

Reporting for the Print Media

FIFTH EDITION



FRED FEDLER

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PREFACE

This fifth edition of “Reporting for the Print Media” has been rewritten, expanded and brought up-to-date. It has also been extensively reorganized, and many of its exercises are new. The book’s primary emphasis has not changed, however; it continues to provide both the instructions and exercises needed to help students become better writers. The book reflects the belief that students learn to write by writing; that students should be given as much practice as possible, and that the practice should be as realistic as possible. Thus, many of the assignments in this book are genuine: actual laws, interviews, speeches, police reports and news releases.

REORGANIZED CHAPTERS

Several chapters have been extensively revised, and four have been rearranged. The material on “Selecting and Reporting the News” has been moved from the seventh to the fourth chapter. The chapters on “Quotations and Attribution,” “Interviews and Polls” and “Improving Newsgathering and Writing Skills” have also been moved, so they appear earlier in the book.

Chapter 1 (“The Basics: Format, Spelling and AP Style”) combines material that, in previous editions, appeared in several different chapters. Chapter 3 (“Words”) is new.

PRO CHALLENGE

Several of the exercises in the chapters about leads and the body of news stories are titled “Pro Challenge.” Professionals have completed the exercises so that students assigned the same exercises can compare their work to the professionals’. This is a new feature.

ANSWER KEYS

Students who, after reading several of the chapters and working on their exercises, want additional practice can complete the extra exercises marked “Answer Key Provided,” then correct their own work. The answers to those exercises appear in Appendix D.

APPENDIXES

As in previous editions, “Reporting for the Print Media” provides four appendixes: (1) a city directory, (2) a summary of The Associated Press Stylebook And Libel Manual, (3) rules for forming possessives and (4) answer keys.

END-OF-CHAPTER MATERIALS

The material placed at the end of each chapter has been greatly expanded. Such material varies from chapter to chapter, but typically includes: (1) lists of readings, (2) discussion questions, (3) suggested class projects, (4) newsroom bulletins, (5) ombudsmen's commentaries and (6) guest commentaries.

Additionally, this book reprints a half-dozen bulletins titled "Write & Wrong" that were prepared for the staff of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. These bulletins discuss common errors and provide additional examples of good and bad writing.

This book also reprints several columns written by ombudsmen, the journalists hired to answer reader complaints. This feature, to teach students more about problems involving ethics and good taste, is new.

Another new feature, "Guest Commentaries," also appears at the ends of several chapters. A young copy editor suffering from carpal tunnel syndrome describes her crippling ailment. An attorney in Washington, D.C., advises students on how to avoid libel. And several experts in broadcasting and public relations tell students more about their fields.

HUNDREDS OF EXAMPLES

"Reporting for the Print Media" contains hundreds of examples of writing, some by students and some by professionals. While introducing a new topic or discussing an error, this book typically shows students two or three examples of the error, as well as how to avoid or correct it.

HUNDREDS OF EXERCISES

This book also contains hundreds of exercises. Many of them are both new and genuine. Examples include

- President Bush's speech announcing the war against Iraq.
- The transcript of a 911 call the police in Milwaukee received about Jeffrey Dahmer, the man who admitted murdering 17 young men.
- A verbatim copy of a confession written by John List, who murdered his wife, mother and three children in their home in New Jersey. Students may remember List because he remained a fugitive for 18 years, then was captured with the help of a television program, "America's Most Wanted."

Similarly, the exercises in Chapter 9 ("Interviews and Polls") contain actual interviews conducted especially for this book. Other exercises, although fictionalized, involve topics recently in the news: a dentist with AIDS, predictions of an earthquake along the New Madrid Fault and a debate over controversial exhibits funded by the National Endowment for the Arts.

Many of the exercises also address ethical concerns: four-letter words, the names of rape victims, bloody details and other material that editors may be reluctant to publish.

SAMPLE STORIES

After discussing a particular type of story (obituaries, for example), this book reprints entire stories written by prize-winning professionals. Students can use the stories as models. An example from *The Milwaukee Journal* shows students how an entire story can be written in chronological order. Many journalists consider Jim Nicholson of the *Philadelphia Daily News* the nation's best obituary writer; two of his stories appear at the end of Chapter 15 ("Writing Obituaries").

COMPUTER SOFTWARE

Faculty members with access to Macintosh computers can use this book with "Media Writer: Computerized Lessons in News Reporting," also written by Fred Fedler (and coauthored by Lucinda Davenport of Michigan State University). The software, sold separately or with the textbook, provides 32 interactive exercises for the students in reporting classes. The first exercises emphasize the fundamentals of news writing: spelling, style, accuracy and objectivity. Other exercises teach students how to write more clearly and concisely. Later exercises ask students to write leads and complete news stories. All the exercises test students' news judgment, including their ethics.

A NOTE OF THANKS

Journalists are wonderful people: enthusiastic, interesting and helpful. While working on this book, I wrote to dozens of them. Reporters, photographers and editors from Salt Lake City to Philadelphia, from New York to Miami, answered my letters and provided advice and samples of their work.

I would especially like to thank a colleague, Pat Mills of the Department of Journalism at Ball State University, for updating the chapter on feature stories.

Six professionals, all former students, completed the exercises titled "Pro Challenge": Eric Dentel, Dana Eagles, Geoffrey M. Giordano, Mike Griffin, Lisa Lochridge and Loraine O'Connell.

Other current and former students also helped. Marty Murray describes her apparent death (an "out-of-body" experience). Taylor E. Kingsley, a talented young journalist who suffers from carpal tunnel syndrome, describes her crippling ailment. Barry Bradley describes a story he covered as a young reporter. Diane Taylor suggested revisions in Chapter 16 ("News Releases").

A friend, Jeanne Scafella, suggested revisions in Chapter 12 ("Communication Law").

Other people provided guest commentaries: Frank R. Stansberry discusses careers in public relations; Joe Hall discusses careers in broadcasting; and Alexander Greenfeld, a Washington attorney, advises readers on 30 ways to protect themselves against libel suits.

I would also like to thank the many other professionals who allowed me to quote their work: Donald L. Barlett and James B. Steele of *The Philadelphia Inquirer*; Mike Clark, reader advocate at *The (Jacksonville) Florida Times-Union*; Roy P. Clark of *The Poynter Institute for Media Studies*; Lucille S. DeView, writing coach for *The Orange County (Calif.) Register*; Harry Levins, writing coach at the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*; Henry McNulty, reader representative for *The Hartford Courant*; Pat Riley,

ombudsman for The Orange County Register; and Jim Nicholson, an obituary writer for the Philadelphia Daily News.

Numerous publications and news services gave me permission to quote their stories or republish their photographs: The Associated Press, The Deseret News in Salt Lake City, The Miami Herald, The Milwaukee Journal, The New York Times, The Orlando Sentinel, the Scripps Howard News Service and United Press International.

The following organizations also allowed me to quote them: the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Society of Newspaper Editors, Society of Professional Journalists, National Victim Center and Southern Newspaper Publishers Association.

Several faculty members gave me permission to use their work as exercises in this book: Margaret Vandiver, Michael L. Radelet, Felix M. Berardo and George P. Moschis.

Jill Vejnaska, a prize-winning reporter for The Courier-News in Bridgewater, N.J., provided a copy of a murderer's confession that was used in an exercise in Chapter 21 ("Advanced Reporting Exercises").

For their insightful comments and useful suggestions during the development process, thanks go to Jim Highland, Western Kentucky University; Rick Jones, Illinois State University; Sharon Smith Pennell, Appalachian State University; and Rick Pullen, California State University-Fullerton.

I would also like to thank the staff at Harcourt Brace Jovanovich—Stephen Jordan, Acquisitions Editor; Cathlynn Richard, Development Editor; Steve Norder, Project Editor; Brian Salisbury, Designer; Sandra Lord, Art Editor; and Erin Gregg, Production Manager—for their part in the publication of this edition.

TO THE STUDENT

Many Americans seem to believe that writing is an easy, glamorous job. The people who think that, says author Elizabeth Lane, "have probably never written anything longer than a check." Lane explains that writing hurts. Moreover, writing does not get any easier as you go along. There is, however, a simple formula for success. "It's this," Lane says. "Fanny on the chair. Elbows on the desk. Fingers on the keyboard. For however long it takes to finish the job."

Like other writers, Lane sometimes asks herself why she got into the business and why she continues to write. "I'm hooked," she answers. "I have a hundred stories in my head and this driving compulsion to put them on paper to read."¹

Lane is not a journalist. She is a romance writer who has published 10 books. It doesn't matter. Most writers, regardless of their speciality, agree with Lane.

Journalists, too, get hooked. They enjoy the challenge of uncovering important stories and the thrill of being there to watch the stories unfold. Journalists also enjoy the challenge of writing stories quickly, under deadline pressure, and of putting words together in a way that will interest readers. However, their greatest rewards come when they finish a piece: when it appears in print, they see their byline and hear from people who like their work.

Elizabeth Lane adds that writers must also be diligent. Most students realize that athletes and musicians must practice several hours a day. Many fail to realize that writers, too, must practice regularly and systematically. Author Sheila Hailey explains:

The one thing all professional writers have in common . . . is that they get down to it and write. They don't just talk about it, they don't wait for inspiration, they don't wish they had time to write. They make time and press on. Oh, there's often some pencil-sharpening and desk-tidying that goes on first. But sooner or later, they write, though never knowing with certainty if they are at work on a masterpiece or a disaster.²

Other writers agree with Lane's assertion that writing is hard work. One of the nation's most famous and talented sportswriters, Red Smith, once said, "There's nothing to writing. All you do is sit down at the typewriter and open a vein."

Columnist James J. Kilpatrick adds:

Our task is deceptively simple. It is as deceptively simple as the task of carpenters, who begin by nailing one board to another board. Then other boards are nailed to other boards, and lo, we have a house. Just so, as writers we put one word after another word, and we connect those words to other

¹Elizabeth Lane. "Writing Romance." *WordPerfect Magazine*. August 1989, p. 70.

²Sheila Hailey. *I Married a Best Seller*. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1978), p. 95.

words, and lo, we have a news story or an editorial or if it goes badly, a plate of spaghetti.³

To avoid a plate of spaghetti, you will need a good editor or teacher: someone who cares about you and who will spend the time needed to evaluate your work critically. For most students, that criticism is the hardest part of all. When they submit a story to a teacher, most students want praise and an "A." Not a critical analysis of their work. Not a dozen corrections. Not a note saying they have to rewrite the entire piece.

If you are serious about becoming a good writer, you will have to learn to accept, even welcome, criticism of your work. However painful the experience, that is how you learn. Too many students fail to realize that. Rather than appreciating such criticism, many students resent it—and take it personally.

For as long as you write, you will have an editor. For the moment, that editor will be your instructor. A good instructor will do everything possible to improve your work, whether it is a news story, an advertisement or a news release. Learn to be grateful and not resentful or thin skinned.

This book, too, will help you learn to write. Its assignments have been made as realistic as possible. While completing them, you will be expected to perform like a professional: to be accurate; to work under deadline pressures; and to produce copy so clear, concise and interesting that your audience will be able, even eager, to read every word.

Many schools require all their journalism students to enroll in a reporting class and to use a book like this one. Why? Because the writing skills emphasized in reporting classes are needed by the professionals in every area of journalism, including those in advertising, public relations and broadcasting. They too must be able to work quickly and to produce material that is clear, concise, accurate and interesting.

This book will also teach you more about the media: about how journalists define news, handle news releases, avoid libel suits and cope with dozens of other problems. And because journalists often deal with problems that involve ethics and taste, exercises throughout this book will challenge your judgment in those areas as well. You will have to decide whether you should use the information provided by anonymous sources; report some bloody details and four-letter words; and identify innocent victims, including the victims of rape.

The early chapters emphasize fundamentals, providing basic, introductory exercises for people with no experience in journalism. They deal with the basic format and style used by newswriters, and with spelling, grammar and vocabulary. Exercises in the following chapters give you a few facts and ask you to summarize them in acceptable newswriting style. Later exercises are more complex and require more sophisticated writing techniques. Still others will send you out of your classroom to gather information firsthand.

Many of the exercises are intentionally disorganized and poorly worded so that you can produce extensive revisions. You will have to develop the habit of critically examining every sentence before using it in a story. To add to the realism, your instructor is likely to impose deadlines that require you to finish your stories by a specified time. And because writing a story in longhand first takes a great deal of time, you may be required to compose your stories on a typewriter or computer.

Students who spend hours working on their first take-home assignments worry about their slowness. This is misperception. As you begin to write, accuracy and clarity are

³James J. Kilpatrick, "The Art Of The Craft." The Red Smith Lecture in Journalism. University of Notre Dame, Department of American Studies. Notre Dame, Inc.: August, 1985. Reprinted in pamphlet form, p. 2.

more important than speed. Through practice, you will develop speed naturally, over time.

Also remember that few first drafts cannot be improved. You will need to develop the habit of editing and rewriting your own work, sometimes a half-dozen times or more.

Here are some additional guidelines to follow while using this book:

- Unless it mentions another location, assume that every story in this book occurred on your campus or in your community. Also assume that every story will be published by a newspaper in your community.
- Use only the facts that you are given or are able to obtain or verify from other sources. Newswriting is based on fact. Never make assumptions, and certainly never make up facts.
- Verify the spelling of names that appear in the exercises by consulting the city directory in Appendix A. So that you get in the habit of checking the spelling of every name, some names in the exercises are deliberately misspelled. Only the spellings in the city directory are correct.
- To achieve a consistent style of abbreviation, capitalization, punctuation and so forth, follow the guidelines suggested by The Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual. This style is used throughout "Reporting for the Print Media," and a summary of the stylebook's most commonly used rules appears in Appendix B. Most newspapers in the United States follow the guidelines recommended by The Associated Press. Copies of the stylebook are available at most bookstores.

Finally, dozens of students and teachers have written to me, telling me what they like and dislike about this book and suggesting new features. I have used many of their ideas, and I would like to hear from you. If you have a suggestion or comment, please write to me.

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