importance and smaller headlines signify lesser importance. Writing headlines for news is like polishing objects made of wood. While writing headlines following points should be kept in mind:

- (i) Headlines should be expressive. They should be able to educate as well as entertain the readers simultaneously.
- (ii) Headlines should be sharp and be able to epitomize the news.
- (iii) Best headlines are written in present tense as it represents currency.
- (iv) Headlines should be written in common spoken language.
- (v) Never put a name between a headline.

- (vi) Only single (‘ ’) inverted commas should be used in headlines as it adds to their aesthetics as well as occupies lesser space in comparison to double inverted commas.

News Coordination

The process of news coordination is very challenging and quite important. The knowledge of news coordination assumes great significance during natural calamities, accidents, floods, earthquakes, etc. The ability to perform the task of news coordination competently and effectively would enable you to convey greater amount of information to the readers in lesser time. For instance, if a train accident occurs 60 kilometers away from Patna and the newspaper is scheduled to go out of the press within one hour then the primary information received from official sources or railway sources will not be comprehensive. Therefore, we will have to find out the history of other such accidents that have occurred in that area from news archives and try to relate the incident to them. This would make the story more appealing and larger because we cannot wait for our correspondent to go to the site of the accident and send telephonic messages or fax from there due to paucity of time. Now, as soon as our correspondent reaches to the site of the accident we start to receive current report which includes witness accounts and opinions of the people present there. Railway sources also provide more information. These then have to be coordinated. News coordination is usually done when there is time pressure and newspaper is about to be send out of the press for distribution.

Newspaper Visuals

Pictures have a direct effect on the mind. Language and nationality do not obstruct their movement. Using pictures to convey their messages to others is quite an old practice of human beings.

The practice of using pictures in newspapers commenced in the year 1855. The pictures of Roger Fenton's Caemia War constituted first visual materials to be published in a newspaper. There was a time when visuals had no place in design and layout of newspapers. Thinking about publishing cartoons and graphics was considered absurd. But today, increasing use of computers and digital technology has transformed



the whole environment of the media world. Everything is possible at just a mouse-click. Advent of softwares like Photoshop has rendered the processes such as reel-development, negative/positive print, etc. completely redundant. These processes have now become history. But technology can never replace human mind. Therefore, your individual and unique outlook is still indispensable. Visuals used in newspapers are quite effective as they are pleasing to the eyes and are representative of the accuracy and comprehensiveness of a news story.

Importance of Visuals in a Newspaper

- 1) Visuals portray events in an authentic, realistic and vivid manner.
- 2) Even a thousand words can never match the amount of information that can be incorporated in a small picture.
- 3) Visuals have a direct effect on the senses of the readers.
- 4) Universal comprehensibility of visuals renders them intelligible to each and every reader irrespective of her/his linguistic knowledge or level of education.
- 5) Visuals generate trust in the minds of the readers and consequently ratify their convictions.

The points discussed above make it amply clear that good visuals play a very important role in boosting the circulation as well as readership of newspapers. Visuals here refer to pictures, cartoons, maps, graphics, etc.

Editing of Visuals

Visuals like news are received from multifarious sources by newspapers but like news all of them cannot be included in them (the newspapers). The publication or non-publication of certain visuals in a newspaper depends upon the discretion of the visual editor. Basically, visual editors are assigned the job of optimal utilization of the space available in a newspaper as well as doing justice with the visuals as a painter or photographer gets emotionally attached to a picture or a photograph while painting or clicking it. For example, if a photographer has taken full shot of a newly appointed group of ministers and send it for publication; in such a case a prudent visual editor will crop the image from the bottom and retain only the faces of the ministers for publishing because, readers are interested only in knowing about the faces of the newly appointed group of ministers and not in their dressing sense.

Although, a visual editor has complete authority regarding visuals but s/he is not authorized to give importance to new thoughts

when it comes to the structure of a page. This is out of her/his purview.

Negative Outlook

While editing visuals; sometimes it becomes important to adopt a negative outlook.

- 1) Too many pictures of receptions should not be published.
- 2) Giving pictures of a crowd of politicians does not prove to be very beneficial.
- 3) Visuals should not obstruct the flow of information to the readers.
- 4) Visuals that are not contextual should not be published.
- 5) Selection of visuals should be done on the basis of their contribution in creating balance in various pages of a newspapers and their atheistic value for the newspaper.

Cartoons

Now a days many newspapers publish cartoons on the front-page or on inside pages of their publications. These cartoons are made by the cartoonists working with them. Single column cartoons published on the front-page are known as 'pocket cartoons'. These cartoons enhance the sharpness of news. Although, news editors do not have any special responsibility regarding cartoons; they have to ensure that cartoons are published on the page and space allotted to them and their titles and captions are correct. The responsibility of the chief sub-editor arises only when certain news in contradiction to the issue being satirized in a cartoon is received. The publication of such news alongside the cartoon would undermine the entire purpose of the publication of that cartoon. Publication of such cartoons becomes a mockery for the newspaper itself.

Caption

Usually, all the pictures to be published require a caption. Caption completes the purpose of a picture. Captions are voices of the silent pictures. Writing captions is also an art and has its own rules. Captions should be written in short sentences and be able to give direct



indication to the readers. Captions written in minimum number of words are considered the best. Language of the captions should be complementary to the picture. Things which are conspicuous to the readers in a picture should not be mentioned in the captions. Captions are placed below the pictures and are usually given in a bit bolder font than the rest of the paragraphs. While giving captions, aesthetics of the page layout should be kept in mind.

Alertness

Extreme caution is needed while selecting pictures for publication. A situation where the picture used is of someone else and the news pertains to someone else, should be carefully avoided. Only those visuals that are sent by reliable and trustworthy correspondents should be published.

Maps

Publication of national-international maps or maps of special areas is as useful as publication of visuals related to an incident. Publication of maps of places or areas which are not supposed to be known to an average reader proves quite beneficial. Giving maps of adventurous expeditions and battle-fields increases the value of a news story tremendously.

Picture editing is very demanding job. To become a good visual editor one must have thorough knowledge of various photo-editing softwares like Photoshop. But the most important thing is the presence of original thought process as originality is the key to success in this field.