

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).

- Provide each group with 12 invented stories. Each story includes a heading and paragraph.
- 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.
- Students will also need to identify one lead story and come up with a new headline and possible photo/image.
- 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.

Activity 3.1: News Values

Write down what each value means in your own words.

Value	Meaning
Current	
Important	
Unique	
Nearby	
Competing views	
Famous (people)	

Which two values do you think are most important when determining news? Explain your choices.

Activity 3.2: Be the Editor

Imagine you are the editor of *The Yourtown Times* news website. Choose which four of the following stories to run on the homepage based on news values (current, important, famous people, unique, close, competing views) and explain your choices. Select one lead story and come up with a headline and image.

Severe storm on the way, residents advised to stay indoors

City officials are recommending that residents stay in their homes tonight, as a storm bringing hurricane-force winds moves toward the city. Freezing rain and golf-ball sized hail are also expected.

“We want everyone to be safe tonight,” says mayor Gail Strong, “please stay home until the storm passes. And definitely stay off the roads.”

Officials are reminding residents to ensure they are stocked with flashlights in case the lights go out, and emergency supplies such as food, water and a battery-powered radio. Yourtown airport is rescheduling all flights in and out of the city.

Llamas escape Capital City Zoo — find snacks and Instagram fame on parliament lawn

Commuters on Regional Road 6 were treated to an unusual sight this afternoon, as a pair of llamas strolled single-file alongside cars, causally heading away from their Capital City Zoo home.

Officials received initial reports of the escaped animals shortly after 10 a.m., by which time the pair had their own Instagram account, @lloosellamas, with more than 2,000 followers.

The llamas, identified as Lizzie and Larry of the Capital City Zoo, were picked up on parliament lawn shortly after 6 p.m., where they were found grazing on grass, and posing for selfies with tourists.

Movie star Guy Silver hospitalized following car crash

Police are reporting that Guy Silver, the star of such recent blockbusters as *Action Train* and *Stop, Kidnapper*, was admitted to hospital early this morning with potentially life-threatening injuries.

Hospital officials refused to comment on the specifics of Silver’s condition or his treatment. The officials only confirmed that the actor had been admitted shortly after 4 a.m. today.

While the cause of the crash remains unknown, eyewitnesses reported seeing Silver leave a local restaurant “looking intoxicated,” before driving away. He is also known to have a rare seizure disorder.

MPP resigns following financial scandal, RCMP investigating

Kim Skimmer, a Member of Provincial Parliament, stepped down today following allegations reported last week by the Yourtown Times.

A former colleague has come forward with evidence that suggests Skimmer stole over 1 million dollars from clients at an investment firm. She worked at the firm from 2010 to 2014.

The MPP for Othertown South maintains her innocence, but said she is resigning for the sake of her party. "I will take this time to fight these allegations," Skimmer said in a statement, adding, "I will be back once I have cleared my name."

An RCMP spokeswoman confirmed a criminal investigation has been launched into the matter.

New development pits city against nature advocates

City council voted 11-4 in favour of allowing commercial development on 100 acres of previously protected Riverside Park. The news was very upsetting to local neighbourhood groups.

The city says the project will be an economic boon to Yourtown. "This is a great day," said councillor Priyanka Planner, "everyone will benefit from the jobs, retail and new housing this project will bring."

Bumni Greene, a volunteer with Neighbourhood Nature, who organized opposition to the project, believes the move is a mistake. "What we need is green space where our kids can play," she said, "and a protected home for the wildlife that live in that park."

Leader of Blueberry party criticizes Strawberries' 'underhanded' election ad

The contest to become the province's new premier heated up this week, as party leaders got personal. Yesterday the Strawberry party released an attack ad targeting the Blueberry leader, specifically his abilities as a parent.

Last week, what appears to be leaked store security footage of the Blueberry leader's 16-year-old daughter shoplifting was released online.

"The Blueberry leader can't even lead his own daughter," the ad begins, "how can we expect him to lead the province?"

When questioned about the ad, Blueberry's leader said, "This is a personal family matter, and I think the citizens of this province are too smart to fall for these underhanded tactics."

Youth unemployment reaches five-year low, government says

Young people aged 18-24 are heading to work in greater numbers than any time over the past five years, according to recently released government statistics.

The job market can be difficult to crack for those seeking their first skilled jobs. A spokesperson credits several job-creation programs launched under the current government for changing numbers and is optimistic for the future.

“Youth employment is a priority of this government,” said Farik Hires, the lead for the Student Jobs Program. “We will continue to find innovative strategies to connect young people with employment opportunities that can be starting points for a career.”

Bus crash in Peru kills 11

A bus accident in the Peruvian Andes mountains has killed 11 visitors to the country, including seven members of a tour group from Mexico.

The accident occurred today when the driver reportedly lost control of the vehicle, which rolled off the edge of a steep road in the Huancavelica region. Six others sustained injuries and were taken to hospital.

Cellphone video taken by a crash survivor shows a harrowing plummet, and paramedics loading the injured into ambulances. There were no Canadians onboard.

Two people killed in B.C. mall collapse

Two people are confirmed dead following the dramatic cave-in at a mall in central British Columbia. The mall is under construction, and the victims are a builder who was working on the site and his friend.

According to family, the construction worker was giving his friend a tour of the job site, when the roof collapsed, killing them both.

The mall’s construction has been plagued with problems, including flooding from a burst water main earlier this month, and halted construction due to problems with inferior building materials.

15-year-old student wins local pie eating competition

It was María Butter's proudest moment. The 15-year-old ate a 12-inch strawberry rhubarb pie in a little over two minutes, taking home the coveted title of Fastest Pie Eater in Yourtown.

The Grade 9 student handily beat her competition, including last year's champion, Nikita Baker, who finished with a time of three minutes, 10 seconds.

"It's my favourite kind," Butter explained, when asked what may have given her a pie-eating edge.

Tainted parsley recalled from store shelves

Canadian shoppers are being advised to discard any Leafy brand parsley purchased over the past two weeks, due to a growing e. coli outbreak.

The parsley, imported from the US, has been responsible for 47 cases of illness south of the border so far, and two in Canada.

Health officials are investigating how much of this parsley may have been imported. Grocery suppliers are working to ensure a bacteria-free supply of the herb returns to store shelves soon.

Most Canadian students favour debt-forgiveness: poll

Nearly 70 percent of students would support government measures to reduce the loan burdens of university students after graduation, according to a poll released today.

The research, conducted by the National Student Group, asked 2,000 students across the country how likely they would be to support programs to forgive loan debt after graduation. Sixty-eight percent said they would be "very likely" to support a move like this.

The average Canadian student graduates with close to \$30,000 in student loan debt, according to National Student Group.

Notes and Questions to Prompt Discussion (Post-Activity)

Severe storm on the way, residents advised to stay indoors

News values: close, current, important

Guiding questions:

- Would this story be newsworthy if the storm was in a different city?
- What about if the storm was predicted to be coming in a week?
- How severe do the storm's threatening effects have to be to make a story like this news?

Llamas escape Capital City Zoo — find snacks and Instagram fame on parliament lawn

News values: unique

Guiding questions:

- Is being funny or unusual enough to make a story news?
- How much do you think about balance when it comes to choosing news? If the whole website was full of stories like this one, would it be considered a serious news source?

Movie star Guy Silver hospitalized following car crash

News values: famous

Guiding questions:

- Not a lot is known about this story – the cause of the crash, or the nature of the injuries. Is it still newsworthy? Would it be more newsworthy with more facts?
- Is it responsible to report eyewitness accounts that suggest the actor may have been intoxicated, when the cause of the crash is not known?
- Would the story be more newsworthy if the actor was intoxicated? What about if the cause was medical?

MPP resigns following financial scandal, RCMP investigating

News values: important, current, competing views, famous

Guiding questions:

- Why is this allegation important?
- If the person was not an elected official, would this story still be newsworthy?
- When stories involve politicians, they are said to be in the “public interest.” Should people be entitled to know more about elected officials than other people? Why or why not?
- There is more than one timeframe in this story: the original report was last week; the allegations took place at least four years ago. Why is this story timely now?
- If the amount of money was very low (\$1,000) would the story still be newsworthy?

New development pits city against nature advocates

News values: close, competing views, important

Guiding questions:

- Would this story still be newsworthy if it were happening in a different town or a different province?
- What about if there was no opposition to the development? (This question could link to a bigger discussion about political participation, and getting involved in your community when you see things you want to change)

Leader of Blueberry party criticizes Strawberries' 'underhanded' election ad

News values: competing views, famous, important, current

Guiding questions:

- Which is the main news value of this story?
- How important is it for the public to think about the ads/messages of people who are running for office?
- Are all stories about elections / leadership candidates important?

Youth unemployment reaches five-year low, government says

News values: important

Guiding questions:

- Is this story important? Are there other news values here?
- How much news value does a report or statistics have?
- Is it possible that important stories are not told because they are not interesting enough?

Bus crash in Peru kills 11

News values: current, unique

Guiding questions:

- Would this be more newsworthy if it happened in the United States? What about elsewhere in Canada?
- What if there had been Canadians onboard the bus when it crashed?
- How does our 'closeness' to an event affect how we think about its importance?

Two people killed in B.C. mall collapse

News values: unique, important

Guiding questions:

- News tends to report deaths when they happen in unusual ways or have unusual circumstances. Is it always newsworthy when someone dies? What kinds of deaths should be reported as news?
- Does the fact that the mall's construction had had previous problems make the story more newsworthy?

15-year-old student wins local pie eating competition

News values: unique, close

Guiding question:

- Would this result be news if it were somewhere other than Yourtown?
- Did the age of the winner influence your choice? What you make a different choice if the winner was an adult?

Tainted parsley recalled from store shelves

News values: important, close, current

Guiding question:

- In the storm story, the risk was to all residents. In this example, it's only to those who purchased parsley. Does that make the storm more newsworthy than the tainted parsley?

Most Canadian students favour debt-forgiveness: poll

News values: important, current

Guiding questions:

- This story may be important, but it is not very specific and is not anchored to an event. Does this diminish its news value?
- Is this story timely? The poll was released today — is the release of a poll a news event?
- How might it depend on what else is in the news for the day? If all the other stories on a certain news day were boring, would polling results be more newsworthy?