

NEWS REPORTING

PRIMER QUESTIONS

1. What is news? How does news serve as a larger commentary on society?
2. In general, what are the most common types of news stories—for example, politics, crime, current events, and so on—covered by the newspapers, radio and television newscasts, and web sites that you access?
3. To what extent is the news content of newspapers, radio and television newscasts, and web sites that you access objective or biased?
4. To what extent is the news content of newspapers, radio and television newscasts, and web sites that you access entertaining versus serious?
5. To what extent does the news content of newspapers, radio and television newscasts, and web sites that you access exhibit depth or brevity?

When you read a newspaper, watch television news, listen to radio news, or link to news on the web, in effect you are dropping in on a kind of society-wide conversation about the country you are in, as well as other countries. When you are exposed to news in the media, you are invited to witness a multilevel discussion about what society believes is important or unimportant, dangerous or safe, wrong or right, and so on. These implicit and explicit evaluations of phenomena happening around you are presented on a continuous basis by the cumulative discourse of news reporting. Such societal commentary by news reporting takes place in newspaper content every single day, and in broadcast and internet content just about every second.

In Chapter 3, news reporting was likened to the “standout” leaves of a tree. Standout leaves are more noticeable than the other leaves of a tree because they are brighter, larger, shinier, or in some way more robust. Standout leaves can be examined to determine the general well-being of other parts of the tree, the whole tree, and to some extent the environment in which the tree grows. As Alan Albarran indicates in *Management of Electronic Media* (2002), news content makes a media system more visible than other kinds of content because, for most people, news reporting is the main source of information about national and international events.

Like other kinds of content, news reporting has been swept up by the winds of globalization. The *BBC World Service* from the UK is credited as the first organization to successfully distribute radio news twenty-four hours a day to mass audiences across the world. *CNN* from the USA is credited as doing the same in television news, ushering in other twenty-four-hour television news distributors such

as the *BBC* (UK), *CCTV* (China) *Al Jazeera* (Qatar) and *FoxNews* (USA). In the realm of the internet, the *Guardian* (UK) in 2004 had the newspaper-based web site most frequently visited by people around the world (see Figure 10.1).

Global news distributors are constantly jockeying to position themselves as worldwide authorities on events that have international appeal. As discussed in Chapter 2 on Globalization, though these organizations deliver fairly standardized news content on the worldwide scale, they also deliver a significant amount of news content that is shaped individually for domestic markets. For example, CNN's news service CNN International is distributed primarily to countries outside of the USA, whereas CNN's Headline News is almost exclusively distributed inside the USA (see Figure 10.2). The CNN news programs that are seen in the USA often feature different reporters and stories from those seen on CNN news programs in other countries.

DEFINING NEWS REPORTING

News reporting is defined as the delivery of new information to mass audiences. There are many ways to classify news reporting, including hard news, breaking news, soft news, feature news, human interest news, entertainment news, business news, medical news, education news, technology news, sports news, culture news, travel news, and many, many other categories. News content in profit-making media tends to be packaged as a product designed to appeal to the largest possible audience. Full-fledged profit-making media run ads within the news content and does not have a strong organizational mission of serving the public. News reporting delivered by profit-making media tends to prioritize brief stories that capture the attention of the audience, but does not do much to increase the understanding of the audience. In contrast, news reporting delivered by public-service media tends to be designed as a service to provide the public with information in longer stories that are perceived to meet public needs. Full-fledged public-service media do not run ads and have a strong organizational mission to serve the general population.

The image shows a screenshot of the Guardian Unlimited website homepage. At the top, there are several advertisements, including one for 'new and used BOOKS' and another for 'amazon.com'. Below the ads, the 'Guardian Unlimited' logo is prominently displayed. A navigation menu lists various sections: Home, Arts, Books, Business, Education, Politics, Feedback, Film, Football, The Guide, and Jobs. A search bar is located below the navigation menu. The main content area features several news headlines with accompanying images, such as 'US launches Najaf assault', 'England v West Indies - live', and 'Lions arm of the law extended'. A promotional banner at the bottom right of the page reads 'YOU COULD WIN \$20,000 TOWARD'.

FIGURE 10.1 Web Site for The Guardian

Source: © Guardian.



FIGURE 10.2 *CNN's Headline News, Distributed Primarily in the USA*

Source: Screen grab by Frank Kutch; permission courtesy of CNN.

The impact of news reporting on audience perceptions about a media system and the larger global environment can be observed at multiple levels. At one level, news has an impact on people's basic decision making as they go about the day. For example, people who hear a weather forecast on the radio about rain may end up canceling something they were going to do outdoors. At another level, news affects people's mind-sets as they experience nonnews events in life. For example, people who watch a television news report about a sexual predator may become more guarded in their interactions with unfamiliar people. At another level, government officials who read about other countries in a newspaper may pursue policies designed to address issues that were raised by that news story. And at another level, personnel in decision-making positions at news organizations may decide to cover an event mainly because other news organizations are covering the event.

Below, three dimensions of news reporting are identified that will be compared across the eight countries to provide the opportunity to assess fundamental differences in the way news is constructed across the eight countries.

BIAS VERSUS OBJECTIVITY IN NEWS REPORTING

One dimension of news reporting involves the degree to which the news content is objective or biased. This is somewhat of a misnomer, because there is no such thing as truly objective

news, as many scholars have written—among them Davis Merrit in *Public Journalism and Public Life* (1998), Philip Meyer in *Ethical Journalism* (TK), Barrie Gunter in *Measuring Bias on Television* (1997), and Klaus Bruhn Jensen in “News as Ideology: Economic Statistics and Political Ritual in Television Network News” (1987). Rather, news reporting always presents a particular viewpoint that is situated within the cultural, political, and economic contexts of the country in which it operates.

At the core of the objectivity versus bias dimension is the degree to which a news organization is independent from outside financial or political influences on the organization’s news content. The extent to which a news organization is independent depends on the degree to which its operations rely on other organizations to provide financing; whether the news organization is expected to generate profit; and whether the news organization has a charter or other governing document asserting its autonomy.

Taking into account the qualifying remarks stated above, the analysis in this chapter focuses on the degree to which news content is biased but leaves the impression that it is objective. This distinction can be observed in the amount of time or space devoted to the following:

Commentary: Reporting by individual media professionals and citizens that effectively editorialize an issue—reports that essentially appraise what is right or wrong.

Advocacy Journalism: Reporting that advocates a policy, position, belief, or action.

Meta Messages: Slogans, promotions, titles of programs and publications, word choices, and imagery that indicate whether the news organization perceives of its news reporting as having either a mission of objectivity or a mission that follows a bias.

Balance: Providing opposing viewpoints within a story, either between two stories that are juxtaposed or across stories appearing on successive days.

ENTERTAINMENT VERSUS SERIOUS NEWS REPORTING

A second dimension of news reporting involves the degree to which news is more entertaining or more serious. The rise of news as entertainment is related to the proliferation of cable and satellite television channels plus internet web sites, all of which compete intensely for audiences. One result is that news reporting is constantly in “breaking news” mode—that is, presenting news as urgent and developing. Important books that discuss adverse effects of aggressive competition for news audiences include: *News in the Global Sphere: A Study of CNN and Its Impact on Global Communication* (1997) by Ingrid Volkmer; *Global News* (2001) by Tony Silvia; *The Global Journalist* (2002) by Philip Seib; and *Breaking the News: How the Media Undermine American Democracy* (1996) by James Fallows.

The distinction between entertainment-oriented news and serious news is not meant to imply that news is either one or the other. However, the following principles can be laid out to identify predominantly entertaining news or predominantly serious news:

People: Entertainment-oriented news covers celebrities or scandals in the private lives of public figures; serious news covers politicians and ordinary people involved in events that are important to the general population.

Priority: Entertainment-oriented news presents dramatic or horrifying news (murders, sexual scandal) at the front of the content (the first page of a newspaper, the first story in a radio or television newscast, the first and biggest link on a web page), or as a constant theme of the overall news content; serious news presents news in order of priority and proportion according to its impact on people's lives.

Special Effects: Entertainment-oriented news makes more use of eye-catching and ear-catching special effects in photographs, graphics, and radio and television stage sets, thereby placing emphasis on the delivery of the news; serious news downplays special effects, thereby placing emphasis on the news itself.

DEPTH VERSUS BREVITY IN NEWS REPORTING

A third dimension of news reporting involves depth versus brevity of the information. Brief news reports can be thought of as superficial "headline" reporting, whereas in-depth news reports can be thought of as more substantial and therefore more meaningful. In general, longer news reports have more depth than shorter news reports. Similarly, news reports that are companion reports to other reports are thought of as providing more depth than single news reports. The following principles indicate depth or brevity in news reporting:

Length: The time length of a story on radio and television.

Space: The amount of space a story occupies in a newspaper or on a web site.

Companion Reports: Multiple reports in a single newspaper, web site, or radio or television newscast that address the newsworthy event.

Serializing: News reporting that includes more than one story on a news event on successive days.

NEWS REPORTING IN FRANCE

Bias versus Objectivity in Newspapers in France

In France, four out of five of the national newspapers are associated with individual political orientations—most of which are to the left side of the political spectrum. *L'Humanité* is considered to be a far-left communist newspaper. *Libération*, founded during a Parisien student revolution in 1968, is characterized as a left-wing intellectual newspaper. *Le Monde* (*The World*) is perceived of as a left-of-center "paper of record." *Le Canard Enchaîné* (*The Enchained Duck*) is perceived of as a left-wing paper that is derisive of politics as a whole. Only *Le Figaro* is perceived of as a right-wing newspaper.

In France, the national newspapers are known for generally practicing objectivity, but also for frequently crossing over into bias. *Le Figaro*, *Le Canard Enchaîné*, and *L'Humanité* carry metamessages, but none designates objectivity as a guiding criterion. Their respective metamessages, carried on their front pages, are "Without the Freedom of Criticism, There is No Way of Flattering Praise" (*Le Figaro*); "Satirical Newspaper" (*Le Canard Enchaîné*); and "The Newspaper of the French Communist Party" (*L'Humanité*). All of these statements invite readers to assume that the newspapers are not objective. *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* carry two pages of clearly identified commentary and debate; the other newspapers tend to mix commentary into most of the pages. The commentary pages in *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro*

NEWS REPORTING IN THE USA

Bias versus Objectivity in Newspapers in the USA

In the USA, almost all newspapers (and radio and television newscasts as well) are known for expressing a goal of practicing objectivity. This does not prevent newspapers from being perceived as leaning to the left or the right. But generally, even newspapers that are perceived as leaning to the left or to the right make attempts to achieve objectivity by providing “both sides” to an issue. Typically, a story will begin with a proposed policy, and then present opposing viewpoints on the policy. For example, the November 13, 2004, *Washington Times* ran a story on the front page with the headline, “Hatch joins Kennedy to Push Hate-Crimes Bill.” The first two paragraphs of the story were as follows:

A new “hate-crimes” proposal supported by Democrats and key Senate Republicans, including Sen. Orrin G. Hatch of Utah, would vastly expand the federal government’s power to prosecute such crimes committed anywhere in the country.

Opponents of one of the most contentious provisions—inclusion of “sexual orientation” as protected category—“have got to grow up,” Mr. Hatch said earlier in the negotiations.

This kind of sentence construction using the words of opponents, in which two sides of a story are presented, is typical of newspaper (and radio and television) stories in the USA.

In terms of metamessages, only the *New York Times* runs a front-page message that promotes one particular ideal of objectivity. The message, “All the News That’s Fit to Print,” implies that no story is out-of-bounds, and therefore that the newspaper does not apply a political agenda to story selection. *USA Today* runs a metamessage, calling itself “The Nation’s Newspaper.” The *Wall Street Journal* does not run a metamessage.

However, in newspapers in the USA (as well as in radio and television news), there is one regular bias that in essence dismisses socialism and communism as distasteful ideologies. For example, a September 15, 2004, Associated Press story that ran in newspapers across the country reported on Hurricane Ivan and the “heavy flooding” it caused in Cuba. The story reported that “Cuba’s tobacco crop was safe,” and that “tobacco is the communist-run island’s third largest export.” The mentioning of communism in the context of a disaster story wherein a harmful crop (tobacco) is grown, invites the reader to link the political ideology to the bad news and immoral behavior. The mention of “communist” in this kind of disaster-story is not normally balanced by mentioning “capitalist” in similar stories occurring in the USA or in other market-based economies.

This antisocialism and anticommunism bias is also very common in quotes that are selected for hard news stories. Often, such news reports with this bias will cover a speech by a politician in which socialism is talked about in a way that identifies it as being obviously undesirable. For example, a May 13, 2004, front-page article by David Pierce in a local newspaper in Pennsylvania (the *Pocono Record*) reported on a county commissioner meeting involving a discussion about rising taxes due to population growth. The report stated:

Commissioner Bob Nothstein said growth is the inevitable consequence of the Poconos [a region in the state of Pennsylvania] being so close to metropolitan New York. But not all growth is bad, he said, and it’s important to strike a balance that results in orderly growth.

"The United States of America was built on free enterprise," he said. "America was not formulated on socialism. America was not formulated on communism." (pp. A1-A2)

Typically, this convention of journalistic bias, which presents a newsmaker's criticism of a policy by calling the policy socialized (or socialist), is unanswered by a counteropinion in the story. Such criticisms typically stop short of explaining the demerits of a socialized policy, thus implying that the policy is automatically wrong because it is socialist or communist.

Another, related bias involves statements that describe the USA as being the greatest or most-envied nation in the world. For example, an article in the July 3, 2004, *Courier Journal* from Kentucky ran a columnist editorial with the headline: "One Great Nation, Despite Its Flaws." The editorial began with the sentence: "Today, class, some letters, comments and large thoughts as we all begin to celebrate the birthday of the greatest nation in the history of the world by complaining about the price of gasoline." These kinds of matter-of-fact statements about the "greatness" of the USA are fairly common in columnist articles and letters to the editor. Often, such articles discuss "freedom," "democracy," or "economic opportunity" in support of the claim that the USA is the greatest nation.

In the USA, most newspapers run commentary on two pages, usually toward the end of the first section. Typically these pages consist of an editorial by the newspaper, opinion pieces by weekly syndicated or regular columnists, and letters to the editor from citizens. It is very common to see all three types of commentary in US newspapers. The *New York Times* editorial has a particularly high status in the second-wave news circulation, as excerpts of the editorials are subsequently widely discussed on politically oriented talk shows on both radio and television, and excerpted or covered in other newspapers.

USA newspapers are not known for actively engaging in campaigns to directly advocate positions on issues and policies that are perceived to affect USA society. More commonly, USA newspapers report opinion polls on attitudes by citizens toward policies, leaving it to policy makers to decide whether the polls warrant further action. For example, the December 22, 2004, *Las Vegas Review-Journal* ran an AP Story on page 11A with the headline: "Most in the U.S. Confident About Drugs." This story reported a poll showing that most Americans felt confident about the safety of prescription drugs "at a time when several popular medications have been linked to increased risk of heart attack and stroke." The newspaper story in itself did not editorialize about whether new procedures should or should not be considered to change the approval process for prescription drugs. Rather, the story reported the poll and then followed up with contrasting quoted opinions from politicians and political advisors regarding whether the approval process should be changed.

Bias versus Objectivity in Radio and Television News in the USA

Radio and television newscasts are not known for being politically biased. Radio and television news generally aims at objectivity by balancing opinions and by refraining from political commentary or advocacy journalism as part of a regular newscast. Usually, radio and television reports include "two sides" to controversial issues to achieve balance, which is seen as a central component of objectivity.

Entertainment versus Serious News in Newspapers in the USA

Most reporting in newspapers is serious, though many newspapers—for example, *USA Today*—also run entertainment-oriented sections or pages. The priority of stories generally

is current events, crime, local news, business news, and sports. The big-city newspapers also usually run sections on Metro, Culture/The Arts, House and Home, and Food. Generally, private indiscretions of people in the news are not as prominent in news reporting about more substantive events. In terms of people, USA newspapers tend to focus on government officials, famous people, sports figures, successful businessmen and women, and military officers. Very often the news is about elected politicians and other government officials. Most often, the leading stories involve current events happening within the USA.

Entertainment versus Serious News in Radio and Television in the USA

Radio news on commercial channels tends to be serious with a lot of entertainment-oriented qualities. For example, often the first two-thirds of a radio station's newscast covers serious stories, and the last third covers sports, weather, and entertainment. Many local and syndicated radio newscasts are integrated into a talk show or music show in an entertaining way, wherein the host and the news announcer exchange pleasantries and jokes before the news announcer begins the newscast. Sometimes, the host will even interrupt a newscaster's story to make a joke. In the USA, musical introductions to radio news programs tend to be pulsating and dramatic. On the noncommercial broadcaster NPR, the tone of news coverage is more subdued and slower-paced.

Television news reporting on commercial stations has many entertaining qualities. Musical introductions to network newscasts and local newscasts typically have a dramatic "fanfare" quality centered on trumpets and bass guitar, which communicate a sense of urgency. USA television news tends to be modern and colorful, with multiple television sets visible in the background. Some anchors—for example, on NBC's broadcast and cable networks—stand in front of virtual backgrounds displaying graphics, video, and still shots. Often, there is a lot of motion on the television screen during newscasts, created by crawling text, rolling video, high-tech animation, and flashy graphics used to illustrate stories as well as provide transitions between camera shots. *FoxNews* is known for using searing sound effects as graphics are presented. On noncommercial PBS newscasts, however, the set is somewhat bland, and graphics are not used very often.

Depth versus Brevity of Reporting in Newspapers in the USA

The prestige and big-city newspapers in the USA are known for providing some depth to big current-events stories, by carrying over stories from the front page to inside pages, and by providing companion stories on inside pages. However, USA newspapers are better known for providing more breadth than depth to news stories, due to a tendency toward large number of stories per newspaper, rather than fewer stories with greater word counts. *USA Today* in particular is known as a newspaper of headlines and news-event summaries. Small-town newspapers are not known for achieving much depth because of a commonly applied journalistic practice of writing to a "5th-grade reading level," which is pursued to make the newspaper understandable to as many people as possible and achieve the largest audience possible.

Two subject areas are consistently covered with a lot of depth in most USA newspapers. One area is public-opinion polls on a variety of subjects generally questioning

people “how things are going in the country.” Three common subject areas targeted by polling include opinions about political figures (such as job-approval ratings, or general favorable/unfavorable ratings), USA foreign policy, and the economy (such as consumer confidence, or whether people plan to spend more or less money during the upcoming year on “big-ticket” items). The statistics presented in newspaper stories reporting these polls fit in with a general theme that characterizes newspaper journalism in the USA—that is the common use of numbers to describe newsworthy events.

A second subject area commonly covered in USA newspapers is business and economic news. The *Wall Street Journal* is particularly known for specializing in this kind of news. Within the general area of business and economic news, most newspapers provide in-depth consumer reports. This news includes a wide range of information generally geared toward reporting on new products and services, manufacturers’ recalls, and popular brands that Americans are purchasing.

It is very common to see essentially the same story—attributed to the AP newswire—in hundreds of local newspapers across the USA on any given day. For instance, on December 29, 2004, an AP-cited story on the death of author and activist Susan Sontag ran in the *Sun* (San Bernardino, California), the *Charlotte Observer* (North Carolina), the *Morning Call* (Allentown, Pennsylvania), and *USA Today*—as well as hundreds of other newspapers across the USA. Out of the four newspapers mentioned, three contained articles discussing one of Sontag’s books, *On Photography* (the *Charlotte Observer* did not discuss that book). All four newspapers carried articles commenting on Sontag’s observations about the relationship between the photograph and the viewer of the photograph. Two of the newspapers carried articles using the exact same Sontag quote: “Pictures sometimes distance viewers from the subject matter.” This kind of homogeneity in news stories in the USA—particularly in news constructed from AP stories—is very common not only in newspapers but also in radio newscasts.

In-depth international news is not usually found in most USA newspapers (notable exceptions include the *New York Times* and the *Christian Science Monitor*), especially small-town newspapers. Newspaper stories on other countries are often a single paragraph placed toward the middle of the newspaper in a column that runs four to six of these one-paragraph international stories. In addition, most international news stories in newspapers amount to “bad news” stories, involving such themes as natural disasters, armed conflicts, disease outbreaks, human tragedy, and other unseemly subjects. For example, the front page of the December 29, 2004, *Los Angeles Times* included the following headlines and subheadlines on events in foreign countries:

Tsunami Death Toll Hits 60,000 (in Asia Pacific); —Survivors Scramble for Food;
 Small Aid Shipments Reach Hardest-Hit Nations
 Getting an Education in Jihad—Infuriated by the U.S.-led ‘Crusade’ in Iraq, a Lebanese
 Teacher Left his Country and Steady Job Intending to Die for the Insurgency
 Father’s Grip No Match for Wave—Hundreds of Children in a Southern Indian City
 were Killed, Unable to Fight the Torrent
 Pledges of Help [To Countries in Asia Hit by Tsunami] Grow with Problems—More
 than \$120 Million is Promised; Damage, War and Other Obstacles Slow Delivery
 of Relief

Five Roadblocks to Peace—Staking Their Claim to a ‘Greater Israel’
Economic Fallout—Island Tourism Takes a Big Hit
Disease—Water Is a Bigger Health Risk than Corpses
Death of a Prince—Thai Royal Grew up in San Diego

Similarly, international stories often portray other countries as having problems that implicitly are not present in the USA. For example, two front-page stories in the October 2, 2003, *New York Times* reported on labor practices in China. The headline for one story was “Vague Call in China for More Democracy.” This story began: “President Hu Jintao has made a vague but insistent call for more democracy in his country on the eve of the country’s National Day, raising expectations that he may support introducing greater pluralism in the one-party state.” The article then went on to analyze the situation as follows: “Chinese leaders promote the concept of democracy mainly as a way of enhancing the credibility of the Communist Party and fighting corruption by low- and middle-ranking officials. Mr. Hu almost certainly does not plan to push Western-style democracy.”

Next to this story was another story with the headline, “Chinese Girls’ Toil Brings Pain, Not Riches.” This story discusses how Chinese girls working in factories making products such as false eyelashes receive much lower pay and poorer working conditions than they were promised. However, the story did not discuss the integral role of consumers in the USA and other countries in purchasing Chinese-made products.

Both of these stories, taken together, illustrate a common theme in international coverage in USA newspapers (and radio and television newscasts)—namely, that many foreign countries are portrayed as having problems that implicitly could be corrected by adopting USA-style democracy and capitalism. Moreover, the problems discussed in newspaper stories often exclude basic background information on the foreign country (for example, defining and explaining what China’s “National Day” is), criticisms of similar practices in the USA; and comments on how policies in the USA are related to the identified problems in the foreign country.

Depth versus Brevity of Reporting on Radio and Television in the USA

Not all radio stations in the USA carry news. The stations that usually carry news include big-city, talk, small-town, top-40, and NPR stations. Other, mainly music-oriented stations may or may not carry news. Almost every big city has at least one radio station that carries news twenty-four hours. Most radio news stories are local. International news stories are more prominent on network newscasts carried by affiliates, but these newscasts are also focused primarily on domestic news. A radio news story on commercial stations typically is fifteen to thirty seconds, and includes a five- to ten-second sound bite. Often, the sound bite cuts off the end of a person’s sentence. The bulk of radio news is scheduled in a five- to ten-minute block at the top of the hour during morning drive from 0600 to 1000 (6:00 AM–10 AM), though news also commonly airs at the top of the hour during evening drive from 1500 to 1900 (3:00 PM–7:00 PM). A typical schedule at small and medium-market stations is for a five-minute block of local/regional news to be aired, followed by a block of five-minute network news. Here are the headlines of stories that aired on December 9, 2004, on *WSBG*, a small-town radio station in Pennsylvania:

Icy Conditions on Roads
 Fund Established for Family Whose House Burned Down
 Co-Owner of a Public Relations Firm Approached by Political Party to Run for Office
 Shooting in an Ohio Nightclub
 Usher Won 11 Billboard Music Awards
 Last Month's Unemployment Filings Show an Increase
 No New Talks between New Jersey Power Company and Electrical Workers
 Sports Scores (University, High School, Professional)
 Baseball Team Signs a Pitcher
 Weather (sponsored by Blue Ridge Digital Cable Provider)

In the USA, national public radio stations usually carry more extensive news. The NPR morning news program *Morning Edition* runs for one hour, and the afternoon news program *All Things Considered* runs for one and a half hours. News reports on these programs typically can run up to ten minutes and usually include follow-up discussions with experts in the studio or by phone.

Almost all terrestrial commercial television stations—both network affiliates and independents—carry news. Often, affiliates and independents run a one-hour local news program at noon, three consecutive half-hour news programs beginning at 1700 (5:00 PM)—wherein the first newscasts concentrate on local news while the latter newscasts concentrate more on national news—and a one-hour local news program either at 2200 (10:00 PM) or 2300 (11:00 PM). Affiliates also usually carry a two-hour network news program at 0700 (7:00 AM), and a half-hour news program at 1830 (6:30 PM). Stations that are members of noncommercial PBS usually only run the network's one-hour news program at 1800 (6:00 PM). Most newscasts focus on local and regional news. National and international news on terrestrial television is normally a staple only on the 1830 (6:30 PM) commercial network newscasts and the 1800 (6:00 PM) PBS newscast.

In addition to terrestrial television news, several cable channels carry news programs during morning, midday, and evening hours. These channels include CNN, Headline News, MSNBC, CNBC, FoxNews, and local cable channels.

Local news programs on commercial affiliates and independents usually follow a similar format. Most stories are one minute or less, and are rarely longer than three minutes. Several stories are usually around fifteen seconds. Usually a newscast begins with a story involving a crime or another kind of tragedy. Fires and murders are common lead stories. For example, the headlines for the three lead stories on the 1700 (5:00 PM) newscast on January 2, 2005, on ABC-affiliate WNEP were: A Fire Kills Two Young Boys; A Fire Destroys Row Homes; Two Bank Robberies Occurred Within a Couple Hours of Each Other. After the lead stories, the subsequent stories usually deal with local current events. Sports stories and weather forecasts usually come about two-thirds of the way through a newscast. Weather is often "teased" at several points in between news stories, wherein anchors indicate to viewers that something interesting may be happening with the weather, and that they should stay tuned. Often near the end of a newscast, a human-interest news story is aired. For example, a January 20, 2005, next-to-last story of a *WBRE* newscast in Scranton, Pennsylvania, was about a teacher organizing a "mathathon" for second-grade students to compete at solving fifty math problems to raise money for victims of tsunamis that hit the South Pacific three weeks earlier.

The formats of commercial network news programs are also fairly standard. Most stories are right around three minutes long. Rarely are stories longer than five minutes. Usually there are three or four advertising and promotional breaks (for upcoming programs), totaling up to twelve minutes. Over the course of a half-hour newscast, typically there are nine or ten stories. Most stories focus on national current events. Stories also often focus on health-related issues such as breakouts of diseases, new drugs, drug recalls, and on tragedies. Sports and weather news is not usually covered on the network news programs. In television news in the USA, there is a lot of “teasing” where, prior to an advertising break, the anchor promotes an exciting, important, or surprising story that is coming up later in the broadcast. This kind of story may be teased several times during a newscast before the story is actually aired. Figure 10.8 lists sample headlines of stories on an ABC evening newscast. Overall, television newscasts in the USA tend to have greater breadth than depth because of the brevity of most stories, due largely to substantial advertising minutage.

The format of news on noncommercial PBS is different from the commercial stations and networks, and has much more depth. Stories are longer, and typically run around fifteen minutes. Over the course of the hour-long newscast, there may be four or five news stories. Most include an anchor introducing a story, followed by the report, then followed by a panel discussion between a PBS anchor and one or more experts in the studio or via satellite link.

Video/sound bites containing a witness’s account of a news event or an expert’s commentary are very common in television news reports. Bites are usually short, typically

Advertisements
 Previews of 5 Stories
 President Submits Budget to Congress
 Defense Budget
 Agriculture Budget
 Two Large Attacks in Iraq
 Secretary of State Leaves the Middle East
 New Palestinian Leadership Making Efforts to Change Status Quo
 Vatican Says it Could be Several More Days before Pope Leaves Hospital
 Promos for 3 Upcoming Stories
Advertisements
 Conviction in Sexual Abuse Case Involving Catholic Priest
 Debut of a Super Computer Chip
 Rising Costs of Prescription Drugs Leading Americans to Order Drugs from Canada
 Promo for Upcoming Story
Advertisements
 Cable TV Companies Airing Porn Yet Donating Money to Candidates for Moral Values
 Promo for Upcoming Story
 Advertisements
 British Woman Sails Around the World Solo
Advertisements

FIGURE 10.8 Sample Headlines from 1830 (6:30 PM) Newscast on ABC World News Tonight in the USA; February 7, 2005

Source: Robert M’Kenzie.

lasting from five to fifteen seconds. Often, the bite is edited in such a way as to chop off the ending of a person's sentence to keep the bite as short as possible. It is somewhat common in television news in the USA for the lead story to be followed by another related news report.

NEWS REPORTING IN MÉXICO

Bias versus Objectivity in Newspapers in México

In México, most national newspapers are known for striving for objectivity, which comes from an emerging general outlook of most newspapers not to flatly support or oppose a political party. But Mexican newspapers are also known for exhibiting contradictory biases that are an outgrowth of a clash between traditional conventions of journalism and newly found press freedoms. Since the 2000 election, there has been a surge of bottled-up criticism of the federal government that probably has greater invective than if there had been a long-standing tradition of critical journalism. Such criticism has been strengthened also by the 2002 federal law, Freedom of Access to Information, which allows citizens and journalists for the first time to access federal records pertaining to the public interest. It remains to be seen whether the hypercriticism of government will be moderated over time.

However, the sensational criticism of the government conflicts with a second bias in Mexican newspapers: the reluctance to criticize governments—particularly state governments—and the tendency to print unedited press releases from the government. Both of these attributes are an outgrowth of the reliance of newspapers on revenue from government-financed advertising insertions.

It may seem contradictory that these two biases—the tendency to sensationalize criticism of the government, and the tendency to refrain from criticizing government—can coexist in Mexican journalism. However, two examples from the November 14, 2004, *La Jornada* (*The Day*) illustrate these two opposing biases. One article supportive of the government ran on page 12 with the headline: “Reducing Seats in the Government Has Resources Going Towards Productive Investments.” This article reports on comments that President Vicente Fox made the radio regarding achievements of his administration. In a subheadline, the article states: “The Best Years are Coming in the Two Years Left of the Fox Administration.” But a second article that was critical of the government ran with the headline: “Siege to Inform and Lack of Freedom of Expression Constitutes Foxism” (a play on words using the name of the then president). The article states, “The Mexican academy of human rights denounces that the present government favors the concentration of assets of communication, impunity in the aggressions to the freedom of press, and the excessive use of the laws to inhibit the freedom of expression” (p. 17).

In México, some of the national newspapers follow a political bias. *La Prensa* is known for covering crime stories using vivid descriptions and photos of people who have been injured or killed, without a political orientation. For example, it would be typical in *La Prensa* for a story to describe in detail how a victim's arm was cut off in a robbery. *El Grafico* (*The Graphic*) is known for being apolitical, and for being sensationalist, though not as much as *La Prensa*. *La Jornada* has been known as a leftwing intellectual and workers' newspaper that often criticizes Mexican government as being corrupt, and foreign policies of the USA as being imperialistic. *La Jornada* also frequently portrays government