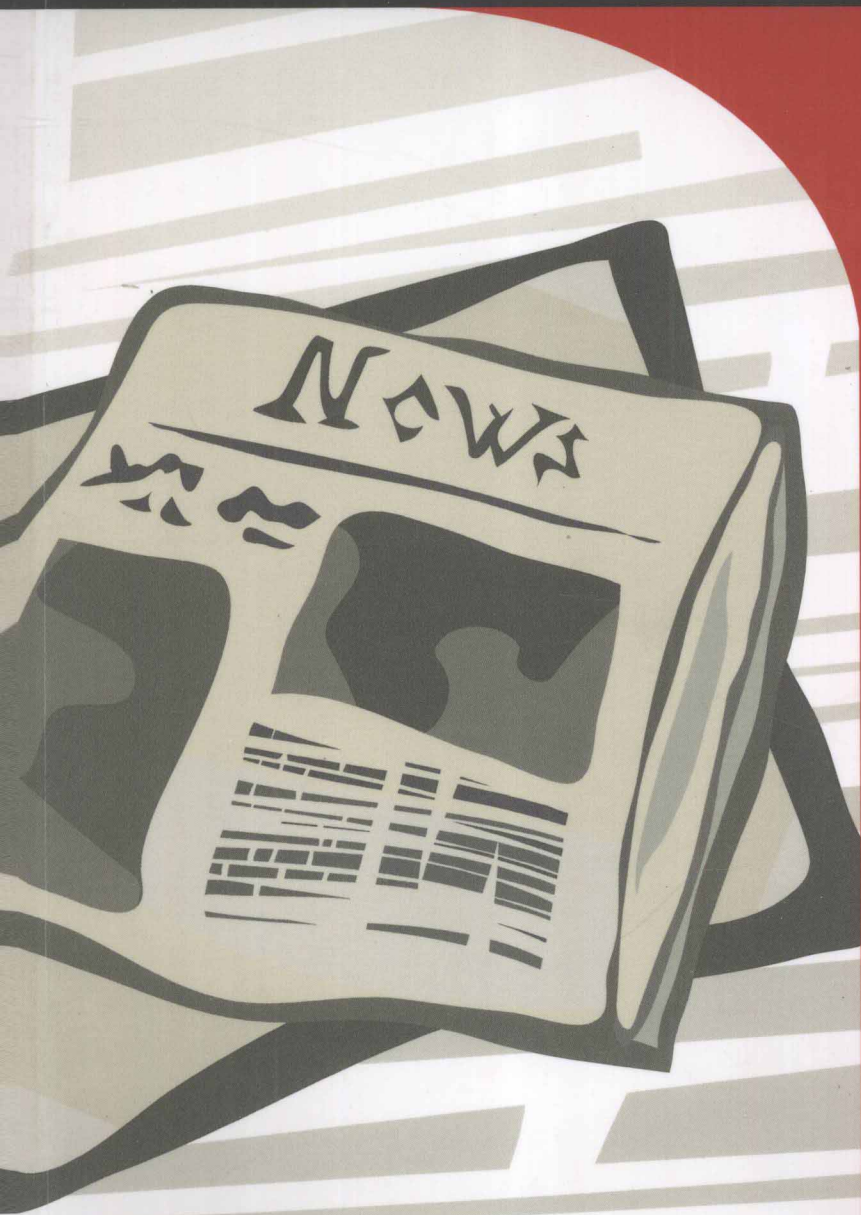


A COMPLETE GUIDE TO THE INDUSTRY



# news papers

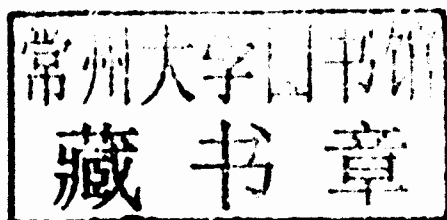
.....

Mike Farrell  
Mary Carmen Cupito

Mike Farrell and Mary Carmen Cupito

## **newspapers**

A Complete Guide to the Industry



PETER LANG

New York • Washington, D.C./Baltimore • Bern  
Frankfurt • Berlin • Brussels • Vienna • Oxford

## Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Farrell, Mike.

Newspapers: a complete guide to the industry /

Mike Farrell, Mary Carmen Cupito.

p. cm. — (Media industries; vol. 6)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Press—United States. 2. American newspapers.

I. Cupito, Mary Carmen. II. Title.

PN4855.F37 071'.3—dc22 2010001846

ISBN 978-0-8204-9509-5 (hardcover)

ISBN 978-0-8204-8153-1 (paperback)

ISSN 1550-1043

Bibliographic information published by **Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek**.

**Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek** lists this publication in the "Deutsche Nationalbibliografie"; detailed bibliographic data is available on the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de/>.

Cover design by Clear Point Designs

The paper in this book meets the guidelines for permanence and durability of the Committee on Production Guidelines for Book Longevity of the Council of Library Resources.



© 2010 Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., New York  
29 Broadway, 18th floor, New York, NY 10006  
[www.peterlang.com](http://www.peterlang.com)

All rights reserved.

Reprint or reproduction, even partially, in all forms such as microfilm, xerography, microfiche, microcard, and offset strictly prohibited.

Printed in the United States of America



## **Acknowledgments**

We are passionate about newspapers and journalism. We both remember that when we were children, we loved to read the newspaper, to find out what the Cincinnati Reds had done, to learn what was going on in the world or just to enjoy an interesting story.

Newspapers have shaped our lives. One of us followed a traditional route, working on them in high school and in college, while the other came to journalism after other fields proved unfulfilling. We worked for them professionally after college, and now we both have spent years in classrooms trying to impart our knowledge—but especially our passion—for newspapers to another generation. We came to understand that newspapers and journalism are vitally important to a healthy democracy, and we make that point class after class, semester after semester, trusting that most of our students will see the light.

We learned journalism from our classroom teachers, but we also learned it from our newsroom colleagues. Some of the greatest teachers who shaped our skills were other reporters, assistant city editors, city editors, and editors.

In many ways, this book reflects the ideas and the impact of all those teachers who taught us how to write, our colleagues who taught us from their own experiences, and our editors who taught us from their knowledge. We stand on the shoulders of those

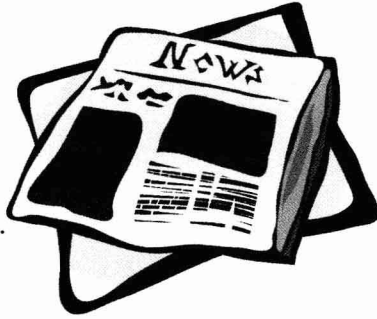
who were willing to help us hone our skills. And it would be a huge oversight if we failed to mention that we have learned from our journalism students, who brought to the classroom that questioning spirit that forced us to rethink and re-examine what we teach.

The list of people to thank is endless. But special thanks are due to our editor David Sumner, who patiently encouraged us through this process. Mary Savigar at Peter Lang has been a steady guide throughout.

Deborah Chung, assistant professor at the University of Kentucky, wrote the chapter on newspapers and new media based on her research program. Al Cross, director of the Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues at the University of Kentucky, made large contributions to the chapter on rural newspapers. Richard Labunski, professor of journalism at the University of Kentucky, reviewed the chapter on newspapers and the law and made important suggestions.

And most importantly, we thank our spouses, who allowed us to write day after day, week after week and kept us from losing our minds when it didn't go well and it seemed like it would never end.

—Mike Farrell and Mary Carmen Cupito



## Contents

Acknowledgments .....	vii
1 Just What Is News Anyway? .....	1
2 The History of Newspapers .....	21
3 Why Freedom of the Press Is Essential .....	43
4 The Roles of a Free Press .....	61
5 The Role of the Rural Press .....	77
6 Newspaper Readership .....	93
7 Newspaper Ownership .....	113
8 Newspaper Ethics .....	135

9 Newspapers and the Law .....161

10 The Newspaper Meets the Internet .....185

11 The Future (Because There Will Be One) .....201

Index .....221



## **Just What Is News Anyway?**

Even those who were children on November 22, 1963, remember the moment they heard the rumor that John F. Kennedy, the charismatic president, hero of PT 109 from World War II, had been shot in Dallas, Texas. The unthinkable, the unbelievable, struck on a Friday afternoon just before school ended in the Eastern Time Zone.

It was news that stopped a nation and plunged Americans into sorrow.

Almost six years later, astronaut Neil Armstrong set foot on the Moon on a sticky summer night, and Americans young and old held their breath until he uttered those famous words, "One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." One estimate is that some 600 million people watched around the world.<sup>1</sup>

It was news that thrilled a nation and inspired a generation who learned it was possible to conquer new worlds.

The phone rang at the *Star-News* in Wilmington, North Carolina. The caller said, "I have a century plant my grandfather bought long ago and it's going to bloom Tuesday night and I thought the paper would like to know about it." The stringer who answered that call, a young reporter paid by the story, learned that a century plant blooms at intervals between five and one hundred years, hence its name. The *Star-News* ran a one-inch item quoting the plant owner. That night in 1938, the street was choked with traffic. The fire truck showed up to focus a floodlight on the street. Vendors sold grape and orange



Popsicles, and people knocked on neighbors' doors begging to use the bathroom. The reluctant plant, growing in a ceramic pot on the woman's porch, drew a crowd but didn't offer a bloom.

It was news that captivated a community and produced absolutely nothing. The stringer's story about the non-event landed him a job and launched a career.<sup>2</sup>

News is the reason 42.8 million people in the United States buy a newspaper every day.<sup>3</sup> That number has fallen from 61 million in 1968, but today's audience is still a large one, people looking to learn what is happening in their community, their state, their nation and the world.<sup>4</sup> They're paying for news.

## Identifying the News

One of the first questions new journalism students are asked is "What is news?" Those who are going to report on it and write about it need to be able to recognize it. Surprisingly, no common answer exists to this most basic question about a practice, reporting, that is vital to the life of a democracy.

One dictionary defines news as "information about recent events or happenings, especially as reported by newspapers, periodicals, radio, or television."<sup>5</sup> A journalism history text defines news as "new information about a subject of some public interest that is shared with some portion of the public." In essence, news is what is on a society's mind.<sup>6</sup> Arthur McEwen, an editor of the *San Francisco Chronicle* declared, "News is anything that makes a reader say 'Gee Whiz!'"<sup>7</sup>

The most quoted definition of news is commonly attributed to John Bogart, city editor of the *New York Sun* in the late nineteenth century: "When a dog bites a man, that isn't news. It often happens. But if a man bites a dog, that's news."<sup>8</sup> Bogart's editor, Charles Dana, developed his own definition: News is "anything that interests a large part of the community and has never been brought to its attention before."<sup>9</sup> David Brinkley, the newspaper and wire service reporter who wrote about that century plant in Wilmington, North Carolina, before he became one of the most successful pioneers of television news, said news is "What I say it is."<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps most telling is a statement published in a journalism textbook more than a half-century ago: "It is easier to recognize news than to define it."<sup>11</sup>

Sociologist Stuart Hall wrote, "news is a slippery concept, with journalists defining newsworthiness as those things that get into the news media."<sup>12</sup> Most journalists approach their daily work without a strong theoretical understanding of what it is that separates what is news from what is not news. They claim to know news when they see it. The practice is circular; something becomes news because reporters and editors recognize it as news.

By definition, events that affect people are news. When the president announces a plan to raise taxes, the news media will cover it. When a member of the Supreme Court of the United States announces plans to retire, that is news. When a jet crashes into the ocean, that is news. When the automakers announce they are closing 25 percent of their dealerships, that is news. News outlets will cover these events.

But news is not only events that people want to know about and talk about with others. Journalists report and develop stories about less obvious items of interest and importance. They write stories about the city's budget, the most dangerous traffic intersections and the latest development in the fight to cure cancer.

Journalists don't make most decisions about whether something is newsworthy in a vacuum. They are bombarded by messages from political figures, corporations, issue advocates and civic organizations that aim to persuade journalists to publicize an event, an idea, or an accomplishment.<sup>13</sup> For example, one study found that most national news in the leading newspapers originated in routine channels in government institutions.<sup>14</sup> Another study showed that nearly half of local beat story ideas came from institutional sources.<sup>15</sup> In a study of statehouse news, the researcher discovered legislators were using reporters who could help them advance policy or institutional goals.<sup>16</sup>

Another element in the definition of news is the need or desire of the audience. Before the Internet, scholars argued that reporters and editors had a sense of what readers wanted to know and what readers needed to know, interesting or not, because it was important to their lives. But without effective feedback methods, reporters and editors were forced to predict what readers were looking for in newspaper content.<sup>17</sup> Sociologists argue that reporters' "sense of news," as it is commonly called, is learned from editors and colleagues in the newsrooms where they work and from their competitors on beats they cover.<sup>18</sup>

Some journalists have always marched to their own drummer, investigating stories that other reporters ignore until those who have ignored them are forced to play catch-up with the competition. The Internet has brought news sites and Web blogs where anyone with a keyboard can report and publish news.

## News from the Beginning

"News" is an old word and an even older concept. By about 1500, people had begun using the word "tydings" to describe their exchanges of information. The word "newes" was coined to describe "tydings" of a more systematic sort: a deliberate method of gathering and sharing information that others might want to know.<sup>19</sup> "Newes" was the plural of "newe,"<sup>20</sup> meaning "new things," and so news was originally considered a plural

(“There are news today from Washington”).<sup>21</sup>

News, however, has a longer story. Ancient civilizations had alphabets and writing. Some Old Testament manuscripts, containing accounts of wars and the daily life of a people, are thousands of years old, for example. A new level of sophistication began during the Roman Empire, which became a power in about the sixth century B.C.

Rome’s upper classes were highly literate and vitally interested in public affairs. An early attempt to systematically collect and distribute information was the *Acta Diurna Populi Romani*, a type of gazette recording the daily acts or occurrences of the Roman people, which was begun by Julius Caesar. The “news” usually consisted of official government actions, decrees and votes by the Roman Senate. It also contained general information about goings-on in Rome and other parts of the Roman Empire, and news of famous people, fires, executions and even the weather.

The *Acta Diurna* was hand-lettered and carved on stone or metal and posted regularly in the forum and other popular public places, such as the baths, in Rome. According to the Roman historian Suetonius, these records began appearing about 59 B.C., and the *Historia Augusta* refers to them as late as A.D. 222.<sup>22</sup> Those who could not read sometimes stood around listening while someone read the news aloud. The wealthy sometimes sent a literate slave to make a copy for sharing at a dinner party or for mailing to friends abroad. At the end of the first century A.D., the *Acta Diurna* departed from its official tradition and began reporting crime, divorces, marriages, gossip and bizarre events. Since the later “editions” were written on perishable papyrus, copies have not survived.<sup>23</sup>

Journalists never have agreed upon a definition of “news,” which is central to their business. What constitutes news in American newspapers—and other forms of mass media—has evolved and continues to evolve in the Internet age. While in one way it has changed so radically that the country’s earliest editors would probably neither recognize nor approve of the tidings in newspapers of today, in another way the roots of what makes the news *newsworthy* can be traced back to the newspapers that started when the country did.

Deciding what is news is the most important element of the journalistic process. It determines how reporters and editors work. It determines the nature of the information the public has to work with.<sup>24</sup> A 2001 study of one hundred newspaper markets concluded newspapers are remarkably consistent both in what is considered news and in how it’s covered.<sup>25</sup>

## Deciding What Is Newsworthy: News Judgment

If journalists have a hard time defining news, they have a formula for deciding what is newsworthy. Most college textbooks on reporting detail a

list of journalism values to help students identify the news. Those lists vary. One textbook written by a veteran newspaper and wire service reporter suggested news could be identified by the significance of the event, the impact on readers, the timeliness of that event, the proximity to the audience, the unusualness of the event and the inclusion of prominent people, conflict, human interest and humor.<sup>26</sup>

Another textbook identifies impact, weight (or seriousness), controversy, emotion, unusualness, involvement of prominent people, proximity, timeliness, currency (what people are talking about) and information that is useful and has educational value.<sup>27</sup> One textbook includes entertainment (stories that make readers laugh), helpfulness (how-to and consumer information), inspiration (stories about people who have overcome difficulties), trends (shifts in issues that affect people's lives such as crime, the price of gasoline, vacation plans), community problems and special interests (such as business, religion, news for women).<sup>28</sup>

One of the standard reporting textbooks—the eleventh edition was published in 2008—lists eight values to determine the “newsworthiness of events, personalities and ideas”: timeliness, impact, prominence, proximity, conflict, the unusual, currency and necessity (defined as something a journalist has learned that he or she believes must be disclosed to readers).<sup>29</sup> Another standard text reduces the list to six characteristics: timeliness, impact, prominence, proximity, singularity (unusualness) and conflict or controversy.<sup>30</sup>

Just as journalists don't agree on a definition of news, so scholars who write textbooks for journalism students don't agree on what values in stories make them newsworthy. The lists vary to some degree, and some textbooks appear to combine categories with broader definitions. In any event, journalism students are taught that news can be defined by a formula that is broad enough to include many events.

The Missouri Group text, in its ninth edition, lists these six news values:<sup>31</sup>

### ***Impact***

News makes a difference. Whether they affect a lot of people slightly or a few people deeply, events that are relevant to the lives of readers are news. If an abandoned barn five miles out of town was blown over in the storm last night, the news value ranges from minimal to nil, even in the smallest news market. But if the wind tore shingles off of one-third of the homes on the city's south side, the news value is high. Reporters will seek construction “experts” to assess the damage, weather “experts” to explain why such wind developed and eyewitnesses to tell their experience, explain their loss and, if they are displaced, say where they are headed. News impacts people.

Journalists have to make sure they answer questions readers will ask: Why should I care about this story? What does this story mean to me?

Journalists must translate their stories into personal terms. For example, it is not enough to tell readers the city council is considering a proposal to raise property taxes by 1 percent. Journalists must tell readers that this means the owner of a home valued at \$100,000 will pay \$250 more per year if the increase is approved. It is not enough to tell readers the hurricane contaminated the water supply; journalists must tell them where they can get safe water and how long this crisis will last.

### **Conflict**

This is a central issue in life; people struggle to overcome obstacles and health issues; politicians debate ideas and policy agendas; countries go to war over resources, territory and ideologies. Strife has been an element in storytelling since the beginning of the human race.

Much of the news involves conflict. Candidate Smith is running to unseat Congresswoman Jones. Mayor Brown disagrees with Police Chief Green's latest policy concerning police department overtime, and they debate their positions during a city meeting. The state Senate wants to spend \$250 million on improving water treatment facilities, while the governor is asking for twice that. The school board has voted to close three elementary schools, and parents are upset their children will no longer be able to attend classes right in their own neighborhood. The accused in a murder trial has maintained his innocence since the day he was interviewed by police. Professor Williams is suing the university, claiming he was fired because his views are not the views of the president.

Conflict involves drama, usually has something at stake for both sides and allows readers to identify with one side or the other. Conflict is also somewhat comfortable for reporters to cover; giving both sides an opportunity to explain their positions fits into the reporting practices of journalists seeking to be fair.

### **Novelty**

Something that happens rarely or is virtually unthinkable is news. The first child born in the century, the first patient in a new hospital or the first time a Hispanic judge is elevated to the Supreme Court—all are news. Anything happening for the first time or the last time is a pretty sure bet as a news choice. The unusual—a swarm of insects pestering a pitcher during the World Series or a cat running across the football field while a tailback sets sail for the end zone—is also a strong news candidate.

Some of the most famous sports stories involve events that were never supposed to happen or the underdog that pulled off an unthinkable upset. The 1986 movie *Hoosiers* thrilled audiences with the story of a high school basketball team from Milan, Indiana, enrollment 161, that won the 1954 state basketball championship on a last-second shot by Bobby Plump. In the 1980 Winter Olympics, the U.S. team upset the favored team from the Soviet Union and went to the championship game, where it won the gold medal. The unexpected is news.

### Prominence

Names are news. The death of a star such as Michael Jackson is a huge news event. Stars are news when they marry, divorce, have children, win an award or hold a concert, or when someone thinks they have married or divorced. The public's appetite for celebrity news seems insatiable. If one car backs into another car on Broadway in Lexington, Kentucky, reporters will not rush to the scene. But if the president of the University of Kentucky was driving one car and the men's basketball coach was driving the other, it is a major human-interest story, even though no one was injured and the damage was minimal. Names are news.

### Proximity

The closer an event is to home, the more likely readers are to be interested. If two men are killed in Seoul, South Korea, the story is likely to get little notice in the *Columbus Dispatch* in Ohio. If two Ohio State University students are killed in an apartment fire in Columbus, readers will look for that story. But it is also news in Columbus if a Columbus family vacationing in California has to be rescued from a forest fire.

Another kind of proximity is related to connections. Editors in Lexington, Kentucky, will look at using stories from anywhere about horses because of the state's many horse farms. Editors in Illinois and Iowa will review any story about new uses for corn. Newspapers near military bases will pay special attention to news relating to military actions, policies, deployments and budgets.

### Timeliness

By its very label, news is something new, something that just happened: Breaking news is the election results just announced, the violence that just broke out, the football game that just ended, the prisoners who just escaped, the tornado that just touched down. News is the update on the search for the escapees, the death toll from the tornado, the pre-inauguration plans for a new administration.

Historical events are not news unless something has been learned for the first time or something related has just happened: the death of the last survivor of the *Titanic*, the diary of a soldier found in an attic. Historical events are news again on anniversaries of the original event. November 22 never goes by without some remembrance of the assassination in Dallas of the president in 1963. September 11 will be marked with ceremonies for decades to come.

Timeliness is a relatively recent addition to the definition of news. Early newspapers published "news" that was months old. The invention of the telegraph in 1844 changed that. The invention of the radio, and later of the television, gave timeliness even more immediacy. Newspapers for decades trailed radio and then television in the ability to be first with a story. Now, utilizing their websites, newspapers can continue to update an ongoing

ing story even after the newspaper has gone to press.

One added element of timeliness is its importance in a democracy. Reporting that the city council has approved a proposal to tear down five blocks in downtown to make way for a hotel/shopping complex is relatively useless to those who disagree with the decision; a story published before the vote would have allowed opponents to learn more about the proposal and build a case against it.

No list of factors could unmask the mystery of news judgment, and no formula could explain all the factors that are involved in story selection. Anyone who has ever participated in a meeting to plan the front-page layout for the next edition—except on those occasions when blockbuster stories are breaking—knows that if five editors meet, more than one opinion will develop as to how the next day's front page should look. A study of news meetings found that editors relied on four factors—potential audience, type of impact, area and conflict—to choose front-page stories.<sup>32</sup>

The news values journalists look for are affected by other factors as well. The newspaper's audience, the environmental factors of the community and the newspaper's traditional role in that community all influence how journalists identify news for publication. Media scholar George Gerbner observed more than four decades ago, "There is no fundamentally non-ideological apolitical, non-partisan news gathering and reporting system."<sup>33</sup> News selection is not always an impersonal decision, either. A journalist's relationships, memberships and interests can factor into the formula. It is easier to tell a stranger that your newspaper doesn't write stories about the birth of twins than it is to tell that to your sister who just delivered them. It is easier to tell the public relations officer of a large company that his event isn't newsworthy than to tell that to someone who interned at the newspaper last summer.<sup>34</sup>

Despite the subjective nature of news selection by use of an indefinite list of news values, the differences in newspaper coverage areas and the differences among various media, it is no stretch to declare that the news is the news. A comparative study of news published in two Chicago newspapers and broadcast on six nightly newscasts, half of them local to Chicago, during a fifty-day period in the fall of 2000 found that the same kind of stories were reported across all media. Graber called the media in this study "rivals in conformity."<sup>35</sup>

A forty-year-old study offers some interesting insights into the interplay of media. The study found that the news media actually complement each other: (1) To some degree, they convey the same information to different people. (2) They display different aspects of the identical information to different people. (3) They also display different aspects of the identical information to the same people. (4) Finally they arouse and reinforce interests which other media help to satisfy. (Television has stimulated interest in spectator sports, but this only increased the readership of newspaper sports pages.)<sup>36</sup>



---

## Newspaper Content

---

Staff organization helps drive newspaper content. Newspaper reporters have traditionally been assigned to coverage beats, either a topic, such as business or education, or a geographic area, such as the inner city or the near suburbs. Once assigned to such a beat, the reporter must know what is going on in terms of that topic or coverage area and must produce stories from the beat. As part of that assignment, reporters will develop sources who are likely to tip them to news events and provide them more details of a story, and they will develop expertise, understanding of the geographic or topic area, that will allow them to do a better job of putting events in context for readers. On the other hand, content areas that are not assigned to a regular reporter will produce fewer news stories and will be covered by a general assignment reporter, who will likely have little background and fewer sources to rely on for a news story.

The average newspaper, according to a study of fifty-two newspapers conducted in October 2003 by the Readership Institute, consisted of roughly one-half editorial content, one-quarter paid ads and one-quarter classified ads.<sup>37</sup>

Those figures may have changed as a result of an economic recession and a declining readership. During the first quarter of 2009, for example, the National Newspaper Association reported that newspaper advertising nationwide had declined 28 percent over the first quarter in 2008.<sup>38</sup> Over the same period, circulation declined 7 percent,<sup>39</sup> and to save money, newspapers have been shrinking the size of their daily products.

The Readership Institute analysis also found:

- Two topics dominated news content: politics/government and sports. Together they accounted for nearly half of all stories in newspapers.
- Almost half (45 percent) of the stories on the front page were about government and politics, and nearly one-third of them were produced by wire or news services.
- Overall, wire stories accounted for almost half (about 45 percent) of all stories in newspapers during the study period.
- Stories about ordinary people, obituaries and community announcements made up less than 5 percent of the content.
- Visual aids—photos, graphics or emphasized text—accompanied less than half of stories, although more visuals appeared in Sunday editions. Front-page stories on average were more likely to have photos and graphic elements.

A 2001 Readership Institute study of one hundred newspaper markets in the United States found that the typical weekday U.S. newspaper offered its readers a mix of news that emphasized (1) sports; (2) politics, government and war; (3) police and crime; (4) health, home, food, fashion and travel and



(5) business stories. These five categories added up to nearly 75 percent of the content. A mix of entertainment, science, arts, disasters and other subjects accounted for the remainder.<sup>40</sup>

Because of the seasonal nature of sports—for example, professional sports dominate during the summer months, when college sports are idle—the results will be swayed by the season and the proximity to teams. The study found sports coverage to be divided into 40 percent professional sports, 38 percent college (inflated because of the National Collegiate Athletic Association basketball tournament, which fell during the study period), 13 percent high school and 10 percent women's sports (at all levels).

The second major category, politics, divided into 38 percent stories about elections, 22 percent stories about the impact of government on business, 11 percent crime (for example, stories about official corruption) and 8 percent war; the balance was spread out over a range of other topics.<sup>41</sup>

Smaller newspapers put more locally written stories on their front pages than did larger papers, 58 percent to 43 percent. Perhaps this fact is explained by the finding that larger newspapers devoted more front-page space to national and international stories.

But that is the front page. Overall, the Readership Institute found that newspapers covered local news in the same proportion regardless of size. On average, newspapers filled 34 percent of space with local news, 16 percent with state and regional news, 40 percent with national news and 10 percent with international news.<sup>42</sup>

#### Other findings:

- Larger newspapers used more photographs, one for every two stories, compared with one photograph for every three stories in smaller newspapers.
- Larger newspapers published slightly more graphics.
- Larger newspapers produced more long stories. Smaller newspapers ran 10 percent long stories, compared with 13 percent in the largest newspapers. In Sunday editions, the difference was 15 percent to 23 percent for large papers.
- Large newspapers printed 54 percent “straight news” stories on Sunday, versus 65 percent for smaller papers. Weekday figures were almost identical: 71 percent straight news.<sup>43</sup>

A study of media content in ten countries, predominately newspapers but also including television and radio news, found that the most prevalent news stories concerned sports and internal politics.<sup>44</sup> Sports stories were most frequent in Australia, South Africa and the United States and least frequent in China. Internal politics was the most frequent topic in Chile, China, India and Russia. Business and commerce news was found more frequently in the United States than in the other countries and more frequently than internal politics.