

Instructor's Manual

for

Writing Right for Broadcast and Internet News

Sharyl Attkisson
CBS News

Don R. Vaughan
Mississippi State University



Boston New York San Francisco
Mexico City Montreal Toronto London Madrid Munich Paris
Hong Kong Singapore Tokyo Cape Town Sydney

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About the Authors

This textbook is written by Sharyl Attkisson and Don Rodney Vaughan who have more than 40 years experience between them in broadcast and Internet journalism.

Attkisson is a writer, correspondent, and substitute anchor for CBS News. She also writes for CBS News Radio and the CBS News Web site. She's anchored for CNN, hosted the Newsweek Production of the weekly PBS series HealthWeek, and worked in four local news television markets as reporter, anchor and producer. Her favorite career moment was being among the first journalists to fly on a B-52 combat mission over Kosovo.

Vaughan has worked in small markets as a radio and TV news writer and reporter, and has taught broadcast news writing at Mississippi State University. He's pursuing a Ph.D. in Mass Communication at the University of Southern Mississippi. Vaughan was inspired to become a broadcast journalist when he was a kid listening to J. Mark Shands reporting state and local news over WKOR-AM in Starkville, Mississippi.

Preface

Thank you for choosing *Writing Right for Broadcast and Internet News*. The style of writing in this book isn't like that of many other college textbooks. It's informal. It's conversational. And the reason is simple: that's how we want broadcast or Internet journalists to learn how to write.

There's something else unique about this book. It integrates the concept of Internet writing into the broadcast writing instruction. Until now, Internet news writing has fallen almost exclusively under the umbrella of college print courses, mostly by default. But the style of writing for the Internet is a unique combination of print and broadcast writing that we call *printcast*. And because most professional broadcasters today are called upon to write versions of their stories for the Internet, we think it makes sense to include it.

The approach of this text is also decidedly nuts-and-bolts. Each chapter is designed to tell students what they need to know to pursue a career in broadcast or Internet journalism, from newsgathering to conducting interviews to thinking ethically.

As you know, one of the best ways to become a good writer is through practice. So we've provided your students many opportunities to practice as they go. We hope you'll find the exercises in the textbook, as well as the suggested test questions provided in this Instructor's Manual, easy to adapt into your own original teaching.

The following elements are included for each chapter (with the exception of Chapters 9 and 11, which don't call for Test Questions):

Overview and Summary

Learning Objectives

Lecture Launchers

Suggested Class Activities

Handouts

Suggested Test Questions

Chapter 1 – Defining and Diffusing News

Overview and Summary:

This chapter demonstrates the importance of writing crystal clear scripts, and explains ways to lift barriers to clear writing and effective diffusion. It describes how poorly written stories impact broadcast news diffusion. First and foremost, stories should be written in such a way that the primary audience can easily understand its meaning. Poorly written stories with word fat, jargon, passive language, and too much detail stand little chance of being clearly understood and accurately diffused. The chapter includes tips on how to write stories that have the most potential for audience comprehension and accurate diffusion, such as ensuring that a given story has news value, then writing it in clear, simple terms. Students following the guidelines in this chapter will be equipped with the building blocks necessary to begin writing clear scripts for broadcast or Internet news.

Learning Objectives:

- to define “news”
- to discuss news value and judgment
- to introduce the theory of broadcast news diffusion
- to identify some barriers to clearly-written stories
- to describe techniques for unmistakably clear writing

Lecture Launchers:

To introduce the concept of subjectivity in news judgement:

Ask students to give their own definitions of "news".

Ask whether they believe each of the following topics is "news" or “newsworthy”. As part of this discussion, have them describe what factors might affect a particular topic's newsworthiness and whether they'd consider the topic "hard" news or "soft" news.

1. Car accident
Factors affecting newsworthiness: Where did it occur? Were there deaths or injuries? Was there anything unusual about the accident? Did it cause a major disruption in traffic?
2. Teenager dies at a college party
Factors affecting newsworthiness: What was the cause of death (drinking or hazing incident)? Was there illegal activity going on at the party? Was the party on campus?
3. Red Cross blood drive on campus
Factors affecting newsworthiness: Is the blood drive to supply victims of a specific disaster? Is there anything unusual or remarkable about the blood drive (such as the first time it's been done on campus, or the most blood donated on campus)?

Suggested Class Activities:

Have the class listen to recordings of local radio reports or television newscasts. Students should be told in advance that they'll need to take notes as to what the stories are about, and try to flag clear and unclear writing.

After viewing or listening to the newscasts, have students rank each story in the newscast from high to low news value, from their own personal viewpoint. They should also write a phrase as to why they valued each particular story high or low. Have a class discussion with selected students explaining why they did or didn't value certain stories.

Next, select two or three stories from the newscast and assign one to each student. Distribute the Chapter 1 Handout, which asks them to re-tell their assigned story and describe its meaning. When students finish, have them talk out loud about what they believe the meaning of their assigned story was. Compare and contrast the differing views on the same story. When students provide conflicting

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accounts as to what they believe a story was about, or what the exact facts were, review the actual story and discuss what factors may have contributed to the confusion. Was unclear writing to blame?

Chapter 1 - Defining and Diffusing News

Chapter 1 Handout

Student's Name: _____ Class Section: _____

Use this fact sheet to help you answer the questions on the following page.

Hard News: breaking news, current issues and happenings, agenda-setting news.

Soft News: features that are entertaining, dramatic, unusual, etc.

News Value

[Based on proximity (compassion, familiarity, vicariousness), timeliness, significance and the medium]

Broadcast News Diffusion: The way in which broadcast and Internet news travels from one person to another.

L2W Lead: Localize, Where and What

Completed Circle (cause and effect)

Five Barriers to Clear Writing:

Word Fat

Passive vs. Active

Poor Attribution

Dependent/Subordinate Clauses

Appositions

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Chapter 1 Handout, Page 2

1. List three examples of different types of "hard news". In each case, also name the category (i.e. breaking news).

2. List three examples of "soft news".

3. For each of your answers to questions #1 and #2, tell what audience members might consider the story newsworthy. For instance, a hard news story about taxi drivers caught rigging their meters to cheat customers would interest people who use taxis, including urban workers and travelers.

4. For each of the answers to questions #1 and #2, tell what audience members would likely not consider the story newsworthy. For instance, the taxi story would be of little interest to those who don't use taxis, including rural residents who work outside of the city.

Chapter 1 Handout, Page 3

5. Select three of your examples from answers to questions #1 and #2 and devise fictitious "lead" sentences that include the components of L2W. For example, the lead sentence to the taxi story might read, "Police have nabbed more than a hundred Cincinnati taxi drivers who rigged their meters to cheat customers..."
6. In each of your answers to question #5, mark the part that "Localizes" the story, and mark the "Where" and the "What". (In some cases, the part that "localizes" the story will be the same that tells "where".)
7. Create your own examples that demonstrate the five common barriers to clear writing. Name the barrier for each example. For instance, "The exterior auto-vehicle door became ajar" is an example of Word Fat.
8. For each answer to question #7, correct the writing to remove the barriers to clarity. For instance, you could change the phrase about the auto-vehicle to: "The car door opened."

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Suggested Test Questions:

Multiple Choice:

1. Which factor does *not* impact news value?
 - a) Proximity
 - b) Timeliness
 - c) Vicariousness
 - d) Significance
 - e) **Loneliness**
2. Sutton Says:
 - a) Don't assume something is interesting to the audience just because you find it interesting.
 - b) Don't give too much detail.
 - c) Don't write for the highly-educated.
 - d) **All of the above.**
3. Which of the following is *not* an element of clear writing?
 - a) Conversational language
 - b) Jargon
 - c) Passive writing
 - d) Closed circle
 - e) **B and C**
 - f) All of the above are elements of clear writing.
4. "L2W" refers to:
 - a) The practice of deciding which two of the five traditional W's to include in the story's lead sentence.
 - b) **Localizing, and telling What and Where in the story's lead sentence.**
 - c) Ensuring the story's lead sentence includes the news of highest value to the local audience.
 - d) None of the above.

5. Which of the following should generally be avoided in clear broadcast and Internet news writing?
- a) **Subordinate clauses**
 - b) Attribution
 - c) Cause and Effect
 - d) All of the above
 - e) A and C

True or False:

6. *Broadcast News Diffusion* holds that the audience only gets news directly from media sources. **(False)**
7. In the *Vaughan-Attkisson Model of Broadcast News Diffusion*, the Message is influenced by a variety of factors before it reaches the intended audience. **(True)**
8. In determining a story's news value, audiences may consider whether the information is timely, significant, or in close proximity to them. **(True)**
9. People are more likely to pay attention to stories if they are about events that have just happened. **(True)**
10. Viewers and listeners generally assign a higher news value to stories that contain as much detail as possible. **(False)**
11. Passive writing is one hallmark of clearly written stories. **(False)**
12. Typically, stories should include *what and where* in the lead sentence; also a *cause and effect* or *completed circle* within the script. **(True)**

Written:

13. Specifically identify the barriers to clear writing and accurate diffusion in the passage below.

"The parents of a newborn infant, Joshua Banks, who died in a drug study being conducted at Regional Hospital at 4020 Medical Drive Southeast in Sturtman, Florida last June, are now picketing outside the medical facility to protest the fact that the physician who led the study is still employed at the hospital. Sturtman, Florida police chief Myron Kane states that as long as the parents of the deceased child, Eva Marie and Jonathan Henry Banks remain on public property, the couple has every right to demonstrate. According to hospital officials, a blue sign with block lettering bearing a photograph of their young infant son is being carried by the Banks. The doctor has been unfairly targeted, because the baby's death was not her fault."

(First sentence too long and convoluted. The passage is filled with non-conversational language, such as "physician" instead of "doctor", and with unnecessary detail such as the address of the hospital, the parents' middle names, and the description of the color and lettering on the sign. It also uses too many appositions which are awkward, such as "deceased child", "the couple" and "the parents" when a simple "they" would suffice. Myron Kane's name isn't necessary. "According to hospital officials" is not a necessary attribution, assuming you saw or can confirm the couple was, indeed, carrying such a sign. But the last sentence

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should have been attributed to the source. "...a sign bearing a photograph...is being carried" is passive. Also, the story doesn't state that anyone is suggesting the parents don't have a right to picket, so the reference to police saying they can do so is unnecessary.)

14. Rewrite the above passage so that it is clearer.

(The parents of a baby who died in a drug trial are now picketing Regional Hospital in Sturtman. That's where the study took place. Eva and Jonathan Banks are protesting the fact that the lead doctor in the study, Susan Smith, still works at Regional. Dr. Smith says Joshua's death last June was not her fault. She says the parents are targeting her unfairly.)

15. Cut the "word fat" from the following passage:

Law enforcement officers apprehended two perpetrators in a stolen automobile in East Middleburg last night, and discovered a cache of weaponry inside the vehicle, including approximately fourteen machine guns. Police originally halted the vehicle because it was traveling at a high rate of speed. The perpetrators, two adult males, attempted to run into a forest that was close in proximity, however police gave chase, captured them, and arrested them on charges that have not been specified publicly. Now, authorities are attempting to determine the method by which the perpetrators obtained the weaponry and where it came from.

(Middleburg police stopped a car for speeding last night, and found more than a dozen machine guns inside. It turns out the car had been reported stolen. The two men inside tried to run into the woods, but police caught them. Now, officials are trying to find out where the guns came from.)

16. Categorize the following news as Hard News (be specific) or Soft News:

The prevalence of road rage on the nation's highways.
Tobacco farmers trying to find alternative crops.
The trial of a notorious serial killer.
A baby beauty contest.
An investigation into the Food and Drug Administration approving dangerous drugs.
The arrest of a swindler who'd cheated local elderly residents out of millions.
A decision to double the local property tax rate.
The discovery of a Russian spy working inside the FBI.
The problem of local farmers being quietly pushed out by urban sprawl.
Tax dollars wasted by county workers who are loafing on the job.
National telephone companies' attempts to control regulation of their industry by contributing to politicians' campaigns.
A profile of a fourth-grade student who won a national spelling bee.
The verdict of a notorious serial killer just announced.
Clothing trends among Hollywood stars.
Genetically altered corn that could one day cure cancer.
A drought affecting thousands of farmers in the Midwest.
The election of the President of the United States.
An investigation into an early release prison program which let loose dozens of child abusers who soon repeated their crimes.
A woman who wallpapered the entire inside of her house with bottlecaps.

[Hard News/Current Happenings: the trial of a notorious serial killer, the arrest of a swindler who'd cheated local elderly residents out of millions, a decision to double the local property tax rate, the discovery of a Russian spy working inside the FBI, a drought affecting thousands of farmers in the Midwest, the election of the President of the United States.

Hard News/Breaking News: The verdict of a notorious serial killer just announced.

Hard News/Agenda-Setting News: the problem of local farmers being quietly pushed out by urban sprawl, an investigation into an early release prison program which let loose dozens of child abusers who soon repeated their crimes, tax dollars wasted by county workers who are loafing on the job, an investigation into the Food and Drug Administration approving dangerous drugs, the prevalence of road rage on the nation's highways, national telephone companies' attempts to control regulation of their industry by contributing to politicians' campaigns.

Soft/Feature News: a profile of a fourth-grade student who won a national spelling bee, a baby beauty contest, a woman who wallpapered the entire inside of her house with bottle caps, tobacco farmers trying to find alternative crops (could also be Hard News/Current Happenings), genetically altered corn that could one day cure cancer, clothing trends among Hollywood stars.]

Chapter 2 – Broadcast News Writing Style

Overview and Summary:

This chapter demonstrates that writing for television and radio newscasts is styled so as to reduce the risk of mistakes or “misreads” by the anchor or reporter who reads the script aloud to the audience. At the same time, the writing must leave little chance for misinterpretation by the audience who will *hear* the words. Unlike print, broadcast stories are presented orally and the audience has just one chance to get the point; there’s no opportunity to mull over the meaning of a confusing sentence or re-read it. Punctuation, abbreviation and numbers are all written in ways to make the words simple and clear on the written page, and easy to digest by the audience hearing them. “Pronouncers” should be used to guide anchors through difficult or unfamiliar names and phrases. And “camel squeezing” is one way to systematically whittle down too much information into a clear, concise, conversational script that the audience can easily understand.

Learning Objectives:

- to demonstrate the contrasts between print and broadcast news writing
- to provide a basic broadcast style guide
- to introduce the concept of *pronouncers*
- to describe the process of “camel squeezing”

Lecture Launchers:

To encourage students to think about the stylistic differences between broadcast and print writing:

Ask students to describe some reasons why a newspaper article read aloud might not make a good broadcasting story.

Ask them to name some of the considerations broadcast writers have that print writers don't, and have them discuss the ramifications. For example, since broadcast scripts are read aloud, “pronouncers” for unusual words and phrases must be included for the anchor. Since the broadcast audience is not reading the written script--only hearing it--the writing must sound clear to the ear. Overly complex thoughts and phrasing must be simplified. Since broadcast anchors read stories aloud, the writing must be conversational and natural. Broadcasting typically deals with much more limited “space,” so stories must be “camel-squeezed” into digestible, concise portions. Punctuation in broadcasting scripts will never be seen by the audience, its purpose is to guide the anchor through the story clearly, and in a way that allows for the fewest “misreads”.

Suggested Class Activities:

Show the Print vs. Broadcast Table and Style Guide either on overhead projector, or via computer generated graphics. Go over every element of this. Then give each student a newspaper article to be transformed into a news story for either radio or television.

Select lengthy stories from the newspaper and assign students to read them aloud in front of the class without letting them review the story beforehand. This is to demonstrate that print style writing can be difficult to read aloud, and hard for the audience to understand. Next, divide students into groups. Give each group one of the newspaper articles that were read aloud. Ask them to translate the stories into broadcast news style by using the appropriate punctuation, abbreviation, numbers, pronouncers, etc. Now, have the groups “camel squeeze” the stories into brief broadcast versions by omitting or condensing unnecessary repetition, wording and detail. A selected student from each group should read the final camel squeezed version aloud to the class. Other students should rank and discuss how well each camel squeezed story retained the main points, whether it was easier to read aloud than the print version, and whether it was more easily understood by the audience.

Chapter 2 - Broadcast News Writing Style

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Chapter 2 Handout

Student's Name: _____ Class Section: _____

Use this fact sheet to help you answer the questions on the following page.

Newspapers:

Longer sentences, more words, more details, less conversational, precise numbers, more detailed attribution, more parenthetical phrases, more appositions, inverted pyramid style, uses all punctuation, more direct quotes.

Radio and Television News:

Shorter sentences, fewer words, fewer details, more conversational, round off numbers, less attribution, avoids parentheticals, avoid appositions, often use completed circle style, use dashes and three dots for punctuation, rarely use direct quotes (actual interviews are used, instead).

Broadcasting Style Guidelines:

Spell numbers "one" through "eleven."

Spell symbols such as "\$" (i.e. "dollars")

Round out complex numbers.

Avoid most punctuation except periods, hyphens, and ellipses.

Don't divide a word between lines. Keep the entire word on the same line.

Don't abbreviate words if they're meant to be read in their full form.

Don't use names in the lead sentence unless they're widely known.

Generally avoid using Mr., Mrs. or Miss. Adults are referred to by both names in first references; last name only in secondary references.

Children may be referred to by first name in secondary references.

Only include a person's age when it's necessary.

Use pronouncers for words that risk being mispronounced by the anchor.