News Judgment

Foundations of Journalism

Emerson College

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News Judgment

- The most important journalism skill a journalist can possess.

- How you differentiate what warrants a story and what does not.

- How you prioritize stories - what leads your newscast, what runs on the front page, etc.

- How you prioritize how high information goes in your story.

News Terms

- Newsworthy - the level to which something warrants coverage.

- News judgment - ability to discern what is newsworthy and prioritize stories in order of importance

- News peg - how a story is related to what is going on in the news/what connects the story to the news.

News Judgment

- Ways to develop news judgment:
  - Experience
  - Study the news
    - Read with a critical eye
  - Analyze what makes something "newsworthy."

News Judgment

- Impact
- Weight
- Controversy
- Emotion
- Unusual
- Prominence
- Proximity
- Timeliness
- Currency
- Usefulness
- Educational Value

News Judgment

- Impact

Impact

- How much will this affect your audience?

- The more people a story will impact/affect, the more news value a story has.

News Judgment

- Impact
- Weight

Weight

- The bigger deal something is, the bigger story it is.

- Loss of life > injury
- $10,000 > $50

- There's certainly an aspect of judgment here.
  - 1,000 people injured > 1 death

News Judgment

- Impact
- Weight
- Controversy

Controversy

- Opposing sides, opinions, etc. generates interest.

- In short, people like drama.

News Judgment

- Impact
- Weight
- Controversy
- Emotion

Emotion

- Stories of survival, tragedy, triumph, underdog.

- Human interest.

- Not always something that has to do with the big picture/news of the day. Just a compelling story.

- Sex appeal.

News Judgment

- Impact
- Weight
- Controversy
- Emotion
- Unusual

Unusual

- Firsts, largests and leasts.

- Things that are out of the ordinary.
  - Sometimes because they are significant, sometimes because they are strange.

News Judgment

- Impact
- Weight
- Controversy
- Emotion
- Unusual
- Prominence

Prominence

- The higher profile (more famous) the subject, the more news value the story has.

News Judgment

- Impact
- Weight
- Controversy
- Emotion
- Unusual
- Prominence
- Proximity

Proximity

- How close -- literally -- a story is to the community you cover.

- All things equal (or relatively similar), the closer a story is, the more news value it will likely have for your audience.

News Judgment

- Impact
- Weight
- Controversy
- Emotion
- Unusual
- Prominence
- Proximity
- Timeliness

Timeliness

- Stories should be timely.

- You need to report on what's happened most recently.

- You also need to be looking to <u>advance</u> the story. (Build on what's out there/what's already happened.)
    - Second-day angle.

- If you're not timely, you're going to lose your audience.

News Judgment

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Currency

- What is the reason that you're telling this story now?

- Generally there is a "news peg" or "news hook." Something going on in the news that makes this story relevant.

News Judgment

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- Usefulness

Usefulness

- The news is about informing - not just about events going on, but also providing your audience with information.

- Service features - stories that provide information readers/viewers can actively use, how-to-stories.

- Can accompany other stories as sidebars/information boxes.
  - "Sidebar" is an additional story or box that runs along with a main story and provides supplemental information.

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- Educational value

Educational Value

- Part of the purpose of the "Fourth Estate" is to educate/keep the masses informed.

- That is not only limited to current events. Sometimes, it is about breaking down concepts/ideas/processes, what is going on elsewhere in the world/science/education/etc.

- We're seeing a combination of more and less of this kind of news.
  - Newspapers have less space and broadcast news has shifted. But the rise of the Web and 24-hour cable news is creating space for more news reporting.

News Judgment

- Increased emphasis on "how and why" in addition to just what happened.
  - Largely due to the emergence of the Web.
  - Putting news in context.
    - The why should be objective/neutral - not your opinion.

Fairness

"News reporting is supposed to be objective, but journalists are people, with feelings, opinions and preconceived ideas."

- Dr. Cynthia Boaz

Fairness

"Most journalists accept that true objectivity is impossible, but fairness is an obtainable goal."

- *Writing and Reporting the News*.

Fairness

- Objective (via Merriam-Webster): expressing or dealing with facts or conditions as perceived without distortion by personal feelings, prejudices, or interpretations

Fairness

- Columns, op-eds, editorials (sometimes blogs) permit opinion. Other stories should be fair.

- Guard against the danger of bias.
    - If you cannot be unbiased in your reporting, cover a different beat. Or find a different profession.

- "You have the right to your own opinions, but not your own facts."
    - As a reporter, your job is to report the verified facts - and all of them. Leave your opinions out of it.

Fairness

- Rooting
- Ignoring
- Agreeing
- Concluding
- Stereotyping
- Excluding

Fairness

- Rooting

Rooting

- You are allowed to have feeling, political leanings, opinions, etc.

- You are not allowed to let them impact/influence/seep into your reporting.

- This is especially relevant in - but not not limited to - political coverage, war coverage, issues coverage, sports coverage.

- Let the facts do the talking, not the reporter's preconceived notion.
  - Don't let preconceived notions shape your reporting or questions either.

Fairness

- Rooting
- Ignoring

Ignoring

- You must give all sides coverage.
  - More than just the pros and cons. Give space to the "yeah, buts" and "maybes."
  - This pertains even if one side is less outspoken than the other.
  - This pertains if one side refuses to speak to you.
    - Strive to find someone that can offer that perspective.

- When relevant, you should shoot for equal coverage.
  - Both sides of an issue, candidate from both parties, etc.

Ignoring

- Accept that some people will get more coverage than others, but aim to provide a whole picture.

- In a quest to give both sides, also be careful that you don't give a tiny minority equal weight as the vast majority.

- Usually, you will be able to find a dissenting voice, but occasionally you may not.
    - If that's the case, you can indicate you tried to find dissention, but couldn't.

Fairness

- Rooting
- Ignoring
- Agreeing

Agreeing

- Even if it's a widely accepted opinion, it is not your place to editorialize.
  - Your opinion should never make it into your reporting.

- Be mindful of weighted language.

Fairness

- Rooting
- Ignoring
- Agreeing
- Concluding

Concluding

- "The reporter's job is to present the facts and leave it to readers to draw conclusions about those facts."

- "[Write] so that your reader has a chane to agree or disagree with the action or comments, … not with you."

  – Writing and Reporting the News.

Fairness

- Rooting
- Ignoring
- Agreeing
- Concluding
- Stereotyping

Stereotyping

- Stereotyping - positive or negative - is bad.

- Avoid any mention of race, religion, sexual orientation, etc. unless relevant.

- Be mindful of gender stereotyping.
  - Nurses, teachers, childcare providers often associated with women.
  - Soldiers, miners, sportswriters often associated with men.
  - Easy solution: Use plural form to change it from he/she to they when possible.

Fairness

- Rooting
- Ignoring
- Agreeing
- Concluding
- Stereotyping
- Excluding

Excluding

- Not covering an entire community or segment of the population/your audience is not fair either.

- Often this is unintentional. That still doesn't make it OK.

- Most newsrooms are not diverse. As a result, you aren't necessarily getting a lot of different perspectives.

Excluding

- Diversity in your sources.
  - Men/women
  - Minorities

- Be mindful of what demographics your outlet isn't covering. What stories are out there that should be done? What issues should be covered?