

Lesson 3: What Is News?

What is published in print, online, and broadcast is selected by editors and producers, based on news values — the qualities that make an issue or event worth turning into a newsworthy story. The more news values an issue or event includes, the greater the likelihood it will be turned into a story for broadcast or publication.

The following factors are often used to determine an issue's newsworthiness:

- **Current:** The issue or event is recent.
- **Important:** The issue or event is likely to affect its audience.
- **Unique:** The issue or event is unusual.
- **Close:** The issue or event takes place geographically close to its intended audience.
- **Competing views:** There are opposing perspectives at play.
- **Famous:** The issue or event involves prominent or famous people.

The editors and producers who select the stories that make it to audiences are often referred to as gatekeepers. Through existing editorial structures and processes, they, along with reporters, decide what gets covered, how those stories are framed (the way they get told), what is included and what is left out.

The medium that news comes through also affects what issues or events get covered and how those stories are told. TV news relies on visual narratives, which is why you see more car accidents than policy discussions on the evening news.

The news media are said to have agenda-setting power because the process of story selection and priority (what is chosen as the top stories) set the terms of public discussion and debate. This was truer before the growth of social media, when these media outlets were the only sources of news and information, but even today major news organizations maintain substantial influence.

The primary purpose of news is to inform, but news is also a business. Unless it is publicly owned, like the CBC, or funded independently, a news organization must make money to pay the costs of reporting the news, while attempting to be profitable.

Newspapers in particular have struggled financially in the transition to online news delivery. Most news organizations operate on an ad model, where advertisers pay for access to audiences. But advertising on news websites produces much less revenue than in print, and news organizations have not figured out how to make up the shortfall. Many papers have scaled back significantly, or closed as a result of inadequate operating revenue.

It is expensive to report the news in a journalistic way, and few organizations have the resources to do this. When news organizations close, particularly local news outlets, it can leave a void that is difficult to fill from other sources.

GRADE LEVEL: Elementary

GUIDING QUESTION

What factors and influences shape the news?

MINDS ON

1. Each day brings many new events, issues and developments. Have a discussion about what makes something newsworthy.

Using Think-Pair-Share, ask students to write down their ideas, share with a partner and then have a final class discussion. Guiding questions:

- What qualities does an issue or event have to have in order to make it news?
- What are some recent examples of news? Do you know why they made the news?

2. Review the fact that not all news organizations cover the same events, issues and developments. Using either option below, compare the front pages of local, provincial and national newspapers.

Option 1: Physical newspapers. Bring in several newspapers and post them around the classroom or down the hallway. Have students participate in a 'Gallery Walk'. Using sticky notes or chart paper, ask students to write down the reasons why they think articles were chosen for the front page.

Option 2: Newseum.org. Using Newseum.org compare the front pages of newspapers in Ontario and/or Canada.

Questions for analysis and discussion:

- Which stories are featured on each front page? How do they compare?
- For reports on the same news event, how do the headlines and/or images compare to each other?
- What additional thoughts do you have about how news is chosen?

ACTION

1. Using the video "[Who Makes the News: An Introduction to the Editorial Process](#)" and Slide Deck 3, review the following key concepts and terms about news coverage and the editorial process.

- In which formats do we receive or consume the news? (e.g., newspapers, newscasts on TV or radio, online media, magazines, social media platforms)
- What is legacy media?
- What are news values? (current, important, unique, nearby, competing views, famous people)
- Who determines and shapes the news coverage in legacy media? (editors and producers – the "gatekeepers")

2. Distribute copies of Activity 3.1 and ask students to write down the meaning in their own words for each news value. Give students time to turn and talk with a partner afterwards and revise their wording if need be.

3. Divide students into groups and have them take on the role of editor or an editorial team (Activity 3.2).

- a) Provide each group with 12 invented stories. Each story includes a heading and paragraph.
- b) Ask students to assess the stories using news values (Handout 3.1) and decide which to include on the homepage (maximum four). Students should provide a reason behind their choices.
- c) Students will also need to identify one lead story and come up with a new headline and possible photo/image.
- d) Have each group present their decisions to the class.

Teacher note: Guiding questions have been included following the invented stories to prompt discussion during or after the activity.

4. As a class, have a closing discussion to reflect on the activity.

- How did each group's choices compare? How similar or different were they?
- Which values did each group prioritize?
- What other factors influenced the editorial selection process?

CONSOLIDATION

Have a brief closing discussion about news production, or ask students to write a reflection on one or more of the following questions.

- Do you think all newspapers or media report on the same events in the same way? Explain your reasoning.
- Which two news values do you think are most important? Explain your choices.
- Select a news article and analyze which news values it reflects.