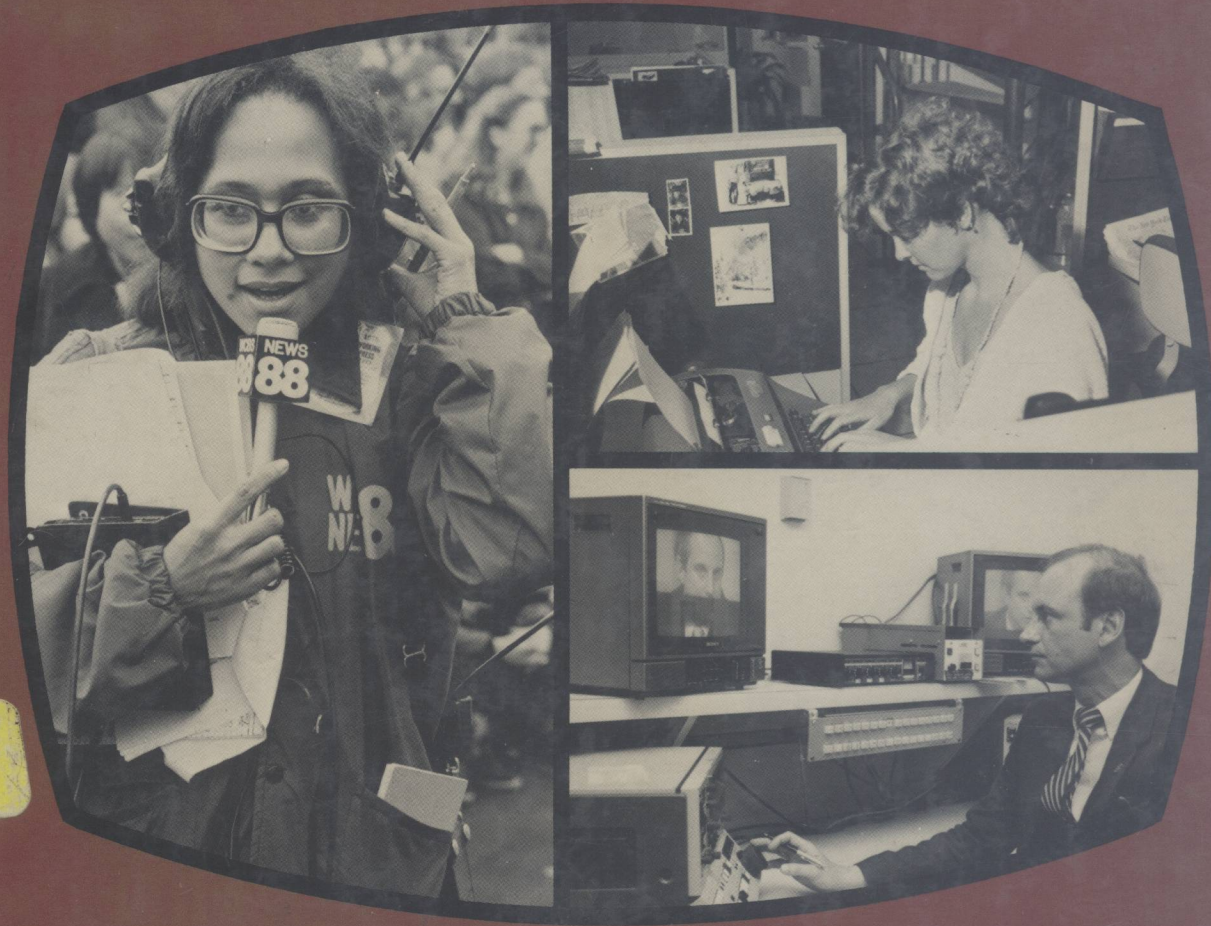


BROADCAST NEWS

Second Edition



Mitchell Stephens

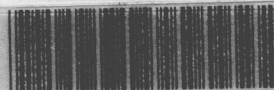
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BROADCAST NEWS

Second Edition

Mitchell Stephens

New York University



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BROADCAST NEWS

FROM THE PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

People depend on broadcast news. The goal of this book is to train broadcast journalists who can be depended on.

The book was written with the following thoughts in mind on how broadcast journalists should be trained:

- Reporting and writing skills can and should be taught, not just hinted at. Concepts such as the “feel” of writing or the “smell” of news must be demystified and defined so they can be clearly communicated.
- The basic responsibilities of all broadcast journalists are the same, no matter what the size of their station or audience. This book would be remiss if it ignored the special problems of small-town or big-city journalists, but the book would be deficient if the standards it advocates were not relevant in all broadcast newsrooms.
- Writing and reporting are best taught with frequent, precise and realistic examples. Most of the examples used in the text were used on the air.
- A book that stresses the need for clear and engaging writing should try not to be ponderous and dry.

This book uses many expressions and terms peculiar to broadcast newsrooms. My excuse for spreading jargon is a conviction that skills are easier to master once they have been named and defined, and these are the names readers will encounter if they find

themselves in a broadcast newsroom. All unfamiliar terms are defined when they are first used in the text, and the definitions can be located through the index.

Any attempt to provide a comprehensive introduction to a field requires a broad perspective on that field. To insure that the discussions here reflect more than just the practices at the stations with which I am personally familiar, a questionnaire was sent to about 3,000 radio stations. News directors from almost one-tenth of the radio stations in the United States responded. Many of the guidelines and examples that make up this book were drawn from their responses.

In addition, in writing this book I relied on conversations or visits with broadcast journalists at more than 100 radio and television stations. Many people were kind enough to find the time to talk with me between newscasts. Though it is not possible to name them all, I am particularly appreciative of the contributions made to the book by Dick Petrik and Karen Crow of KOEL; Larry Dodd, John Harding, Constance Ober and David Miller of WRVA; Lou Adler, Mike Callaghan and Liz Shanov then all with WCBS; James T. Farley, Jr., of NBC; Russell Patrick of CBC; Dallas Townsend of CBS; Peter Flannery and Bill Diehl of ABC; David Ensor then with NPR; Mike Eisgrau of WNEW; Rick Wallace of KABC; Bob Madigan then with KNX-FM; Susan Burdick of WEEI; Gael Garbarion of WRIT; Walt Dibble of WTIC; and Tim Lennox

of WERC. Many of these people have changed jobs since I interviewed them, but here, and where I mention journalists elsewhere in the book, I have chosen to list the positions they held when they supplied the information used in the book.

A number of people reviewed these chapters and strengthened them with their suggestions: James T. Farley, Jr., NBC Radio News; Peter E. Mayeux, University of Nebraska, Lincoln; Richard D. Yoakam, Indiana University; Mike Eisgrau, WNEW Radio News; Arthur Engoron, the law firm Olwine, Connelly, Chase, O'Donnell and Weyher; Gerald Lanson, Boston University. I am also appreciative of the contributions of: H. Al Anderson, University of Texas, Austin; Ernest F. Andrews, Syracuse University; John Cramer, Arkansas State University; Dan G. Drew, Indiana University; Robert H. Farson, Pennsylvania State University; George A. Mas-troianni, California State University, Fullerton; Robert H. Prisuta, University of Colorado; Jayne Rushin, Auburn University; Jay L. Schadler, Miami University.

The book benefited from the advice and encouragement of my colleagues: David Rubin, Joshua Mills and William Burrows of

the New York University Department of Journalism; and Herbert Jackson of the Communications Department of the William Paterson College of New Jersey. Thanks, too, to my teachers: Jerome Jacobs of KABC-TV and Walter Wilcox of the University of California, Los Angeles.

Susan Linfield helped prepare the practice assignments included in the book. Mary Quigley did research for one of these chapters. Stations WSB and KGW and CBS, Inc., were particularly helpful in supplying photographs. And my editors at Holt—Roth Wilkofsky and Pamela Forcey—provided valuable guidance and advice at many stages in the production of this book.

I am also blessed with a family of good editors. My father, Bernard Stephens, read almost every sentence here and helped quite a few of them. My mother, Lillian Stephens, reviewed several of these chapters. And my wife, Esther Davidowitz, spent many an evening editing copy. For this, and more important kindnesses, the book is dedicated to them.

M.S.

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Broadcast News has been something of a communal effort from the start. I could not have written the first edition without the assistance of a large group of thoughtful broadcast journalists and broadcast journalism professors. In preparing the second edition I have asked for more such help, and I have also depended heavily on the support, encouragement and advice of the instructors and students who used the first edition.

My primary goals for this edition, aside from such tasks as getting stories about "President Carter" out and information on satellites, computers, CNN and INN in, were to strengthen the discussions of television journalism, of radio documentaries and of reporting in general. Public affairs programs, television reporting and television newscasts have each been allotted separate chapters in this edition. And examples from television have been integrated into the earlier chapters. I believe the book now presents a more balanced introduction to broadcast news.

The list of people I want to thank for help on this edition begins with James T. Farley, Jr., of NBC, who has remained an enthusiastic contributor to and supporter of the project. Thanks, too, to Alan Walden of NBC; Mervin Block of CBS; Kathy Lavinder of ABC; David Kogan of the BBC; Mitch Lebe of WYNY; Mike Sechrist, Wendie Feinberg and Steve Sabato of WTNH; Lee Giles and Steve Sweitzer of WISH-TV; Carissa Howland of KLWY-TV; Ed Walsh of WRKO; Jeff Wald, KTLA-TV; and to all the news directors who took the time to respond to my requests for information.

I am also grateful to the following professors and journalists for their detailed suggestions or their work in reviewing and improving the manuscript: James L. Hoyt of the University of Wisconsin—Madison, Zoltan Bedy of Syracuse University, Steve Ramsey of KWCH-TV, Jim Stimson of KCRA-TV, Marv Rockford of KCNC-TV, Sarah Toppins of the University of Illinois—Urbana, William Furnell of Santa Monica College and Vincent L. Spadafora, Jr., of Onondaga Community College.

A former student, Hyman Bender, gave the original edition a thorough and intelligent going-over. Neil Offen encouraged me to think more deeply about some of the issues raised by the compression of the news into 25-second stories. I am also appreciative of the work done on this edition by Herman Makler and Nicolette Harlan at Holt.

The people with whom I worked at NBC and my colleagues in the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at New York University have strengthened my understanding of journalism and, therefore, strengthened this book. I benefited in particular from the chance to talk and work with Eliot Frankel, now at Vanderbilt University. I also learned from Gerald Lanson, now at Boston University, as we wrote a textbook together on newspaper journalism (see Suggested Readings), and much of what I learned was of direct value in this revision. Finally, thanks to my wife, Esther Davidowitz, my partner through these hectic but rewarding years.

Many news directors provided examples for use in this book.
Here is a list of the broadcast news organizations that appear in the book.

NETWORKS

ABC
AP
BBC
CBC
CBS
CNN
INN
Mutual
National Black
Network
NBC
NPR
PBS
RKO
UPI

ALABAMA

WERC
WNPT
WVOK

ARIZONA

KTSP-TV

ARKANSAS

KATV

CALIFORNIA

KABC
KCBS
KCBS-TV
KCRA-TV
KFWB
KGO
KLOS
KOME
KNAC
KNDE
KNX
KNX-FM
KRCR-TV
KRED
KSMA
KTLA
KWSO

COLORADO

KCNC-TV
KOA
KREX
KVOR
KWBZ

CONNECTICUT

WSUB
WTIC
WTNH
WXLS

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

WETA
WMAL

FLORIDA

WEKB-FM
WHOO
WINK-TV
WKIS
WLOD
WMEL
WSPB

GEORGIA

WSB
WSB-TV

ILLINOIS

WBBM
WBBM-TV
WBMX-FM
WBNQ
WDAI
WGN
WIND
WJVM
WLS
WLS-FM
WSOY
WUSN
WXTA

INDIANA

WARU
WAZY
WIFF
WIFF-TV
WISH-TV
WNAP
WNDE

IOWA

KLGA
KOEL
KWSL

KANSAS

KFLA
KLWN
KMAN
KWCH-TV

KENTUCKY

WAVE-TV
WBGH
WBLG
WFMW
WVLK

LOUISIANA

WBBZ-TV
WRNO-FM
WKWH

MAINE

WRKD

MARYLAND

WCEM

MASSACHUSETTS

WARA
WBUR
WBZ-TV
WEEI
WHDH
WIEV
WJDA
WRKO

MICHIGAN

WDEE
WGHN
WKNR
WSJM
WXYZ
WZZM-FM

MINNESOTA

KCLD
KCUE
KOWB
WCCO
WCCO-TV

MISSISSIPPI

WELO

MISSOURI

KSIS

MONTANA

KULR-TV

NEBRASKA

KODY
KYNN

NEVADA

KENO
KLUC

NEW MEXICO

KOB

NEW YORK

Shadow Traffic
WABC
WABC-TV
WAXC
WBLS
WCBS
WCBS-TV
WHEN
WINS
WMCA
WNBC-TV
WNEW
WNET
WOR
WPIX-TV
WPDM
WRFM
WTLB
WWLE

NORTH CAROLINA

WADA
WOHS
WRBX

NORTH DAKOTA

KXMB-TV

OHIO

WEBN
WFIN
WLEC

OKLAHOMA

KAKC
KHHW

OREGON

KEX
KGW
KPNW
KROW

(continued on following page)

PENNSYLVANIA

KDKA
KQV
WWWE
WCAU
WFIL
WFLN
WGCB
WIP
WJET
WKPA
WNAE

**SOUTH
CAROLINA**

WRHI

TENNESSEE

WLAC
WMAK
WTVF

TEXAS

KBWD
KENR
KEYH
KFJZ
KLOL
KNOW
KRLD
KRQX
KWTX
Texas State Network

UTAH

KWMS

VERMONT

WKVT
WSYB
WWSR

VIRGINIA

WBRG
WFFV
WFIR
WNOR
WNOR-FM
WROV
WRVA
WRVQ

WASHINGTON

KGDN
KGMJ
KREW
KWYZ

WEST VIRGINIA

WLOG

WISCONSIN

WHSM
WIBA
WSAU

WYOMING

KCWY-TV
KVOC

BROADCAST NEWS

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INTRODUCTION

It's 6:52 in the morning. The phone rings in a room at KOEL in Oelwein, Iowa. News director Dick Petrik leans over to answer it and immediately begins typing notes as he shoots out questions:

"You don't know what stores, do you?"

"Did they have guns?"

"Okay, thanks. If you hear any more, get back to me."

It's a tip from a police dispatcher in a nearby county. The sheriff is out investigating a series of robberies, but the dispatcher doesn't have any details; he doesn't even know what stores were hit.

Petrik dials a couple of restaurants and cafés in the area to see if anyone has heard anything. Someone has: a customer at a café saw the sheriff's car leaving a local gas station. Petrik calls the gas station: "I heard the sheriff was there this morning."

"Did he say anything about any robberies in town?"

"The hardware store? Did they hit anywhere else?"

"Are you sure that was the Railroad Diner?"

He calls the hardware store: "I heard they got you last night."

"How much did they take?"

"How many were there? Do you know?"

"When did the sheriff leave?"

The Railroad Diner, and another series of questions. Petrik hooks the telephone up to a tape recorder and records the diner owner's



Dick Petrik, KOEL, Oelwein, Iowa.

indignant description of the mess the robbers made. Then he begins typing the story. It will be on the air by 7:30.

• • •

At 11:39 a.m. in Richmond, Virginia, WRVA reporter Dave Miller calls in on the station's direct line from the State Capitol. The story he's been covering all morning has just fizzled. A legislative subcommittee has found "a gentlemanly Virginian" way of killing a proposal to certify teachers. Miller files a story on the rejection of the plan, but a defeated plan is small news.



Dave Miller, WRVA, Richmond, in a hotel lobby, talks to a sniper holed up in an upper-floor room. Miller got there before the police, called the sniper on a house phone, and the recorded conversations were played over the air almost immediately. Shortly thereafter, the sniper shot himself. (Amir Pishdad, Richmond Times-Dispatch)

After he gets off the phone, Miller wanders through the Capitol looking for something hotter.

At 11:46 he stumbles onto something: A representative of one of the candidates for governor says his man is going to mount a major attack on the state's power company. Miller writes out a report on the upcoming attack on his pad. By 11:59 he's back on the direct line to the newsroom. His report is recorded, a lead-in is written, and it's aired on the station's 12:05 newscast

• • •

At 3:13, Liz Shanov sits behind a typewriter at one of eight desks in WCBS's mod-

ern newsroom. She faces a picture window with a view of the East Side of Manhattan. On the walls around her are three clocks, two television sets, two maps, and one poster of King Kong climbing the Empire State Building, with the news director's head pasted over Kong's.

Shanov's fingers are driving her typewriter. On her head are earphones that allow her to audition the tapes of newsmakers and reporters that are stacked on the desk in front of her. Next to the tapes is a pile of wire copy that has been churned out of the station's many small computer printout machines—connected to the Associated Press, United Press International and Reuters. Shanov must