

Beats

Foundations of Journalism
Emerson College
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Beats

- Beat reporting - reporting focused on a specific subject or geographic area.
- Beats can be general or more specific.
- Large outlets tend to have more beat reporters and more beats.
 - i.e. environment, religion, science, health
- Smaller outlets tend to have broader beat coverage.

Beats

General	Specific
Education	Cambridge public schools, Harvard University
Sports	High schools, Boston Celtics
Courts	Suffolk County Courts, Boston Superior Court
Cops	Precinct A
Business	Financial markets, biotech industry
Politics	Statehouse, Federal offices
Local Government	City Hall, City boards
Neighborhoods	Roxbury, Western suburbs
Lifestyles	Music, Theater

Beats

- Metro reporter = city reporter, generally will have a more specialized focus under the metro beat.
- General assignment = all-purpose reporter
- Many smaller outlets will have general assignment reporters covering almost all aspects of the community.
 - One exception is sports almost never falls under general assignment.

Beat Reporters

- Beat writers must be **EXPERTS** on their beat.
 - Know the terminology.
 - Translate jargon
 - Know the issues
 - Know what constitutes something newsworthy or potential newsworthy
 - Editors will expect you to be on top of your beat.
- However, don't forget your job is to convey the news on your beat to the average reader.
 - Still want stories understandable/accessible.

Beat Reporters

- Must know what has happened (history/background)
- Must know what is currently happening.
- Must know what will likely happen.
- Must know why for all of the above (context).

Sources

- Must know and be able to build sources.
- Constantly working source relationships.
- Should ideally know news before it breaks.
 - Tipped by sources.
- Must know who to call (and how to get them) immediately when news breaks.

Resources

- Records your beat might include
 - Where to find them.
- News sources/publications you should be reading.
 - Journals, magazines, sites, blogs, etc.

Story Ideas

- Beat reporters are responsible for generating story ideas on their beat.
- This includes...
 - What events to cover
 - What might warrant a feature or in-depth reporting
 - Spotting trends/patterns
 - Knowing when news might break
 - Knowing news before it breaks

Story Ideas

- Must be able to constantly come up with story ideas.
 - Who to profile
 - Spot trends
 - Notebooks
 - Investigative stories
 - Enterprise reporting
 - Columns (depending on outlet)

Beats

- Patience is important in beat reporting, but reporters need to be able to jump right in.
 - Takes time to develop beat expertise, sources, establish yourself (both to sources and readers) etc., but “I’m still learning” is not an excuse to do a mediocre job.

Beats

- Flexibility to transition from one beat to another.
 - You are not forever locked into a beat you choose early in your career.
- Many journalists start their reporting careers as beat writers.
 - Almost all columnists have beat coverage experience.

Beats

- Some beats are more desirable than others.
 - Need to work your way up.
- Some beats have higher burnout rates than others.
 - Cops and courts can be very depressing.
 - Sports grueling travel.

Digital Age

- The Internet has changed beat coverage.
 - The emphasis shift from breaking news to “owning news.”
 - Growing emphasis on context, educational value, analysis, offbeat, news features
 - There is less value in the straight recapping of events/reporting news that is easily available in the Internet era.

Digital Age

- Beat writers have more responsibilities than ever before.
 - Traditional responsibilities
 - Hard news, features, trends, event coverage, enterprise
 - Blogging
 - Curating and original quick hits
 - Social media
 - Both their own and staying on top of others
 - Analysis and/or columns
 - Computer assisted reporting

Social Media

- Social media can help beat reporters
 - Use as a way to disseminate information.
 - Don't only use social media to share your content.
 - Shouldn't just be a tool for self-promotion.
 - Way to discuss your stories/beat issues.
 - Offer insight and analysis.
 - Avoid offering opinion.
 - Remain non-biased/avoid appearance of bias.
 - Engage with your audience

Social Media

- Social media can/should also be used as a beat reporting tool.
 - Follow:
 - Sources
 - People related to you beat, Companies, Orgs., etc.
 - Other journalists/outlets
 - Local = your competition
 - Other markets = idea inspiration
 - National = localizing

Social Media

- Social media can be a good source for identifying potential interview subjects/sources/experts.
- Social media can be a good tool for contacting subjects/sources/etc.

Social Media

- Social media can provide valuable on-scene reporting (if you can't be there, before you arrive).
 - Verification/Confirmation/Attribution is even essential.
- Everything on social media considered “public domain.”
 - Tweets, Facebook posts, blog posts, Instagram photos, etc.

Social Media

- Break news on your site/station, not over social media.