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FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF MASS COMMUNICATION

PROGRAMME: BSC MASS COMMUNICATION

COURSE: WRITING FOR THE MASS MEDIA

COURSE CODE: CMS 102

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Definition of the Mass Media

Blake and Haroldsen, also cited by Uyo, refer to the mass media as technical vices through which mass communication take place. Technically, the mass media can be said to be an institution that keeps daily records of events in a society. The representation of the day-to-day events going on in the society is filtered through the skills and observations of the mass media writers. The mass media writers are writing professionals with the ability to put pen and paper in good use, expressing idea or sharing meaning with readers. To be good at writing for the media, the writer should be able to develop nose for information, arrange the information in a logical, coherent and interesting way that is suitable to the message's purpose, to the audience and to the medium. Furthermore, this expectation to write, places a lot challenges on the media writer who must hone his or her writing skills in order to be relevant to the contemporary society.

The mass media therefore have the nature of being:

- Easily noticed

- They possess the nature of being outspoken
- It is also in their nature and character to always be in a hurry.
- They are publicist in nature.

The mass media has the characteristics of having something to present for groups and individuals. They exhibit the character of being independent which must be upheld by the polity if the mass media are to serve as the last hope of the common man and the voice of the voiceless.

Message types presented in the mass media include:

1. News Stories: This is a straight, formal, objective, balanced, accurate and timely account of a factual event. Here, the 5Ws & H are emphasised at the very beginning of the story as quick as possible.
2. News Analysis: This can be described as a less objective or assessment of the issues in the news. That is, breaking down of news events in order to highlight the important point. It is an attempt to explain for better understanding the events that make headlines.
3. Editorial/Commentary: An editorial comment is the official stand of a media organization concerning a typical issue. The editorials and commentaries are usually given prominent play in the media.
4. Advertising/Commercials: These are materials that must be paid for before they are printed or aired. The word advertisement is more in use in print media just as commercials are popular among broadcast media.

5. Feature Article: These are less time conscious presentations of the mass media. Although they are timely and typical, they are usually presented in relax atmosphere. That is, it is written with a mental picture of the relaxed reader who has time at his disposal.
6. Opinion Article: Opinion articles are subjective opinion of the individual writer. The writer is at liberty to express himself on any issue as long as it confines to the laws of the land.
7. Discussion: This is a presentation of the broadcast media. It is a kind of panel analysis in which a presenter or anchor person selects a topic together with experts to discuss the topic with on air. It is a popular programme menu by most broadcasting stations.
8. Talk: Talk is equally a broadcasting affair. It is one of the innovations of broadcast presentations. Here the host engages the audience on an interesting topic. Such topics are usually emotional in nature. The host moderates the presentation of the participants.
9. Drama Presentation: Drama/musicals are one of the popular presentations in broadcasting. They constitute the bulk of the entertainment function and glamour of the broadcast media. Drama production is a basic function of the programmes department.
10. Cartoons: These are aspect of reporting that comes in artworks. They are caricatures that go above amusement and laughter. Cartoons are presented by both print and broadcast media.
11. Letters to the Editor: They are an audience participatory presentation by the print media. Its equivalent in broadcasting is phone-in programs. They are feedback oriented. That is, the readers and the viewers are given an opportunity to react to media presentations.

Challenges of the Mass Media Writing

Challenges arise for a media writer in these three areas:

- i. Message: you have to consider the kind of message you are presenting and write accordingly. A straight news report is not written in quite the same way as an in-depth analysis. Also, a news or press release is different from a feature and both are quite different from advertorials. Commercial messages have more in common with editorial because they too are persuasive, but like the different appeals of editorial, commercial messages make particular appeal based on purpose. Problem occurs in understanding how to alternate 'having something to say' and 'how to say it' in trying to deliver the message. A news story written to inform, is more likely to be read through to the end if it is also entertaining. Features that entertain may also inform. Commercial messages that persuade may also entertain. The difficulty of writing or communicating through the mass media is the lack of immediate feedbacks from your audience. The mass media writer does not have that opportunity.
- ii. In writing for others through the mass media you must be acutely conscious of your own perspectives, some words may have different meanings to others. Look at what you have written to see whether you have examined all the ways others might view it. This is a problem sometimes for public relations people who have to write a press release that will be approved by top management yet pass the careful scrutiny of news editors who routinely look out for missing or misleading information.
- iii. The mass media audiences are diverse. Your writing style must be accessible to all, and at the same time you must not forget that certain types of readers and listeners or viewers expect certain types of write-ups. On the sports page for example, your style must be appropriate for sports enthusiasts, clear enough to be understood by more casual readers. Another important thing to note is the level of use of abstract words.

Words with vague referents are said to be abstract. The further away you get from the specific, the less sure you can be that someone will know what you are writing about.

Write about a man and not men. Also important in this regard is context. The words surrounding a word help to explain it. The meaning never resides in the words alone.

Context also helps explain a word that might be unfamiliar to your audience.

Obligations of the Media Writer

You are obliged as media writer to be honest, accurate and fair and work by the prescribed code of ethics that guide media practice.

Your obligations as a media writer can be broadly classified into the following:

1. Obligation to the profession.
2. Obligation to the medium.
3. Obligation to the society (your readers).

One of the virtues that help a media writer fulfill all these obligations and still remain above board is honesty. Honesty means representing the reality of a situation as accurately as the language will allow.

Considerations of the Media Writer

Media writers owe their audience three major considerations:

- i. Writing with Care: Careless construction can lead to misconceptions and create errors. It is the duty of the writer to write coherently to avoid the problem of misunderstanding the content. The writer who understands grammar and punctuations should make the effort to use words well and be precise to get the intended message across to the readers.

An error as slight as a single comma that is out of place can cause confusion. It is the writer's job to make the reader's job as easy as possible. The more effort you require of the reader, the fewer readers you will have. Even in broadcast writing, where the inflections of speech may make the meaning clear, grammar and punctuation must be taken into account.

- ii. **Style:** Media writers must know and observe the style rules of Standard English. Although, they have the additional burden of obeying the rules of the medium they are writing for. Most publications, broadcast stations and public relations operations have stylebook that specifies certain company conventions in matters of writing. Adopting a media writing style means developing a way of expressing ideas that represent you well to the media consumers, allow you to feel comfortable, and communicate your intended message
- iii. **Clarity:** Good media writing must be functional to be good writing. The media writer must make the audience's task as easy as possible. Sentences should be instantly clear as confusing words could cause readers to turn the page and listeners to turn the dial. The key to clarity is writing simply and directly. Write what you have to in plain English. The following expert's advice can be of help: Think about what you want to write; organize your material. Be brief, keep sentences short and avoid a succession of loose sentences. Use specific but simple language; avoid jargon and redundancies. Use active voice; inject variety into your choice of words and sentence structure. Be logical, check for accuracy and presentation of ideas. Get candid critiques of your writing from good writers and editors.

Principles of Good Media Writing

The following are some of the principles of good media writing:

- a. **Be Concise:** Strive to get your message across in the fewer possible words. The objective of effective journalistic writing should be to avoid cumbersomeness without becoming choppy. You have to guard against superfluous words, phrases and clauses. A good media writer is the business of giving audience information not building their vocabulary. Use words that your audience will understand much of the time, replace the unfamiliar with familiar ones.
- b. **Be Concrete:** Good media writers prefer words that give the reader something to see.
- c. **Be Positive:** Statement in positive form is easier to read and understand than evasive and negative construction. And they make the message more forcefully more direct and interesting. According to Strunk and White, 'not' is a weak word. Somehow, they contend that reader is consciously or unconsciously dissatisfied with being told only what is and what is not without what is. (Newson 1988) pp. 29-39.
- d. **Be Organized:** Good organization means that the sentences and paragraphs come in the right order. One leads naturally to the next. Don't throw sentences at your readers haphazardly. Make a point clearly, support it and then make a smooth transition to the next point.
- e. **Good transitions are essential in guiding the audience from one sentence to the next.** Changes in thought must be clearly signaled. Transitional words and phrases that could establish the relationship between sentences and paragraphs include: however, moreover, nevertheless, furthermore, in spite of this, despite this, e.t.c.
- f. **Be Natural:** It is wrong to think that writing calls for language that is more formal and sophisticated than speech. It is true that some types of writing do. One of the golden rules

of good writing is 'write the way you talk.' This does not mean the writer should reproduce the repetitions and circumlocutions of everyday conversation. But writer should use natural words, short and simple sentence. Natural language is one of the media writer's most effective ways of making a write-up interesting.

- g. **Be Readable:** There is nothing mysterious about making something readable. It is just a matter of applying the readability developed by experts. The most important of these principles are: Keep sentences short. Keep paragraph short. Use short common words.

Reportorial ethics to observe when writing for the mass media.

1. Be open-minded and objective as it is humanly possible to be.
2. Seek the truth and understand the behaviour of others.
3. Do not allow prejudices to colour your stories.
4. Guard against conflict of interest by avoiding controversial community issues.
5. Your role is to report and not to participate in issues in order to maintain our neutrality.
6. Confidentiality of source
7. Be of ware of gifts and favours
8. Shun moonlighting and political involvement
9. Verify all private sources.
10. No excuses for inaccuracy or lack of thoroughness.

The Print Media

This is a type of media writing that are usually printed in booklets and paper form. They include newspaper, magazines, leaflets, test books, pamphlets, brochures etc.

The Characteristics of the Print Media

Permanent: Unlike the broadcast media that is transit and fleeting, the print menu is permanent. That is the reader has the opportunity of material recall and rereading for better understanding.

Detail: Print details are more detailed than those of broadcast. Broadcast is said to give the readers the 'first test' while the prints media give readers the 'most test'.

Delayed: Print stories are usually delayed. Unlike in broadcasting where there is opportunity for live transmission, print does not have such opportunities.

Financial Outlay: Any media consumer who wants to be part of the print presentation must be ready to part with some amount every day.

Geographically Bound: unlike broadcast that is ubiquitous, print is geographically limited. That is, it can be physically checked.

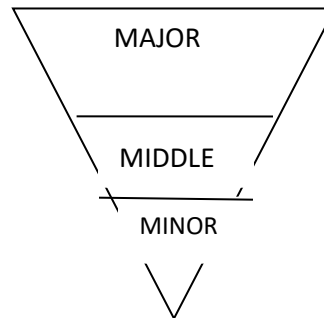
Guidelines for Writing Print Copy:

1. Try as much as possible to gather more information than required.
2. Do not be too simplistic.
3. De-emphasis the use of past tense to avoid your story looking stale.
4. Always cross check your stories before submission.
5. Insure that your story is balanced by identifying the parties involved.

Writing Styles in Print media

Inverted Pyramid Presentation Format: this is a writing format that involves crowding as much information as possible into the first paragraph, it requires presenting information in descending order of importance to answer the 5 Ws and H in the first paragraph. The inverted pyramid style of writing provide answers to **what** the writer is writing about or happening, **who** are the people or person been written about, **where** what is been written about happened, **when** the event or activity took place, **why** the event occurred and **how** it happened.

INVERTED PYRAMID DIAGRAM



Importance of inverted pyramid style of writing:

- It facilitates reading
- It satisfies curiosity of readers
- It facilitates make-up
- It facilitates headline writing

Different Types of Media Writing Produced as Print Copy

Newspapers: These are daily or weekly mass media publications that are written and printed to disseminate information. Newspaper therefore, requires a lot of writing and speed, the writer must be somebody who functions well under pressure. Newspapers and their writers epitomise the haste that journalism writing is known for. Writing in a haste style is suitable for newspaper because of the nature of information processing for newspapers publication and the nature of a typical newspaper reader.

Types of newspapers Available

Daily Newspapers:

Weekly Newspapers:

Community Newspapers:

National/International Newspapers:

Importance of graphics in a newspaper

1. They help the assimilation of the stories.
2. They encourage readability.
3. They help to break gray matters.
4. They contribute to effective page planning.

5. They are used as make up components.

Guidelines for Writing Online Newspapers and Magazines.

- Avoid using all capital letters called shouting in online journalism.
- Limit each e-mail story to one topic and identify that topic in the subject line.
- State only the necessary background information in the story.
- Keep your email stories short.
- Always check e-mail stories to make sure they are free from grammatical spellings and typographical errors.
- Personalization: You need to know the customers you serve.

Magazine: They are usually published at intervals. It, therefore, exerts less pressure on the writer unlike newspapers.

Newsletters: this also one of the mediums that print writers use for information dissemination.

Posters and Brochures: These are publicity publications designed to call attention to something like product, service, event or someone.

Books and Pamphlets: Pamphlets are really mini-books, different from brochures in that their graphics may not always be especially interesting

Writing News story

News story: news story is a recorded or written article that informs the public about current events, concerns or ideas. It can come in form of a straight news or hard news, features and editorials. It

needs to be recent and new, captivating enough to interest readers, it must be timely and must answer the 5 Ws and H in a constructive manner and well detailed with enough facts and direct quotations from sources.

Elements of News Stories.

The head (the main point), Secondary point in a tie-in transition, elaborate more on the main point, support for the lead, background, development of the main idea and details.

- i. The main points come first with the 5Ws and H infused into the main point.
- ii. The lead and secondary points captures the essence of the main point but does not give a complete, thorough account of it, you then introduce the major secondary points right behind the lead. A major secondary point that turns will surprise the reader.
- iii. Elaboration on the main point. This is further expansion and explanation to the lead.
- iv. Support for the lead. The lead makes a claim, the story should prove it. Thus, it is necessary to give specific supporting evidence for the point made in the lead. Sometimes the support can be simple and brief. In other cases you might need several paragraphs of statistics examples or expert testimony. Here is an Example, (The lead)World hunger is caused not by over population but by politics, the keynote speaker for “Hunger week” said this on Monday. Shortly thereafter is the direct quote supporting the lead. “The reason people remain hungry in this world is that they are powerless” said Comrade Adams President Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC).

- v. Background: All beginning news writers soon learn this cardinal rule of journalism: never assume anything. So you must repeat essential background information in every story.
- vi. Development of the main idea: - from the lead to its elaboration, support, and background information are the basics of the news story. The writer follows up on the consequences of the news and how it will alter the upcoming events or the economy or the environment, how it will affect residents of the area, what will happen next. The news writer must explain the significance of an event, not just present the facts of it.
- vii. Details – In a news story details are the subsidiary points that relate to the main one point. Very important details will be introduced right after the lead, and returned to later on – perhaps before the lead is developed, perhaps

Other Important Aspects of News Story Writing

1. **Lead:** it is the opening paragraph of a news story that gives the audience the most important information of the story in a concise and clear manner while maintaining the reader's interest. It answers the 5Ws and H. there are different types of leads: i. summary leads, it gives a quick summary of the lead in a story. ii. Single item lead, it focuses on one or two elements of the summary lead. iii. Delay identification lead, this lead does give out the "who" immediately but uses a descriptive pronoun to describe the person. iv. creative lead captures the interest of the reader. v. Short sentence lead uses a short phrase to tease with the rest of the lead. Vi. Analogy lead makes comparison of issues or events.

2. **Headline:** headline is the title of a newspaper story, printed in large letters at the top of the story. It scantily describes the subject and topic of your content. The purpose of a headline is to quickly capture the attention of readers.

Essential things to know when writing for radio.

- i. **Simplicity:** simple writing is the central approach of writing for radio so that the ear can transmit them easily the first time the message is read. Before you put pen on paper to write for Radio and TV, you must simplify your ideas, thoughts, words, language, sentences and punctuation.
- ii. Communicating on air requires the simple declarative sentence – subject – verb – object. However, you must guide against the habit of short, jerky and disconnected sentences and thoughts.
- iii. Your writing should have transition, it should flow. You talk to the paper as you write. This will help you gain the conventional approach.
- iv. Avoid complicating phrases and clauses. Most punctuation for broadcasting will be commas, periods and dashes.

Three basic rules which must be followed by the TV reporter writing for visuals:

- a) Do not cram your video narration full with details.
- b) Relate words to the pictures when telling the story. The narration and pictures must go hand in hand.
- c) Carry the viewer into the story by describing the way it happened. Although the narrator may begin with a brief opening summary (without pictures) telling the viewer the main points of the

story, when the film rolls on, the story should be told as it happened not necessarily in chronological order.

Some simple rules that the on-camera studio reporter/ correspondent should follow:

- i) Maintain self-control. Expect problems and be prepared to cope with them;
- ii) Always prepare file copy. If film or video tape fails to come up, have the file copy close at hand, to carry on the show.
- iii) Be familiar with studio cue-signals.
- iv). warming up listeners when writing for the broadcast media

The philosophy behind warming up listeners when writing for the broadcast media is so that the listener may actually hear those first few words while airing, it is important for the writer to get the listener's full attention without jamming into those first few words. To meet this target, experienced radio/TV writers frequently use the warm up method of telling the listener to come awake and listen closely. Therefore, the first sentence of a broadcast write up should: (i) Catch the listener's attention (ii) Orient him and prepare him for what is to follow.