



News Values and Judgment

Version 1.0 (Updated 9-2021)

The basics of news

- **Who** is the news event about?
- **What** happened in the news event?
- **When** did the news event happen?
- **Where** did the news event happen?
- **Why** did the news event happen?
 - What is its significance?
 - Why is it important to us?
- **How** did the news event happen?

Essential practices of journalists

Journalists:

- Believe their job is to seek out truth and report it accurately and fairly
- Know the truth they discover today may change tomorrow – and that they must constantly reassess what they have learned
- Ask questions about why and how something happened, and then listen carefully to the answers
- Consider themselves professional skeptics, always looking for proof and seeking verification of what they have been told

Essential practices of journalists

Journalists also:

- Know their work can do good as well as harm. Journalists weigh the consequences and choose words and images carefully
- Aspire to tell stories that uncover injustice, right wrongs and help people live their lives better.
- Look out for ordinary folks whose voices are seldom heard and keep a watchful eye on those in power.

Shared values of journalism

- Accuracy
- Integrity
- Curiosity
- Diversity
- Freedom of speech and expression
- Discipline of verification
- Attention to detail

What is journalistic objectivity?

Journalistic objectivity speaks to the practice of reporting and presenting information in such a way that personal and cultural biases do not undermine the integrity of the work.

Is journalistic objectivity possible?

A better standard to aspire to is that of **fairness**. Here are three key questions to ask:

- 1) Are a variety of perspectives represented?
- 2) Have assertions been fact-checked and verified?
- 3) Does the article in question pass the ‘smell test?’

Traditional elements of news judgment



TIMELINESS:

IMMEDIATE, CURRENT
INFORMATION



PROXIMITY:

THE CLOSER IT IS TO ME, THE
MORE IMPORTANT IT IS TO ME



IMPACT:

RELEVANCE TO THE PEOPLE
AFFECTED BY A STORY OR EVENT

Traditional elements of news judgment



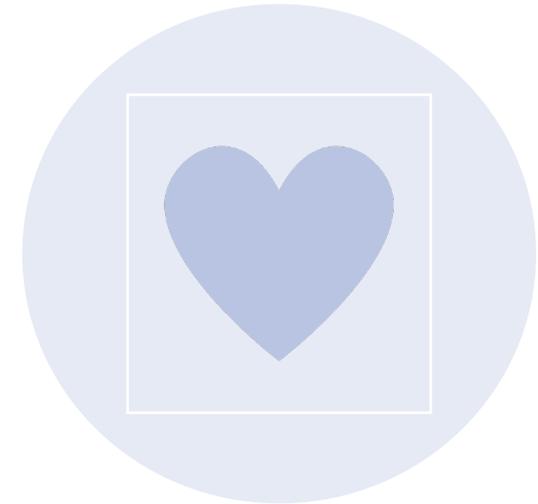
PROMINENCE:

PEOPLE OR INSTITUTIONS THAT
HAVE A LARGER AWARENESS OR
FOLLOWING BY THE PUBLIC



RARITY:

FOCUSES ON THE MORE
UNUSUAL OR INTERESTING



HUMAN INTEREST:

DEPICTS A PERSON, GROUP OR
COMMUNITY IN A WAY THAT
ELICITS EMOTION

Traditional elements of news judgment



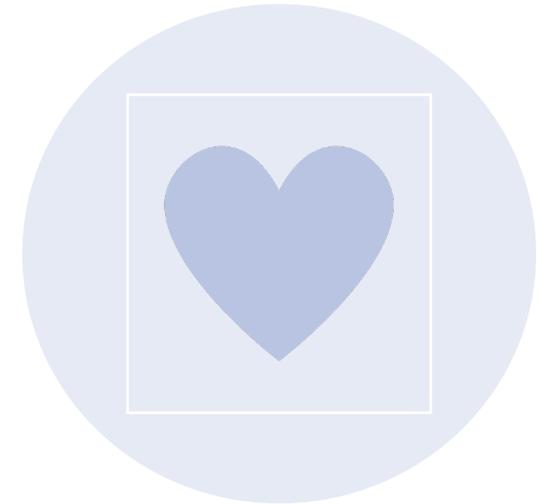
CONFLICT:

WHEN PEOPLE OR ORGANIZATIONS ARE AT ODDS, PEOPLE WANT TO KNOW WHY



CHANGE:

FOCUSES ON THE MORE UNUSUAL OR INTERESTING



CURRENCY:

WHAT PEOPLE ARE TALKING ABOUT: OTHERWISE KNOWN AS “TRENDING” NEWS

Two more elements for the modern era

- **Inclusion:** Whose views are represented?
Whose views are excluded?
- **Perspective:** How will this content be perceived by different segments of our audience?

The discipline of verification

- Get it right
- Never assume, always verify
- Our first loyalty is to citizens
- Details matter

Added dimensions for headlines, design

- **Tone:** Serious? Humorous? Conversational? How should readers receive and react to this information?
- **Weight:** The placement of a story, the size of display type and the space devoted to it is a signal to readers of how important and/or interesting that story is

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- **Do not add anything that was not there to begin with** unless it is also verified; rely on the journalist's original reporting or separately confirm its accuracy
- **Identify the source of all published information:** Staff report? Freelancer? News release?

Four must-do's when things do not go well

Admit your
mistake

Correct your
mistake

Learn from
your mistake

Don't do it
again