

Practical 6

Basics of Editing for News

The ideal principle, which governs editing, is: 'never overestimate the public's knowledge and never underestimate the public's intelligence'. In a news organization, editing plays a vital role. A news story is written by hurried reporters, and is rough-edged like raw diamond. Hence, the copy is polished and honed by a team of editors. Thus, editing is done to achieve a balance of news between that originating within the organization and that pouring in from outside. Sorting out and sifting also helps induce parity between the well-written articles and those written by the inexperienced reporters. In the process, the unwanted matter gets weeded out. Only the newsworthy stories are finally selected. These are checked and rechecked for grammar, syntax, facts, figures, and sense and also clarified for betterment, and are condensed for economy of space.

Objectives

1. Striving for focus and accuracy: Accuracy is one of the chief corners of the editing stage. News reports have the professional and ethical responsibility to include in their research and writing process the checking of facts, which includes the correct spelling and pronunciation of names, the factual details of a story, and any basis upon which conclusions are drawn. Multiple checks for accuracy are the norm. All careful, responsible writers should do the same. The reliability of the finished text depends upon accuracy in the researching and writing process.
2. Fact Checking: The internet has increased access to sources for checking facts. Unfortunately, the internet has also increased access to dubious sources. Debates about the academic credibility and trustworthiness of sources to which the public can contribute will probably continue as expanding internet access changes the rules by which sources are evaluated. Ready access, speed, and the look of authenticity typically influence public use and acceptance of available resources, as the proliferation of medical, legal, and other specialty web sites attest. One can even

watch surgical operations online. Who is to say what is real and what is staged? Most internet users are savvy enough to avoid entering credit card information on unfamiliar and unverified websites. The “buyers beware” admonition is just as applicable to those who would use the web indiscriminately to find factual information.

3. **Maintaining Objectivity:** Inaccurate information can also be dispersed by wellmeaning sources. For example, a distraught mother who claims that her incarcerated son is an innocent victim of a federal law might have reached that erroneous conclusion as a result of her own emotional investment in her son’s case, as opposed to the facts of the case. To maintain objectivity, one can report the mother’s perspective as her factual, though undocumented, point of view, while also reporting the contents of the actual arrest warrant or any other claims communicated by the arresting authority.

4. **Staying on Track:** Maintaining the focus of a piece of writing is another important element of the editing stage. Writers are notoriously protective of their work. Crafting a text can be a painful, time consuming process. After investing so much time and effort, it is very difficult for some writers to recognize and delete tangential sentences or passages—particularly if they are well-crafted or contain brilliant ideas. Writers can also be blinded to generalizations that do not adequately cover the specifics of a topic. In short, taking on an editor’s role often conflicts with the writer’s emotional and intellectual investment in the writing process. For that reason, it is common for many writers to distance themselves from the text before editing it, or to ask someone else to read the text as a dispassionate editor

Principles of Editing

- Accuracy
- Attribution
- Balance and Fairness
- Brevity
- Clarity
- Readability
- Human interest and

- Sharp observation

Accuracy: The sub editor should be obsessed with accuracy because one mistake can destroy the reputation of a newspaper or magazine, and it takes just fraction of a second to make one. Checking and crosschecking names, figures and verifying facts are of utmost importance.

Attribution: Always attribute the news to the source so that readers can judge its credibility. "A highly placed Defense Personnel, Finance Ministry Sources". Etc. are attributions that help readers to arrive at their own conclusions, while steering clear of the suspicion that the reporter is giving his own version of the story.

Balance and Fairness: Balance and fairness form the foundation of good editing. Balance is giving both sides of the picture, while fairness is not taking sides. It also means not providing support to political parties, institutions, communities or individuals, etc., through the columns of the newspaper. It is the attribute of a professional reporter and the duty of a sub editor to implement it.

Brevity: Brevity is a great virtue in journalism appreciated by readers and editors alike. It is telling a story, as it should be, without beating around the bush. It saves time and space and wins applause when consummated to perfection.

Clarity: Clarity is the ability to think clearly and translate it into paper—a quality that can take one to the higher echelons of media hierarchy. Readability has a bearing on sentence length and simple and forthright manner of expression.

Readability: The average length of a sentence should not exceed 18 words, which is standard. It is not easy to read a sentence with more than 18 words. Beyond 25 words the sentence would be very difficult to read, though some accomplished authors have far exceeded the standard and yet remained readable because of their craftsmanship. But beginners are advised to stay out of long-winding and complicated sentence constructions. The best way is to write news stories using simple words, short and simple sentences.

Human Interest: Using a style that arouses human interest is what the craft of editing is all about. Sub editors should see the events from the readers' point of view and the news stories keeping the reader ever in mind along with his hopes, fears and aspirations. The sub editor should identify himself with the proverbial common man who does not exist but represents the silent majority whom the journalist is duty-bound to defend and protect.