Keywords in News & Journalism Studies

Barbie Zelizer
& Stuart Allan

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Keywords in News & Journalism Studies

This comprehensive glossary offers clear and insightful definitions of the most significant keywords in news and journalism studies.

Ranging from 'above the fold' to 'zinger', and with over 400 terms in between, it covers words associated with newspapers, radio and television news, magazines, photojournalism and internet reporting. Other examples include 'agenda setting', 'libel', 'news values', 'objectivity', 'scoop' and 'tabloidization'.

Written by two of the field's leading scholars, it offers an informed perspective on the key terms. It considers a range of genres, including business, crime, environmental, fashion, lifestyle, investigative, science, sports and war journalism as well as looking at new alternatives such as 'Wikinews' and 'Twitter'.

This lively and engaging treatment will provide students, researchers and journalists with a solid grounding in the fast-moving vocabulary of news and journalism studies.

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Keywords in News and Journalism Studies

Preface

Keywords are building-blocks to inquiry, and writing a book about them felt at times as though we had been thrown back to the building-block stage of our development as academics. Crafting definitions for words we had been using for years without appreciating every nuance of their meaning or their precise origins was a humbling – and enriching – experience. Writing *Keywords in News and Journalism Studies* has thus enhanced our regard for the broad field of academic literature on news and journalism which we necessarily scoured to produce this book, much of it literature we already knew but which required careful rereading for this project.

We followed a few simple principles in setting up the criteria for what we felt merited attention as a keyword. Our keywords needed to be clear enough to be used by both academics and practitioners, durable enough to have withstood time, relevant enough to clarify the evolving state of journalism – as well as news and journalism studies – and general enough to warrant recognition beyond a local setting. We eschewed the inclusion of individual figures and news organizations, gravitated largely towards the national contexts we knew best (the United States and United Kingdom), strived to avoid jargon but remained sensitive to how journalese operates, and tried to project not only our sense of the field today but an anticipatory view of where it is going. These are, of course, principles of degree rather than kind, and our hope is that the resulting list, by no means exhaustive, will engage its readers in thinking anew about the organizing tenets of the study of news and journalism. There is a certain foolhardiness in attempting to delineate the conceptual vocabulary of any field, but doing so may lead us one step closer to its formalization.

Raymond Williams's *Keywords* project showed us that the preferred terms of scholarship only become meaningful when they are used, and it is to their varied, frequently complicated, uses in the existing literature that we pay homage. Various sources helped us, wittingly or not, craft this set of key terms. They include the *Encyclopedia of American Journalism*, *Encyclopedia of Journalism*, *International Encyclopedia of Communication*, *Key Concepts in Journalism Studies*, *Oxford English Dictionary*, *Project for Excellence in Journalism*, *The Routledge Companion to News and Journalism* and a plethora of web-based sources. On a personal level, we thank Angela Lee, Joel Penney, Michael Serazio, Piotr Szpunar and Lokman Tsui for locating some of the materials and

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A

Above-the-fold: a news item deemed sufficiently important to warrant placement on the top half of the front page of a **broadsheet** newspaper. Given the prestige associated with this most prominent of spaces, being positioned above-the-fold is highly prized by journalists.

Accuracy: the state of being precise and exact. Accuracy is a long-standing ideal associated with **neutral** or **objective** norms of journalistic practice. It is particularly associated with **professionalism**, by which journalists are expected to provide fact-based, value-free accounts of the events and issues on which they report. Accuracy stretches across all aspects of a news story – the spelling of names and places, correct grammar, the sequencing of events, and the veracity of the claims being made. Accuracy does not come into existence at any one point in time but rather involves a series of journalistic practices, including verifying facts, questioning the judgement calls of others, contextualizing and assessing details, eradicating mistakes and ensuring that the most widely supported perspective gets represented. Even when journalists have good intentions about being accurate, they are not always easily able to achieve it. Errant **eyewitnesses**, a source's slanted perspective, even the technical limitations of the medium can all get in the way of a reporter providing an accurate account.

Ace: abbreviation for assistant city **editor**. The term is also used more generally to refer to an on-call reporter.

Actuality: the sound of an event being recorded as it unfolds on location. Most strongly associated with radio journalism and also called natsot (short for 'natural sound on tape'), actuality produces audio clips – recording, for instance, the sound of a parade, **press conference**, **interview** with a sports fan – that may be inserted into a news item to further enhance its claim to have captured an aspect of reality. In **documentary** film, the notion of actuality similarly revolves around the use of recorded material from actual events – so-called 'actuality footage'. Early formative examples from **radio news** include the famous 'This is London' eyewitness broadcasts of Edward R. Murrow for CBS News during the Second World War. His reports furnished the listener with 'pictures in sound', engendering at times a breathtaking quality of **immediacy**. Experimental use of actuality material followed with the development of 'on the spot' battlefield reporting, a new mode of war journalism on radio with extraordinary appeal for audiences demanding 'authentic' news. The BBC's *War Report*, for example, promised to deliver the 'latest and fullest picture of the war' to the listener. It 'took the microphone to places where things were happening, and let it listen – as one would one's self like to

listen – to the sounds of battle, to the voices of men just returned from the fighting line, to observers who spent that day touring the scene of action' (cited in Briggs 1970: 662).

Ad/ed ratio: the ratio of advertising to **editorial** content appearing on a specific page or within a section of **newspapers** and **magazines**. Typically, the ad/ed ratio ranges from 25/75 to 40/60.

Adversarial journalism: a type of journalism which displays a consistently hostile perspective in its treatment of government and politics. Thought to be a long tradition in liberal democracies and an outgrowth of the notion of journalism as a **fourth estate**, adversarial journalism is often seen as **participant** or **advocacy journalism** taken to an extreme, where reporters engage with political events, issues and figures in a rude, arrogant or cynical fashion. Current forms of adversarial journalism are increasingly thought to have tipped the balance in the direction of too much negativity. Said to be on the rise in the United States since the 1970s (when the **Watergate** scandal generated renewed interest in **investigative** techniques of newsgathering), adversarial journalism reflects a heightened degree of scepticism among journalists toward politicians and political institutions. Critics point to increasing levels of hostile content, brasher assertiveness and lessened deference in interactions with officials, an undue emphasis on political scandal, and a preoccupation with political strategy over political substance as evidence. They contend too that adversarial journalism is contributing to rising public distrust towards both government and the news media, and to cynicism about the optimum functioning of large-scale public institutions (Patterson 1994; Cappella and Jamieson 1997).

Advertorial: an advertisement presented in a blended format with the news or **editorial** copy surrounding it. Blurring two otherwise distinct genres of text in presentational and stylistic terms, the advertorial can be of either a commercial or political nature. Often advertorials alert the readers of more reputable newspapers and magazines to their status as a paid advertisement via a printed disclaimer on the same page or a section heading such as 'special advertising section', but sometimes no disclaimers are made and the similarities in writing style and typography render them indistinct from surrounding **copy**. Advertorials have been attempted in media other than **newspapers** and **magazines**, such as 'infomercials' for broadcasting, but they remain particularly prevalent in the print media. Critics maintain that presenting advertising as editorial content is irresponsible and risks violating the relationship of trust with the audience.

Advocacy journalism: a type of journalism that eschews principles of **neutrality**, **impartiality** and **objectivity**, and thereby the separation of news from opinion, in order to intentionally take a strategic position on

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