UNIT 2 Qualities of a News Reporter

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Reporters write stories, report events and happenings in and around the society. They provide the core of news stories that are published daily in our commercial newspapers or broadcast in the electronic media. As there is no substitute for good reporting, so also there is no substitute for good reporters. A good reporter is a great asset for his/her media organisation. He/she is the ear and the eye of his/her medium.

It is what he/she reports that the audience will know about. The reporter touches lives with his report.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end this unit, you should be able to:

• identify who a reporter is and what differentiates him/her from other media practitioner
• identify qualities a good reporters
• differentiate between a good reporter and a bad one.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Qualities of the News Reporter

Some of the major qualities that make a good reporter are discussed below.

S/he must have a mastery of the written or spoken language of the medium of expression: This will enable him/her to interact easily with news sources, eyewitnesses or even the victims of events.
S/he must have a nose for news: This means the reporter or journalist must be curious about getting news from newsy or stale situations. A good reporter must have a natural instinct for news and should be able to identify news from seemingly events that may not be considered newsworthy by everyone else.

S/he must be current and keep abreast of events and happenings: In the media industry, yesterday’s news is stale and no more needed. To remain relevant in the industry, therefore, the reporter must keep abreast of happenings in and around him/her.

A good reporter must be fair, accurate and objective in his news writing and reporting job. Fairness, accuracy and objectivity are news virtues, which the profession thrives on. Any attempt to compromise any of these values makes a mess of the reputation and credibility of the industry. These qualities of a reporter must be jealously guarded.

A good reporter must be creative: Creativity makes the reporter see another unique story from an already published report. Without creativity, the reporter will remain dry, uninspiring and boring to his readers and even his sources.

S/he must also have the ability to dress well: A common idiom says how you dress is how you are addressed and I add that it also betrays your address. A good reporter must know how to dress for the occasion otherwise he/she will be lost in the crowd or misrepresented. Dressing well is not necessarily dressing expensively. It only means having the right kind of dress for each occasion or situation.

A good reporter must have perseverance: Perseverance is having the staying power and refusing to give up even when the situation calls for giving up. A good reporter must have the ability to stay longer and under stress or pressure.

A good reporter must be a “good mixer”: There is no room for the reserved kind of reporter who cannot easily get into a discussion with a potential news source. A good reporter should be able to blend easily with all kinds of persons especially when such persons are primary to getting the news he/she is pursuing at that moment. The good reporter should be able to make contacts, grow and maintain them.

S/he must have a high level of comportment: The good reporter must have self-control and high level of comportment no matter the situation or circumstances. He/she is not expected to be carried away easily by any surrounded situation.
A good reporter must have the ability to embark on **creative risk** and **courage** especially in reporting coups, wars, conflicts, crime, disaster etc.

S/he must have the ability to ferret out news through the process of monitoring people and events.

**S/he must also possess good observatory skills and have an eye for details:** Poorly trained reporters look without seeing. The good reporter is able to see leads and news worthy situations by merely observing people and situations. Whenever the good reporter looks, he/she sees. He/she is also able to taken in a lot of details by mere observation.

**S/he must be a good listener and must have an unusual patience:** The poorly trained reporters are only interested in hearing their voices in an interview situation. However, a good reporter is only interested in hearing the news source talk. Therefore, listening becomes a vital quality a reporter must possess in order to succeed.

**S/he should also possess enough idealism** to inspire indignant prose but not too much as to obstruct detached professionalism (Ragged Right cited in Agbese, 2008).

A **good and modern reporter must be multi-skilled:** S/he should be equipped with an array of skills to meet the demands of diverse media users (Mencher, 2010).

A **good and modern reporter must also have the unique quality called enterprise:** He/she should be able to work through tougher assignments or situation by instantaneously assessing the situation and taking decisions and steps that will give him/her what the media organisation wants.

A good reporter must also have the strength of character to lead a disrupted personal life without going absolutely haywire (Ragged Right cited in Agbese, 2008).

### 4.0 CONCLUSION

Good reporters are great assets to their media organisations. Not everyone who went to a journalism school usually turns out to become a good reporter. This is the primary reason they are always sought after anywhere they could be found. According to Sid Bedingfield, President, Fault Line Productions (cited in Mencher, 2010), “Reporting is the essential ingredient in good journalism. Everything else is
The reporter is the engine that drives the newspaper, the contributor who makes the newscast worthwhile.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit specifically dealt with the qualities a good reporter who wants to work in a reputable media organisation must have. Fifteen of such qualities were discussed in this unit. Further readings may bring up some more.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. As an aspiring reporter identify and discuss five solid qualities you think you must possess to be able to assume a reportorial role in a Newspaper organisation.
2. The Nigerian media industry is a unique media terrain. Discuss 10 relevant and time-tested qualities that will help you survive as an upcoming reporter.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING


UNIT 3 WHAT MOTIVATES A NEWS REPORTER?

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Reporters populate most media organisations but not all of them win the Pulitzer Prize. Those who do are usually motivated by something to do the extra, which results in awards and peer-recognition. This unit therefore focuses on the seven motivating factors identified by Byron Calame, the Public Editor of New York Times (cited in Mencher, 2010).

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

• identify the motivating factor for news reporter.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 What Motivates a News Reporter?

Byron Calame cited in Mencher (2010) identified seven motivating factors while working and competing with more than a 100 reporters in his successful career as a reporter and editor.

Being first with new facts or fresh insights

Every reporter really desires to be the first to get the news out. The so-called old fashioned scoops are still fashionable even in today’s media industry. Being the first gives them a sense of fulfillment and originality.
Pursuing stories that can have impact

Successful reporters are usually motivated by the desire that their outputs changed the course of history. Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein of the famed Watergate Scandal are examples of reporters in this class.

Wining prizes

This is a little controversial because most journalists argue that their stories were not motivated by prize and awards. But a careful look at the work of journalists suggests this is one of the motivating factors.

Impressing sources

According to Byron Calame cited in Mencher (2010), most of the journalists remain highly motivated to impress their sources with the accuracy, fairness and depth of their work.

Finding out what’s really happening

According to Byron Calame cited in Mencher (2010), “A fundamental motivation of reporters is the curiosity that drives them to get to the bottom of a confusing or complicated situation and to find patterns that help explain it to readers. Making sense out of chaos-especially when you can do it first-is something many reporters find rewarding.”

Telling stories in a compelling way

Most reporters who aim to the top are usually moved to tell their stories in a way that their listeners or audiences are compelled to see to the end of the story.

Getting on the front page

Any reporter who spends five months in a media organisation, say newspaper, and does not get on the front page of the paper, may be regarded as not doing well. Front page stories are big stories in the judgment of editors. So, reporters strive to have a sense of fulfillment that their story was considered big and good to make a front page. The feeling is always rewarding and unexplainable.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

In your own words, discuss five factors that drive reporters to success.
4.0 CONCLUSION

In life, there must be something that drives you to fulfillment. The same is applicable to careers especially in the media industry. Reporters are not amongst the richest in the society and the profession is not very financially rewarding especially in Nigeria. There must be something then that drives reporters in this part of the world to be courageous and take creative risks. These factors are what we attempted to discuss in this unit.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we considered the various factors motivating reporters and journalists alike to career growth and fulfillment. These factors were from the work of Byron Calame, the Public Editor or Ombudsman of The New York Times. Seven of such motivating factors were identified and discussed in this unit.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. In your own assessment, suggest two other factors that you think motivate reporters that were not discussed in this unit.
2. Defend the argument that winning prizes does not motivate reporters.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING


UNIT 4   GENERAL RULES FOR NEWS WRITING

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1.0   INTRODUCTION

The success of any profession depends on the quality of rules and regulations guiding such a profession and concerted efforts to ensure such regulations are not tampered with. In this unit, we shall be considering the general and basic rules that guide news writing and reporting.

2.0   OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

• identify not less than 20 rules that guide news writing and reporting.

3.0   MAIN CONTENT

3.1   General Rules for News Writing and Reporting

• Do not pass a verdict or make a judgment: It is not your duty as a reporter or writer to pass a verdict or make judgment. Just gather the facts of the story, present them to your audience and let them decide on whose side they will want to go.

• Do not editorialise: Leave editorialising to the editorial writers. News reports must be as straightforward and objective as possible.

• Avoid the use of unfamiliar jargon: Do not assume that your audience understands the meanings of the unfamiliar jargons you are using. Always use familiar words.

• Keep yourself and other reporters out of the story: Keep yourself and other colleagues out of the story unless you and them are an essential part of the news.
• Avoid the use of “told me,” “told this writer” or “told our reporter: The phrase “in an interview will serve your purpose.

• There must be perfect accuracy in writing and reporting: When in doubt, leave it out.

• There must be no willful distortion of facts in either news or headlines: Never tamper with the facts of a story no matter the benefits that may accrue to you as a result. This is an unforgivable offence in journalism. Any reporter who tampers or fabricates the so-called facts of a story is “finished” in the industry. You become leprous, untouchable and unemployable.

• Guard against publication of libelous statement: The good reporter is the one who lives to write another report and see the fame of the previous reports come to him. Avoid writing your way into jail. Libelous statements should be avoided because of its capacity to keep you in jail and close down your media organisation because of insolvency resulting from the inability to pay court fines.

• Always use simple words: News writing and reporting are not the platforms to impress anybody with long sounding and big words. Always use the nearest simple word. A good news report is the one the average reader reads and understands.

• All news copies must be typewritten and double-spaced: The era of hand-written copies is gone. Therefore, a reporter must know how to type his story using the computer. It must also be typed in double space so that sub-editors and editors will be able to edit the copy.

• The first page must carry the reporter’s surname, a slug line and date in the top left hand corner: Slug lines must be short—preferably one word.

• Start your story halfway down the first page: You must give enough space for your superior editorial staff to work on your copy.

• Leave at least one-inch margin at left, right, top and bottom of each page: Do not overcrowd the pages. Leave appropriate margins as required.

• Each page must be numbered or lettered: The correct letter or numeral is in the form of “B copy next” or “page 2 next.” This type of numbering must appear at the bottom right hand corner of each page except the last.

• The end of a story must be marked by a centred “30” or “***” or “#.”

• Always make your lead interesting: Guard against misleading leads. Leads sell a story. Therefore, to get and keep the attention of your audience, the lead must be interesting.
Use the inverted pyramid format when writing your news story: This is the generally accepted format for writing news reports because it presents the most important elements of a story in the first few paragraphs. The format also makes it easy to cut stories from the bottom without losing any substance of the story.

You must quote accurately: Use quotes only where necessary to brighten up your story. Please, do not overdo this in your copy.

Use “said” if you want to write in the present tense and “said that” if it is reported speech: This style helps the copy retain currency and life.

Always read your copy carefully and connect all typographical spelling and grammatical mistakes before turning it in: This is a primary rule even in ordinary or everyday writing. No amount of haste could justify a badly written copy.

Your copy must be submitted in duplicate and both copies must be properly edited.

Never underline words or phrases or titles of books in your copy.

A seasoned reporter and publisher, do not exaggerate, do not over-dramatise, beware of adjectives, use the active voice and be natural and conversational when you write.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Identify at least 10 rules guiding writing a good copy of news and report.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The media industry is an organised industry and so there must rules and regulations guiding how copies are written and filled for publication. Some of these rules may differ from country to country but the underlying fact is that they make for good writing. Any report that lacks these rules or some of them will definitely turn out rejected by a reputable editor or media organisation.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit focused on the rules that make for a good copy. It is believed that you are now familiar with these rules after going through this unit.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Identify 10 rules of news writing and argue that they should be retained even beyond this century.
7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING


MODULE 2  THE BASICS

Unit 1  Elements of Good Writing/What Makes for Poor Writing?
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UNIT 1  ELEMENTS OF GOOD WRITING/WHAT MAKES FOR POOR WRITING?

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1.0  INTRODUCTION

A good reporter must first and foremost be a good writer. This is because his writing skills are needed in his news writing and reporting job as a journalist. A poor writer can never make a good news writer or reporter. Good news writing begins first from understanding the elements of good writing and applying them in our writing assignments. This is the focus of this unit. Good writing has six characteristics, which are called elements of good writing.

2.0  OBJECTIVES

At the end this unit, you should be able to:

• identify the rules or elements of good writing and demonstrate a reasonable skill in the use of such element
• identify and discuss the elements that could constitute poor writing.
3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Elements of Good Writing

3.1.1 Precision

A good writer must always obey the rule of precision. Words should be used and they should mean exactly what you intend them to mean. You should never use for example “uninterested” when you mean “disinterested”, nor should you use “farther” for “further”. For instance, if you report that fire has destroyed a house, you mean it must be rebuilt, not repaired. If you say fire fighters donned oxygen masks to enter a burning building, you are impugning either their intelligence or yours. Oxygen is dangerous around fire; fire fighters use their tanks.

Words are the tools of your trade and the writer can use only certain words in certain situations. In addition, the writer can choose from many words. That freedom can be both exhilarating and dangerous.

3.1.2 Clarity

All news reports and stories must be clearly written. Every reporter should be aware of the following when attempting to write clear stories.

- Use simple sentences and familiar words.
- Use correct grammar and punctuation.
- Structure the story to have a beginning (lead), middle (body) and end (conclusion).
- Make use of the active voice.
- Avoid adjectives and exaggeration.

3.1.3 Pace

Good writing must have a pace appropriate to the content. Sentences and words give a story mood. Short sentences convey action, tension and movement. A series of long sentences conveys a more relaxed mood; long sentences slow down the reader. Between these two extremes are sentences of varying lengths, and good writers use them all. Not all sentences should be long or short. Nor should they all be of medium length. An abrupt change in sentence length draws attention to the sentence. Try it sometimes.
3.1.4 Transitions

Good writing uses transitional devices that lead the reader from one thought to the next. A transition is a bridge, which assures the reader that the writer has a sense of direction. A transition can be a word, a phrase, a sentence or a paragraph. Common transitions are “and,” “but” and “however.”

3.1.5 Sensory Appeal

Good writing must appeal to the reader’s senses. Good writing appeals to one or more of our five senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch.

3.1.6 Analogies

Good writing uses analogies. Analogies permit writers to show similarities and contrasts. Similes and metaphors are often used to achieve this purpose. Where the simile compares one thing to another, a metaphor says one thing is another. With similes and metaphors, writers draw word pictures.

What Makes For Poor Writing?

If the story shows dull writing: Dull writing never makes good copy. To avoid this always use active voice and make your write up conversational and lively.

If the story is not interesting: Interest is a constant variable in selecting a story as good. Any uninteresting story will sure pass off as a clear evidence of poor writing.

If the story is too vague, abstract or unclear: Vague and abstract stories will always be rejected on the platform of poor writing. To make your stories interesting, it must be clear and unambiguous.

If there are too many stories already on the subject: Your story could be rejected as poor if you are writing on what every other person has written on. This is even worsened by the fact that you did not bring in any new or fresh facts to your writing. Therefore, avoid writing on what every other person has written on if you do not want your report to be considered poor.

If the story is a piece of propaganda or resembles one: Any attempt to pass off a piece of propaganda for a news report or story will definitely be rejected as poor writing.
If the story is trivial: Trivial and unimportant stories are likely to be rejected as poor writing or evidence of it. Write on important issues that will interest majority of your audience.

If the story is not in good taste: Any writing that offends public morality or shows evidence of bad taste in the choice of words and phrases will be rejected as poor writing.

If the story runs against the policy of the newspaper or its style guide: Every media organisation has a style guide - a body of rules that guides how a particular media establishment intends to present its reports and stories. Any violation of the style guide will send your paper to the editor’s wastebasket.

If the story has too many figures and statistics: People naturally hate stories with too many figures and statistics. If your story is, for instance, about a budget proposal, find a creative way of presenting.

If the story is free publicity stunt: A story that is free publicity stunt usually tries to trick readers with an advertising matter in a form of a news story. Readers and editors normally abandon such stories.

**SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

1. Discuss five elements that must be available before you could consider writing as good.
2. Why will an editor or writer regard a story as poor writing?

**4.0 CONCLUSION**

Knowing how to write generally is the first practical step to knowing how to write for media organisations. The elements of good writing therefore serve as fundamental pillars upon which good writing rests.

**5.0 SUMMARY**

This unit focused on the elements of good writing. Six of such elements were discussed. Also discussed in this unit are the elements that could make one’s writing turn out poor. About 10 of such were also discussed in this unit.

**6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. Defend the argument that the presence of the elements of good writing will definitely return a copy as good.
2. Discuss the major reasons why a copy may turn out as poor writing.