

Lesson 4: News and the Editorial Process

What becomes news?

Each day news organizations make decisions about which issues and events are turned into stories that are then broadcast or published, and which stories are prioritized. The news media are said to have agenda-setting power because these decisions impress upon citizens which issues and events they should be aware of and also help shape public discussion and debate.

Editorial decisions are shaped by news values, audience preferences and the overall priorities of the news organization.

The medium that news comes through also affects which issues and events are chosen and how stories about them are told. Television news relies on visual narratives, which is why you see more car accidents than policy discussions on the evening news.

What are news values?

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

- Timely: The issue or event is recent or related to current events.
- Important: The issue or event is likely to affect its audience.
- Unique: The issue or event is unusual or original.
- Nearby: The issue or event takes place close to its intended audience.
- Competing views: There are opposing views or perspectives.
- Famous (people): The issue or event involves notable people.

The more news values an issue or event contains, the greater the likelihood it will be assigned as a story and selected for broadcast or publication. Story selection is different for current events compared to investigations. With respect to investigative journalism, each news organization selects important issues or interesting leads that it wants to explore and examine more deeply.

Who makes the decisions?

The editors or producers at each news organization select the stories that make it to their audiences and are often referred to as "gatekeepers". Through editorial structures and processes, editorial staff and reporters decide what is covered, how those stories are framed and what is included and what is left out.

What other factors are at play?

The primary purpose of news is to inform, but news organizations are also businesses. They must make money to pay for the costs of reporting the news, while attempting to be profitable for their owners.

Newspapers in particular have struggled financially in the transition to online. Most news organizations operate on an advertising model, where advertisers pay for access to news organization audiences. This is a challenge, however, as online advertising produces much more revenue than print advertising and news organizations have not figured out how to make up the shortfall.

As a result, many newspapers have scaled back reporters and editors significantly or even closed due to inadequate resources. This weakens the force of journalism which in turn has a negative impact for our democracy. There are fewer journalists to hold our elected officials to account and citizens are less informed about the issues and decisions that affect them.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

What factors and influences shape the news? Why should I read multiple sources?

MINDS ON

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

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

- What underlying factors lead to something being covered in the news?
- Why do some events or developments make the news while others do not?
- What criteria do you think editors and producers use to decide what becomes news?

2. Review the fact that not all news organizations prioritize or report on the same events, issues and developments, or even in the same way.

Each day **Newseum.org** posts the front pages of papers from around the world. Look at the local, provincial and national papers, and compare the stories and headlines. Source: [Newseum – Front Pages](#)

Questions for analysis and discussion:

- Which stories are featured on each front page? How do they compare?
- For stories about the same development or event, how do the headlines or photographs compare?
- Can you think of any other factors that contribute to an event or issue making the news?

ACTION

1. Watch the NewsWise video “Who Makes the News” to review the editorial selection process.

2. Using Slide Deck 4, review the following key concepts and terms about news coverage and the editorial process:

- What are legacy media? (long-standing established newspapers, radio and television networks)
- What are news values? (timely, important, unique, nearby, competing views, famous people)
- Who determines and shapes the news coverage? (editors and producers – the “gatekeepers”)
- What other factors influence the news? (ownership and political leanings, audience demographics, formats)
- Where can we see evidence of editorial opinions and priorities? (editorials, story selection and placement, choice of investigative stories)

Teacher Note: An editorial is an expression of opinion by the editorial staff/editorial board/owner based upon a selection of facts for the sake of influencing opinion, interpreting significant news, entertaining or offering critique or praise.

3. Using one or both of the examples below, compare two different sources reporting on the same story. Guiding questions: How do the news stories compare or contrast? Was one story more comprehensive than the other? How did each shape your views on the event/development?

a) Ontario Provincial Budget 2018

Two different pieces of new coverage of the 2018 Ontario budget (video stories).

- [Could the Ontario 2018 budget be Kathleen Wynne's last?](#) (*Global News*, March 28)
- [Ontario budget promises new spending and years of deficits](#) (*Toronto Star*, March 28)

b) Northern Ontario Leaders' Debate

Different versions of the same Canadian Press story "Doug Ford's team defends 'take care of our own' comment on immigration." (See pages following the lesson)

- [Globe and Mail](#)
- [Toronto Sun](#)

Teacher Note: The Canadian Press is a national news agency that produces news reports and sells them to news organizations.

4. Ask students to find an article that is both interesting and important to them and write an analysis (Activity 4.1). It may be interesting to assign a group of students the same publication or news source and isolate the period so that they can compare their own selections.

CONSOLIDATION

It is common practice for newspapers to endorse a specific political party at election time, advocating for one party over another prior to election day. This usually presents itself in the form of an editorial, separate and distinct from the news pages of a newspaper.

During the 2015 federal election, Postmedia (publishers of the *National Post* and other papers throughout the country) made a controversial move by having all of its member papers run an election advertisement endorsing the Conservative Party; this came the day following the paper's official endorsement of the party, and just two days before the election ([Huffington Post article](#)).

- What do you think of the practice of endorsing parties or candidates?
- Do you think a paper can be fair in its coverage of all parties when it supports one over the others?

EXTENDED LEARNING

A. As a fun activity, ask students to review news coverage on TV or online newspapers in the evening and make predictions for front page news stories the next day. Review the predictions as a class and examine the actual front pages. Were any predictions correct? Have students explain their reasoning.

B. Most news organizations earn the money required to operate by selling advertising space to companies. This model allows readers and viewers to pay for little or none of cost to produce stories. One exception is

the CBC, Canada's public broadcaster, which receives funding from the federal government, although the CBC also sells ads for revenue.

However, advertising revenue that once went to traditional media companies has moved online, but mostly to internet and social media companies, like Google and Facebook. Ad revenue on the websites of individual media companies is limited, falling far short of the amount required for them to operate. (For more background information look at [The Shattered Mirror: News, Democracy and Trust in the Digital Age](#))

Canadian newspaper owners and lobby groups have been making the case that the government should intervene to provide funding for struggling newspapers, given the important role they play in society and democracy. In its February budget the federal government announced a five-year \$50 million fund for news and journalism but has yet to announce the details of how that will be administered.

Reflection questions:

- How might editorial choices be different between organizations where costs are covered differently (e.g., advertisers, government, individuals, foundations)?
- Whose responsibility do you think it is to address challenges faced by the news industry? Is it up to governments to make sure newspapers stay in business?
- Should audiences pay for news? Would you pay money to access high-quality news? What are the challenges to increasing costs for users?

Doug Ford's team defends 'take care of our own' comment on immigration

TORONTO, THE CANADIAN PRESS, Published by **THE TORONTO SUN**, on May 12, 2018

Facing criticism for suggesting Ontario has to “take care of our own” before pushing for immigrants to move to northern Ontario, Doug Ford’s campaign team said the Tory leader is supportive of new Canadians and immigration.

In a statement Saturday, Ford’s campaign spokeswoman Melissa Lantsman said the leader’s comments at the debate are being mischaracterized by his political opponents.

“Doug Ford is completely supportive of new Canadians and immigration policies that welcome immigrants,” she said. “Ford Nation is a diverse group of supporters, including strong support in immigrant communities.”

During Friday’s northern debate, Ford said the government would have to exhaust every option for employing locals before relying on immigrants to fill jobs in sparsely populated areas.

Lantsman said Ford is open to the northern Ontario immigration program but believes that people in the north have felt “left behind.”

“We need immediate policies to help those currently living in these communities,” she said.

Premier Kathleen Wynne said the Progressive Conservative leader would have to explain exactly what he meant by the comment, which she said was “very disturbing”.

Both Wynne and NDP Leader Andrea Horwath said they would consider an immigration pilot project to combat population decline and draw workers to the northern reaches of the province, similar to one already in place in Atlantic Canada.

Wynne said that in a country where everyone except Indigenous people are immigrants, she doesn’t know who Ford considers “our own.”

Meantime, Horwath called Ford’s comments on immigration “worrisome” not only for herself but for the northern municipal leaders who hosted the debate.

“I have to say I was a little bit shocked,” she said Saturday. “I’ve heard that language used by people who are suggesting that newcomers are not welcome in the province or in our country and that’s not an opinion that I share.”

She added that Ford’s response showed he did not understand what the municipal leaders were saying with their question on facilitating immigration to the region.

“They want more newcomers in their communities, they want to ensure the local economy has more skilled workers and more population,” she said.

“While the municipal leaders were basically saying, ‘Let’s find the way to roll out the red carpet and welcome newcomers in,’ Mr. Ford’s comments seemed to be completely opposite of what they were asking for.”

Michael Coteau, a Liberal MPP for a Toronto riding, called on Ford to address the comments on Saturday morning.

“I found PC Leader Doug Ford’s comments on immigrants insulting,” he said. “As an immigrant myself I took it personal, but also as a resident of this great city that’s been built on a strong immigrant past. Our economy continues to be built on immigration. I find he doesn’t really understand what makes this country great.”

A spokesman for Ford said Saturday morning that the Tory leader was not immediately available for comment.

Doug Ford's team defends 'take care of our own' comment on immigration

TORONTO, THE CANADIAN PRESS, Published by **THE GLOBE AND MAIL**, on May 12, 2018

Facing criticism for suggesting Ontario has to “take care of our own” before pushing for immigrants to move to northern Ontario, Progressive Conservative Leader Doug Ford repeatedly refused to explain his comments, instead saying he is supportive of new Canadians and immigration.

At a news conference Saturday, Ford was asked four times to explain what he meant by the remarks, but would not elaborate. Instead, he slammed his opponents for seizing upon the remarks he made at the northern issues leader’s debate Friday.

“My opponents are playing politics – you know that,” Ford said. “There’s no politician that probably has more support out there for new Canadians. Ford Nation’s full of new Canadians.”

Ford said that if he’s elected June 7, his government will create more spaces for apprenticeships and break down barriers that keep credentials held by new immigrants from being recognized.

“We take care of new Canadians,” Ford said. “We take care of immigrants coming to this country. They call me personally on my phone. If you they have credentials from other countries, we will make sure that we do everything in our power ... to recognize those credentials and speed up the process.”

In a statement early Saturday, Ford’s campaign spokeswoman Melissa Lantsman said the Tory leader’s comments at the debate are being mischaracterized by his political opponents.

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Meanwhile, Ford pledged Saturday \$98-million a year to provide free dental care to seniors making less than \$19,300 a year if his party is elected next month. Older couples making less than \$32,300 a year would also qualify.

Ford said the plan will help approximately 100,000 seniors a year.

“Many Ontarians have dental insurance, but two thirds of low income seniors cannot afford it,” he said. “They end up in (the) ER due to unbearable dental pain. More suffering for seniors and more strain on our health-care system.”