

Teacher's Manual

A Beginner's

Guide to

MEDIA

COMMUNICATIONS



Val Gause

Teacher's Manual

A Beginner's **Guide to**
M E D I A
COMMUNICATIONS

Val Gause



National Textbook Company

a division of *NTC Publishing Group* • Lincolnwood, Illinois USA

Mr. Val Gause currently teaches newspaper, television, and yearbook classes at Garcia Middle School in Sugar Land and Hodges Bend Middle School in Houston, Texas. Both schools are part of the Fort Bend Independent School District.

Published by National Textbook Company, a division of NTC Publishing Group.

© 1997, by NTC Publishing Group, 4255 West Touhy Avenue,
Lincolnwood (Chicago), Illinois 60646-1975 U.S.A.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored
in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means,
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without
prior permission of NTC Publishing Group.

Manufactured in the United States of America.

CONTENTS

A Note to the Teacher		1
Chapter One	An Introduction to Writing for the Media	3
Chapter Two	Newspapers	5
Chapter Three	Your Student Newspaper	9
Chapter Four	Pictures Sell Papers	11
Chapter Five	Yearbooks	15
Chapter Six	Radio	17
Chapter Seven	Television	21
Chapter Eight	Film—The Movies	25
Chapter Nine	Recordings	27
Chapter Ten	New Technologies and Futurecasting	29
Bibliography		31

A Note to the Teacher

A Beginner's Guide to Media Communications, designed for middle-school students, introduces the basics of print and broadcast journalism, from keyboarding rules for preparing copy for a news story to preparing and reading a script for radio or TV broadcast, from taking photographs for publications to writing a screenplay. In each of the ten chapters in this practical worktext, students are provided with models, many of them created by students just like themselves, followed by ample opportunities for practice in producing their own media communications.

This student book was created with the aspiring young writer, reporter, cartoonist, photographer, radio or television/broadcast journalist in mind. Students are encouraged to seek publication not only through the school newspaper or media centers, but through local/community media organizations as well. Providing practical advice and professional know-how, *A Beginner's Guide to Media Communications* also stresses the importance of media literacy—critically reading, viewing, listening to and, just as importantly, producing media.

Media communications is a cross-curricular area of study, so the student text has been flexibly designed for use not only in journalism and media studies classes, but also in any speech, English, literature, or social studies class. The hands-on approach to writing allows students to convert text exercises into special assignments for creative writing, speech communication, or multicultural studies classes, as well as articles for student newspapers or school yearbooks.

The lessons in *A Beginner's Guide to Media Communications* are designed to help students sort out the messages with which they are bombarded by mass media today—radio and recordings, television, movies, magazines, and telecommunications in general, including the Internet. Without “preaching” to students, this worktext provides exercises and guidelines so students can learn to become critical consumers of media, to determine worthwhile media entertainment, and to recognize and practice ethical, responsible journalism.

In Chapter Two, for example, students learn how to recognize biased or slanted material in publications—including tabloids. Likewise, drills in Chapter Ten demonstrate techniques for spotting unreliable information on the Internet.

Without ever singling out any musical genre or group, Chapter Nine shows students how to evaluate and to judge the worth of individual contemporary music recordings for themselves. Exercises help students categorize various songs and analyze lyrics in terms of messages and the music itself based on production values and artistry.

Literature teachers may draw parallels between fine literature, the art of storytelling, and film in Chapter Eight. Creative writing exercises in that chapter

focus on the special techniques of condensing works of fiction into screenplays, stressing the importance of remaining true to the main ideas of the original.

Speech teachers will find the radio and television chapters helpful, with enunciation drills and practical strategies for preparing timed oral presentations. Special exercises, such as learning to "wing it" on the air, will even help students prepare for extemporaneous speaking.

Keyboarding and computer skills are essential in school today, as well as on the job and in life in general. For the professional journalist, of course, knowing how to type and prepare copy properly is a *must*. Some school districts may not offer keyboarding classes until high school, but your middle school students are often expected to type for school and community publications, not to mention for everyday school assignments. Even if your students' only equipment is a typewriter, the standard keyboarding/typing rules for journalists introduced in the first chapter of *A Beginner's Guide to Media Communications* will be helpful.

Except for the practical recommendation that teachers start with the basic introduction set out in Chapter One, *A Beginner's Guide to Media Communications* is written so that you may cover the chapters in any order. Journalism and media communications teachers will probably want to cover Chapters One through Five in the order they are presented in the student text for practical reasons. However, teachers in other areas may choose to present material from this text in whatever order is most convenient for the curriculum of their courses.

The Teacher's Manual is designed to provide tips to help all teachers successfully present material and increase the impact of each lesson. In some cases, the manual suggests additional activities to explain difficult concepts. As with the student text, the Teacher's Manual is written to provide classroom teachers with maximum flexibility.

Chapter One An Introduction to Writing for the Media

It's a good idea to begin journalism/media communications classes by polling students individually, asking them to list their first two preferences for assignments. Choices include writing, photography, cartooning, layout and editing, and proofreading. You may have to explain layouts a bit to help students understand this function. Often cartoonists will be extremely good at layouts because they already have an understanding of graphic balance in two-dimensional artwork.

Make sure students understand that they won't be forced to stay with their initial choices. Many students aren't sure what they want to do and want a chance to try all aspects of journalism.

This technique can also work well with English classes, especially if you plan to publish journals or newsletters. Assigning editors, and making them responsible for the final product, is also useful.

IT ALL STARTS AT THE KEYBOARD

You may wish to add to or tailor the basic keyboarding rules list to your own class/school style. For additional practice in handling quotes, ask students to find different styles of quotes in magazines or newspapers, and type them. Students should find quotes that identify the source at the beginning of the sentence, quotes that identify the source at the end of the sentence, and interrupted quotes that identify the source in the middle of the sentence. This latter type of quote may be somewhat difficult to find, but stress the importance of practicing with these quotes also because students generally have the most difficulty correctly typing interrupted quotes.

Another rule for preparing copy in journalistic style you should note regards the series comma. Generally, journalists do not use a comma before *and* in a series. Both student and professional writing models in the student text follow this rule.

HOW TO GET RID OF THOSE TYPOS!

After students complete proofreading exercises, ask them to retype both drills. This will help reinforce typing skills. For more proofreading practice, have students exchange papers on assignments and read them backwards first for typos or misspelled words. If students don't read the copy backwards on the first reading, they will get so interested in the content that they will miss errors. After the backwards reading, students should read the copy in the conventional manner for content, grammar errors, and awkward sentences.

Chapter Two Newspapers

YOUR READERS ARE IN A HURRY

Writing concise newspaper leads is one of the most challenging skills your students will need to learn. For additional practice, choose several stories from a current newspaper and list a few facts from each story. It's not necessary to list them as complete sentences—that's your students' job. But be sure to list a few inconsequential facts to see if your students can distinguish facts that belong in the lead from facts that should appear later in the story.

If you are considering a style manual for your journalism class/newsroom, you should look at *The Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual* or the international high school journalism honorary society's guide, the *Quill and Scroll Stylebook*, published by the Quill and Scroll Foundation (University of Iowa).

However, there is a pitfall here that English teachers should be aware of. Students who learn journalistic-style writing quickly may start to write *all* school assignments in this style. Warn your students that they are learning a totally new style of writing that may not be suitable for other class assignments.

REPORT THE NEWS (NOBODY WANTS YOUR OPINION)

Writing totally objective hard news and feature pieces is a difficult concept for students who have been taught to use adjectives and adverbs liberally in writing assignments. In most cases, it will take several assignments before students will remember to strip their stories of words like *beautiful* or *impressive*.

You can help by continually reminding them to describe what they see *exactly*. Careful, concise descriptions will enable readers to understand that the artwork or play must indeed have been both beautiful and impressive.

For the exercise in this section of the text, in which students are assigned to write a hard news or feature piece, base the word count on your current newspaper or newsletter needs. Allow students at least 250 words because they aren't yet accustomed to condensing material into shorter pieces. In fact, allowing them to write a piece with up to 500 words isn't unreasonable for this first assignment.

SPORTS WRITING IS A LITTLE DIFFERENT

For the sports writing drill, have students cover school sports teams. Most middle schools have at least eight teams from which students can seek interviews. Generally, there are both A and B teams for girls and boys in both seventh and eighth grades. Assign specific teams to each member of the class. Also, insist that the reporters do their homework by learning some background information on the season to date and star players before they cover a game.

As a follow-up exercise, videotape some professional or college sporting event that is to be televised. (Football and baseball usually take too much time, but soccer, basketball, and boxing are ideal.) Then play the videotape in class with the sound turned off.

With the sound off, students will not be influenced by anything the commentators say. Instruct students to take notes for a 250-word piece. Usually there will be enough graphics information displayed on the screen for students to get most of the necessary background information, such as win/loss records and player height, weight, and reach statistics.

For special situations, such as the loss of key players due to injuries, simply tell students about these problems before the tape is played. Depending on the quality of the graphics, you may also have to match the names of the players with their numbers.

When grading these pieces, emphasize accuracy and objectivity. Once again, students will usually produce a better story by including specific events and statistics than by including lots of adjectives and adverbs.

WHAT IS LIBEL? (HOW NOT TO GET SUED)

One problem you may encounter with middle school students is that they have been conditioned to believe anything any adult, particularly a teacher, tells them. (They haven't figured out that teachers make mistakes just like everyone else.) Make it a rule in your journalism class to train students to use disclaimers like *according to*, *said*, and *reportedly* in their pieces.

Have them practice by attributing quotes by characters from stories in their literature books.

You may have students select a short story and report it as if it were news. Remind them they were not witnesses and that they will have to rely on using the phrases "according to," "reportedly," and so on—along with direct quotes, attributing story characters.

OP-EDS: YOU STILL NEED FACTS

In helping students research their op-eds, you might take a class period to demonstrate how much information is available free of charge at local government offices and through various organizations, such as the American Heart Association. Doctors' offices frequently have pamphlets on different health-related topics like preventive health care, health hazards, and specific illnesses.

Simply bringing a couple of copies of the Yellow Pages to class can be a good way to get students started researching topics. Social studies teachers might want to take a couple of class periods to go over the pamphlets students bring to class, looking for evidence of special interest group influence in state laws and regulations.

PERSONAL COLUMNS—NOW YOU CAN GET CREATIVE

Social studies and speech teachers should find these exercises especially useful. For social studies teachers, the research and presentation skills required for term papers are similar to the disciplines emphasized in either op-eds or personal columns.

Speech teachers should find the research skills and concise writing demands of personal columns useful for debate preparation. Both speech and English teachers might incorporate humor columns into a study of sarcasm, parody, and irony.

A WORD ABOUT TABLOID JOURNALISM

Teaching students to be critical and skeptical readers is almost always a challenge. Once again, many middle school students have been conditioned to believe everything they read.

As a critical reading exercise, you may want to have students compare an item of news about an entertainer, for instance, as told by a reputable national or local newspaper with the story as told in a tabloid. Considering the nature of the stories covered by tabloids, you need to use your discretion as a teacher in the stories discussed and what you ask students to bring in for this exercise.

For a follow-up class exercise, you may want to identify obviously slanted editorials in newspapers or tape segments of both conservative and sensational talk shows (tabloids) and show them in class. Emphasize that, *for this lesson*,

students' personal beliefs don't matter. The objective here is for students to learn to recognize facts that are presented in a manner that supports the views of the reporter and excludes other objective observations.

Chapter Three Your Student Newspaper

Journalism teachers should use the story proposal format in Chapter Three as a weekly grade. Requiring students to submit a certain number of story ideas each week will generate more variety in your newspaper articles. Use this same format for mainstream newspaper proposals discussed later in the chapter. The only significant difference will be that students will have to consider possible stories from an adult perspective. For example, adults are more likely to be interested in special art or science projects than students are. To students buying the student newspaper, science projects, even innovative ones, are still just school assignments and deserve only passing mention, at best. However, adults might be intrigued by special projects and want to read about them in detail.

HOW TO INTERVIEW

Good interviewing means getting the subject to talk. At least on the first several interview assignments, it's a good idea to require students to show you a list of their questions before allowing them to go out on the actual interviews. No matter how thoroughly you cover this section, if you don't "edit" their questions, some students will go on interviews armed with questions that can be answered with just one word.

EDITORIAL CARTOONS

Just as with story proposals, students should be required to submit proposals for cartoons as a weekly assignment. Collect the ideas each week until you have enough for your next newspaper edition. Also contact your local newspaper editor about the possibility of running student cartoons in special sections or editions of the paper.

THE FIVE Ws FOR REVIEWS

Students will often enjoy creative writing assignments more when they are linked to visual media such as television or movies. English, social studies, and multicultural studies teachers may be able to generate more student enthusiasm

for writing essays when the assignments are to review televised historical dramas and/or documentaries or current movies.

FILLING THE HOLES

Other sources of filler materials include printing upcoming exam schedules, sports tryout dates, deadlines for submitting sports physicals, standardized test dates and requirements, upcoming holiday schedules, school picture schedules, and yearbook sale prices and deadlines.

GETTING PUBLISHED IN LOCAL PAPERS

The first place students should seek publication is in their school publications, but community newspapers are also a venue worth exploring. Call newspaper editors in your area to tell them about your students' proposals and/or pieces. Don't forget to ask editors what their biggest needs are. Often, short-handed editors will look on you and your students as godsenders. You might be surprised at how often local editors are criticized for not covering local school events, when they simply don't have the staff to do so.

Many local newspapers run special columns and features strictly for student writing. When submitting a story or column, send pictures whenever possible. Don't bother sending a negative. Just tape the picture to a separate sheet of paper with a double-spaced outline below it that includes the photo credit. Be sure to include an identifier in the photo credit, such as, "Photo by eighth-grade Anywhere Junior High journalism student, Joe Jones." Prompt students to submit their own work to you first, as the situation dictates.

Again, whenever possible, assign one student to write the piece and a different student to take the photos. This not only gets two students published in one piece, but it also lets photographers start building portfolios that can land them on high school yearbook or newspaper staffs as freshmen.

Other publication outlets include neighborhood newsletters and school newsletters to parents. Although these publications rarely run photos, they can help fill a young writer's clip book and impress high school journalism teachers and maybe even a local newspaper editor.

Chapter Four Pictures Sell Papers

If you don't have a computer scanner that will produce acceptable pictures for your newspaper, you'll have to find a photo lab that converts prints into *halftones* or PMT (*photomechanical transfer*) *dot screens*. An 85-line dot screen is a good, economical choice for newspaper publication. This means there are 85 dots per square inch in the picture. By contrast, slick magazine photos typically use 130 dots per square inch. Newspapers don't need this degree of photo quality, and in any case, no photocopier currently on the market will do justice to a 130-line dot screen.

As of this writing, you can buy a dot screen sheet for twenty dollars or less. Dot screens come in varying sizes, from 8-1/2" x 11" on up. To make the best use of your supplies and money, crowd as many prints on a dot screen as possible. So be sure to crop your pictures *before* taking them to the photo lab. If you just need a mug shot for an op-ed, crop everything but the head.

To get a straight cut when you crop, don't rely on scissors, razor blades, or a traditional paper cutter. You know how difficult it is for your students to get straight cuts using scissors and razor blades. Dot screens are made of the same slick paper used on prints, so traditional paper cutters will give you crooked cuts also because the paper slides away from even the sharpest blades as they slice down. Go to an office supply store and purchase a paper cutter that uses a rotary blade. Used with care, a rotary-type cutter will give you perfect crop lines every time.

LIGHTEN UP

In this section of the text, there's no substitute for letting students shoot tremendous numbers of pictures. Let them follow the three-for-one rule mentioned in the text, shooting three pictures for every one they need. If you don't let them do it here, they won't do it on assignments, and they'll fail to get some of those pictures you desperately need.

Start with something simple, like getting mug shots of the entire newspaper or yearbook staff. You'll need these prints anyway for things like running students' pictures with op-eds. To make this a worthwhile exercise, have students shoot the mug shots in different locations, requiring them to make some basic photographic judgments about lighting and background. It's a good idea to keep these mug shots on file to send out to local newspapers with student pieces, since many editors like to run such pictures with the articles.

Of course making all these pictures can be expensive, but getting prints developed doesn't have to be time-consuming as well. Get your film developed at any one-hour photo lab. If you're using black and white film, be sure to get film that can be developed in color chemicals. As of this writing, there are at least two brands widely available. Ask your photo lab consultant for the brand available at 400 speed and buy it by the brick (ten rolls). It's cheaper in these large quantities, and you'll go through several bricks before the year is over.

Incidentally, you may get prints back that are not exactly black and white, depending on what chemical balance happens to be in your photo lab's equipment that day. Black and white prints may come out with a tan-, yellow-, or even rose-colored tint. Don't worry about this. Whether you use a scanner or photo lab to generate your halftones, they will come out a perfect black and white with no funny tints once the prints have been converted.

EVEN SUNLIGHT CAN BE INADEQUATE

As a journalism teacher, you are trying your best to teach photojournalism as well. Still, you have a problem most other teachers don't have—you may be expected to crank out a product too—the student newspaper or yearbook. If you're the yearbook sponsor, you're also working under deadlines that will cost your school plenty of money if you fail to meet them. If you're working with middle school students, your most practical option is to purchase basic point-and-shoot cameras.

There are a number of fine cameras on the market that will suit your needs. Choose a camera with a built-in zoom lens. Beyond that, most point-and-shoot cameras work pretty much the same way. Hence, they have a common flaw. While these cameras generally do a fine job of focusing automatically, their automatic light meters are almost always inadequate for shooting portraits or anything else in tricky lighting.

As a rule, *don't trust the "auto" mode with point-and-shoot cameras.* Built-in light meters in point-and-shoot cameras activate the flash based on the amount of light striking the camera's light sensors, which are housed in the camera, not your subject. Instruct your students to use the manual override so they can use the flash with almost every picture. The main exceptions will be when photographing shiny or light subjects, backgrounds that may bleach out, or reflective backgrounds that may cause "hot spots" (reflections of the flash). If your students are not sure whether to use the flash, tell them to take three pictures using the auto mode and three using their best judgment, either with or without the flash.

ANTICIPATE ACTION

Sports, especially basketball, volleyball, and tennis, will be the hardest subjects for your students to photograph. They will get so caught up in the excitement of the game, they will forget that most shots, even the best action shots, tend to look rather silly unless they also capture the image of the ball in the picture.

Even after your students learn this, they will waste a lot of film taking blurry pictures unless you purchase a tripod. (You can generally purchase a good tripod for less than \$100.) The faster the action, the steadier the photographer has to hold the camera.

Unfortunately, tripods won't solve all your problems because officials often will ban them from the sidelines, fearing injury to players who might run into them. If tripods are banned, tell your photographers to sit on the floor or ground and brace their elbows on their knees while holding the camera.

WHO IS THIS GUY?

A photo ID form will be among the most useful tools you have for assuring that every picture has the correct cutline. Insist that students fill out the forms, including the grade and comment blanks, and that they use quotes for the cutlines.

CUTLINES ARE NEWS, TOO

Many of your students will find writing good cutlines (usually referred to as captions for yearbooks and magazines) almost as difficult as writing headlines. If the photo ID form doesn't provide a usable quote, suggest that students go back over their notes to get one.

It's rare that students manage to work all the information into their stories. So cutlines often provide an excellent outlet for incorporating interesting material that could not be worked into the main story.

For students who need additional practice writing cutlines, clip example cutlines out of newspaper or magazine stories, and assign students to read the stories and then write cutlines for the pictures. Caution students that their cutlines should not simply be reworded versions of information in the piece itself. Note: This exercise should only be used on a limited basis to help students work abbreviated versions of the five *Ws* into their cutlines.