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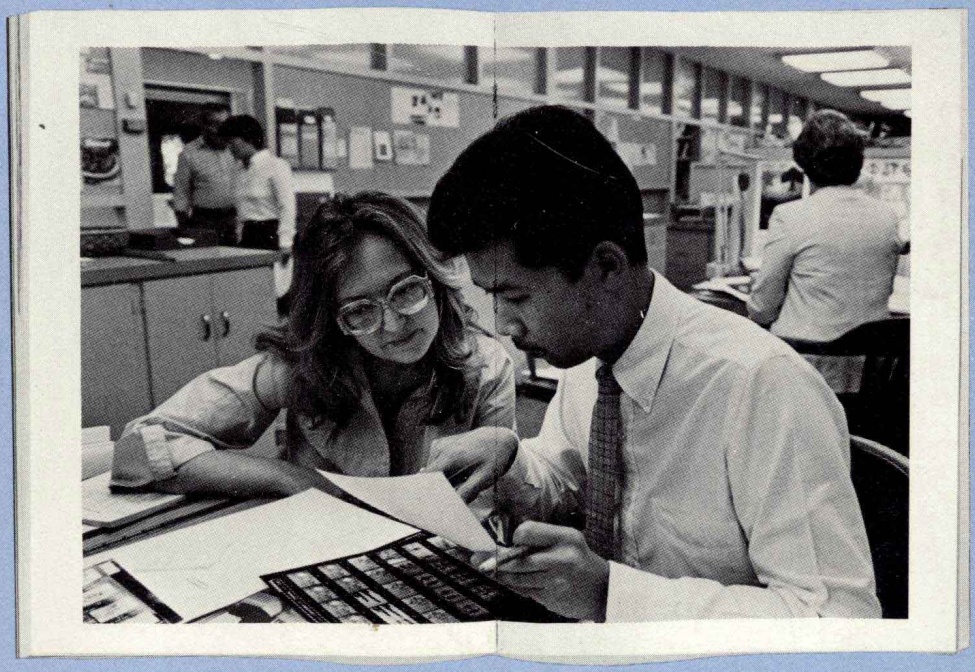
TEXT AND EXERCISES

William L. Rivers



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Preface

Magazine Editing in the '80s is designed to show you the various tasks of a magazine editor and to let you experience those tasks through the eyes of actual working editors, who describe in their own words what they do. All aspects of magazine editing are covered as concisely as possible, and because this book is both a text *and* a workbook, you can sharpen your magazine editing skills by doing the many exercises at the ends of chapters.

In this book you will find that, in spite of some similarities, magazine editing is in fact quite different from newspaper editing. This is so, in part, because magazines must appeal to a wide audience, whereas most newspapers have a built-in readership. In the introduction, you will find that magazines have definite purposes and readerships, and you will probably be surprised at the great number of magazines that exist in the United States today.

Chapter 1 is divided into four sections: The first quotes a successful editor; the second shows how three types of magazines were started; the third describes editors' duties; and the last chronicles the revival of a once-successful magazine. In Chapter 2, writer-editor relationships are explained in detail. Chapter 3 deals with copy editing and gives examples

of professional and student work. Chapter 4 explains the best ways to edit words, sentences, and paragraphs for magazines. Again, both professional and student examples are cited. Chapter 5 teaches how to write magazine headlines, titles, and subtitles and discusses specific pitfalls to avoid. Chapter 6 presents the complex subject of graphic arts, including typography, copyfitting, illustration, and printing. Chapter 7 discusses picture editing and the use of color in magazines. The basic rules of layout and design are introduced in Chapter 8, where you will see, among other things, how to dummy a magazine. Chapter 9 develops your understanding of law and ethics in publishing magazines, focusing on the important issues of libel, copyright, obscenity, and pornography.

At the end of the book appear a glossary of terms used in the magazine field and a description of how *Newsweek* is prepared for publication. Also included are the American Society of Journalists and Authors Code of Ethics and Fair Practices, and important guidelines for avoiding sexism in writing and editing.

I wish to thank many people for their help in the creation of this book, but I am especially grateful to Bryce McIntyre, a graphics expert who helped with the graphic arts sections as well as at other points throughout the project. I am also grateful to John Boyle, who did the sketches for many of the illustrations. Finally, I would like to express my appreciation for the guidance of Tom Siegfried of Texas Christian University, especially in Chapter 8 on layout and design. I also thank the following reviewers, who offered many useful suggestions: Floyd L. Arpan, Indiana University; Karen Boyd, Arizona State University; Chet Hunt, San Antonio College; and Howard M. Ziff, University of Massachusetts.

Contents

Introduction

Let us begin with the most important problem: With 1,760 newspapers published and nearly 1,000 television stations, more than 5,000 radio stations, and almost 4,000 cable systems broadcasting daily, and with book companies publishing more than 35,000 titles each year, why should magazines continue to exist? Yet they *do* exist—about 37,000 various magazines move through the mails to meet the changing interests of the readers.

Editor and writer Edwin Diamond wrote in 1981: "Special-interest magazines include *Wet: The Magazine of Gourmet Bathing*; *The Razor's Edge*, which concerns itself with women sporting shaved heads; *The Pick-Up Times*, a self-spoofing guide to meeting women; and *The Chocolate News*, printed on paper that smells like its subject."

Although it is entirely possible that all of the above magazines will have disappeared by the time this book is published, other magazines will sprout to replace them. At least 200 new magazine ventures were started in 1981 alone; only about 20 of them survived the first year. Lewis Lapham, the editor-in-chief of *Harper's*, described the central reason why: "Twenty years ago, an issue of *Harper's* might have contained

articles or essays on topics as miscellaneous as marine biology, toy railroads, the failure of U.S. foreign policy, the ecology of Yellowstone National Park, and the unhappiness of women. Now, each of these topics commands a magazine of its own."

The Thinker's Medium

An issue of *Saturday Review* once carried an article entitled "The Thinking Man's Medium." In it, Roy Larsen, the former vice-chairman of the board of directors of Time, Inc., pointed out that research has indicated that those who read significant magazines are "the thinking men and women of our time." "The magazine audience," he wrote, "includes the generals and captains and lieutenants of the Command Generation—and the top revolutionaries as well." This is not surprising. Although commercial magazines of large circulation often support the status quo, are imitative, and help the other mass media create their own version of reality, it is nonetheless true that magazines in America—including some of the largest commercial magazines—have long ranked with books as the media of thought.

By magazine standards, the newspapers, press associations, and the electronic media came quite late to interpretative reporting. But interpretative writing and its forerunner, the essay, have been central to magazines for centuries. To clarify, to explain, sometimes to promote—these are the *raisons d'être* of our magazines. One editor called them "the characteristic literary medium of our generation."

The Changing Magazine Public

Pasted on the wall at eye level above a typewriter in the office of a movie-fan magazine editor is a small picture of a young girl, a sales clerk in a Woolworth's store. The editor has never met her; he keeps the picture

in view to remind him of his primary readership. When he is choosing and editing articles and photographs, he thinks of this young girl's tastes.

This story illustrates a basic fact about magazines: most are written and edited for particular audiences. Few editors actually restrict their view of the audience this severely, and many feel that anything more definite than a vague picture of their audience is impossible. Nothing is more obvious, however, than the fact that most magazines, unlike newspapers and broadcasting, do *not* attempt to appeal simultaneously to the bank president and the janitor, to the teller and his 11-year-old son.

Magazine editors and writers know well that it is folly to think of the public as "one great mass." There are as many publics as there are levels of income, education, taste, and civic awareness; as many as there are political allegiances and religious loyalties. What concerns one public may be trivia to another.

During the first half of the twentieth century, the big general magazines—like *Collier's, Saturday Evening Post,* and *Coronet*—were able to lure several million subscribers by shrewdly appealing to different publics. They were able to do so because, as Theodore White once observed,

> The whole country is one market; you can make one brand image for the nation and deliver—but only if you can find a way of talking to the whole country at once. They need a big horn—a horn that will reach everybody.

The big general magazines were successful also because advertising paid most of their costs. This became painfully clear when television became the chief medium for general information and entertainment, and lured advertising away from the general magazine. Lewis Gillenson, the last editor of *Coronet*, one of the many mass magazines that died, pointed out:

> Contemplate the cost of a subscription. A giant weekly publisher begs you to sign up for a year with an enticing "9 cents a copy" offer. The magazine sells weekly on the newsstand for 25 cents. The following are, roughly, average costs for the publisher: production, 40 cents; mailing, 4 cents; fulfillment, billing, delinquency, 3 cents. Total, 47 cents. In all, the magazine is behind 38 cents on subscriptions, or about $20 for the year. Multiply this figure by 3 million, a reasonable estimate of the number of cut-rate subscribers a big magazine might carry, and you begin to get an idea of the deficit that must be made up by advertising.

Before midcentury, there were a dozen weekly magazines of general appeal. Now there are almost none. *Look* was among the last to go. After

several years of operating in the red, it finally ceased publication in the early 1970s.

This is not to say that all magazines are moribund, just general magazines. In fact, some evidence suggests that the magazine world is stronger than ever. As the general weeklies have weakened and disappeared, the magazines of special interest that seek out the individual public have become far stronger. The greatest new successes in publishing during the last 25 years have been special-interest magazines: *Sports Illustrated, American Heritage, TV Guide, Scientific American,* and many others. The change is described by a veteran editor, Robert Stein:

> It used to be that we could cover almost any subject in a popular magazine by assigning a very good writer to go to a number of obvious sources, get the necessary facts and figures, and dramatize them with a few anecdotes or individual experiences, then put it all together in a neat, well-rounded way. The result would be that the reader would be superficially informed, would quite possibly be entertained, but would be left with very little of real value to him.
>
> Now, on some of the most serious subjects, we find that we are investing as much as two years of time; that we're using not only writers, but (often) teams of researchers to help them. In some cases we're working with research organizations to do basic research which goes far beyond reporting, simply to find out what the reality of the situation is before we can figure out what we're going to say about it, how we're going to treat it in a magazine. This is a growing trend because readers can discern the difference between an exploitation of their interest on the part of the magazine and the magazine's desire to serve their interest by clarifying confusion about issues that are important to them.
>
> When I first started writing magazine articles on almost any subject of direct concern to the reader, I finished with ten rules on how to handle the subject. Well, the ten-easy-rules days are over, because any issue that can be treated with ten easy rules isn't worth considering in the first place.*

The last fifteen years have proven that the modern network of mass media has no place for magazines that attempt to reach everyone simultaneously. *Reader's Digest*, which has the largest subscription list of any publication in the world, appeals to the general masses at the expense of the intellectual audience. More important in judging total readership is the fact that the *Digest* does not reach millions of others who think of it as too serious, *too intellectual*. Other, smaller magazines reach audiences that the *Digest* misses but cannot hope to duplicate in its broad appeal.

*Courtesy, Robert Stein.

Types of Magazines

Magazines were first introduced in France in the seventeenth century. The term "magazine" originates from the French word *magasin*, meaning "storehouse." From the beginning, the chief distinguishing characteristic was a *variety* of writing—essays, poetry, and plays. In fact, for many years publications in newspaper format that offered a variety of writing genres were known as "magazines." The late Frank Luther Mott, considered the foremost historian of American journalism, once defined a magazine as "a bound pamphlet issued more or less regularly and containing a variety of reading matter." Now, however, magazines are distinguished from newspapers and books by format and by their appeal to particular audiences.

Magazines can be categorized according to type and audience. *Writer's Market*, a leading guidebook for free-lance writers, lists more than 100 categories: general interest, women's poetry, sports and outdoor, and so on. But it is more useful for us to deal with magazines in four categories: mass magazines, news magazines, class magazines (including "little magazines"), and specialized magazines (including business publications).

The increase in postal rates that came in the early 1970s threatened most magazines, even some with loyal readers who were willing to pay more for their favorite publications. The increase was especially hard on the small political and literary magazines that appeal to a small segment of the market. The postal increase hurried the demise of some mass magazines that were already deep in trouble.

Mass Magazines

Mass magazines, as the name implies, are aimed at a large, general audience (although certainly not at everyone). Two features characterize the mass periodical: its huge circulation, usually in the millions, and its effort to bridge many levels of education, income, religion, and interest. The demise of *Look* came as no surprise to those who had been watching the magazine world for two decades. At the risk of oversimplifying, the birth of television signaled the slow death of general weekly magazines, which had long attempted to do what television could do better: entertain and inform a wide range of people at low cost to advertisers. There were, of course, other factors, but when the advertising dollars used to support magazines turned to television to reach many more millions of listeners

than even the largest magazine, all the general weeklies and some of the monthlies died.

The general monthlies that survived decided quite early to raise subscription and newsstand prices—some to the point where their readers paid nearly all the costs of production and distribution, leaving most of their advertising revenue as profit. To continue to lure buyers, of course, it became necessary to create publications so attractive that readers could not resist them even at their higher rates.

The death of the *general* weekly, however, failed to mark the death of the mass magazine or the specialized weekly. Not only are many large monthlies and fortnightlies thriving—*Ms.*, *Rolling Stone*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Playboy*, for example—but some weeklies that address particular interests of many readers now have mass circulations as well. *Sports Illustrated* is a prime example; *New York* is another; *TV Guide*, with a circulation of 18 million a week, sells more copies annually than any other magazine in history.

News Magazines

News magazines also try to bridge many levels of readership. Most news magazine readers, however, have a strong interest in contemporary affairs, which sets them apart from the majority of Americans. The three leading news magazines—*Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News & World Report*—all have circulations in the millions and all attempt to bridge several categories of readers. But even a cursory look at them indicates a different intent from other mass magazines.

The publication of the first issue of *Time* on March 3, 1923, was an important event in American journalism on many counts. Although it began with a circulation of only 12,000, *Time* now sells nearly 5 million copies each week. It is the keystone of one of the strongest magazine-publishing empires in the world, a complex corporation that includes *Fortune*, *Sports Illustrated*, and *Money*. It is no exaggeration to state that *Time* has altered the course of American journalism by turning journalistic interest toward the meaning and texture of the news. (Many professional reporters have an active disdain for it, particularly because its cleverness is sometimes carried to extremes to support the point of view of its editors.)

The founders of *Time*, Henry R. Luce and Briton Hadden, were originally interested in developing a magazine that would flesh out spot news. The prospectus ran:

> People in America are, for the most part, poorly informed. This is not the fault of the daily newspapers; they print all the news. It is not the fault of the

> weekly reviews; they adequately develop and comment on the news. To say with the facile cynic that it is the fault of the people themselves is to beg the question. People are uninformed because no publication has adapted itself to the time which busy men are able to spend on merely keeping informed.

Luce and Hadden originally emphasized the newspaper aspect of their new publication, as indicated by one of the rules in the prospectus: no story was to be more than 400 words long.

There have been several changes in *Time* since its earliest days, among them longer stories and the gradual disappearance of many components of "Timestyle"—which was for years chiefly characterized by freshly coined, usually flippant words and inverted sentence structures. The narrative, or chronological, story structure emerged soon after the beginning of *Time*, and remains a dominant form.

One of the most distinctive changes, however, has been the evolution from news reporting and news interpretation to news feature treatment—an alteration that made *Time* more like conventional magazines. The long "cover stories," though they are usually built around personalities in the news, are often similar to articles published in magazines less concerned with timeliness. *Time* and the news magazines that came after it, *Newsweek* and *U.S. News & World Report*, bridge newspapers and magazines and contain elements of both.

Among the news magazines themselves are distinct differences. *Newsweek* seems similar to *Time* (and certainly might have been seen as "an imitator" during its earliest years), but *Newsweek* tends to be more objective in its news reports, with overt editorial comment restricted to signed columns.

U.S. News & World Report is a distant relation of *Time* and *Newsweek*. It grew out of an effort by the late David Lawrence, an outspoken conservative, to publish a national newspaper that he called the *United States Daily*. Curiously, *U.S. News* now has actually less newspaper flavor than the other weekly news magazines. It is made up largely of long "magazine-type" articles that are not always tied to news events.

Class Magazines

Class magazines or, as they are sometimes called, "quality magazines," are aimed at more educated audiences, who have a greater interest in public affairs and literature. The circulation of class magazines—including *Harper's, The Atlantic, The Nation, New Republic*, and *National Review*—will never reach a half-million. Because their readers are often opinion leaders, however, the class magazines usually wield more influence than do the mass news magazines.

Certainly class publications will never begin to challenge any national television program. The editor's chief concern is with winning a few more loyal readers and a little more advertising—just enough of each to make the economics of publishing a little less dismaying. William F. Buckley, Jr., editor of the right-wing political journal *National Review*, described the problem:

> When the cost of manufacturing goes up 10 percent, the mass periodical publisher seldom has to turn to his readers to demand a 10 percent increase in the subscription rate. He turns, instead, to the advertisers for an additional subsidy; and the advertisers absorb the increase as a cost of doing business, which is reflected, naturally, in the price of their product to the consumers. But the little magazine has no such buffer. Normal business enterprises turn immediately, as they must, to the consumer, to absorb an increase in the cost of production. But the consumers of periodical literature are accustomed to being heavily subsidized, and hence partially relieved of personal obligation for the cost of production.

It is important to distinguish between current problems of the mass magazines and continuing problems of publications like *National Review*, which have always faced financial trouble. Little magazines have been springing up and dying out for decades; the unusual publication is the solvent one. Generally, smaller magazines exist only because individuals or groups think enough of the message they disseminate—usually political or literary—to make up the deficits.

Specialized Magazines

Specialized magazines exist in bewildering variety. Some, like *Popular Mechanics*, might also be considered mass magazines if only circulation were measured. Others, like *Editor & Publisher*, struggle to reach 30,000 readers. All have a great advantage over the mass magazines: they are aimed directly at highly definable audiences, some large, some small. The readers of *Popular Mechanics* may differ strikingly in income, occupation, religion, and location, but they share an interest in mechanics and popular science. The readers of *Editor & Publisher* share an interest in the newspaper business.

Some specialized magazines, like *Popular Mechanics*, are well known, but others exist in such relative anonymity that they almost defy classification. Russell Baird and Arthur Turnbull, authors of *Industrial and Business Journalism*, have divided business publications into: