







Manufacturing the News

You have learned about an opening for a job as a fact checker at a media outlet. The money offered is important to you so you would like to be able to do a good job and make a serious contribution. Before applying, you have decided to find out more about how information is tailored and packaged before reaching the public. Basically, you want to know two things: what is news and what is its role across media. This should put you in a position to decide which facts matter and how decisions are made about the news.

Goal of the Learning Situation:

To understand the purpose, target audience, and social functions of various types of news. To recognize the communication conventions used in various media. To recognize how news reports are structured and organized.

ACTIVITIES

 1 Inform or Entertain? >	 4 Different Media – Different Descriptions >
Goal: To understand the purpose, target audience and social functions of various types of news	Goal: To recognize the type of media and the type of language used
 2 At First Glance >	 5 News Divided into Sections by Topic >
Goal: To recognize the communication conventions used in various media	Goal: To recognize how information is divided into major sections or themes
 3 Organizing the News >	 6 Reflect and Evaluate >
Goal: To recognize how news reports are organized	Goal: To reflect on what you learned and evaluate your progress so far



EXPLORE AND DISCOVER

ACTIVITY 1 Inform or Entertain?



60 min

GOAL To understand the purpose, target audience, and social functions of various types of news.

In this activity, you will:

- ▶ Examine how news stories are written.
- ▶ Demonstrate that you understand what a target audience is.
- ▶ Take the target audience into consideration.
- ▶ Examine the different purposes of news stories.
- ▶ Learn how to recognize anecdotes.
- ▶ Identify the role that news reports have in society.

Task A: Is This News?

Do you know how publishers of news outlets decide which news to publish? If you got a job as a fact checker in a news outlet, you should be aware that the publisher of a news outlet on the web has to make decisions about what to publish. Out of the thousands of pieces of information out there, which ones contain stories that are worth publishing?

- 1** Look at the following headlines from news stories and choose the ones you think are worth publishing. Check Yes if you would publish the news items, No if you would not.

News Item to Consider for Publication	Yes	No
Mermaids prevent construction workers from building dam		
Dead mayor is re-elected		
Child floats down river in toy truck		
Flight attendant makes exit on inflatable chute with beer in hand		
Cat chases dog away from child		
Only 50% of lost cell phones recovered		
Government increases minimum wage		
Police officers refuse to give tickets in protest of working conditions		

See Answer Key

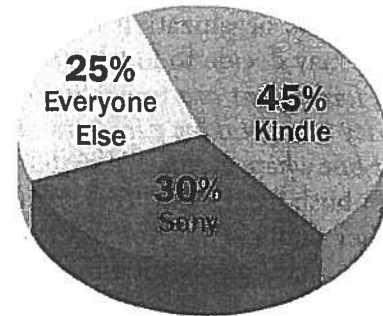


These definitions will be helpful as you go through this learning situation.

Market share

For a product or service, market share is the percentage of the overall business that one company has. In the media, it refers to how many readers a news outlet has compared to other news outlets, or how many people are watching a TV show compared to all the people watching TV at that time. On the right is a graphic that shows the market share of e-readers in 2009 based on research by teleread.com.

eReader Market Share



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News outlet

A publication or broadcaster that provides news reports or feature stories through media such as newspapers, magazines, radio, television, or Internet sources.

Target audience

A target audience is the people who are the most likely to be interested by the kind of news published. A target audience is defined by the common characteristics of these people, for instance, sports news target mostly young men. We can say that the target audience of sports news is young men.

Task B: What Is News?

Above, you made some decisions about what you thought was worth publishing. In order to make these decisions easier, you have to ask yourself: what makes an event or situation newsworthy?

2 What is your definition of news?

See Answer Key



Task C: Target Audience

The target audience is simply the people that the news media want reading their news. It represents the people who will be interested in the news chosen for publication by the news organization. This might be related to the mission that a news organization has set for itself. A publication, for example, *GlobalPost*, may decide to focus on “. . . knowledge of other countries and of the global forces that are impacting our economy, our environment, and our very security (. . .) taking people to distant places around the globe most will never visit but where events are shaping all of our lives.” Obviously, *GlobalPost* does not publish local news. This clarifies the type of news they will publish or reject. Other publications, for example, may prefer to run stories about violence and destruction, or stories about scandals.

Ultimately, many news media choose the news that will bring them the largest market share because the larger the market share, the more they can earn from advertising revenues. The more people that consume the news from their organization, the more they can charge the advertisers. Such is the nature of the news business.

Task D: Anecdotes and Factual Accounts

Anecdotes

We begin our discussion of “what is news” with a discussion about anecdotes. An anecdote is a short, interesting, often amusing story that is usually based on personal experience or on the experiences of others. Anecdotes are often used as a lead to a news story because they are effective at drawing in the readers. The anecdote will relate to the topic of the news story.

The media use anecdotes because people tend to take an interest in stories that reflect their own lives or the lives of people that they know. In some news items, anecdotes might make people want to react to a situation they find unfair or sad.

Examples of Anecdotes

In an article about dog training, the writer tells an anecdote about how his dog was nearly run over by a truck because the dog ran after a cat across the street.

In a report about a fire in an apartment building, the writer tells an anecdote about a family’s difficulties in finding a place to stay after the fire.

In a report about amusement parks, the writer tells an anecdote about her first trip to an amusement park when she was a child.

News Stories

Most news stories tell the facts of a story. The news story will often begin by answering questions about who, what, when, where, and why, as well the “how” of a story. These are the famous WH—question words that we all learned about

in grade school, sometimes learned as the 5Ws plus How. The news story will then go on to give more details about the story; beginning with the most important details. Sometimes quotes from the people involved are added to provide support for the story. Quotes also give the readers the impression that they are “at the scene” of the story.

Task E: Identify Anecdotes and News Stories

In this task you will be asked to read a text. You have to identify the main facts in the text and then decide if the text is an anecdote or a news story. One way to figure out the difference between an anecdote and a news story is to ask yourself what impact the text has on the readers. If the story is only amusing or entertaining, it is likely an anecdote. If the text has an impact on many people, it is likely a news story.

3 Cat Chases Dog

My cat Spiff is two years old and she thinks she is a gardener. She likes to sit out front on the porch overlooking the yard. One day a big stray dog stopped and started sniffing around on the lawn. Before you know it the dog started to poop on the lawn. Spiff jumped off the porch and chased the huge pooping dog away from our front lawn. The dog was no match for Spiff; she was not going to let some dog spoil the front lawn.

- a) What are the main facts in the text above? _____

- b) Is this an anecdote or a news story? _____

See Answer Key 

4 Minimum Wage Raise Sofador News

The government is raising the minimum wage by \$1 an hour, stating that at the current wage, workers remain under the poverty line. This increase comes with a promise to adjust the minimum wage annually according to the rate of inflation.

In an announcement made yesterday in the capital, Premier Dufort announced the raise. The adjustment, the first in two years, follows the rise in the Consumer Price Index.

“Most people will agree that making ends meet on minimum wage is arduous and our increase is fair to both workers and employers,” the Premier said.

In a communiqué, the provincial Business Council expressed its disagreement, stating that the increase would lead to job losses.

The new wage will give employees the second highest minimum wage in Canada.

- a) What are the main facts in the text above? _____

- b) Is this an anecdote or a news story? _____

See Answer Key 



Soccer Fan Killed after Being Hit by Toilet Bowl in Brazil: Report

SAO PAULO Sat May 3, 2014 6:23 a.m. BST

(Reuters)—A fan was killed in clashes outside a football stadium in Brazil late on Friday when he was hit by a toilet bowl thrown from the stands, according to local media.

News site *globoesporte* reported that the incident occurred after Recife club Santa Cruz drew 1–1 with visitors Parana in a second division match.

There were clashes outside the Arruda stadium and fans ripped toilet bowls out and threw them at rivals on the streets below.

“In front of Gate 6 there was a big fight that resulted in the death of the fan,” police captain Wilson Queiroz was quoted as saying. “The toilet was thrown from the stands and hit him full on.

“The victim was with someone at the time but everyone fled the scene after the incident.”

Source: Reuters - SAO PAULO / PARS International Corp.

- a) What are the main facts in the text above? _____
- b) Is this an anecdote or a news story? _____

See Answer Key 

Task F: Write an Anecdote

For this task you will write a short 150-word anecdote about something that happened to you. Make sure you edit your text for any spelling or punctuation mistakes.

Task G: Guiding Choices

Organizations that publish news make their decisions based on their target audience. For example, a magazine for people interested in architecture will not choose the same articles as a magazine for people interested in the lives of rich and famous Hollywood stars. News media in print, on television, or on the web, often choose news that are interesting to the general population. They may have a slant or angle towards more socially oriented news or more business oriented news. You have to recognize how information can be tailored to what the readers like.

Headlines

A headline is a short line of text that indicates the type of story below the headline. Headlines are used to grab attention and sum up a story. Many news organizations may even hire a person to write the headlines for the stories they will publish.

6 Based on the headlines below, examine the facts, and then determine who could be the target audience for the news stories.

a) How to make ends meet when we can't miss a pay cheque

b) Couple must find a way to reduce \$3,200 a month on entertainment budget before retiring

c) Best-designed university buildings around the world

d) Kardashian to renovate new house

See Answer Key



Best-designed university buildings around the world

Kardashian to renovate new house

Task H: Write a Headline

For this task you will write a headline to accompany the text below. Read the text and then create your headline.

Headline: _____

Hockey fans in Montréal were shocked yesterday by the sudden announcement of the retirement of head coach Marcel Bastien. The news comes with the hockey club having one of its worst starts of the season. Coach Bastien mentioned personal and family reasons for his mid-season departure, but a string of recent losses and complaints from star players have surely been a factor in Coach Bastien's decision.

ACTIVITY 2 At First Glance



60 min

GOAL To recognize the communication conventions used in various media.

In this activity, you will:

- ▶ Identify the parts of articles in various publications.
- ▶ Recognize the function of layouts in various publications.

Task A: Examine How Information Is Presented

Communication conventions, or the way information is presented in different media, can vary greatly from one publisher to another. However, some elements are fairly common in news sites, papers, or magazines. Let's see if you can identify the elements that make up communication conventions.

- 7** Choose terms from the list of elements below and match the labels pointing to each part of the articles on the next page.

byline, caption, explanation,
headline, graphics, image,
lead, quotes

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For this task you will write a headline to accompany the text below. Read the text and then create your headline.

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a) _____
In much larger font than the text, it is used as a hook to get the reader to read by summing up what the story is about.

b) _____
It tells the reader who wrote the article. This matters when you have to assess the credibility of an article.

c) _____
Placed at the top, it gives the most important information: who, what, when, and where.

d) _____
Divided into short paragraphs, often just one sentence that can easily be cut to shorten the article, it provides additional information that helps understanding.

e) _____
Along with more details, this part often includes, word for word, some of the things that witnesses, experts, or officials told the reporter.

Boy swept downstream after driving into river

Paul Nanabai

Sofador News

On his birthday, a three-year old toddler drove a toy truck into a northern B.C. river and was swept downstream 12 kilometres while clinging to his toy for more than two hours before being rescued yesterday.

Young Demetrius Jones left his grandmother's trailer while everyone was asleep at 7 a.m. He drove himself into the Peace River.

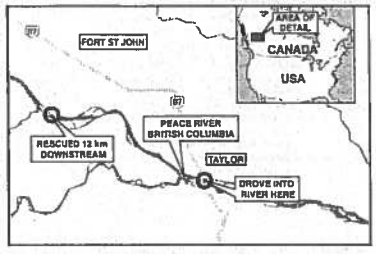
The family was on holiday at Peace Island Park in Taylor, B.C., and woke up to find the child missing from the campsite.

Fearing the worst, the police, relatives, friends and neighbours began to search for him.

Anita Newdorf, the boy's grandmother, told her son, "If he's in the river, he's gone."

Over two hours after he went missing, a local group of volunteers found Demetrius kneeling in his half-submerged overturned plastic truck in deep frigid water.

Don Loewen, who lives nearby, dove in and rescued the boy. "We just kept going down the river and watching all the logjams and keeping our eyes out for any sign of the truck or the boy."



f) _____
An illustration created to give supplementary data or to visually clarify some aspect of the news. Here, it shows the various points on a map where the boy floated down the river.

The rescuers got the shivering boy into the boat and wrapped him up in a blanket. "He was pretty concerned about where his truck was," Loewen added.

The RCMP said that the young boy does not seem to have realized the danger he was in.

Constable Jackelynn Passarell said "He was very excited to see the police."



g) _____
When available, it shows a scene or people in relation to the article. Many news sites, however, use stock images or images taken from their archives to accompany a story.

The image above is not Demetrius or his truck but it is an example of the type of toy that floated down the river with the boy aboard.

Copyright: ISchmidt

Some parts of this article were contributed by news agencies (Reuters, Canadian Press).

h) _____
A few lines under the picture that describe or name what the picture or illustration refers to.

See Answer Key

Task C: Sidebars

Three-column layouts often include sidebars. Sidebars provide additional information about the context or background of the main text. Anything can be added in a sidebar. It can present a true story or add information related to the content of the article, for instance, a list of symptoms if the article is about a disease. It may also present a different point of view, discuss a finer point, or even offer a quiz on what people know about the topic of the article. The Cultural Tile and Did you know? sections in this learning guide are examples of sidebars.

Sidebars often come with their own colours and fonts. In longer articles, they afford some blank space to rest the eye, even when a three-column layout is used. Sidebars are also very common on information websites.

Task D: What Goes In a Sidebar?

8 Below, you will find three sets of titles for news stories. For each set, one is the text of the main news article and the other is a sidebar. Which one do you think is the news article and which one is the sidebar? Provide an explanation for your choice. Write the article or the word sidebar on the line next to the title.

a) Eight ways to start a fitness program _____

Time to get fit at any age _____

b) Five symptoms of strokes _____

Selfie of a stroke helps doctors make diagnosis _____

c) Resources to get started as a mystery shopper _____

How to become a mystery shopper _____

See Answer Key 



GOAL To recognize how news reports are organized.

In this activity, you will:

- ▶ Identify the who, what, where, when, why, and how of news stories.
- ▶ Recognize whether a text is informative, explanatory, or narrative.
- ▶ Identify the type of organization of a text, such as chronological, and cause and effect.

In this activity we will look at how the main facts are presented in news stories and how news stories are structured. One basic principle is that a news story starts with the 5 WH-question words plus “how.” News stories found on websites and newspapers present reports in a way that sums up the most important information at the top of the article. This is called the lead. If you are looking for facts, this is where you should start because that’s where **who, what, where, when** appear and allow the readers to decide if the news is important enough to find out more about **why** and **how** and to learn other details about the event. Facts are generally presented from the most important to the least important.

Task A: Recognizing the 5 WH-Question Words Who, What, Where, When, Why, + How

Read the following news story.

Auto Thefts Plummet in B.C.

KRISTEN THOMPSON

METRO VANCOUVER

October 1, 2009 5:01 a.m.

Vancouver police celebrated the seventh anniversary of the Bait Car program yesterday by announcing car theft has dropped 71 per cent in the province this year compared to six years ago.

Theft of cars is also down 27 per cent this year compared to last, with 710 cars having been reported stolen between January and June.

“Bait cars are a shining example of how innovation, integration and investment are working to reduce

auto-theft crime,” said Solicitor General Kash Heed at Vancouver police headquarters.

Bait cars credited for helping to reduce thefts by 71%

“B.C. now has the largest bait-car fleet in North America.”

Bait cars are placed around the city and can be tracked by police once they are stolen.

Everything that takes place inside the bait car is caught on live audio and video, and once police are behind the stolen vehicle, its engine is disabled.

“We’ve seen a continued drop in auto-crime claims thanks to this successful partnership and customers taking steps to protect themselves,” said Nicolas Jimenez, ICBC’s road-safety director.

“It’s one of the reasons we’ve been able to lower optional insurance rates.”

Source: <http://www.metronews.ca/vancouver/local/article/327089-auto-thefts-plummet-in-b-c>

9 Describe the factual content of the story by identifying the 5 WH-question words and the "how."
a) Who: _____
b) What: _____
c) When: _____
d) Where: _____
e) Why: _____
f) How: _____

10 The end of a news story often provides closure, stating the conclusion of the story. How did the end of the story provide closure?

11 In news stories, facts are usually placed from the most important to the least important. Explain whether the facts in the article are arranged from the most important to the least important.

12 Examine how the paragraphs are divided. How many sentences are there in each paragraph?

See Answer Key 

Task B: The Purpose of News

When we speak of the purpose or social function of news we mean the three main types of texts: informative, explanatory, and narrative. The way an article is structured depends on the reason or purpose for writing the article.

Most articles in the media are, at their core, informative: they offer reliable accounts of events. Other approaches are also used. An article can be explanatory when the readers need to understand the *whys* and *hows* of natural phenomena, of a complex business process, or of a decision taken by government, for example. Occasionally, articles may be narrative, for instance, where a human experience is described. News articles may be composed of sections of informative, explanatory, and narrative text, but generally an article has one main focus.

If you reread the article about Vancouver's bait car program above, you will note that the social function of the article is to inform and explain.