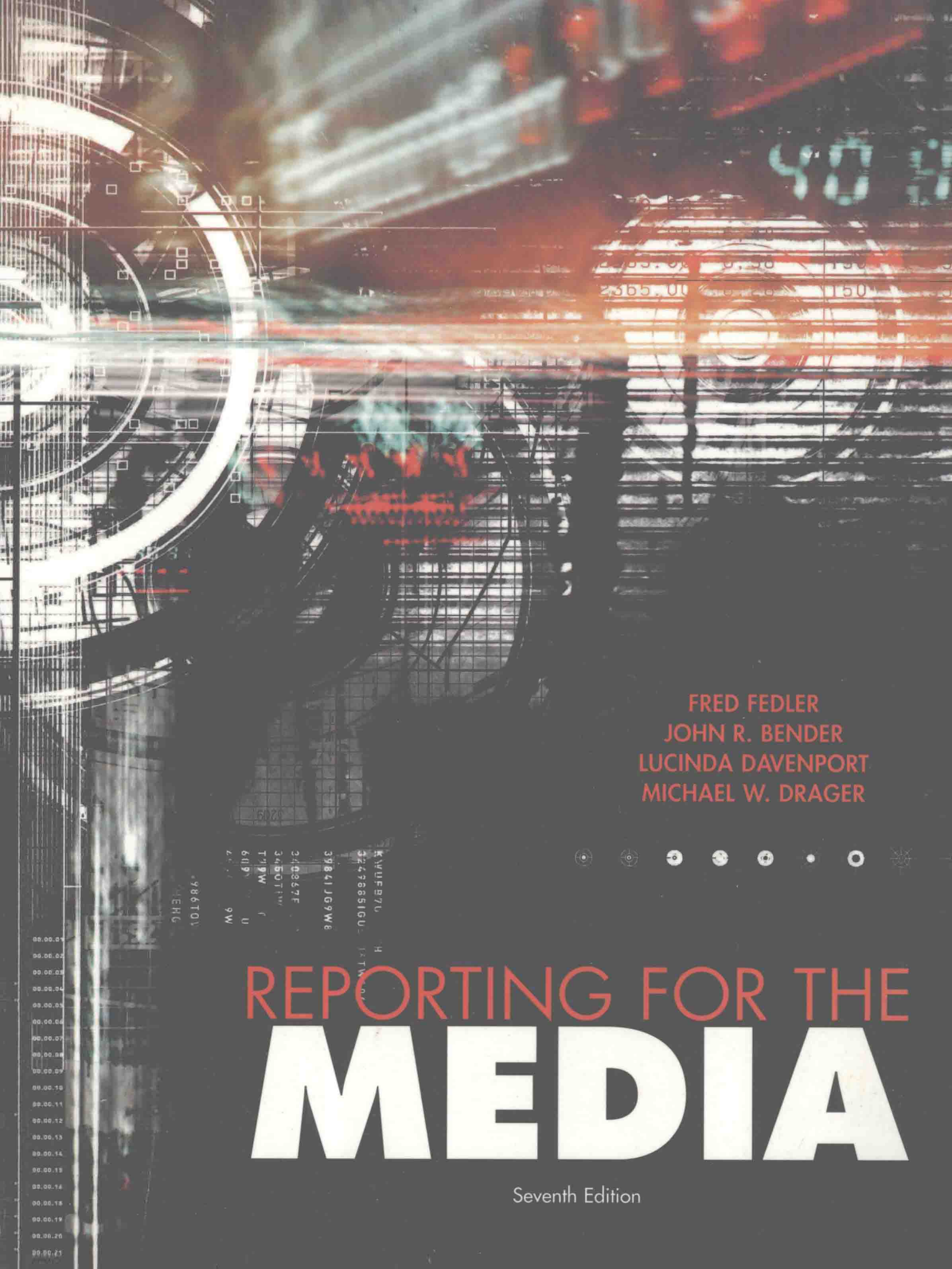

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REPORTING FOR THE MEDIA

Seventh Edition

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New York Oxford
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Oxford University Press

Oxford New York
Auckland Bangkok Buenos Aires Cape Town
Chennai Dar es Salaam Delhi Hong Kong Istanbul Karachi
Kolkata Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Mumbai Nairobi
São Paulo Shanghai Singapore Taipei Tokyo Toronto

and an associated company in Berlin

Published by Oxford University Press, Inc.
198 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10016
http://www.oup-usa.org

Oxford is a registered trademark of Oxford University Press

ISBN: 0-19-515515-7
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 00-102670

Printing number: 9 8 7 6 5 4 3

Printed in the United States of America
on acid-free paper

Preface

Is journalism a social science or a humanity? Do journalists have more in common with sociologists, political scientists and economists or with poets, philosophers and painters? These questions may seem esoteric, but the answers describe what journalists do and suggest how they should be trained.

The subject matter of most news stories falls squarely within the domain of the social sciences: crime, the economy, government policies, international relations. Reporters must be familiar with those fields. Some reporters are experts in law, economics or diplomacy. Yet the practice of journalism has more to do with the humanities than with the social sciences. Like novelists and playwrights, reporters are storytellers. Like poets and painters, they seek compelling, emotionally powerful images. So what does it take to be a reporter?

Good reporters need two characteristics:

1. They must be engaged in the world around them.
2. They must be articulate.

Being engaged in the world means reporters have a high degree of curiosity about their beats and life in general, and they feel empathy for the people who are the subjects of their stories.

Curiosity helps reporters generate story ideas and develop the stories assigned to them. Good stories emerge when reporters ask why things work as they do, what's wrong, what's right and who makes a difference. The more sophisticated the questions reporters ask, the more sophisticated—and interesting—the stories they tell. Curiosity should lead reporters to ask about things others may not have considered newsworthy or interesting. The incurious reporter might have a parent who is facing a debilitating disease and see it only as a personal problem. The curious reporter in the same situation recognizes that many people may be living with the same problem and looking for support, information and encouragement. From that recognition emerges a great story idea. The incurious reporter may watch the city council award contract after contract to the same company and not wonder why that happens. The curious reporter will ask why the contractor is so successful, whether that success carries over to competition for private sector projects and what connections to the city council the contractor might have. From those questions emerges a prize-winning investigative project.

Reporters must be constantly curious, asking about the details of their beats. How do police work? What do they do at a crime scene? How do they handle interrogations? Reporters should ask such questions with no expectation the answers will lead to stories. No reporter can predict what tidbit of information may help unravel a great story. But even if the information yields no story, it might be a fact or insight that helps the reporter understand and explain events to readers and viewers.

Being engaged also means having empathy for the sources and subjects of news stories. People in the news often are involved in highly emotional situations. They may be victims of crime or the relatives of a victim; they may be people who have lost loved ones in a plane crash; they may be athletes who have just suffered a defeat; or they may be community residents worried about how a proposed development might affect their lives and their property. A story about a knife attack by a male employee on a female supervisor is not just an antiseptic crime story or an exercise in deductive logic. It is a story about anger, frustration, betrayal, terror and humiliation. A reporter who cannot empathize with the people involved cannot truly understand their experiences or tell their story.

The ability to empathize does not require reporters to abandon objectivity and impartiality. Empathy differs from sympathy. Sympathy requires one to have the same feelings as another or to achieve a mutual understanding with another. Empathy means projecting one's personality into that of another so as to understand the other person better. Reporters who have empathy for others can understand them without embracing or approving their emotions. Empathy not only is consistent with objectivity, it is probably indispensable for producing a truly objective and thorough story. If reporters cannot understand the emotional state of the people they write about or assess the emotional impact events have on their sources, they will fail to report the full story.

Curiosity and empathy enable reporters to get the who, what, when, where, why and how of a story. Putting those elements into a coherent, interesting and readable story requires that reporters be articulate.

Being articulate combines at least two skills. One is the ability to use words effectively, to select the appropriate words and use them correctly, to arrange them in sentences that are grammatical and properly punctuated. The other skill is the ability to organize the elements of the story—the facts, the quotations and the anecdotes—in a manner that is captivating, informative and dramatic.

Reporters who understand grammar and diction can construct sentences that are clear and precise. The skillful writer knows that the following sentences mean very different things:

She only kissed him on the lips.

She kissed him only on the lips.

The skillful writer would also know that one of these sentences accuses the subject of a crime:

Wanda sent her husband Bob to the store.

Wanda sent her husband, Bob, to the store.

The first sentence uses "Bob" as an essential modifier of "husband," meaning that Wanda has more than one husband and the one she sent to the store is Bob. The sentence implies Wanda has committed the crime of bigamy. The second sentence, because it uses commas before and after "Bob," makes it clear that Wanda has only one husband, and his name is Bob.

The ability to construct clear, correct sentences is fundamental. But a news story may contain nothing but clear, correct sentences and still be impossible to read because the writer has failed to organize the material. Readers crave organization; if they don't find it, they may stop reading. A story that jumps from one topic to another and back to the first without any sense of direction will confuse readers and drive them elsewhere for information. Reporters need to know how to organize information in a way that makes its significance and drama clear. Usually for news stories, this means placing the newest, most newsworthy information early in the story. But sometimes, writers want to hold some particularly dramatic or poignant fact for the end of the story.

All of the skills one needs to become a great reporter—curiosity, empathy, a knowledge of grammar and the ability to organize stories—are skills a person can learn. Some people may learn them more easily than others, or some may develop one set of skills more than the others. But anybody who can handle college-level course work can cultivate the skills a professional reporter needs. This seventh edition of "Reporting for the Media" offers many features—some new to this edition—to help students master the skills of news reporting.

Features of Interest

As with the previous editions of this textbook, the seventh edition contains several changes. One is that Fred Fedler is stepping aside as the lead author. Fedler created this textbook nearly 25 years ago and nurtured it through its first five editions by himself. For the sixth edition, he added three co-authors and assumed the role of lead author and editor. One of those co-authors,

John Bender, has taken over most of those duties for this edition. Fedler remains involved in making decisions about the content and format of the book, and his co-authors are committed to keeping the book one that longtime users will be comfortable with.

Although the seventh edition contains hundreds of changes, some major ones are worth noting:

- The Selecting and Reporting the News chapter now includes an extensive section on prewriting. This section tells how to select a central point for a news story and to organize the information so as to stick to and develop the central point. The idea of having a central point is one that the authors return to frequently throughout the textbook.
- The first chapter, The Basics, Format and AP Style, has been rewritten to include material from the introduction to the previous editions.
- A chapter on spelling and grammar has been added. This chapter introduces basic principles of sentence structure and grammar, which later chapters build on.
- A chapter on gathering information from the Internet has been added. The chapter covers some basics of how the Internet works, how to search the World Wide Web efficiently for information and the problems of gathering information from the Internet.
- The chapter on advanced reporting has been revised and expanded and now includes introductory concepts on computer-assisted reporting.
- The Interviews chapter has been completely rewritten and expanded.
- Almost every chapter includes new exercises, most based on real incidents and real news stories.
- Joe Hight, managing editor of The Daily Oklahoman, has contributed 12 columns on writing and reporting. These columns appear in various chapters throughout the book and replace many of the columns from previous editions.
- New photographs and illustrations have been added, some to chapters that had no illustrations in the past.
- The discussion of public relations is concentrated in one chapter in this edition, rather than spread over two chapters as in the past.

Other Features of Interest to Faculty Members

Answer Keys

Some students want more practice after they read the chapters and work on their exercises. They can complete the extra exercises marked "Answer Key Provided," then correct their own work. The answers to those exercises appear in Appendix D.

Appendices

"Reporting for the Media" provides five appendices: (A) a city directory, (B) a summary of The Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual, (C) rules for forming possessives, (D) answer keys for some exercises and (E) a discussion of common writing problems.

Checklists and Other End-of-Chapter Materials

A variety of supplemental teaching materials appears at the end of each chapter. The materials include expanded checklists that review and reinforce the chapter's primary instructions. Other

materials vary from chapter to chapter but typically include (1) lists of readings, (2) discussion questions, (3) suggested projects and (4) sidebars or columns.

Flexibility

"Reporting for the Media" is flexible. Teachers can assign its chapters in almost any order. Moreover, the book provides enough exercises that faculty members can assign their favorites, then assign extra exercises for students who need more help. Some teachers use the book for two semesters: for basic and advanced reporting classes. There are enough exercises for both terms.

Faculty members who prefer the book's traditional emphasis on the print media can assign the chapters on public relations and writing for the broadcast media as optional readings.

Hundreds of Examples

"Reporting for the Media" contains hundreds of examples, some written by students and some by professionals. While introducing a new topic or discussing an error, this book typically shows students examples. For errors, the book also shows students how to avoid or correct them.

Some examples have been written by prize-winning professionals, and students can use their stories as models. For instance, examples from the Norfolk (Va.) Virginian-Pilot and The St. Petersburg (Fla.) Times illustrate the focus-story and the hourglass-story formats. And Jim Nicholson of the Philadelphia Daily News, considered by many journalists to be the nation's best obituary writer, is quoted extensively in Chapter 11 (Writing Obituaries).

Realistic and Often Genuine Exercises

This book contains a multitude of exercises, and teachers can select the ones most appropriate for their students. Many are real. Chapter 12 (Speeches and Meetings) includes President Bill Clinton's address at a memorial service for victims of the Oklahoma City bombing and President George Bush's address to the nation at the start of the Persian Gulf War. Chapter 15 includes an exercise based on 911 tapes involved in the investigation of serial killer Jeffrey L. Dahmer. Exercises in other chapters, although fictionalized, are drawn from real events.

To add to the realism, many of the exercises contain ethical problems: profanities, sexist comments, the names of rape victims, bloody details and other material that many editors would be reluctant to publish. Students completing those exercises will have to deal with the problems, and their decisions are likely to provoke class discussion.

Instructor's Manual

The authors provide a detailed Instructor's Manual: 135 pages of ideas, recommendations, answers and quizzes. The manual's introductory sections discuss accuracy, grades, suggested policies and assignments. Those sections are followed by sample course outlines and lists of the exercises that contain ethical dilemmas and sexist remarks. Other lists tell you which exercises mention your city, state or school and can be localized. Later sections provide answers for many of the exercises. The manual also has tests covering style, vocabulary, attribution and spelling, as well as true/false questions for most chapters. (If you would like your city or school mentioned in an exercise in the next edition, contact any of the authors.)

Computer Software

Teachers who have access to Macintosh computers can use this book with "Media Writer: Computerized Lessons in News Reporting," also written by Fred Fedler and Lucinda D. Davenport. The software, sold separately, provides 32 interactive exercises for students in reporting classes. The first exercise emphasizes the fundamentals of news writing: spelling, style, accuracy and objectivity. Other exercises teach students how to write more clearly and concisely, with prac-

tice in writing leads and complete news stories. All exercises are designed to test student judgment and ethics.

Practical Approach

Like previous editions, the seventh is concrete, not abstract or theoretical. Its tone is practical and realistic. Its language is readable: clear, concise, simple and direct. Because of the book's realism, students will encounter the types of problems and assignments they are likely to find when they graduate and take entry-level jobs with the media.

Pro Challenge

Several exercises in the chapters about leads and the body of news stories are subtitled "Pro Challenge." Professionals have completed the exercises so students assigned the same exercises can compare their work to that of the professionals.

A Single Volume

By combining everything students need in a single volume, "Reporting for the Media" provides a convenient package at a reasonable price. Like earlier editions, the seventh edition includes both the instructions and examples that students need to learn to write more effectively. It also includes a multitude of exercises and a summary of The Associated Press Stylebook. Thus students do not have to buy separate workbooks and stylebooks along with the text.

A Note of Thanks

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

We would especially like to thank the many professionals who gave us permission to quote their work: Roy Peter Clark of the Poynter Institute for Media Studies; Don Fry of the Poynter Institute for Media Studies; Ken Fuson, a reporter for the Des Moines Register; Jack Hart, managing editor of The Oregonian in Portland; Joe Hight, managing editor of The Daily Oklahoman; Robin Hinch, an obituary writer for the Orange County (Calif.) Register; Kelly Luvison, publisher of The Evening News of Hornell, N.Y.; Henry McNulty, a former associate editor of the Hartford (Conn.) Courant; Jim Nicholson, an obituary writer for the Philadelphia Daily News; Clarence Page, a columnist for The Chicago Tribune; and Kathleen Parker, a columnist for Tribune Media Services. We would also like to thank two former students who allowed us to use some of their work: Shannon Hefflefinger and Chris Heine.

Some teaching colleagues also gave us permission to quote their work: Bryan Denham, an assistant professor at Clemson University; Eugene Goodwin, a retired journalist, professor and author of "Groping for Ethics in Journalism"; Dean Kazoleas, a professor at Illinois State University and public relations professional; M. Timothy O'Keefe, a professor at the University of Central Florida and a free-lance writer; and Jim Underwood, a professor at Ohio Wesleyan University.

Numerous publications and news services gave us permission to quote their stories or republish their photographs: The Associated Press, The Ann Arbor (Mich.) News, The Boston Globe, The Chicago Tribune, The Daily Nebraskan, The Dallas Morning News, The Detroit News, the Greensboro (N.C.) News & Record, The Houston Chronicle, The Los Angeles Times, Lincoln (Neb.) Journal Star, The New York Times, The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, The Orlando (Fla.) Sentinel, The San Mateo (Calif.) County Times, The Seward County (Neb.) Independent, The San Francisco Chronicle, The St. Louis Post-Dispatch, The St. Petersburg (Fla.) Times, USA Today, the Norfolk (Va.) Virginian-Pilot and The Washington Post.

The following organizations also allowed us to quote their material: The Society of Professional Journalists and the National Center for Victims of Crime.

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

We could also like to thank another colleague, Pat Mills of the department of journalism at Ball State University, for her help during a previous edition in revising and improving the chapter on feature stories.

For their insightful comments and useful suggestions during the development process, thanks go to Ginger Carter, Georgia College; Beth Haller, Towson University; James Highland, Western Kentucky University; Rose Anne Robertson, American University; Karon Speckman, Truman State University; and James Whitfield, Northeast Louisiana State University.

We would also like to thank the staff at Harcourt College Publishers: Stephen Dalphin, acquisitions editor; Cathlynn Richard Dodson, developmental editor; Rebekah Mercer, project editor; David Day, art director; Cindy Young, production manager; and Adrienne Krysiuk, market strategist; also, freelancers Leon Unruh and Mike Nichols for their expertise in copyediting and proofreading.

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John R. Bender is an associate professor in the news-editorial department of the College of Journalism at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Bender worked for six years for the Pittsburg (Kan.) Morning Sun, starting as a reporter covering local government and politics. He became the paper's assignment editor, news editor and then managing editor. During his term as managing editor, the Morning Sun won awards for farm coverage, photography and editorial writing. Bender has taught at the college or university level for 15 years. He was a journalism instructor at Culver-Stockton College in Canton, Mo., for five years, and he joined the faculty of the University of Nebraska in 1990. His teaching and research areas include news reporting and writing, communications law, media history and controls of information. He is also executive director of the Nebraska High School Press Association. As an undergraduate, Bender majored in sociology at Westminster College in Fulton, Mo. He holds a master's degree in journalism from the University of Kansas and a doctorate in journalism from the University of Missouri at Columbia.

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Many students and teachers have written us over the years telling us what they like and dislike about this book and suggesting new features. We have adopted many of those ideas, and we would like to hear from you. If you have a comment or suggestion, please write any of us:

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