

News Judgment & Fairness

Fundamentals of Journalism - JR 220

Week 2 - Sept. 11

Emerson College - Fall 2012

News Judgment

- The most important journalism skill a journalist can possess.
- How you differentiate what warrants a story and what does not.
- How you prioritize stories - what leads your newscast, what runs on the front page, etc.
- How you prioritize how high information goes in your story.

News Judgment

- Impact
- Weight
- Controversy
- Emotion
- Unusual
- Prominence
- Proximity
- Currency
- Usefulness
- Educational Value

News Judgment

- Impact

Impact

- How much will this affect your audience?
- The more people a story will impact/affect, the more news value a story has.

News Judgment

- Impact
- Weight

Weight

- The bigger deal something is, the bigger story it is.
- Loss of life > injury
- \$10,000 > \$50
- There's certainly an aspect of judgment here.
 - 1,000 people injured > 1 death

News Judgment

- Impact
- Weight
- Controversy

Controversy

- Opposing sides, opinions, etc. generates interest.
- In short, people like drama.

News Judgment

- Impact
- Weight
- Controversy
- Emotion

Emotion

- Stories of survival, tragedy, triumph, underdog.
- Human interest.
- Not always something that has to do with the big picture/news of the day. Just a compelling story.

News Judgment

- Impact
- Weight
- Controversy
- Emotion
- Unusual

Unusual

- Firsts, largests and leasts.
- Things that are out of the ordinary.
 - Sometimes because they are significant, sometimes because they are strange.

News Judgment

- Impact
- Weight
- Controversy
- Emotion
- Unusual
- Prominence

Prominence

- The higher profile (more famous) the subject, the more news value the story has.

News Judgment

- Impact
- Weight
- Controversy
- Emotion
- Unusual
- Prominence
- Proximity

Proximity

- How close -- literally -- a story is to the community you cover.
- All things equal (or relatively similar), the closer a story is, the more news value it will likely have for your audience.

News Judgment

- Impact
- Weight
- Controversy
- Emotion
- Unusual
- Prominence
- Proximity
- Timeliness

Timeliness

- Stories should be timely.
- You need to report on what's happened most recently.
- You also need to be looking to advance the story.
(Build on what's out there/what's already happened.)
 - Second-day angle.
- If you're not timely, you're going to lose your audience.

News Judgment

- Impact
- Weight
- Controversy
- Emotion
- Unusual
- Prominence
- Proximity
- Timeliness
- Currency

Currency

- What is the reason that you're telling this story now?
- Generally there is a “news peg” or “news hook.” Something going on in the news that makes this story relevant.

News Judgment

- Impact
- Weight
- Controversy
- Emotion
- Unusual
- Prominence
- Proximity
- Timeliness
- Currency
- Usefulness

Usefulness

- The news is about informing - not just about events going on, but also providing your audience with information.
- Service features - stories that provide information readers/viewers can actively use, how-to-stories.
- Can accompany other stories as sidebars/information boxes.
 - “Sidebar” is an additional story or box that runs along with a main story and provides supplemental information.

News Judgment

- Impact
- Weight
- Controversy
- Emotion
- Unusual
- Prominence
- Proximity
- Timeliness
- Currency
- Usefulness
- Educational value

Educational Value

- Part of the purpose of the “Fourth Estate” is to educate/keep the masses informed.
- That is not only limited to current events. Sometimes, it is about breaking down concepts/ideas/processes, what is going on elsewhere in the world/science/education/etc.
- We’re seeing a combination of more and less of this kind of news.
 - Newspapers have less space and broadcast news has shifted. But the rise of the Web and 24-hour cable news is creating space for more news reporting.

Fairness

“News reporting is supposed to be objective, but journalists are people, with feelings, opinions and preconceived ideas.”

- Dr. Cynthia Boaz

Fairness

“Most journalists accept that true objectivity is impossible, but fairness is an obtainable goal.”

- *Writing and Reporting the News.*

Fairness

- Objective (via Merriam-Webster):
expressing or dealing with facts or
conditions as perceived without
distortion by personal feelings,
prejudices, or interpretations

Fairness

- Columns, op-eds, editorials (sometimes blogs) permit opinion. Other stories should be fair.
- Guard against the danger of bias.
 - If you cannot be unbiased in your reporting, cover a different beat. Or find a different profession.
- “You have the right to your own opinions, but not your own facts.”
 - As a reporter, your job is to report the verified facts - and all of them. Leave your opinions out of it.

Fairness

- Rooting
- Ignoring
- Agreeing
- Concluding
- Stereotyping
- Excluding

Fairness

- Rooting

Rooting

- You are allowed to have feeling, political leanings, opinions, etc.
- You are not allowed to let them impact/influence/seep into your reporting.
- This is especially relevant in - but not not limited to - political coverage, war coverage, issues coverage, sports coverage.

Fairness

- Rooting
- Ignoring

Ignoring

- You must give all sides coverage.
 - More than just the pros and cons. Give space to the “yeah, buts” and “maybes.”
 - This pertains even if one side is less outspoken than the other.
 - This pertains if one side refuses to speak to you.
 - Strive to find someone that can offer that perspective.
- When relevant, you should shoot for equal coverage.
 - Both sides of an issue, candidate from both parties, etc.

Ignoring

- Accept that some people will get more coverage than others, but aim to provide a whole picture.
- In a quest to give both sides, also be careful that you don't give a tiny minority equal weight as the vast majority.
- Usually, you will be able to find a dissenting voice, but occasionally you may not.
 - If that's the case, you can indicate you tried to find dissention, but couldn't.

Fairness

- Rooting
- Ignoring
- Agreeing

Agreeing

- Even if it's a widely accepted opinion, it is not your place to editorialize.
 - Your opinion should never make it into your reporting.
- Be mindful of weighted language.

Fairness

- Rooting
- Ignoring
- Agreeing
- Concluding

Concluding

- “The reporter’s job is to present the facts and leave it to readers to draw conclusions about those facts.”
- “[Write] so that your reader has a chance to agree or disagree with the action or comments, ... not with you.”

– Writing and Reporting the News.

Fairness

- Rooting
- Ignoring
- Agreeing
- Concluding
- Stereotyping

Stereotyping

- Stereotyping - positive or negative - is bad.
- Avoid any mention of race, religion, sexual orientation, etc. unless relevant.
- Be mindful of gender stereotyping.
 - Nurses, teachers, childcare providers often associated with women.
 - Soldiers, miners, sportswriters often associated with men.
 - Easy solution: Use plural form to change it from he/she to they when possible.

Fairness

- Rooting
- Ignoring
- Agreeing
- Concluding
- Stereotyping
- Excluding

Fairness

- Rooting
- Ignoring
- Agreeing
- Concluding
- Stereotyping

Excluding

- Not covering an entire community or segment of the population/your audience is not fair either.
- Often this is unintentional. That still doesn't make it OK.
- Most newsrooms are not diverse. As a result, you aren't necessarily getting a lot of different perspectives.
- Be mindful of what demographics your outlet isn't covering. What stories are out there that should be done? What issues should be covered?