

**A PRACTICAL TOOL-KIT FOR NEWS GATHERING: FROM A REPORTER'S PERSPECTIVE.**

**Associate Prof S. A. SHAIBU**  
*Dept. of Mass Communication*  
*Bingham University Karu.*

&

**IBRAHIM JOHN TAL**  
*Independent Reporter, Abuja*

**Abstract:** *The journey of production of news either for radio or for television starts from source, concept, production via the medium of choice to the destination or consumption stage. This paper is an exposition of those practical stages as a student-companion-guide to effective content delivery using Lasswell's as well as Shannon & Weaver's theory or model of communication.*

**Key Words:** *Toolkit, New gathering Reporter's Perspective.*

**Objective of Study** – *To practically showcase the processes of News gathering from concept to actualization from a Reporter's Perspective.*

**Methodology** – *The methodology here is gleaned from the practical gathering of workshop of Reporters at Bingham University for the training of News Reporters for Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC) community Radio in Abuja Nigeria.*

**Introduction:**

Scholars of News gathering such as Gruhl (1999), Engelmores and Morgan (1988), Agbese (2008), Hule & Anderson (2003), Mencher (2010), Obe (2005) and a host of others are unanimous in the definition of news via different sentences. To define news is one thing to get it is another. To gather news, the reporter must know where and when to look for it, what and whom to see, why and how to verify the facts he assembled and when and how to use the information he has gotten to write a story. News gathering is the major occupation of both cub and experienced reporters.

**NEWS GATHERING AND SOURCES:**

Every story begins as a stream does "from a source". You cannot find a great story today that does not have a source. This is a reminder of a paradigm of a Professor that "every PhD has a story!" Such stories also have a beginning. This is the major reason most persons who are unfamiliar with the news gathering process often wonder how reporters gather and assemble their information, how do they get access to information and information sources, and how do they sustain the daily publication of news in their media organisations. This shall be our concern in this section.

There are three broad categories of sources of news stories thus:

1. Predictable Sources
2. Unpredictable Sources
3. Anticipated Sources

1. Predictable;

These are sources that regularly service the news industry either because of their function that make their activities of public interest or by their nature that help generate events that attract a large number of people.

Predictable sources include diary of news, published reports in form of newspapers, magazines, journals, and handouts, broadcast on Radio/TV and prepared speeches. It also includes active or

dramatic newsbreaks, which include news from the police, hospitals, fire service, hotels, schools, religious organisations, labour and political associations, With predictable sources, you are sure to get something from there all the time.

2. Unpredictable Sources;

This means a nose for news that borders on the ability, training, exposure and experience of the reporter to determine what news is and report it accordingly. Unpredictable sources are the likely sources where breaking news or tips that could lead to scoop could come from,

3. Anticipated Sources;

This is similar to predictable sources except for the fact that anticipated sources are restricted to planned events that a reporter knows will definitely happen. Such events include a national day celebration, budget speech and special anniversaries, worker's day, and so on.

### ***HOW TO FIND THE STORY IDEA?***

'How to find the story idea?' has always pricked the mind of reporters especially during lull period. However, the imaginative reporter will discover in this section that the story idea could be obtained from a lot of places.

### ***Other Publications***

News stories are sometimes recycled across the country by different media organisations in different ways. Editing is a key function of a news organization. An unedited copy is like rough-edged diamond. The editing team, also called the desk persons, works under tremendous pressure and severe time constraint, yet they ensure that copy should go clean and well edited. News editing is making a copy worthy for print and readable, correcting factual and syntactical errors, giving the required shape and size by using the right kind of expressions and styles. A copy is edited to highlight the "news sense" in a story, and to bring uniformity of language and style in an issue of a newspaper.

### ***What is News editing?***

Received news items, called copy, are processed in the news room, Unwanted news items will be weeded out and the newsworthy stories get finally selected. News items after selection will be taken on different pages in a newspaper.

Accordingly, desk persons (sub editors/chief sub-editors) will take the copies or they will be given by a news editor. There will be some copies which require rewriting.

There will also be some well-written articles which are written by experienced reporters. The copies will be checked for grammar, syntax, facts, figures and sense.

### ***Needs of Editing***

The desk (news room) in a newspaper or in a news agency receives a large number of news items from different sources. Most of the raw news copies when received lack the basic criteria of good writing. There will be different types of mistakes in the copies. It may not be properly structured. The news point will be buried. There will be spelling errors in names of places or people. There will be syntax errors.

Reporters write in a hurry, especially in the evenings, when the news development gathers momentum. The copy written by them under pressure carry errors of all types. Also, the duty of a desk person is to cut the copies as per the space and requirements of the newspapers. The desk person has to ensure that a proper headline is given. Considering these factors, editing of the news copy becomes essential magazines, books, pamphlets and the house journals and newsletters of businesses and organisations.

### ***What is News?***

News is one of the most difficult issues to define in mass communication. There are almost as many definitions of news as there are journalists. Even laymen in the streets can readily come up with acceptable definitions of news. In general terms, news is very relative and depends on what one thinks news is. At any given moment millions of events happen simultaneously throughout the world, "Obasanjo sacks Education Minister", "FRA Williams dies," "Super Eagles thrashes Gabon" "Obama wins Reelection", "Clinton in Sex

Scandal”, and so on are potentially news. However, they do not become news until some reporters give an account of them. In other words, news is the account of an event, not the event itself.

*We can now consider some definitions given by scholars and media professionals thus:*

William S. Maulsby defined news thus: News is an accurate, unbiased account of the significant facts of a timely happening that is of interest to the readers of the newspaper that prints the account.

Elements of News Values While definitions of news vary, the main determinant of what can be considered as news is "INTEREST". To be news, an account of an event must be of interest to the readers, listeners or viewers. Interest in a story is determined by the news values. The elements that determine news values may be subdivided into two groups.

a. Determinants

b. Components

**Determinants:** A determinant is a factor that sets the character of something. In this case, news. The determinants of news are as follow.

- a. Timeliness
- b. Proximity/geographic location
- c. Prominence/personality involved
- d. Consequence/impact/significance
- e. Human interest
- f. Novelty
- g. Conflict
- h. Necessity

- Timeliness

Today's news may be stale tomorrow. Therefore, to attain that reader, viewer or listener interest or appeal, facts must be fresh. However, some issues of great impact are timeliness. Therefore, the best time to tell an important story is as soon as it happens or as soon as possible.

- Proximity/Geographic Location

Distance between the news item's place of origin and its place of publication determines its degree of reader-appeal, and the limits of reader – interest.

Usually, the nearer an individual is to the location of a news event, the more relevant it becomes for him/her. This is referred to as geographic proximity. There are two types of proximity;

- Geographical Proximity This has been described above,
- Proximity of Interest- An account of students' unrest in Kano will definitely interest students in Owerri than a businessman in Kano. This is referred to as proximity of interest.

- Prominence/Personality Involved; All men may be created equal, but some are more equal and more newsworthy than others. In fact, “names make news” goes a cliché.

However, names do not always make news. Still, happenings that involve well known people or institutions are likely to be interesting even if not very important.

- Consequence/Impact/Significance/Magnitude; How many people an event or idea affects and how seriously it affects them determine its importance as news, as well as the extent to which the information may be useful. Again, an item or event may give rise to thought not because of itself but because of its probable consequences - its significance.

- Human Interest- Interest in human beings and events because they concern men and women in situations that might confront anyone else, is called human interest. In a general way, human-interest stories might be defined as those stories that arouse an emotion in the reader/listener/ viewer and evoke emotional response.

- Novelty; This sounds like human interest but shows some differences. The unusual makes news. The bizarre makes news too. Remember the-man-bite-dog principle.

### **The Components of News**

A component is a constituent part of something. They tend to have more news values or higher news values than stories that lack them. The more of news components you find in a story, the higher the news worthiness

of such a story. Many items could easily fall into the components of news. However, we shall discuss eight that always sell a story anytime it is a content of such story.

### **QUALITIES OF A NEWS REPORTER**

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.

### **OBJECTIVES**

*Some of the major qualities that makes a good reporter as gleaned from Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) production manual, Shaibu's UNESCO mass literacy production manual, FRCN training school production manual etc. 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 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 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 take 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 n Agbese, 2008)

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 dressing...

The reporter is the engine that drives the newspaper, the contributor who makes the newscast worthwhile.

### **WHAT MOTIVATES A NEWS REPORTER?**

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

1. 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.

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

3. 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.

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

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. When news is processed, the next challenge is editing. This can be audio or visual editing, for radio and television broadcasting respectfully.

### **WHAT IS SOUND EDITING?**

Sound editing is described as an art of producing great quality sounds for mixing, implementation and processing. In simpler words, sound editing is a laborious task of making noisy and lousy recordings sound good. It is one of the processes that make the project whole.

Overlooking the editing side will always result in subpar production.

Imagine you are writing a book and you plan your paragraphs. You write them down, and you work on the wording and single sentences. Only then you put it into the final product. It may not be the perfect example but thinking of editing as part of the process will make it easier to understand why you should pay more attention to it. Sound editing is not just cleaning up bad recordings. Some creative processes are easy to do during editing before the audio moves onto the next stage.

### **TOOLS**

When it comes to choosing right tools, it is down to choosing the right software. Today, we do most of the work on a computer. And even though there are some interesting ideas such as editing touch pads like Slate Raven, let us focus on the most common editing choices.

Picking the right software is important. But depending on a project the choice can be rather limited, working on big budget production there may not be an option at all, you work with what you got. Working as a freelancer gives you more options but again it is much easier to work in the same program as the client. Exporting finalised session with the same settings will be a straightforward job.

There are a few things that are important in your selection.

Stability, speed and control.

Stability is rather self-explanatory. Less system crashes you get much less chamomile tea you need to drink.

The knowledge that you can rely on your system goes a long way, especially during long nights.

Speed is important as in how fast you can edit with given tools and how responsive the program is. System lag is the curse of every editor. There are a lot of variables that go into the equation, but some workstations are quicker to react than others.

Control over the interface is last on the list. Some programs try to be helpful and offer an array of smart, all in one function. These can be helpful but when it comes to fast-paced editing, a clear list of keyboard shortcuts and easy customization are on the top of the pyramid. Today, Avid Pro Tools is an industry standard. It has its faults, but it checks all the boxes that you need to do a good editing job. It does not mean that other programs are worse or better. Everyone works in a different way, so it is best to try out a few different options before the final decision.

### **GROUND WORK**

When it comes to editing, planning is crucial.

What sort of recording will you work on?

How much time do you have?

Where are you sending files? Or maybe you are the one that is going to mix it as well?

These are the most basic questions you need to ask yourself before commencing the work. Let's assume the project is a short student movie that will be later mixed by somebody else. First, communication between all the people involved is vital.

Apart from the obvious here are some other tips too. Isolating your sounds into groups like dialogue, effects and music is a basic tactic. Simple things like color-coding, naming conventions and general order of your sounds will make the whole process flowing. Make a list of what you need and what you are working on. It is easy to get lost when there are thousands of sounds to get through.

### **TECHNIQUES**

When it comes to editing techniques the fundamentals are cutting up cleaning and moving sounds around. Cleaning from unwanted noise such as lip smacks, clicks or cloth movement can be tiresome. And not every recording will be easy to fix.

There are special programs such as Izotope Rx that will help you to automate some of these tasks. Cutting up and moving sounds around is much simpler as it only requires the most basic functions of your software. Some projects will need an extra treatment called offline processing. Reversing audio slowing down or speeding up the sounds are only a few from many options in which you can process your sounds. It is important to have a backup of the original sound. Offline processing is a destructive process copy your original audio on a track below and mute it; you never know when it may come in handy.

### **COMPLETION**

So, your editing is complete. The guidelines on how you should save and deliver the completed work are on your desk. There are different options now you can pass the files on to the next stage. You can save your session so it will serve as the fundament for mixing, or you can export the audio as single files. No matter which way you and your team will choose, remember that good and transparent layout of the sounds will save you a lot of hassle and time. Being a sound editor may not be a glamorous position but it is an important part of the post production process. Often it will be just an element of your work as you may also act as a sound engineer and a mixer. Especially when it comes to low budget projects. On big productions, an editor must work to strict guidelines such as file formats, naming conventions and color-coding Make yourself familiar with it and make a good layout planning part of your working habit.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Content delivery has always been the contending issue in radio & television as well as new social media deliverables. This practical explanatory journey is an eye opener to producers, News and Current Affairs operatives/reporters that want to take content delivery serious in the production process.

Once the nitty gritty of the processes are known and imbibed corridor productions and peripheral productions will be relegated to the background and quality productions of news and news related programmes will become the norm. All these are the testaments of different scholarly input by the different professionals in this work.

### **CONCLUSION:**

The conclusion of the practical News Reporting gathering is that the practical inculcation of processes of News gathering/reporting stick lasting memories in the memory bank of Reporters.

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