

SIGNIFICANCE AND OBJECTIVES OF EDITING

Editors are the face of any news paper. They lead the newspaper by example. They are the motivational force for any newspaper and inspire the entire editorial staff working under them. In the current scenario, they not only decide what is to be published in the news paper but also decide the area where it is to be published. In addition, they are also responsible for managing the day-to- day organizational policies. Because of this, the editor is now referred to as managing editor.

The objectives of this Unit is to know:

- more about the editor's role;
- about the work of editorial staff;
- about characteristics of good editing;
- about the principles of good editing; and
- the tips for better editing in order to make good news.

PRINCIPLES OF EDITING

Every idea or theory is based on certain principles to run the system and process in order to sustain for a long period of time. Editing is the process prior to publishing and printing of a newspaper or magazine. News editing is based on principles that is required to provide it shape as per the firm's ethics and systems.

Principles of editing news stories are as follows:

Accuracy: Editing is a time bound and data based activity requiring accuracy. A single mistake can damage the reputation and goodwill of the news paper. The advice often given to editor/ sub-editor in the news paper industry is: "If there is any doubt, keep it out". For e.g. "we received this information from a highly placed source." Such words should not be used in print and electronic media unless the source is well identified. It takes just a fraction of a second to destroy

the whole purpose of a story. Therefore, it is better to check and cross-check to ensure that the facts and figures are perfect and authentic as it will also help the organization develop and retain its credibility.

Brevity: Brevity is a great need from a newspaper reader which is appreciated by a cross section of professionals in the newspaper industry. A good editor is one who can convey his message in a very concise manner. He/she always preserves the sanctity of time and space. Brevity and reliability are the key words in order to sustain in the competitive publishing line.

Clarity: Clarity is another key factor for success in print media. The vision pursued by a news organization translates onto paper. Clarity in content of messages helps to maintain the credibility of a newspaper. This is important as it assists the newspaper stand out compared to its peer group.

Readability: Yet another principle of print media is that, while writing, the length of a sentence should not exceed more than eighteen words, which is the accepted standard norm. It is assumed that if a sentence exceeds the word limit of 18, it becomes difficult to grasp easily. The second assumption is that if the word limit crosses 25 then it becomes difficult to read and understand. However, there are many editors who do exceed the standard word limit set for fine editing but due to their art of writing, the flow can still make it attractive for readers. Hence, it ultimately depends upon the writers and how they excel in storytelling. But it is suggested that all newly recruited editors follow the word limit norm and keep the story short and compact.

Human Interest: Human interest is a basic ingredient of all our needs in life including gaining knowledge or pursuit of any career. Editing is an art of writing to maintain justice with human interest. A person cannot become a good editor if he/she cannot understand the readers' perception. Hence, it is expected of a good editor to write stories keeping in mind the hopes, aspirations, desires and above all, the interests of the readers.

Sharp Observation: Observation plays a pivotal role in the successful life of any

human being. Sharp observation skills is a basic characteristic needed for an editor as he/she is the person who creates, recreates, and writes stories for a news paper with a sense of responsibility after sharp observation of the society. He/she should be able to mould the story keeping pace with dynamism of the situation, newsworthiness highlighting the truth of the society.

Understanding News Value and Newsworthiness

News value is like the vein for any print media organization. In other words, news value is the factor which attracts an editor to pick up a news item. News value is the reason to determine the story prominence compared to others. An editor or a journalist can easily identify the value of human interest, attraction and information while picking up news for a story.

The factor determined by journalists to publish after filtering out the negative portion of information is called newsworthiness. News value is the central to consider newsworthiness. A perfect news value has four factors to engage the attention of readers:

- a. Timely Unexpected
- b. Impact Close to home
- c. Conflict Human interest
- d. Current Prominent

a) Timely: In news value, time is an important factor to identify its worthiness.

What is 'new' in 'news' is always a matter to consider its value. The source of the information is not relevant but time factor is an important component i.e when it is coming. For e.g., "The new species of massive dinosaur discovered in Africa." Clearly, here dinosaur is not a new thing, but the discovery is. Therefore, in news value the analysis or information is not important, but the highlight "what's new" creates its worthiness.

b) Impact: The way a news story makes its impact on masses or its readers is always an important consideration for news value. For e.g. as Delhi faced severe air pollution problem, the state government declared a two day closure for schools after Diwali festival. This is because it feared the situation was going to worsen and create an impact on a majority of the people. Here two things can be considered: first, the proximity of public and reach by different news media and second, the impact leading to action to save human lives that is creating newsworthiness.

c) Conflict: Conflict is an integral part of news as without conflict not a single story can be written. When an editor or journalist writes any story, they express the facts as they receive from different sources. For e.g. in recent times, the Congress party has raised questions about the defence Rafale deal of the NDA government while the ruling Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP)'s argument is that the Hon'ble Supreme Court has cleared all the allegations regarding it. So, a deal has created a conflict between two political parties. And such situations often arise whenever a reporter covers a story for a news paper.

d) Current: In the newspaper industry, the word 'current' stands for momentum. This applies to 'seasonal' news as well as trending news items. For e.g., when the Indian government presents the budget in the Parliament, it attracts the attention of a majority of the citizens and they are curious about different products and their prices as it impacts their day- to- day life.

Mari Holmboe Ruge has identified three levels for news values:

1. Impact
2. Audience Identification
3. Pragmatics of Media Coverage

The famous television reporter John Sergeant has stated about news values "journalist rely on instinct rather than logic" while the legendary news paper editor Harold Evans has said "human sieves of the torrent of news."

Editorial Policy, Judgement and Style-Sheet

Editorial Policy: Editorial policy is the set of guidelines by which a news paper organization functions. It includes the mission and vision of the news paper. It reflects its outlook towards the community and citizens of particular country. All editorial decisions are taken under its purview.

In editorial room, the editor –in- chief is responsible for taking all decisions and implementing them with the support of other members of the editorial board based on correct information and sufficient research. Usually, the editorial board meets once in a week to take decisions about the content and subject for publication.

The editorial policy of a news paper helps create value for it and helps to shape its image. Hence, it is often said that an editorial is the mirror of a news paper.

Judgement: One of the biggest challenges for any news paper editor is taking the right decision at the right time. This is referred to as judgement. He/she editor requires leadership qualities to grasp the mood of the readers and to understand their complex nature without any bias. This is judgement. Editors may be busy with publishing news paper and magazines in their routine day-to-day work, and occasionally, they may not be able to explain a situation thereby resulting in editorial mistakes. On such occasions where an editor is required to apologize for such a editorial blunder, it is due to the failure of editorial policy. While publishing an article in any news paper, it is always better to take a story of public interest. This is because a complex subject can create problems. There is an old saying that goes as follows: “Devil is in the details” to avoid taking any kind of wrong decision.

Style-Sheet: In print media, organization style sheet has an important role to play for the editors, authors and proof readers etc. to maintain uniformity and consistency within a single manuscript across the news paper. This is called as

style sheet. Traditionally, a copy editor for any news organization creates a stylesheet as he/ she edits and passes the same style-sheet onto other professionals working on it to check.

A style sheet is usually a word document file defining the layout, design and presentation. The style sheet specifies the parameter, page size, font and its margin. It is very important for any news paper to maintain a uniform and a consistent style for the whole document.

Editorial Values: Truth, Objectivity, Fairness, Balance and Independence

An editor needs to have certain ethical principles to pursue his/her profession. These are referred to as ‘editorial values’. Every editor has to observe a set ‘code of conduct’ while writing for a news paper. Most print media organizations have their own guidelines to maintain and implement editorial values for their editorial team.

However, there are certain general parameters that need to be kept in consideration

while writing for news papers such as the following:

1. **Truth:** Truth is a factor at the heart of any newspaper. As an editorial value, truth ranks high. It is indicative of truth in sentences while conveying information and based on its subject, nature and trustworthiness. If any newspaper strives with honesty and is devoid any kind of speculation, then the value of its news is very high.
2. **Objectivity:** As an editorial value, objectivity means that the issue or event is presented in an unbiased and neutral manner by the newspaper. Objectivity can be incorporated by being fair, factual, balanced and impartial.
3. **Fairness:** Credibility of any prominent newspaper is based on fairness, honesty and straight forward approach with their readers indicating that it respects their values. Fairness is also the value which keeps the newspaper

worth in high esteem among competitors.

4. Balance: Maintaining balance while writing for newspaper is another editorial value set. Neutrality and impartiality are core values for print media writing as it is important to be open-minded and balanced while examining the facts.

5. Independence: Yet another important aspect relates to reflecting independence by remaining unaffected under various kinds of external influences by vested interest. By continuing with its independence the newspaper can maintain its editorial integrity and credibility for longer period of time. Independency of a newspaper from outside influences whether it is personal, political or commercial leads to retention of readers who tend to remain loyal.

Editorial Challenges: Competition, Bias, Slant, Different Pressures

In the era of paid news journalism, majority of newspapers deeply compromise on their independence in order to sustain themselves in a highly competitive market as they face huge challenges from their peer groups. They have to tread carefully. If perceived as mouthpiece of government they start losing credibility among readers. Merely covering citizen concerns, issues of social responsibility does not fetch revenue. So, there is a struggle to retain values within the newspaper

industry these days often leading to authenticity being traded off. Some reasons are as follows:

Competition: Today print media is facing overwhelming challenge from the electronic the media as well as the digital media. Even small news papers are facing operational survival challenge to run due to contemporary digital media. In

fact, the social media is posing a huge threat to the print media resulting in many newspapers being on the verge of closing down. In the current scenario, running a newspaper is not only a difficult task but generating revenue is also a big

challenge for survival.

Another consideration in this respect is the kind of engagements between readers and viewers. Majority of the consumers of print media and electronic media are facing difficulty to get time to read newspaper or watch television. In this situation social media plays a very pivotal role in filling up the gap between the two.

Despite all this, the beauty of print media is the information it imparts. They publish matter which is important, pertinent and also covers the topic extensively and helps the reader to know the facts deeply. Hence, print media is still surviving even in times of competition.

Bias: The former chairman of Press Council of India Markanday Katju once stated that today's media is situational. The term "media bias" implies to a situation when majority of newspapers spread controversies pervasively to sell their stories. The degree of media bias today has spread even more. It is now easily possible to understand which newspaper is promoting which party ideology.

In such a scenario, media credibility and mission carried out by newspapers is getting distorted. The piousness of newspapers and values they were carrying since long are now questionable. Even during the emergency, some of the Indian media did not favor the government. An often quoted example of that is of veteran journalist and owner of Indian Express Ramnath Goenka. Ironically, today media is selling the stories either which is pro government or able to create sensation in the society. Such a mentality and situation is dangerous for our democratic setup.

Slant: Slant is a also a kind of bias or non objective writing for the newspaper.

When an editor does not maintain the objectivity of story written by him and gives his/her personal touch and unconventional support to an article it called slant.

Different Pressures: A newspaper editor is a professional who works within a set of guidelines provided by the Press Council of India. He/she tries their best to preserve the ethical values of the new paper. But at times, they may come

under different kind of pressures from within or outside the organization. As a journalist's job is not permanent, his position tends to be unstable. He/she is always working under the mercy of the employer which can be a government agency or a private organization. Therefore, while he/she may want to follow the code of ethics, yet if he/she does not obey the owner's orders, he/she is likely to be fired. This may not give them courage to write articles as per their wish or try to uphold ethical values.

Apart from that, politicians often pressurise the public service editors and journalists to report matters according to their desire. If the report is not favorable to the government in power they may enforce public service discipline against them to harass them. It is not only government owned organization based editors and reporters who feel this kind of pressure but even the private media organization employees also feel the same. This is also because their salaries and perks are dependent upon commercial advertising and sales. Advertising companies may also bring pressure on editors and owners of newspaper organizations. A big advertiser may threaten to stop advertising anytime unless they publish news reports in their favour.