

Fred Shook | John Larson | John DeTarsio

TELEVISION FIELD PRODUCTION AND REPORTING

A GUIDE TO VISUAL STORYTELLING

Sixth Edition

Shook • Larson • DeTarsio

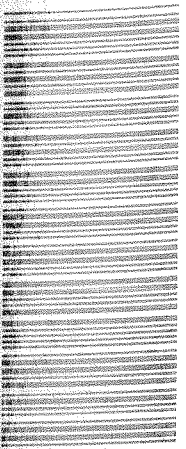
TELEVISION FIELD PRODUCTION AND REPORTING

A GUIDE TO VISUAL STORYTELLING

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—NPPA



CONTENTS

Preface	xii	LOOK FOR A STORY FOCUS IN SPOT-NEWS EVENTS	15
About the Authors	xv	TELL YOUR STORY THROUGH PEOPLE	15
INTRODUCTION	1	STRONG NATURAL SOUND HELPS TELL THE STORY	16
NEW TITLES FOR NEW JOB DESCRIPTIONS	1	BUILD IN SURPRISES	16
HOW TO RENEW OR JUMPSTART YOUR CAREER	2	KEEP SOUND BITES SHORT	17
HOW TO EXCEL IN MULTIPLE CAPACITIES	2	ADDRESS THE LARGER ISSUE	17
ANTICIPATE KEY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	3	CHALLENGE YOUR FOCUS STATEMENT	17
NOTES	3	VIDEO PACKAGES ARE FACTUAL MINI-MOVIES	17
		THE LEAD	18
		PROVIDE VISUAL PROOF FOR ALL MAIN POINTS	18
CHAPTER 1		THE CLOSE	19
Telling the Visual Story	4	BE HARD ON YOURSELF AS A WRITER	19
THROUGH STORIES WE SHARE HUMAN EXPERIENCE AND UNDERSTANDING	5	WRITE FROM THE VISUALS	20
THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN VISUAL STORIES AND REPORTS	6	LOOK FOR A STORY WHILE CAPTURING UNCONTROLLED ACTION	20
HEART, EMOTION, DEMEANOR	6	LOOK FOR THE LARGER STORY	21
PLACING THE HUMAN PERSPECTIVE IN PERSPECTIVE	8	SUMMARY	22
THE VALUE OF PICTORIAL NARRATIVE	8	KEY TERMS	22
SILENCE AS A WRITING TOOL	9	DISCUSSION	22
THE SILENT LANGUAGES OF THE SENSES	9	EXERCISES	23
PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER	10	NOTES	23
CULTURE IMPACTS PERCEPTION	10		
HOW TO PLAN THE VISUAL STORY	11	CHAPTER 2	
THE BEST STORIES CONVEY A SENSE OF PROGRESSION	12	The Visual Grammar of Motion Picture Photography	25
FIND IMAGES THAT CONVEY A CLEAR STORY FOCUS	12	THE SHOT	25
WRITE THE PICTURES FIRST	13	THE SEQUENCE	25
REPORTORIAL EDITING	13	BASIC SHOTS	26
WORKING AS PART OF A TEAM	14	LONG SHOT	26
PROVE THE STORY'S FOCUS VISUALLY	14	MEDIUM SHOT	27
THE FOCUS MAY CHANGE	15	CLOSE-UP	27
		HOW THE BASIC SHOTS WORK TOGETHER	27
		CAMERA MOVEMENT	28

PAN	28	EVERYONE IS AN EDITOR	47
MOVING SHOT	29	THE CUT	48
COMBINATION SHOT	29	CHOOSING EDIT POINTS	48
TILT SHOT	29	THERE CAN BE NO MATCHED ACTION WITHOUT OVERLAPPING ACTION	49
TRACKING SHOT	29	CUTTING ON ACTION OR AT REST	49
TRUCKING SHOT	29	INTO-FRAME/OUT-OF-FRAME ACTION	50
DOLLY SHOT	30	JUMP CUTS	50
CHANGES IN CAMERA PERSPECTIVE	30	POP CUTS	50
STABILIZATION OF SHAKY IMAGES	31	DEVICES TO COMPRESS TIME AND ADVANCE THE ACTION	51
SHOTS THAT HELP TELL THE STORY	31	PARALLEL CUTTING	52
ONE SHOTS TO CROWD SHOTS	34	SHOT ORDER IMPACTS THE ILLUSION OF CONTINUITY	52
MASTER SHOT WITH CUT-INS	34	CONTENT DICTATES PACE	53
OVERLAPPING ACTION	35	CUTTING TO CONDENSE TIME	53
MATCHED-ACTION SEQUENCES CAN BE SHOT IN SPOT NEWS	35	COMPOSITION AFFECTS PACE	53
JUMP CUTS	37	SCREEN DIRECTION	54
THE CUTAWAY	37	EDITING TO ELIMINATE THE FALSE REVERSE	54
THE MOTIVATED CUTAWAY	38	THE TRANSITION SHOT	55
THE TRANSITION OR REVEAL SHOT	38	SOUND AS A TRANSITIONAL DEVICE	56
USING CAMERA MOVEMENT TO ENHANCE STORYTELLING	39	COLD CUTS	56
POINT-OF-VIEW MOVEMENT	39	FLASH CUTS	56
THINKING CAMERA	39	CUTTING TO LEAVE SPACE FOR AUDIENCE REACTION	56
SCREEN DIRECTION	40	COMMUNICATION PAYS	57
HOW TO AVOID THE FALSE REVERSE	40	DISSOLVES AND OTHER OPTICAL EFFECTS	57
VARY CAMERA ANGLES	41	SUMMARY	58
PHOTOGRAPH PEOPLE AT EYE LEVEL	42	KEY TERMS	59
ANGLES PROVIDE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT	42	DISCUSSION	59
CONTRAST AND COMPARISON	43	EXERCISES	59
COMPOSITION	43	NOTES	60
SUMMARY	43		
KEY TERMS	43		
DISCUSSION	44		
EXERCISES	44		
NOTES	45		
		CHAPTER 4	
CHAPTER 3		Shooting Video in the Field	61
Video Editing: The Invisible Art	46	COMPOSITION GUIDELINES	61
EDITING IS ANOTHER WRITING TOOL	46	THE RULE OF THIRDS	61
TOWARD A PHILOSOPHY OF EDITING	47	POINTERS FOR WIDE SCREEN COMPOSITION	64
		USE A TRIPOD WHENEVER APPROPRIATE	65
		THE HANDHELD CAMERA	65

BALANCE THE CAMERA	66	CHAPTER 5	
USE A WIDE STANCE	66	Writing with Light	82
CONTROL BREATHING	66	PHOTOGRAPHY IS THE ART OF CONTROLLING LIGHT	82
PREPLAN BODY MOVEMENT	66	LIGHT-MOUNTED FILTERS	85
WALK IN LOCKSTEP	67	MIXING LIGHT SOURCES	87
AVOID UNPLANNED CAMERA MOVEMENT	67	BASIC LIGHTING PATTERNS	87
HOW TO USE THE ZOOM LENS	67	THE ROLE OF ARTIFICIAL LIGHT	87
AVOID CALLING ATTENTION TO THE ZOOM	68	KEY LIGHT	88
ADJUST SPEED AND DURATION OF ZOOM TO STORY MOOD AND PACE	68	CONTRAST CONTROL	89
RECOMPOSE THE SHOT AS YOU ZOOM	68	THE INVERSE-SQUARE LAW OF LIGHT	89
STORYTELLING AND PLANNING	68	BACKLIGHT	89
ESTABLISH COMMUNICATION IN THE FIELD	68	BROADLIGHTING AND SHORT LIGHTING	91
THINK BEFORE YOU SHOOT	70	LIGHTING FOR HIGH DEFINITION	91
SHOOT SEQUENCES	70	FLAT LIGHTING	92
SHOOT AND MOVE	71	LIGHT DIFFUSION	92
ANTICIPATE ACTION	71	BOUNCE LIGHTING	93
SHOOT ONLY THE SHOTS YOU NEED	71	EYE REFLECTIONS	93
AVOID INDISCRIMINATE SHOOTING	71	EXPOSURE	95
EDIT IN THE CAMERA	71	ESSENTIAL LIGHTING EQUIPMENT	96
SHOOT TO ELIMINATE THE FALSE REVERSE	72	LIGHTING IN SUNLIGHT	96
INVOLVE THE CAMERA IN THE ACTION	72	HOW TO LIGHT A NEWS CONFERENCE	97
WORKING WITH PEOPLE	73	SETTING UP LIGHTS IN COOPERATION WITH OTHER CREWS	98
AVOID DISTRACTING THE SUBJECT	73	LIGHTING ETIQUETTE	98
STAGING VERSUS MOTIVATING	74	LIGHTING SPOT NEWS AT NIGHT	98
THE ONE-PERSON BAND	75	PHOTOGRAPHING SUBJECTS WITH DARK SKIN	99
HOW TO SHOOT AND CONDUCT INTERVIEWS SIMULTANEOUSLY	75	LARGE-SCALE LIGHTING	99
HOW TO PHOTOGRAPH YOUR OWN STANDUP	76	CAUTIONS	99
SHOOTING IN COLD WEATHER	76	SUMMARY	100
SAFETY FIRST	77	KEY TERMS	101
DISTANCING	78	DISCUSSION	101
SAFETY IN NUMBERS	78	EXERCISES	102
PLAN TO MAKE MISTAKES	78	NOTES	103
ON RETURNING TO THE STATION	79		
SUMMARY	80		
KEY TERMS	80		
DISCUSSION	80		
EXERCISES	80		
NOTES	81		
		CHAPTER 6	
		The Sound Track	104
		HOW MICROPHONES WORK	106
		DIRECTIONAL PATTERNS	106

ON CHOOSING A MIKE	107	"HOW DO YOU FEEL?"	130
IMPEDANCE	107	ANTICIPATE QUESTIONS THE VIEWERS WOULD ASK	130
FREQUENCY RESPONSE	107	PRACTICE THE FINE ART OF HESITATION	131
MICROPHONES FOR THE VIDEO JOURNALIST	108	PITCH REPORTING OPPORTUNITIES	131
THE WIRELESS TRANSMITTER-RECEIVER	110	PREARRANGE SIGNALS BETWEEN REPORTER AND PHOTOGRAPHER	131
THE MIXER	112	HOW TO REACT WITHOUT APPEARING TO AGREE	132
ESSENTIAL POINTS FOR AUDIO	113	RETAIN CONTROL OF THE INTERVIEW	133
TECHNIQUES TO REDUCE WIND NOISE	117	INTERVIEWING CHILDREN	133
BE AGGRESSIVE	118	THE TALKING HEAD	134
THE MICROPHONE HEARS DIFFERENTLY	118	INFLUENCING HOW VIEWERS PERCEIVE THE SUBJECT	135
SOUND PERSPECTIVE	119	ONE-EYED TALKING HEADS	135
STEREO AND SURROUND SOUND	119	BODY LANGUAGE	135
COVERING NEWS CONFERENCES	120	AFTER THE INTERVIEW IS OVER	136
RECORDING GROUP DISCUSSIONS	120	INTERVIEWS ALLOW REPORTING THROUGH DIRECT OBSERVATION	136
THE TWO-PERSON INTERVIEW	121	SUMMARY	137
RECORD ROOM TONE	121	KEY TERM	137
THE SEDUCTIVE QUALITY OF NAT SOUND	121	DISCUSSION	138
WATCH WHAT YOU SAY	121	EXERCISES	138
SOUND AND VIDEO ACCESSORIES	122	NOTES	139
SUMMARY	123		
KEY TERMS	123		
DISCUSSION	124		
EXERCISES	124		
NOTES	125		
		CHAPTER 8	
CHAPTER 7		Video Script Formats	140
The Video Interview	126	READER	140
ESTABLISH TRUST	126	VTR VO (VOICE-OVER VIDEO)	141
PRACTICE GOOD MANNERS	127	VTR VO (VOICE-OVER VIDEO) VO/SOT/VO (VO SOT OR A/B FOR SHORT)	141
THE MOST IMPORTANT INTERVIEW QUESTION	127	INTROS TO LIVE SHOTS	144
SAVE YOUR QUESTIONS FOR THE INTERVIEW	127	LIVE INTROS TO PACKAGES	145
DO YOUR HOMEWORK	127	PACKAGE SCRIPTS	145
HOW TO FRAME INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	128	REPORTER AND ANCHOR CLOSES	147
USE A WIRELESS MICROPHONE	128	THE CASE FOR CAPS AND LOWERCASE	148
THE ART OF LISTENING	129	SUMMARY	148
AVOID THE EASY QUESTIONS	129	KEY TERMS	148
AVOID TWO-PART QUESTIONS	130	EXERCISES	149
		NOTES	149

CHAPTER 9

Writing the Package	151
DEFINE YOUR FOCUS	151
WRITE THE BEGINNING (STUDIO LEAD-IN)	151
WRITE THE PACKAGE LEAD	151
WRITE THE MIDDLE OR MAIN BODY	151
WRITE THE CLOSE	154
PREPLAN THE PACKAGE	154
SPOT-NEWS PACKAGES	156
SET A HIGH STANDARD FOR PACKAGES	157
USE NATURAL SOUND LIBERALLY	158
SUMMARY	158
KEY TERMS	159
EXERCISES	159
NOTES	160

CHAPTER 10

Write Like a Storyteller	162
TRANSMITTING THE EXPERIENCE	162
WRITING YOUR FIRST SENTENCE	165
THE THREE HORSES—STORYTELLING TOOLS FOR VIDEO STORIES	166
FIRST HORSE: SURPRISE	166
SECOND HORSE: QUEST	171
THIRD HORSE: CHARACTER	173
TIPS FOR WRITING STRONG STORIES	175
SUMMARY	177
DISCUSSION	178
EXERCISES	178

CHAPTER 11

Video Journalism	180
THE BIG PICTURE	180
SIZE MATTERS—BIGGER IS NOT ALWAYS BETTER	180
BOTTOM LINE	184
STARTING OUT, OVER OR UP	185
SIX OVERLOOKED TOOLS FOR VIDEO JOURNALISTS	185

MINUTE BY MINUTE—ONE MAN BAND LESSONS LEARNED IN THE FIELD	189
A GUIDED TOUR: LESSONS LEARNED	189
SUMMARY	194
KEY TERMS	195
DISCUSSION	196
EXERCISES	196
NOTES	197
CHAPTER 12	
How to Improve Your Storytelling Ability	198
SEEK GRADUAL IMPROVEMENT	198
HAVE A STORY	199
INVOLVE THE CAMERA	199
SEQUENCES ADVANCE THE STORY	199
DON'T TRY TO SHOW ALL OF NEW ZEALAND	201
PURSUE YOUR INTEREST IN PEOPLE	201
MOTIVATE VIEWERS TO WATCH	201
DEVELOP VIDEO FLUENCY	202
KNOW THE COMMUNITY	203
CURIOSITY PAYS	204
SEE BEYOND THE OBVIOUS	204
SHOW AUDIENCES WHAT THEY MISSED	205
HELP VIEWERS EXPERIENCE THE STORY AS YOU DID	207
ADAPT YOUR REPORTING TO STORY DEMANDS	209
REPORTING THE NONVISUAL STORY	209
PERSONAL APPEARANCE AND CONDUCT	210
ETIQUETTE	210
SHOOTING AND REPORTING SPOT NEWS	210
TOWARD A NEWS PHILOSOPHY	213
SUMMARY	213
KEY TERMS	214
DISCUSSION	214
EXERCISES	215
NOTES	216

CHAPTER 13			
Live Shots and Remotes	217	KEY TERMS	260
WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO "GO LIVE"?	218	DISCUSSION	260
SPOT NEWS	219	EXERCISES	261
TELEVISION LIVE SHOT FORMATS	222	NOTES	261
NARRATION	225		
HELICOPTER LIVE SHOTS	227	CHAPTER 15	
LIVE IN THE NEWSROOM	227	Journalistic Ethics	264
LIVE GRAPHICS	228	DEFINITION OF ETHICS	264
LIVE/ANCHOR INTROS	228	EFFECTS OF COMPETITION	264
REPORTER CLOSE	229	SITUATIONAL ETHICS	266
ANCHOR CLOSE	229	LICENSING	266
WHY GO LIVE?	230	CONTRACT WITH THE PUBLIC	266
WHY NOT GO LIVE?	230	AT ISSUE: IMAGE MANIPULATION	267
LIVE PHONERS	231	CASE STUDIES IN ETHICAL DILEMMAS	271
LIVE TEASES	231	REVERSE-ANGLE QUESTIONS	275
SOME PARTING ADVICE	233	STAGED NEWS EVENTS	275
A FINAL THOUGHT	234	REENACTMENTS	275
SUMMARY	234	FILE VIDEO	277
KEY TERMS	235	MATERIAL PROVIDED BY OUTSIDE SOURCES	277
EXERCISES	235	TOWARD AN INDIVIDUAL CODE OF ETHICS	277
		SUMMARY	281
CHAPTER 14		KEY TERMS	282
Law and the Digital Journalist	237	DISCUSSION	282
GATHERING THE NEWS	238	EXERCISES	282
LIBEL	238	DISCUSSION OF ETHICAL CONFLICT SITUATIONS	282
INVASION OF PRIVACY	240	NOTES	285
DEFAMATION	241		
USE OF THE WORD <i>ALLEGED</i>	241	APPENDIX A	
APPARENT AUTHORITY	242	Shooting Video	286
TECHNOLOGY	243	THE CAMERA	286
TELEPHONE RECORDINGS	244	THE LENS	288
SUBPOENAS AND SHIELD LAWS	246	SUMMARY	295
ACCESS LAWS	246	KEY TERMS	295
COURTROOM TELEVISION	247	DISCUSSION	295
THE DIGITAL MILLENNIUM COPYRIGHT ACT OF 1998	251	EXERCISES	296
FAIR USE	254		
SUMMARY	258		

APPENDIX B		KEY TERMS	315
Improving Performance in Field Reporting	297	NOTES	315
DEVELOP QUALITIES THAT MAKE YOU INTERESTING AND INTERESTED	297		
REASONS FOR STANDUPS	297	APPENDIX C	
SEEK REACTION	303	The Assignment Editor and Producer	316
COMMUNICATE WHAT YOU FEEL ABOUT THE STORY	303	THE ASSIGNMENT EDITOR	316
DELIVERING FROM THE STUDIO	305	ASSIGNMENT EDITORS HELP CONCEPTUALIZE THE PACKAGE	317
PUT EXPERIENCE INTO YOUR REPORTS	305	THE PRODUCER	319
MULTIDIMENSIONAL REPORTING	305	TOWARD A NEWS PHILOSOPHY	320
MARKING COPY	305	TEASES	325
LEARN HOW TO RELAX	307	HELP MAKE THE STATION A REGIONAL FORCE	326
DEVELOP CONVERSATIONAL DELIVERY	307	IMPROVE AUDIO-VIDEO LINKAGE	326
YOUR APPEARANCE	308	VISUALS	327
FIELD LIGHTING FOR HDTV	309	FRESHEN FILE VIDEO	327
LET THE AUDIENCE KNOW YOU AS A FRIEND	309	USE TALKING HEADS WITH PURPOSE	327
IMPACT HOW PEOPLE PERCEIVE YOUR INTERVIEW SOURCES	311	WEATHER AND SPORTS	328
POSTURE MATTERS	312	SUMMARY	329
SPLIT-FOCUS PRESENTATION	312	KEY TERMS	330
THE ANCHOR DEBRIEF	313	DISCUSSION	330
WHEN YOU ARE BEFORE THE CAMERA	313	EXERCISES	331
HOW REPORTERS EVOLVE INTO ANCHORS	313	NOTES	332
SUMMARY	314	Glossary	333
		Credits	341
		Index	343

CHAPTER

7

The Video Interview

Shooting the Quotation Marks

Although images communicate much of the visual story, interviews provide the little moments of emphasis that punctuate the story. Interviews provide essential detail, help give stories spirit and atmosphere, and impart vital spontaneity. Part of the interviewer's function is to gather facts, but an equivalent obligation is to reveal the person being interviewed. The best interviews are often so strong that viewers would recognize the main subject days after seeing the story. Inevitably, some interviews feature the world's mayors, ambassadors, and other authorities. Still, the most poignant and memorable interviews often are with ordinary people who have never been on television and may never be on television again. KAKE's Larry Hatteberg observes that people listen most closely when they hear folks like themselves talking.

Whatever your story assignment, interviews usually play a valuable role. The following discussions apply whether you are a "one-person band," an employee at a station where reporters are expected to shoot video for one another, or a partner in a traditional reporter-photographer team.

ESTABLISH TRUST

As a video journalist you're most often an outsider, yet your job as an interviewer depends on your ability to establish trust and gain acceptance from perfect strangers quickly. The job is sometimes less difficult for print reporters, who can walk up without a camera and immediately establish rapport, than for the photojournalist who pulls up to a story burdened with camera, lights, microphone, and other gear.

Because your presence is so obvious, some people will be curious about you; others may be hostile, frightened, or indifferent. To achieve their cooperation, you will have to be open enough to let people come to know and trust you. "People will talk to a friend long before they'll talk to a stranger," says photojournalist Art Donahue.¹

The process can take as little as five minutes and be as simple as a brief chat over coffee, but it can never happen unless you have a genuine interest in people and have the self-confidence to reveal something of yourself. If you are afraid to approach people as you launch your interviewing career, remember that most people feel flattered to be on TV even if they seem nervous at first.

PRACTICE GOOD MANNERS

In a sense, the audience will be peering over your shoulder throughout the interview. Your conduct will determine how the subject reacts, so even when you are in a rush to meet deadline, practice good manners and treat subjects with genuine courtesy. Arrive on time and take leave before you wear out your welcome. Leave the chewing gum at home, and refrain from sitting unless you are invited. Be friendly but not overly familiar. Journalists are always invited guests. Because viewers may identify more with interview subjects than with the reporter, how you treat the interviewee may translate into how viewers subconsciously feel you have treated them.

THE MOST IMPORTANT INTERVIEW QUESTION

Often the people you interview have never been on television, so your first task is to do everything you can to get their mind off why you're there. So great can be the anxiety that one of the West's most gifted poets routinely suffered bouts of diarrhea before television interviews and once fainted before anyone could ask him a question.

Because the objective in television news is communication of ideas through visual action, and because the most compelling stories and interviews reveal personality, it is well to remember that the interview itself is not the thing that happened. It is supporting structure for the larger story. For this reason, sometimes the most important question you can ask an interview subject is, "Show me what you do."

Interviewees are more at ease if they can focus on familiar work and surroundings than if they are forced to focus on themselves, their appearance, or their performance during the interview. Often you can interview people while they're engaged in familiar activities rather than standing them in front of a blank wall and thrusting a stick mike in their face. People are more relaxed doing something other than watching you photograph them. To avoid the appearance of staging in such situations, remember not to ask for or suggest action unless the person already routinely performs the activity in your absence.

SAVE YOUR QUESTIONS FOR THE INTERVIEW

The best interviews carry at least the illusion of spontaneity. Often, however, the reporter sets up the interview and determines in advance the subject matter to be covered, the time of day the interview will be conducted, and even the location for the interview. To help preserve the feeling of spontaneity, try not to share questions in advance of the interview. That's because subjects ordinarily put most of their energy into their first response. Once the camera rolls they may leave out the detail because having told you once, they assume you already know what they said. Although it's natural for interview subjects to want to think through their answers in advance, the best interviews address the moment and the feelings of the moment and grow naturally from the honest interaction between you and the subject.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK

The more you know about your source, the more confidence you give the person and the more you can concentrate on listening without having to worry about the next question you'll ask. Anyone can ask anyone else questions, but the interviewer can succeed only by asking informed questions that are based on knowing everything possible

BOX 7.1 HELP INTERVIEW SUBJECTS FORGET ABOUT THE HARDWARE

Many people you interview will have little experience with reporters, microphones, lights, and cameras. Predictably, their first reaction will be to become almost painfully self-conscious and to direct their focus inward. To help put interview subjects at ease and keep their focus off themselves, the following strategies may help.

- If you have the time, leave your equipment out of sight until you've had a chance to talk with the person you plan to interview.
- Spend as much time as possible getting to know the subject, whether you have only a few minutes or a half hour. Often, this interaction is the most valuable time you can spend on a story because it gives you and the interviewee a way to come to know and trust one another.
- Talk about things that interest the subject; try not to talk about yourself unless the subject first expresses an interest in you.
- Preferably, use a miniature lavalier microphone and wireless transmitter.
- Try to avoid talking about your equipment and how much it costs.
- Give the subject time to become accustomed to the camera, recorder, tripod, light case, and cables.
- Let the subject do as much of the talking as possible.
- When you record, turn off the tally light so people won't know the camera is rolling. ■

about the subject. Author Cornelius Ryan believed journalists should never interview anyone without knowing 60 percent of the answers. Do all the homework you can before the interview. The person you're interviewing has, and will be, prepared.

Among the resources available to most reporters are encyclopedias, almanacs and yearbooks, government manuals, directories, magazines and newspapers, the public library, the Internet, and, of course, phone calls and visits with acquaintances, friends, and relatives of the person to be interviewed. The absence of full and certain knowledge about a subject virtually guarantees an interview far beneath its potential.

HOW TO FRAME INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

So often, reporters think up the questions they'll ask on the way to the interview. The result is an interview without focus. "When you start asking questions, the other person immediately wonders, 'Why does she want to know that?'" If your purpose is unclear, your subject may be reluctant to talk. Ask a few questions to warm up, but save the best and strongest or most controversial questions for the last part of the interview and actually build the interview to a climax. The interview must lead to a given conclusion, somewhat like a story with beginning, middle, and end. Never should it be simply a series of unrelated questions.

USE A WIRELESS MICROPHONE

When you conduct one-on-one interviews at close range with people unaccustomed to the bright lights and hardware of television, try to avoid the handheld mike and even the shotgun mike because such hardware reminds people they're being recorded (Figure 7.1). If you can use a wireless mike instead, subjects are more likely to forget about the microphone. They'll feel and act more natural and may engage in more unguarded conversation.

To further keep the hardware low profile, arrive early to set up the equipment. Whenever necessary, use low-intensity lights, and set them up ahead of time to give interview subjects time to adjust. Long-time interviewer Bill Moyers suggests that

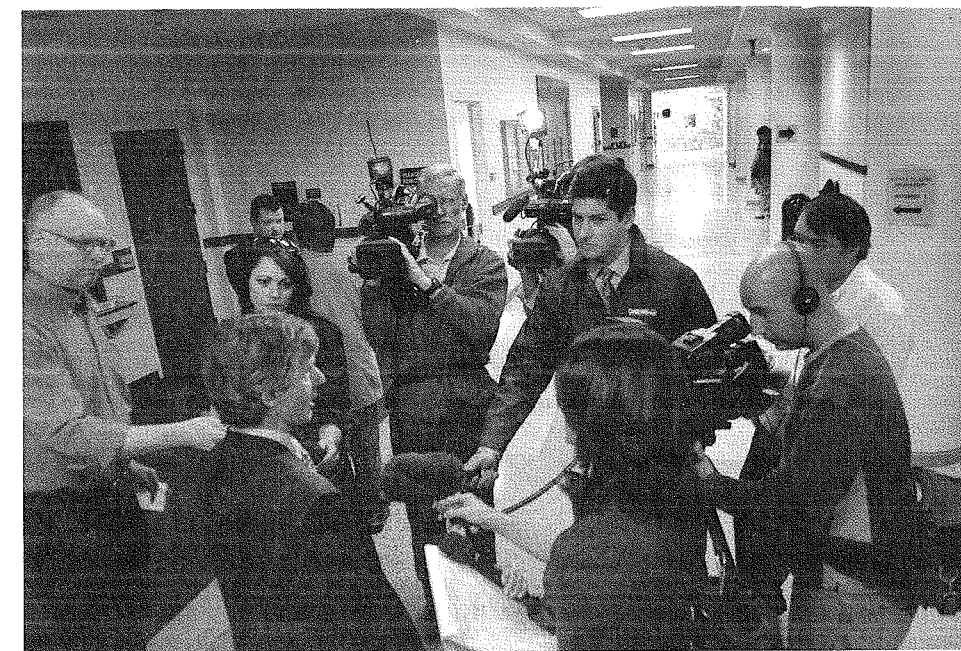


FIGURE 7.1 Unless field crews are sensitive to the problem, reporting hardware can quickly intimidate and overwhelm interview subjects.

regardless of the camera, lights, and other gear, try to operate in such a way the person forgets it's a TV interview and has a conversation.

THE ART OF LISTENING

The most powerful interviews originate from conversations, yet there can be no conversation without a listener. Most obviously, that job falls to the interviewer. Listening, in fact, is one of the reporting arts. If you're prepared, listen well, and show interest in what people say, good interviews will follow. People will give part of themselves to you if you give part of yourself to them, observes Larry Hatteberg.

Listening also helps you frame more meaningful questions. A spontaneous interview is most likely if your questions build naturally off the other person's responses. Attentive listening also frees you from having to concentrate so hard on formulating your next question that you miss what the other person is saying.

As a further payoff, good listening can help you identify potential "edit points," even while you are in the field. When you feel something about what the person says, for example, it's generally a strong bite. "Whenever I interview someone, I try to identify the emotions I feel, and which points during the interview I feel them," says NBC News senior correspondent Bob Dotson. "Inevitably, when I go back to those moments in the interview while I'm editing, that's where I find the strongest statements."²

AVOID THE EASY QUESTIONS

It would help all interviewers to talk with a celebrity or two about interviewing. Whether they are screen stars or football quarterbacks, all celebrities have endured countless questions so similar and predictable that they become clichés. Especially when you work with people who appear frequently on television, think up fresh questions. Again, the task is easier the more you know about the subject.

If your research leads you nowhere, perhaps you can call one of the subject's old college classmates for background information that may point you in new directions. Along the way, you can ask questions and dig for details based on your curiosity about the interviewee, even when they lead you beyond the subject under discussion.

When shooting sit-down interviews, for example, and you have time, be alert for the moment when your subject becomes more than just an expert on the story and reveals personality and humanity. When you dig for details, you'll likely throw away 98 percent of what you unearth, but the more small details interview subjects reveal, the more you learn what matters to them. Sometimes, the small details will become the most touching and memorable moments in your story. Avoid interviewing someone for more than a few minutes, however, if you know you can only use one or two short informational sound bites in your story. Know what you need. Get in, get out, and move on.

Build Questions around the Five W's

The strongest interview questions solicit information and often arise from queries that begin with the "Five W's" familiar to all reporters: Who, Why, Where, When, What (and How). Such words compel informative responses. The question that begins "Why did you oppose reinstating the draft?" is vastly superior to the question or observation that results in a simple yes or no response: "I understand you opposed reinstating the draft." Another good technique is simply to prompt the person for clarification, "Really? Tell me about that," or "I know you oppose the draft. Tell me why."

AVOID TWO-PART QUESTIONS

The strongest interviewers ask their questions one at a time, building each new question on the subject's last response. Inevitably, whenever you ask two-part questions, one of them is left on the table: "How likely are we to see prefabricated factory-built houses dominate the new home market in the United States this century, and if they do come to dominate the market, will financing be provided mostly through private lenders or through government agencies?" Most subjects will answer the first question, then having answered, will ask the interviewer, "What was the other question?"

"HOW DO YOU FEEL?"

The question most likely to pop from the reporter's mouth at inappropriate times is, "How do you feel?" The question is asked of grieving parents, air crash survivors, and losers of football games. Perhaps the question is inappropriate because the answer normally is so obvious: "I feel like hell/sad/miserable/alone/scared/angry." Given story context, any viewer can fill in the blanks.

Sometimes a better approach is to make an observation, "I know it's tough for you right now," or to ask a question that probes the subject's emotions less deeply, such as "What do you think about this?" At other times, the best approach of all is simply to walk away. Some interviews aren't worth the invasion of privacy and loss of dignity they would require.

ANTICIPATE QUESTIONS THE VIEWERS WOULD ASK

As the reporter or solo journalist, try to anticipate questions your viewers would ask the subject if they had the opportunity. You are the viewer's representative in the field, and you will frustrate viewers if you overlook obvious or important subject

matter in your interview. Conversely, because you are the viewer's representative, remember to keep your questions in good taste and to the point.

PRACTICE THE FINE ART OF HESITATION

Silence can be golden as an interviewing technique known as the "non-question question," described from the photojournalist's point-of-view in Chapter 4, Shooting Video in the Field. Experienced interviewers know the single most interesting thing they can do in television is to ask a good question and then just wait for two or three or four seconds after the answer as if they're expecting more. Typically, interview subjects become a little self-conscious and reveal more about themselves than intended. Even experienced interview subjects, who have "heard it all before," sometimes give their best response to a question that was never asked.

PITCH REPORTING OPPORTUNITIES

When conducting interviews for "people stories," professionals follow two rules. **Rule #1:** Don't interview people only in one location; move them around. A change of location can help rejuvenate the interview, and it provides a good chance to go from soft questions to the tough ones. **Rule #2:** Don't interview people. Have a conversation. Use little conversational questions and observations to which subjects can automatically respond, and in responding, define the moment. The observation "I'll bet it's cold in there" may elicit just as meaningful a response as a direct question. Remember, however, to use this technique as a way to elicit a response, not as a way to lead the subject to any particular response. Television journalist Jim Hanchett recommends four standard questions to foster this more conversational process:

- What's happening?
- What's going on?
- What do you think of this?
- What happens now?

Normally, the questions are asked of interview subjects as they sweep out the mud from their flooded storefront or sift through tornado debris for their possessions, while Hanchett's photographer uses a camera-mounted shotgun microphone to pick up their answers. No time is wasted setting up a formal interview, no spontaneity lost because reality has been interrupted (Figure 7.2).

To capture responses in the aftermath of a flood, for example, Hanchett might drive the news car along a street where flood cleanup operations continue while his photographer sits on the car hood and takes pictures. At opportune moments, either of the two will call out to people sometimes fifteen or twenty feet from the camera: "How's it going?" Back comes the response: "This is terrible. I just got flooded out of my house; I lost everything." Extemporaneous questions give people no time to become nervous or to rehearse their answers.

PREARRANGE SIGNALS BETWEEN REPORTER AND PHOTOGRAPHER

A similar technique sometimes is possible even in more formal interview situations. Sometimes interview subjects will be at their most spontaneous and energetic best before the interview begins. If you work alone and your camera already is on a tripod,

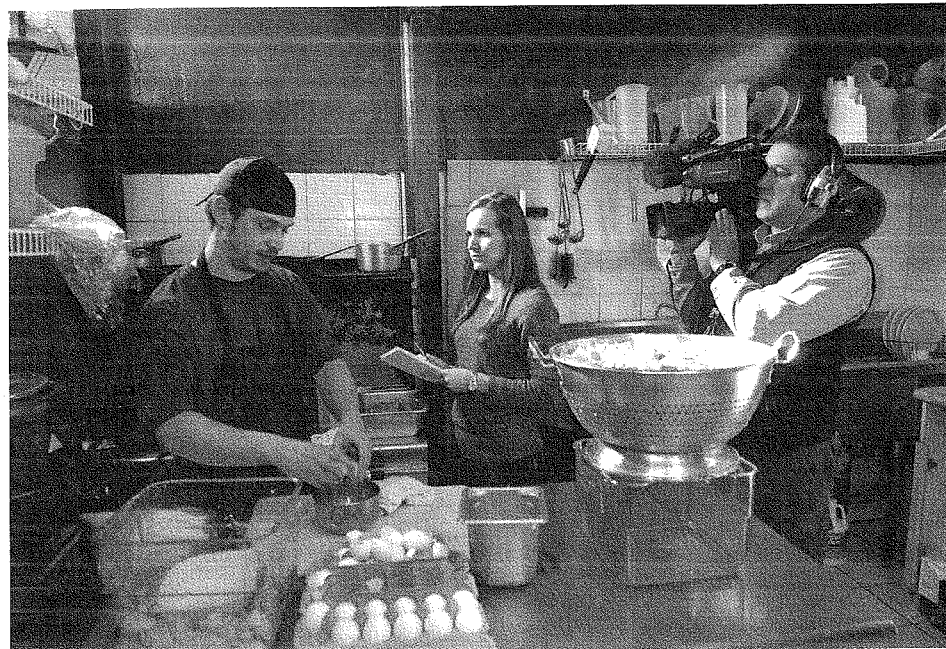


FIGURE 7.2

A good way to interview people unaccustomed to appearing before the camera is to carry on a conversation with them while they continue to work at a familiar task.

focused, composed, and ready to record, you can capture the subject's energy and feeling without interrupting the moment. You can start recording on some cameras with a remote. (You did remember to put a wireless on your subject first thing when you arrived?)

The technique also works for reporter-photographer teams. Using a prearranged gesture as simple as replacing a ballpoint pen in a purse or shirt pocket, the reporter can signal the photographer to begin recording, even without the subject's knowledge. By the time the interviewee asks, "When do we start?" it's sometimes possible to reply, "We've just finished. Thank you so much."

HOW TO REACT WITHOUT APPEARING TO AGREE

Part of the art of conducting the interview is to react, but without indicating agreement or showing inappropriate displays of sympathy with the subject. Into this category fall nods of the head or responses such as "I see" and "uh huh." Most often your intent is to indicate your understanding, or to prompt your subject, through body language that communicates "keep going," but audiences may see such actions as agreement. As a further problem, your own utterings may make it impossible during editing to cleanly pick up the start of a sound bite if you have stepped on that part of the audio with your voice.

To avoid such problems, some reporters tilt or cock their head slightly to one side to show interest in the subject's response, or perhaps even utter an occasional "mm-hmm," provided it's low enough in volume not to be recorded on the sound track. Also be mindful to blink your eyes occasionally, and to allow your interest or concern

to show in your eyes as appropriate. It is also acceptable to change body position, even to lean forward to indicate your interest in the subject's responses, but do skip the "I see's" and "uh-huhs," no matter how well intentioned.

RETAIN CONTROL OF THE INTERVIEW

It is important for the reporter to retain control of every interview, even when the interviewee is assertive enough to grab the handheld mike and hold it as a means to seize control. In such moments, the best defense is a good offense. Firmly and forcefully, take back the microphone. If the interviewee refuses to yield, then stop the interview so you can explain, "I have to hold the mike and ask the questions. Now, let's try again."

At other times it may be hard to interrupt a nonstop talker. In this situation, be assertive enough to interrupt the interviewee so you can ask another question. Take a deep breath and hold it, until the interview subject stops talking long enough to breathe. When that magic moment happens, seize it as your cue to ask the next question.

INTERVIEWING CHILDREN

Few *NBC Today* viewers who watched that day will forget the report about Bill Samples, a patrol officer stationed at Philadelphia's Children's Hospital who spent his off-hours helping make the dreams of very sick children come true. *NBC News* correspondent Bob Dotson told of Samples and his wife, Helene, who helped find money so dozens of terminally ill youngsters could see the mountains or visit the ocean before they died. The report, titled "Sunshine Child," enabled viewers to accompany tiny Christina Wilson, who suffered from leukemia, on a visit to Disney World where she hoped to meet a mouse named Minnie.

On the plane from Philadelphia to Orlando, photographer Warren Jones showed Christina the wireless microphone that would be in her purse when she met Minnie, and he let Christina hold the camera he would be using to tell the story. The camera was valued at more than \$30,000. When they landed in Orlando, the lens was covered in fingerprints. But by the next day, the lens had been cleaned and Christina was all but oblivious to the reporting crew and the hardware that surrounded her.

"Have you seen Minnie?" Christina asked the next morning, amid the crush of children who had gathered to meet the Disney characters. Suddenly, a big black foot stepped into frame behind Christina. The little girl turned. "Hi, Minnie," she whispered. Minnie Mouse held out her arms and the two hugged each other for long moments. Once more Christina looked up at the big mouse. "Minnie, I love you," Christina said. Minnie knelt down to offer her big black nose, and a moment later Christina kissed Minnie.

Jones's technique with Christina is central to the success of visual storytellers who interview and work with children. The camera and other reporting hardware fascinate younger kids, so a good approach is to sit down with them and explain the equipment, even to let them look through the camera viewfinder if possible (Figure 7.3). Soon they will be their natural selves, oblivious to the camera and sometimes even to the reporting process itself. This approach often leads to stronger interviews and may even result in less time spent on the interview itself.

Specific questions work best with children (Figure 7.4). A usable response is more likely if the reporter asks, "What did Minnie's nose feel like?" than if the child is asked, "What did you like most about Disney World?" Children often give vague answers if questions are too vague.



FIGURE 7.3

KUSA photojournalist Brett Alles helps a young story subject become familiar with the camera and accustomed to his presence. This technique helps subjects forget the camera and reporting process.

THE TALKING HEAD

FIGURE 7.4
The strongest interviews with children commonly result when questions are specific and to the point.

The viewers' inherent interest in people can help lead them to an expanded interest in news. Although interviews are never substitutes for the story, they are an essential component of stories told through people. For the most part, whenever you edit interviews, keep bites short. Use them to provide emphasis rather than as substitutes for the story or for your own reporting. Many strong bites will run less than ten seconds to little more than twenty seconds, but use good judgment. Depending on content and pace, even two-hour interviews can be compelling and memorable.

Some organizations instinctively deride the **talking head**, as though a speaker on-screen is boring by definition; however, legitimate talking heads can enhance the story's meaning, sometimes even serve as a main point. Such talking heads may serve to

- provide insight into the speaker's personality
- show that what is said is less important than why and how the speaker says something
- show the person as he or she is
- show speakers who are compelling and dramatic or who have dramatic statements
- help prove the visuals



By contrast, the talking head can become a handicap in the video report when it displays the peculiarities that have created its bad reputation. Such characteristics are to be seen whenever the sound bite

- substitutes for the report
- substitutes for legitimate visual communication
- substitutes for a succinct script
- fails to enhance the visuals
- is long-winded and boring

INFLUENCING HOW VIEWERS PERCEIVE THE SUBJECT

It is vital to represent the interview subject honestly and to make the interview technically acceptable. How you structure and photograph interviews and their environments will affect how viewers react to interview subjects and what they remember about them.

Interviews by their nature are meant to reveal personality and, for the most part, call for reasonably close shots. But avoid shots that place the viewer uncomfortably close to the subject. "The viewers are entitled to look as closely at newsmakers and strangers as they look at the anchors," says Boston photojournalist John Premack. "Yet extreme close-ups flatter no one."³

ONE-EYED TALKING HEADS

Compose shots so viewers can see both the subject's eyes throughout the interview. Eyes are among the most eloquent indicators of the inner self and state of mind. Too often, however, photographers compose shots so viewers see only the side of the subject's head, a shot that incorporates a full view of the subject's ear but only a single eye. Ears, in and of themselves, rarely communicate much meaning.

BODY LANGUAGE

Finally, the interviewer's body language and attire inevitably affect how viewers perceive the interview subject (Figure 7.5). If interviewees are open and generally friendly, no purpose is served by inadvertently portraying them otherwise. To generate context about your interview subjects, consider the following behaviors as appropriate.

BOX 7.2 MAKE YOUR SUBJECT THE CENTER OF ATTENTION⁴

With every sit-down interview, when the camera is on the tripod, I try to create as much space as I can between the subject, the background, and myself. This lets me deemphasize the background in two ways: It lets me keep the key light off the background, and it gives me distance enough to zoom into the person's head and shoulders, making the background even less noticeable. With more separa-

tion and less emphasis on the background, the more the subject's face becomes the center of attention. Watch any movie with Tom Cruise and you'll notice that most close-ups are shot on a long focal length. The face really stands out when the camera is far away and the background is fuzzy.

—John DeTarsio,
freelance network photojournalist ■



FIGURE 7.5
The reporter's appearance and body language influence how viewers perceive both the interviewer and the interview subject.

person outside; communicate a clear impression that the person is with you of his or her own free will.

If the mood of the interview is investigative or adversarial, then the atmosphere and body language change accordingly and can be reflected through the following behaviors:

- Place something between you and the source (a desk, a stick mike, etc.).
- Place more distance between yourself and the other person.
- Wear a coat and tie, or dress in a similarly businesslike way.
- Face the person straight on, instead of at an angle.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW IS OVER

By day's end, video reporters and storytellers who cover five or six stories a day find it difficult to remember who said what, let alone have time to preview the various interviews before writing the stories. Yet an exact knowledge of wording is necessary to write naturally into and out of sound bites and integrate them properly into packages. Some reporters solve the problem by making a backup recording of the interview with an inconspicuous, handheld audio recorder. They play back the interview in the car on their way to the station or to the next story and note the exact wording of the sound bites they will need for the story.

The process can be streamlined even more if you train your ear to listen for sound bites during the interview itself. Listen for edit points and note the moments when you feel something about what has been said. Later, it will be easier to locate the statements you need and, if necessary, to communicate that information to an editor. If your field camera is equipped with a time-code generator, you can even set the generator to correspond to the time on your wristwatch. Then, as usable statements are made, a simple glance at your wristwatch during the interview can help you identify where in the video the statements can be located.

INTERVIEWS ALLOW REPORTING THROUGH DIRECT OBSERVATION

In the final analysis, video journalism is the art of reporting through direct observation. Through the broadcast interview, participants in news events can report their own observations, firsthand and with an intensity and believability unparalleled in

If the mood of the interview is open and friendly, and you will appear on camera with the interviewee:

- Take off your coat, roll up your sleeves, and if you're a man, loosen your tie should you wear one.
- Open up visually and physically; show your friendship and your concern; move closer to the subject.
- Sit beside the source with nothing between you, not even a stick mike.
- Angle your body toward the person, rather than face the person head on.
- Create a sense of freedom by taking the

other forms of journalism. Sometimes journalists have a rare opportunity to see into a person's soul, but that moment happens only if people feel comfortable enough on camera to reveal their innermost selves. If you have established a comfortable working environment, prepared yourself for the interview, and allowed your source to see that you are a reasonable and caring human being, then you will have set the stage for powerful reporting.

SUMMARY

Interviews impart a sense of authority and spontaneity to visual stories and provide intimate detail that otherwise would be unobtainable. Interviews further help reveal something of the person being interviewed. None of these goals is possible unless the reporter first establishes trust with the interviewee. An atmosphere of trust is most easily created if the reporter is open and courteous and exhibits a genuine interest in people.

Interviewees usually are more at ease if they can focus on familiar work and surroundings rather than on themselves or their "performance." Thus, interviews may progress more smoothly if a subject continues with a familiar task, and if the reporter makes observations and has a conversation with the subject rather than attempts to conduct a formal interview. Such exchanges progress even more smoothly when lights, microphones, and other reporting hardware are unobtrusive.

Few interviews achieve their full potential unless the journalist has conducted sufficient research to learn everything possible about the subject. Preparation is a prerequisite to success. Full knowledge of a subject also frees the reporter to listen closely to responses as the interview develops, another critical interview skill. As you listen to responses, react as appropriate but strive to avoid indicating agreement or showing inappropriate sympathy with the subject. Remember also that the reporter's body language influences how viewers will perceive the subject.

Because you are the viewer's representative, anticipate the questions viewers would ask if they had the opportunity. Interview questions can be constructed around the Five W's—who, why, where, when, what (and how)—to help elicit informative responses. Questions that elicit simple yes or no responses are less desirable, as are two-part questions, which can be confusing and difficult for the interviewee and audience to remember.

In all interview situations, good taste and courtesy are mandatory. If the audience feels uncomfortable with a reporter's conduct or questions, the interview may fail. When interviews are lengthy, consider interviewing subjects in more than one location. A change can help rejuvenate the interview, and it provides a good opportunity to change the subject.

Retain control of the interview, even when subjects seize the microphone or refuse to stop talking. If necessary, stop the camera or use a prearranged but unobtrusive signal between reporter and photographer to cut the sound and recompose the picture, as, for example, during a live shot.

Children represent special interview challenges. Good strategies include explaining the equipment before the interview and asking very specific questions during the interview.

Although interviews are never substitutes for the story, they are an essential component of stories told through people.

KEY TERM

talking head 134

DISCUSSION

1. Explain the essential role of the interview in video stories.
2. Discuss ways that will help you establish trust with an interview source.
3. What personal conduct and manners are important to observe whenever you are in someone else's home or office?
4. What is the most important question you can ask during an interview?
5. Discuss ways to help put the interview subject at ease.
6. Why is it important not to reveal the questions you intend to ask until the actual interview begins?
7. Describe the most important steps you can take to help interview subjects forget the microphone, lights, camera, and other hardware involved during the interview process.
8. Explain why research and planning are so important to the interview process.
9. Describe a good way to structure the interview questions you intend to ask.
10. Why is listening such an important part of the interview process?
11. What constitutes a "dumb" interview question?
12. Describe the difference between asking an interview question and pitching a reporting opportunity.
13. Devise and describe some prearranged gestures that a reporter-photographer team could use to signal one another during interviews without interrupting the spontaneity of the moment.
14. What are some good ways to react to an interviewee's statements without appearing as though you agree with what is being said?
15. What steps can you take to retain control of the interview, even when an interviewee seizes the microphone?
16. Explain the special challenges that arise when you interview children.
17. Describe the characteristics that make for a legitimate talking head interview.
18. Discuss how environment, lighting, composition, and even your body language can influence how viewers perceive the interview subject.

EXERCISES

1. Study professional television interviewers such as Diane Sawyer, Conan O'Brien, Oprah Winfrey, Katie Couric, and Craig Ferguson. Pay special attention to how they put interview subjects at ease, elicit meaningful information, and move the interview along.
2. Arrange to interview a news source or someone who will play the role of a news source. Research the person and the topic you wish to discuss, schedule a time for the interview, arrive on time, and take a few minutes to become familiar with the interviewee. This time, take just a notebook and pencil and leave the camera at home. Concentrate on being relaxed, knowledgeable about the subject, interested, and friendly.
3. Repeat exercise 2, but with a different person. This time take the camera, lights, and microphone.
4. Interview someone while the person continues a familiar task. Make observations or offer "reporting opportunities" rather than ask formal questions.
5. Construct two lists of questions: (1) questions you would expect an informed interviewer to ask you about your life interests and activities and (2) questions of the same nature that you would like to ask a friend based solely on your existing knowledge of that person. Compare the two lists of questions. How do the questions differ? Now, experience the value of research firsthand by calling your friend's parents, old schoolteachers, close

- friends, classmates, and brothers and sisters, and ask them questions about your friend. Using this new knowledge, expand the list of questions you will ask your friend.
6. Practice listening to people more attentively, even in everyday conversations. Develop your ability to listen to people into a fine art.
7. In your everyday conversations, practice listening to people without appearing to agree. Act interested, but suppress any body language that tends to communicate agreement.
8. Practice conducting interviews and working with children until you are able to routinely elicit broadcast-worthy responses.
9. Study television interviews to determine how interview environments, lighting, camera composition, and body language can influence the viewer's perceptions of interviewers and interview subjects.
10. Listen to interviews on radio and television to practice identifying alternative "edit-in" and "edit-out" points in sound bites. Often, the routine sound bites in news stories can be shortened with no loss in meaning and sometimes can even be improved.

NOTES

1. Art Donahue, "Utilizing a Creative Eye for Everyday Assignments," a presentation at the NPPA TV News-Video Workshop, Norman, OK, March 21, 1986.
2. E-mail correspondence with the principal author, Norman, OK, June 27, 2007.
3. John Premack, "What's Wrong with Interviews," *RTNDA Communicator* (September 1984), 17.
4. DeTarsio expands on this advice in Chapter Four, "Shooting Video in the Field." See examples of his work for CBS *60 Minutes*, such as "Brazil's Rising Star," at <http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=7143554n&tag=mncol;lst;5> accessed for this reference December 21, 2010.

CHAPTER

10

Write Like a Storyteller

—By John Larson

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Have you ever attended a class in which a teacher dutifully lists names, facts, equations, or dates but fails to interest you? The information never connects in any meaningful way? Can you remember walking out of that class, relieved to be out in the fresh air?

At its worst, reporting is similar to that lecture. It fills the air with important sounding names and facts, but fails to make them matter very much. Storytelling, on the other hand, is a bit like walking out into the fresh air—it feels natural, interesting, and a little like recess. When a great story begins, your senses come alive, as if an adventure lies ahead of you.

Great reporting borrows from the best of both of these worlds—reporting important truths and revealing this information in interesting, powerful stories. Learning to write like a storyteller can help any journalist.

An important first step is to understand that although a reporter learns facts, storytellers pay attention to what they experience while learning those facts, and what the people in their stories are experiencing. They pay attention to what they see, hear, and feel. This is important in any form of journalism—newspaper, magazine, radio, blog—but is especially important in video journalism.

TRANSMITTING THE EXPERIENCE

You know by now that good video storytelling shares, or transmits, an experience. It gives viewers a sense that they are there. You see, hear, and experience a story. Good storytellers also are aware their own experiences can be powerful tools to help tell stronger stories.

Why choose storytelling over other forms of communicating information? The advantage of sharing experience and information through video storytelling is that it takes advantage of our senses. People are *hardwired* to be curious about what they see, and intrigued by what they hear. It is less like the lecture mentioned previously and more like going out for recess. If journalists could capture smell, taste, or touch in order to tell a more powerful story, we certainly would—but that is for some future medium. Much is written about the importance of pictures and sound, but they are important only because they mimic the way your viewer experiences the world. Use this to your advantage. Ignore it, and your stories will falter. How do you do this? Some of the ways follow.

BOX 10.1 JOHN LARSON, NETWORK CORRESPONDENT

Recognized as one of the country's best storytelling reporters, network correspondent John Larson excels in investigative, breaking, and feature news reporting. He reports and produces stories for PBS *Need to Know*, and is a former *Dateline NBC* correspondent. At *Dateline NBC*, he traveled to the corners of the world. He investigated and reported on corrupt police in Mexico City; terrorism in Morocco, Spain, and Central Africa; a sinking ferry in Indonesia; and a five-year-old Buddhist monk in Nepal. Larson also has become an international "backpack" or Video Journalist (VJ) since he joined this book's previous edition as a co-author, and shares what he has learned on that front here and in Chapter 11, Video Journalism: Storytelling On Your Own.

Larson's numerous accolades include national Emmys for investigative reporting of the Louisiana police and breaking reporting coverage of the Houston floods. Most notably, Larson is a four-time winner of the prestigious duPont-Columbia Baton, the equivalent of television's Pulitzer Prize; in 2001, for "A Paper Chase," an investigation of the insurance industry and one of the most honored works of journalism in broadcast history; in 2004, for "A Pattern of Suspicion," an exposé on racial profiling; in 2006, for his work with other NBC reporters covering Hurricane Katrina; and the 2011 duPont-Columbia Baton, honoring Larson and other team members for a KCET investigative series. Their three stories exposed the negligence and fraud of local, state, and federal officials in preventing the "often illegal growth of medical marijuana shops in Los Angeles."

The *Philadelphia Inquirer*, in 2001, called "The Paper Chase" "shocking and delightful. Larson skewers executives with an understated, yet relentless technique that could teach Mike Wallace a thing or two." The *Florida Sun Sentinel* declared it was "stunningly impressive. John Larson breaks down executives . . . in a way that would make Perry Mason envious." Judges for the 2011 awards cited the series' thorough sourcing, excellent



FIGURE 10.1

Network correspondent John Larson is recognized as one of television's most gifted storytellers.

Source: Photo by NBC Universal, Photo Bank

writing, strong production, and "clear, thorough and well produced reporting that brought change to the community."

Before his selection as a *Dateline NBC* correspondent in 1994, Larson spent eight years at KOMO-TV in Seattle, Washington, where he won sixteen regional Emmy awards for his reporting. His creativity and powerful writing have made him a sought-after speaker, teacher, and motivator at workshops and newsrooms across the country and abroad.

Larson lives with his wife, two children, and terrier in San Diego, California. ■

Be a Tour Guide

You can think of this as the “tour guide” school of storytelling and writing for video. Think of the last time you took a guided tour. It might have been in a museum, an historic district, or a national park. Along the way, you may have discovered that the best tour guides are great storytellers. They lead you up to each revelation and help you pay attention.

A tour guide might say, for example “On your left is the Washington Monument. Notice the three birds sitting on the very top edge? The monument is 555 feet high, the cornerstone was laid in 1848, but it took 40 years before the first person ever set foot inside.” While the tour guide says this, everyone looks at the monument, wondering, “Why did it take so long?” The tour guide might then tell a deeper story: “You can’t see it from here, but inside the monument, buried in the walls, are 193 special stones, each one different, each one hand-crafted, each one a memorial stone made with the soil of one of the nation’s 50 states. The monument’s builders thought the soil of every state seemed a good way to say ‘thank you’ to the man who gave birth to a nation. What do you think?”

Take your audience by the hand and walk them into the story. Use your words to verbally show them around; point out the pictures and sounds that are important. Help them focus and understand what they see. And then, while they watch, tell deeper stories.

This is sometimes more difficult than it sounds. Reporters are often so busy trying to cram as many facts as they can into a story, they forget to transmit their experience—what they saw, heard, and felt. They forget how their audience is hardwired to experience the world. They deprive their audience the fun of experiencing a story.

Use “Wows!”—The Things That Turn You On

The way *you* experience a story—the things that intrigue you and bore you—are excellent hints about how your audience might experience a story, and how you might construct your story. Don’t underestimate this. Pay close attention to your own reactions. This is the beginning of transmitting an experience—your experience—realizing your reactions are often similar to your viewers’.

For example, pay attention to what happened when you were first introduced to a story. What bored you or interested you? What made you laugh, moved you, or made you say, “Wow!”

Say your assignment is to write a story about a factory that was closed, the jobs exported overseas. You’ve done your research and know the facts: the number of jobs that were lost, the cost to the local economy, and so on. You meet a company supervisor at the shuttered plant. He takes you into the factory and you are immediately struck by the immensity of it—the huge, silent room, silent machines, assembly lines, and workbenches. You think, “Holy *&!\$#!” I call these moments “wows.” Good writers notice wows and write to them. When I experienced this in a shuttered pulp mill in Washington State, I wrote it this way,

“The first thing you notice about the ATT-Rayonier Plant—is the silence.”

Let Your Audience Experience the Wows

Once you’ve identified a wow, make sure you shoot it. Take video as you walk through the door that reveals how huge, empty, and silent the factory is. You need

video of the empty workbenches, and the work gloves left behind. Then, write to it. Allow several long moments of silence so the audience can “look around,” appreciate the emptiness, and experience the same sense of loss that you did. This requires you to stop talking for a moment, and let the shot transmit an experience. If you do, viewers will experience the moment much as you did.

Moments

The wow you just experienced and recorded is called a “moment.” Moments are wonderful bits of reality, full of meaning. Moments often make the best television because, when used properly, they take advantage of our hardwiring, the way we experience the world. You will encounter moments during the course of shooting and gathering a story. Sometimes they happen right in front of you; other times they happen during an interview.

GREAT MOMENTS ARE ALMOST ALWAYS UNEXPECTED Moments are often powerful, funny, poignant, and urgent precisely because you don’t see them coming. For example, imagine you are interviewing a farmer about the tightening economics of small farms. He is being forced to sell his family’s farm. He interrupts the interview to yell across the yard, “Sarah! Grab your daddy’s saddle! Tomorrow they’ll take everything not nailed to the barn floor.” This is a moment. It helps you appreciate more about what is happening than whatever he was telling you about before the interruption.

ONE THOUGHT ABOUT FIELD TEAMWORK If you’re part of a team, capturing moments in the field requires the reporter/producer and photographer to work together. It means the reporter cannot barge into a situation, talking over the possible moments that would occur were he or she less disruptive. It means a reporter has to think and act like a good photographer—looking for powerful moments, sounds, and pictures. It means the photographer and soundperson have to think like storytellers. They need to be flexible, intuitive, and fast on their feet. They need to value moments more than perfectly lit or framed shots.

WRITING YOUR FIRST SENTENCE

Once you return from shooting your story in the field, if you have not already started writing (I recommend you begin writing early in the day whenever possible, even before your news gathering is complete), you have to sit down and write. The most daunting challenge in writing a short story for broadcast is often (no surprise here) the first sentence. Ideally, the first sentence should impart critical information, attract the listener, and reflect the direction or tone that you are about to take. It can act as a signpost—giving the viewer a sense of where the story is going, and how it might end. Sounds like a lot to accomplish in a first sentence, doesn’t it? Frankly, figuring all this out before you start writing is often overwhelming. Want writer’s block? Try making your first sentence perfect.

If you have trouble getting started, here are two thoughts. The first is courtesy of a friend and Pulitzer Prize winner Howard Weaver of McClatchy Newspapers:

Lower your expectations: That’s right. Even the best writers do it. When you’re stuck trying to write something really good, sometimes it helps to risk writing something bad. Lighten up, demand less of yourself, and start writing. Writing will often get your creative juices flowing and lead to something better. At least

it will get you going. This doesn't mean you should be lazy. It means that getting going is an important part of the process.

Another writer's advice for beating the first sentence block is a bit more colorful:

Just vomit: "Throw up" your immediate ideas on the page. Don't edit yourself before you start. Just get it out. Purge. Again, just writing something down will often get you going. Then, you'll be ready to begin considering how to tell the rest of your story.

THE THREE HORSES—STORYTELLING TOOLS FOR VIDEO STORIES

When it comes to writing for video, I believe there are three "great horses"—storytelling *tools* or engines that you must master if you want to tell powerful video stories. These horses are powerful. But before you "saddle up," try this exercise: Think of a great movie, or even a great novel, something you really loved. Can you remember the reasons you liked it so much? It probably had strong characters—people who interested you because of what you discovered about them or what they did. It probably had a strong plot line: a mystery, a drama, or a sequence of events that evolved and led to a satisfactory ending. The movie also likely surprised you in many ways: It took you someplace you were not expecting to go, things happened that you didn't anticipate, or people said things that you didn't see coming.

These elements are storytelling engines—tools that make story lines compelling and meaningful. I've found that it does not matter if your story is two minutes long or two hours, these horses remain important. I call them "horses" because I've found they have their own momentum—energy I can use while reporting or "telling" stories. The three great horses are simple: surprise, quest, and character. All three are different, but you can easily learn how to recognize them, capture them, and write to them.

FIRST HORSE: SURPRISE

At *Dateline NBC*, we called surprises "reveals." For example, I once wrote a story about a television anchor in California who was an alcoholic. Unable to quit drinking, his life dramatically unraveled—he lost his wife, his friends, and his health—all while being on the air every day. Eventually, he lost his job, too. We interviewed him, broke, bloated, and in denial, during the final stages of his decline. It was clear he wasn't going to make it. His liver was damaged, and his doctors said he had only weeks left to live. Several months after our interview, we received a phone call. A friend had found him on the floor of his empty apartment. I wrote the story something like this:

SOT: (*Charla, his friend talking*) "I hadn't heard from him for a couple of days. He didn't answer his phone. So I went to his place, opened the door. The first thing I saw was that small, dead Christmas tree in the corner. The heat was off. It was cold. And then I saw him in the middle of the floor."

LARSON NARRATION: Charla called 911. Paramedics rushed Dave to the hospital. Emergency room doctors fought to save his life. But after all the vodka, all the years of breakdowns, and broken promises, the former newsman...survived.

SOT: (*The anchor, now many months sober and a smiling picture of health*) "Yeah, been sober six months now. I can't believe I made it."

The anchor's survival was a surprise. Everyone watching the story was expecting him to die. His survival and his appearance on camera produced a "wow." It was something I purposely held back while reporting our story, so the audience could appreciate how desperate his situation was before his collapse and enjoy the same sense of surprise and victory I experienced when I first saw the recovered alcoholic with his fresh, lean face—healthy and strong after months of sobriety. Imagine if I had just reported the facts. It would have been something like this: "A former newsman is fine and recovering tonight in a local hospital. A friend said he had been drinking too much." That may be an accurate report, but not much of a story.

Here's the Windup, and the Pitch

The key to writing for surprises is to remember that all surprises require a setup. You have to prepare your audience to expect one thing; only to be surprised by another. It is a lot like telling a joke. A joke first makes you think about one thing and then delivers an unexpected punch line. It is always done *in that order*. Think of the primitive childhood joke,

Question: "Why did the chicken cross the road?"
Answer: "To get to the other side."

The punch line always comes at the end. It is never, "Chickens get to the other side by crossing the road."

Likewise, a surprise is always delivered *at the very end* of a deliberate sentence, or sequence of sentences. To do this, you must first recognize the parts of the story that surprise you—a moment, a comment from an interview, a development—and then, set up your surprise with a deliberate sequence of fact. This will often require you to delay and hold back some information until the best stage has been set to deliver your surprise. This does not mean that you should mislead your audience on factual matters. It simply requires you to recognize the natural surprises that happen and allow them to exist in your storytelling. Warning: Reporters have difficulty holding back information. Storytellers seem to do it naturally.

The Audiences' Right Not to Know

Using surprise properly turns one journalism standard on its head. As journalists we know it is essential to our democracy that people be informed. So, we work to protect the "public's right to know." However, a storyteller changes this a little. A storyteller knows that it is the public's right *not* to know *until the best possible moment*.

Surprise and the Setup

I once wrote a story about a small town in which the mayor had a phony, prank parking meter. There were three surprises in the story:

1. There was only one parking meter in the entire town.
2. The meter was movable.
3. The person behind the joke was the mayor.

The mayor would take the parking meter up and down the street and “ticket” his friend’s cars. But of course, I didn’t tell the story that way; I told it like this:

NARRATION: The people of central Washington count on a few days being over 100 degrees every July. Wheat farmers out here count on 10 inches of rain every year.

SOT: (SOUND OF WHEAT POURING INTO HOPPER)

NARRATION: And there is a small town out here named Mansfield. Driving through town takes exactly...

SOT: (SOUND ON ONE CAR WHOOSING PAST CAMERA)

NARRATION: That long. Things are pretty predictable here, too.

SOT: “BREAD DOUGH WILL BE HERE THURSDAY.”

NARRATION: Rick the grocer knows every customer. He knows every car on Main Street.

SOT: “THE BLUE PICKUP IS THE ZELLUMS’. ETHEL POOLE, SHE’S PROBABLY JUST ABOUT READY TO GO TO WORK IN CHELAN.”

NARRATION: Lynn the café owner knows her customers so well she can start their orders before they arrive.

SOT: “HARRY BEARD, HE’S USUALLY A HOT CAKE AND BACON, OR FRIED ONE EGG HASHBROWNS AND TOAST, OR, TOM POOLE, WHICH IS A HAM AND CHEESE OMELET EVERY SATURDAY MORNING, LIKE CLOCKWORK.”

NARRATION: That’s why it kind of surprised everyone when a stranger from the big city showed up. (Reveal meter here) One... parking meter. The only meter in 7 thousand 200 square miles.

SOT: “JUST HAVIN’ A LITTLE FUN.”

NARRATION: Tom Snell, the county’s road boss, bought the meter as a prank.

SOT: “IT COST ME 50 DOLLARS, BUT IT SITS HERE ON THE STREET EVER SINCE.”

NARRATION: Tom knows most out-of-towners aren’t dumb enough to fall for the parking meter. (Car passes meter)

SOT: “AW, HE’S GONNA TRY TO GO AROUND, AW SHOOT! YOU SEE THERE’S A TYPICAL RESPONSE.”

NARRATION: But you see, they don’t have to be. (They roll meter down the sidewalk to the parked car)

SOT: (Rolling meter) “I THINK WE GOT ’EM NOW.”

NARRATION: This victim was from Canada.

SOT: “IT’S A WAY TO MAKE MONEY I GUESS; IT’S A SMALL TOWN.”

NARRATION: And when there aren’t a lot of visitors, Tom includes his friends. Friends like Harold Beard. (Rolling meter) That’s Harold’s truck over there. That’s Harold.

SOT: “GIMME A TICKET HERE, FOR CRYING OUT LOUD. NOT SUPPOSED TO GET A TICKET IN THIS TOWN” (Laughter).

NARRATION: The meter is not just Tom’s joke. Shortly after breakfast we saw Rick the grocer nail Floyd Avenell’s car.

SOT: (Laughter) “IT’S NOT LIGHT. BUT IT DOES GET MOVED QUITE FREQUENTLY.” (Flag in background) **NAT SOT:** (Rolling meter)

SOT: “YEAH, I PUT IT IN FRONT OF THE MAYOR’S CAR. I PUT IT IN FRONT OF THE SHERIFF’S CAR. (Snort)

NARRATION: There goes Lydia, the lady who owns the tavern.

SOT: (Rolling meter) “IT’S KINDA FUN.”

NARRATION: Now you’d think sooner or later someone would get sick of it all and complain about Tom’s parking meter to the mayor.

SOT: “DON’T THINK IT WOULD DO THEM ANY GOOD.” (LARSON: “HOW’S THAT?”) “‘CUZ I’M THE MAYOR.”

NARRATION: So maybe small towns are predictable. But if you go to Mansfield, don’t be surprised if they treat you ... like they’ve known you all your life.

SOT: “EVERY TOWN’S GOT ITS WAY.”

NARRATION: In fact, you can almost count on it.

SOT: “TIME EXPIRED. HOW ’BOUT AN I-OWE-YOU? YOU DON’T EVEN HAVE A PENNY? I DON’T! SEE, I’M A FARMER’S WIFE!”

NARRATION: John Larson,

SOT: “WHAT’S NEXT? I’M TRYING TO WORK ON A FIRE HYDRANT ON WHEELS.”

NARRATION: KOMO News Four, Mansfield.

SOT: (Laughter)

Three Surprises and Three Setups

Notice how all three surprises in the previous story come at the end of a setup.

FIRST SURPRISE: THERE IS ONLY ONE METER. THE SETUP **NARRATION:** That’s why it kind of surprised everyone when a stranger from the big city showed up. (Reveal meter here) One... parking meter. The only meter in 7 thousand 200 square miles. (The viewer is expecting us to introduce a person here, not a parking meter.)

SECOND SURPRISE: THE METER IS MOVABLE. THE SETUP **NARRATION:** Tom knows most out-of-towners aren’t dumb enough to fall for the parking meter. (Car passes meter) **SOT:** “AW, HE’S GONNA TRY TO GO AROUND, AW SHOOT! YOU SEE

THERE'S A TYPICAL RESPONSE." NARRATION: But you see, they don't have to be. (*They roll meter down the sidewalk to the parked car*) (The viewer here is expecting the out-of-towner to successfully avoid the meter.)

THIRD SURPRISE: THE PERSON BEHIND THE JOKE WAS THE MAYOR. THE SETUP NARRATION: Now you'd think sooner or later someone would get sick of it all and complain about Tom's parking meter to the mayor. SOT: "DON'T THINK IT WOULD DO THEM ANY GOOD. (LARSON: "HOW'S THAT?") "CUZ I'M THE MAYOR." (The viewer is expecting Tom to explain that people do complain to the mayor.)

Experience Surprise

Whenever possible, it is important to allow your audience to experience the surprise instead of just reporting the surprise to them. This means the best surprises are delivered by the *field video and audio*, not by a reporter's narrated track. Notice in the previous story that all three surprises *are never reported*, but are visually demonstrated.

I don't say, "In this entire town they have only one parking meter." Instead, I say, "That's why it kind of surprised everyone when a stranger from the big city showed up." Next, I let the video reveal the one parking meter.

For the surprise that the meter moves, I don't say, "The meter moves." Instead, I say, "But you see, they don't have to be." Then the video reveals for the first time that the meter moves.

Last, instead of saying "The man behind the prank is the mayor of the town" I write, "Now you'd think sooner or later someone would get sick of it all and complain about Tom's parking meter to the mayor." And then I let the interview reveal it with the SOT: "DON'T THINK IT WOULD DO THEM ANY GOOD." (LARSON: "HOW'S THAT?") "CUZ I'M THE MAYOR."

Surprise Changes the Way You Gather News

Surprises are moments or wows that you don't expect. Once you start trying to capture surprises on camera you must be patient and wait for them. You also must be able to anticipate where the surprises might occur, and make sure your camera is rolling and your audio is strong. Last, you need to be very flexible. Surprises frequently don't happen where you think they will. A good storyteller becomes adept at rewriting stories to include unexpected surprises.

A Note about Rhythm

Notice how the writing in the parking meter story is often interrupted by natural sound and interviews. Almost every sentence is followed by a break for sound. Whereas every story does not require this many breaks, every good story has its own rhythm. Just like a song, a good narrated video story has a beat—a cadence of words and sentences that you can almost tap your foot to. Preachers know this: When a good preacher gets going, his or her congregation can often clap their hands to the rhythm of the preacher's delivery. Lawyers trying to sway a jury know it, too. The late Johnnie Cochran, famous lawyer in the OJ Simpson trial, kept repeating his message about the bloody glove, and how it didn't fit Simpson's hand: "If it doesn't fit, you must acquit. If it doesn't fit, you must acquit."

When you want your story to accelerate, and your viewers' attention to intensify, shorten your sentences and/or increase the regularity of your breaks for natural sound and sound bites. If you want to slow it down, do the opposite.

SECOND HORSE: QUEST

The second horse is "quest." It is a lot like plot, but simpler and more specific. Quest consists of "someone trying to get something done."

Example: Let's say you've been assigned to a story about a city councilman who changed his vote on a zoning ordinance, supporting a developer's plan to knock down some aging but popular retail stores. While you wait to interview the councilman, you notice his secretary's phone is ringing constantly, with many constituents complaining about the councilman's vote. The secretary explains, "The councilman is on the line; may I have your name and he'll get back to you." With each new call, the secretary writes out the details of the complaint, and then spikes the note on a rapidly growing stack of messages. She is clearly overwhelmed by the volume of phone calls. Finally, you get a chance to enter the councilman's office. He, initially on the phone, hangs up to do an interview with you.

A *straight news report* might write it this way:

NARRATION: Last night's city council cleared the way for BrightCity to develop L Street.

SOT: "BY A VOTE OF 6 TO 5 THE MOTION IS DEFEATED."

SOT: (*SOUND OF CROWD'S GASPS AND PROTESTS*)

NARRATION: More than 150 people, who turned out expecting to celebrate saving the popular businesses along L Street, were stunned.

SOT: "I CAN'T BELIEVE THEY DID THIS. AFTER ALL THE PROMISES, THEY JUST LET THE BRIGHTCITY DEVELOPERS HAVE THEIR WAY."

SOT: "IT WASN'T SUPPOSED TO GO LIKE THIS. EVERYONE IS SAYING HARDESTY SOLD US OUT."

NARRATION: Councilman Dave Hardesty had publically supported efforts to save the aging buildings and businesses along L Street, but last night he voted...

SOT: "NAY."

NARRATION: Today the councilman explained.

SOT: (*COUNCILMAN HARDESTY*) "AFTER CAREFUL CONSIDERATION, I NOW THINK EVERYONE WILL EVENTUALLY BENEFIT FROM BRIGHTCITY. L STREET NEEDS NEW IDEAS AND NEW LIFE."

NARRATION: Which means, work on the proposed BrightCity complex of 140 Condominiums, plus retail, will begin almost immediately.

SOT: (*DON SALESKY, BRIGHTCITY DEVELOPER*) "WE'RE DELIGHTED THE COUNCIL TOOK THE TIME TO STUDY THE ISSUES, AND UNDERSTAND HOW BRIGHTCITY WILL HELP THE ENTIRE AREA. WE'RE EXCITED."

NARRATION: L Street supporters promised to keep up the fight saying they will now take their campaign from the historic street . . . to the Courts. John Larson, NBC News, Spokane.

Storytelling Using Quest

There is nothing wrong with straight reporting, but it does not take advantage of the “pull” of a good story. Using storytelling quest, or “someone trying to get something done,” completely changes whose “voice” carries the story. It requires you to focus at least some of your report on one person. For example, the previous report might be told like this:

SOT: (ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT DANA LEWIS) “COUNCILMAN HARDESTY’S OFFICE.”

NARRATION: 18 Years a receptionist, Dana Lewis thought she’d heard it all.

SOT: (DANA LEWIS) “YES, I UNDERSTAND YOU’RE UPSET.”

NARRATION: But today,

SOT: (DANA LEWIS ON PHONE) “COUNCILMAN HARDESTY’S OFFICE.”

NARRATION: This secretary needs a secretary.

SOT: (DANA LEWIS) “OF COURSE I’LL TELL HIM! WHY DO YOU THINK I’VE BEEN WRITING THIS DOWN?”

NARRATION: Her phone was already ringing with angry complaints when she walked in at 8.

SOT: (DANA LEWIS) “YES, I THINK HE KNOWS THAT, BUT AS I SAID, I WILL TELL HIM.”

NARRATION: That was five hours ago,

SOT: (PHONE RINGING) “COUNCILMAN’S HARDESTY’S OFFICE; PLEASE HOLD. THIS IS UNREAL!”

NARRATION: Her boss, Councilman Dave Hardesty, last night changed his vote on the L Street project,

SOT: “NAY.”

SOT: (SOUND OF CROWD’S GASPS AND PROTESTS.)

NARRATION: Angering almost everyone who came to watch.

SOT: “IT WASN’T SUPPOSED TO GO LIKE THIS. EVERYONE IS SAYING HARDESTY SOLD US OUT.”

SOT: (RING) “WHAT’S YOUR NAME? MR. LINDSTROM? OKAY.”

NARRATION: 107 Complaints—and she hasn’t had lunch yet.

SOT: (DANA LEWIS) “YES, I’LL TELL THE COUNCILMAN.”

NARRATION: We told him first.

LARSON: “Your secretary is going to need a raise or a vacation.”

SOT: (COUNCILMAN HARDESTY LAUGHING) “YES, I GUESS SHE WILL. WE’LL JUST HAVE TO EDUCATE PEOPLE HOW GOOD THIS IS GOING TO BE. (EDIT) I NOW THINK EVERYONE WILL EVENTUALLY BENEFIT FROM BRIGHTCITY. L STREET NEEDS NEW IDEAS AND NEW LIFE.”

SOT: (PHONE RINGS)

NARRATION: Supporters of saving L Street are already planning to sue the city, sue BrightCity, and sue Councilman Hardesty. But don’t tell Dana; she’s got her hands full.

SOT: (PHONE RINGS)

SOT: (DANA LEWIS) “YES . . . I’D BE HAPPY TO WRITE DOWN YOUR COMPLAINT.”

NARRATION: John Larson, NBC News, Spokane.

Finding the Quest

Remember, quest is simply “someone trying to get something done.” In the previous example, the secretary’s quest is simple: “Dana the secretary is trying to answer the phones and write down all the complaints following last night’s council vote.” Most reporters would ignore the secretary. Storytellers would not. You can use Dana’s experience to draw in the viewer and drive home the contentiousness of the vote. In the process, the secretary’s quest shows us how the councilman is partially shielded from his actions, and we learn how a local democracy works.

If you look for them, small personal quests are often all around you. They are literally “in your way.” A secretary answering calls, a janitor sweeping up after a demonstration, a police officer trying to call in the details of a tragic accident, a fire victim trying to find out if anyone has found her missing pet—all are quests worth consideration.

Ask yourself, could this small quest demonstrate my larger story in an interesting or powerful way? Can I use this quest to share other important facts of the story? If the answers are yes, try using it.

Quest Changes News Gathering

Once a storyteller decides to follow someone’s quest, everything changes. The story’s focus changes. What the reporter and photographer choose to photograph changes. Suddenly, recording a secretary’s phone call may be more important than shooting an exterior of the council building. The interview questions change as well. Instead of asking the councilman why he voted the way he did, you’re asking the secretary, “What time did you come into work? Was the phone ringing? Have you eaten lunch yet?”

THIRD HORSE: CHARACTER

My third horse is character. There are people in all good stories; the challenge is to find the right details about those people, their life, or their quest to make them meaningful and memorable. This is what I call finding character. Talking heads do not automatically have character; you need to find it. Sometimes, compelling video provides details that make someone memorable. Other times, it is a personal fact or a special quote that makes him or her memorable.

Telling Details

One of the most important lessons a journalist can learn is that building character into a story requires a search for powerful details. “Telling” details can be the contents of a wallet, a favorite nickname, an heirloom, a recurring dream, a child who passed away, the color of a car, anything. In order for details to be telling, they need to be symbolic of something larger: the quality of a life, the context of a struggle, the courage or fear of a character, and so on. How will you know if a detail is telling? It will strike you, move you emotionally, surprise you, or add depth and new dimension to the story.

For example, Chip Scanlan, a fine reporter, writer, and professor at the Poynter Institute in Florida, was once given an assignment to write about smoking and cancer for the *St. Petersburg Times*. He interviewed the widow of a cigarette smoker. Her name was Marie. Chip asked all the regular questions but kept listening for details that might bring Marie or her loss into clearer focus. If she told Chip that she missed her husband, Chip would ask deeper questions like, “When do you miss him most?” “Is there a time of day or night when it is especially difficult?” Eventually, he asked for a tour of Marie’s house. As they stood in the master bedroom Marie said, “Would you believe it? At night, I sprinkle his aftershave on my pillow. Just to feel close to him.”

This is a powerful detail. It says much about the wife, her love, and her loss. Somehow, it even tells us about her husband. Details like this, however, do not come easily. Chip was patient. As he tells it,

Scanlan: I interviewed Joe’s widow, Marie, at her home in Fort Myers. We sat for a while on her couch, looking at scrapbooks while she told me the story of their lives together and his terminal illness.

Larson: What were some of the questions you may have asked that did not pay off with anything memorable?

Scanlan: I asked, “How has this affected you? What’s your life like without him? What’s it like to see someone go through what your husband endured?” These are all serviceable questions, but I don’t think I was getting enough to help me answer my initial questions. At that point, I asked Marie if she’d give me a tour of her house. It changed the static nature of the interview; it gave me a chance to see details, hear stories behind them, which “showed” rather than “told.”

Larson: What led to the aftershave comment?

Scanlan: Marie took me up into the bedroom she’d shared with her husband. It was immaculate. I spied a photo stuck in the mirror—one of those 3 × 2 inch casual shots. I noted it in my notebook. It was then that, unbidden, Marie said, “Would you believe it? At night, I sprinkle his aftershave on my pillow. Just to feel close to him.”

I was speechless. I couldn’t believe she would tell a stranger such an intimate detail. I felt compelled to ask her if I could use it in my story. Yes, she said. But the quote haunted me. I prided myself on being the kind of reporter that people would trust enough to share their lives, but to be honest, I also felt protective when they did so. After I drafted the story, I called Marie back, and once again asked if I could use the quote. Yes, she said. And then just before the story was ready to go to press, I called her a third time.

Notice that Scanlan immediately sensed the personal nature and power of this telling comment. Yet instead of rushing it to print, he asked her three times if she wanted

him to withhold it. This not only tells you a lot about who Chip Scanlan is, but also something about the kind of people strong storytellers often are—thoughtful, caring, intuitive, engaged. People with powerful personal details trust such reporters more than they do reporters who seem to be “in it for themselves.”

Bottom line: People fascinate me, and the trappings of their lives are windows into their inner lives, which is what I’ve always been after as a reporter and writer.

TIPS FOR WRITING STRONG STORIES

Physician, Heal Thyself

I hope you will have many good teachers. In writing, however, only one teacher will watch your every step and stay with you throughout your career—you. Journalism is a worldwide craft often practiced by people in small rooms with small desks. In other words, although your work will take you out into the world, you often might feel isolated when it comes to improving your craft. Reach outside your immediate environment. Seek out the exciting work of other journalists around the country and around the world. Educate yourself with examples you like. Stay enthused.

The “Rip It Off” School of Journalism

It sounds awful, but I first learned to write by ripping people off. I would read good writing and then try to steal it. Don’t get me wrong: I didn’t steal quotes or crib observations. I didn’t plagiarize. (Plagiarism is a wonderfully efficient way to find a new career in the fast-food industry.) No, I’d notice *how* other people told their stories, and then try to use their techniques. I’d try to write like John McPhee of *The New Yorker* magazine one month. Another month, I’d try to write like John Hart of NBC News. I never wound up writing much like either of them, but I would try their use of detail, their sense of pace, their choice of subject, and I improved in the process. I made them my heroes.

Think Heroes: Bono, Mother Teresa, Tiger Woods

Great writing is like great music, political activism, or sport. It requires heroes.

Every good writer has heroes. Find yours. Find writers who make you curious, angry, sad, or laugh out loud. Then, figure out how they did it.

Years ago, I discovered the work of John McPhee. He had a powerful, intelligent curiosity. He would gather details, arrange them in a special order, and create a total effect that would be greater than the sum of the individual parts. I learned from McPhee how a well-chosen fact could be wonderful, humorous, and striking.

John Hart was an NBC News correspondent who had a way of using telling details as metaphors. He’d write international new stories full of powerful details. I remember his story of the violence in Northern Ireland between the Catholics and the Protestants. He chose to mention a teenaged girl who had been attacked. Her attackers, full of religious righteousness, had carved the girl’s face with a knife. The scar, Hart observed, “was in the shape of the Cross.”

Strong Stories Are the Work of Strong Storytellers

I was working in a small television station in Alaska and part of my first reporting job was to write down what happened on *NBC Nightly News* every night. The

program had many strong writers and reporters back then: Tom Petit, Tom Brokaw, Ken Bodie, John Hart, Judy Woodruff, Roger Mudd. I noticed some reports were very professional, but not very interesting. I noticed other reports were professional *and* interesting—informative *and* moving. The same reporters, regardless of the subject, consistently did the best stories. It didn't matter if it was a story about the White House, a flood in the Midwest, a protest, or a riot—the best reporters moved from one subject to another and made it compelling. An assignment manager once told me, "There are no bad stories, only bad reporters." He was wrong. (I thought to myself, "There are no bad stories, only unimaginative assignment managers.") There are plenty of bad stories—pointless, unimportant, unworthy of our attention. However, the assignment manager was right about one thing: A strong reporter consistently tells powerful stories, whereas weak reporters do not.

Challenge Yourself

When I was a reporter in Seattle, I learned the highest broadcast journalism award was the Columbia–DuPont Baton—given to broadcast journalists around the world by Columbia University, the same institution behind the Pulitzer Prize. Only the best are recognized. So, I wrote to Columbia for a copy of that year's winners, explaining that I was "teaching a course on excellence in journalism."

A box of winning stories arrived around Christmas each year. I pored over them. I was teaching a course, but there was only one student enrolled—me. I cut out a picture of the Baton and hung it in my closet so I would see it every morning when I dressed. I'd say to myself, "Somewhere a reporter is doing work worthy of the DuPont. What can I do *today* to make it be me?" It took a few years, but eventually I won a DuPont for an investigation of the insurance industry. A few years later, I won another. But my long journey to the award ceremonies really began back in Seattle, opening that box of tapes each year and studying the finest work the world had to offer, all by myself.

At the awards ceremony in New York, I confessed my deception to the DuPont director, the woman whom I had written to years earlier and who had faithfully sent me the tapes each year. She laughed, her eyes lit up, and she said, "Obviously, the course was a complete success."

Concluding Thoughts

Always remember, reporting and storytelling require different tool sets. A reporter works on sources, gathering information and getting it right. A storyteller works on transmitting an experience in a powerful and meaningful way. When strong reporting and strong storytelling converge, the result is great journalism—work capable of both informing and moving its audience.

Like great reporting, great storytelling demands that we challenge ourselves and dig deep. We have to care about the individuals we encounter and listen for the deeper resonances of their stories. Storytellers must "show" their stories, instead of just "report" their stories. They must involve viewers with powerful pictures, sounds, and thoughts. To do this, all the tools of the medium—video cameras, microphones, writing, editing, and your own passion—must be engaged and in sync.

The payoff is twofold. You become the best journalist you can be, usually moving ahead of the less imaginative reporters working around you. More important, your work will help people care about their world and bring people together with meaningful information.

SUMMARY

The best stories and storytellers transmit experience. In a sense we are "tour guides," who take our audience by the hand and walk them into and through the story. Show them around; point out the pictures and sounds that matter most. Help them focus and understand what they are seeing. And then tell them deeper stories while they watch.

Writing a compelling story can be difficult. An even more daunting challenge can be writing the first sentence. If you have trouble starting your story, demand less of yourself and begin to write. Often the simple act of writing will lead you to something better. Get something down on the page, even if it fails to meet your standards. You can polish it later.

Powerful video stories require that you use effective storytelling tools, engines that make stories compelling and meaningful. Three of the most important tools are the three horses: surprise, quest, and character.

Surprises are the unexpected elements in a story, the U-turn that helps elevate a story from routine to exceptional. Surprises require a setup. You prepare the audience to expect one thing, only to deliver something different, always in that order—much like the unexpected punch line to a joke. You delay and hold back some information until the stage is set to deliver your surprise. Surprises can occur multiple times in stories, and the best are delivered by the field video and audio, rather than a reporter's narrated track. Reporters find it difficult to hold back information. Storytellers do it naturally.

Another important tool is quest. It is similar to plot in that it consists of "someone trying to get something done," often against opposition. Showing a person's effort to achieve a goal gives storytellers a way to draw in the viewer, to drive home the meaning and context of events. Quests can be something as small as a fire victim trying to find her missing pet, or a rancher trying to move horses away from an approaching wildfire. The key is to use even small quests to demonstrate the larger story in an interesting or powerful way.

A third important tool is character. All good stories involve people, so the challenge is to find the telling details about the people in your stories, their lives, or their dreams, goals, and hopes. Compelling video can help reveal character and make someone memorable. Even small things like an heirloom or the sound of a voice can be powerful details, provided they symbolize larger meaning, such as the influence of a grandparent, or the ways in which the blind "see" through sound. Other times, you might use a personal fact or a special quote to help illuminate character. You will know the detail is "telling" if it strikes you, moves you emotionally, surprises you, or adds depth and new dimension to the story.

As you learn to write as a storyteller, you will be the only teacher who will watch your every step and stay with you for your entire career. You can learn new writing approaches by seeking out the work of journalists whose writing you admire. Educate yourself by studying their examples and even imitating their style as you begin your writing career. This doesn't mean you should plagiarize, but that you should notice and practice *how* other people tell their stories, and then try to use their techniques. Find writing heroes; absorb and analyze their work as you begin to develop your own unique style.

No one ever perfects writing or storytelling. We only improve our skills and become better at our jobs through observation, practice, and long experience. It's fun and rewarding, even if it takes us the rest of our lives to master.

DISCUSSION

1. Why is it important to transmit a sense of experience in your video stories?
2. What is meant by the tour guide school of writing for video?
3. Why is writing the first sentence of your story so challenging? How does John Larson suggest you solve the problem?
4. John Larson speaks of the “three great horses”—the storytelling tools—which every storytelling reporter must master. Discuss the use of each tool from the perspective of (a) traditional journalism, as it is typically practiced in print media and (b) by a few notable storytellers in television and on the web. What qualities do these horses lend the storytelling process?
5. How do you set up surprises in stories?
6. Why do you delay surprises in stories?
7. Describe how storytelling reporters can use surprises, telling details, and memorable moments as little golden nuggets to keep the viewer interested as the story unfolds.
8. Some storytellers equate surprises in stories with the layers of an onion. Explain how you can use their insight in your own storytelling.
9. Why is it more important to let viewers experience the surprise in field video and audio instead of just reporting the surprise to them?
10. How does the search for surprises change the way you gather news?
11. Define *quest* and explain its role in the storytelling process.
12. Define and discuss the differences in writing and story structure between the straight news script in this chapter about BrightCity’s L Street vote, and the script that emphasizes storytelling quest.
13. You can find people pursuing quest in many activities. Name ten newsworthy situations that involve quest and specify the nature of the quest in each instance.
14. Define *character* and explain why it’s important to find the small, telling details about a person’s character, life, or quest to make your stories and characters memorable.
15. Describe the steps a storyteller can take to create a lifelong system of continuing education as a writer.

EXERCISES

1. Obtain some of John Larson’s stories (shot with photographer Mark Morache), which are available from www.nppa.org/professional_development/self-training_resources/AV_library/tv.html. View the stories and review Larson’s and Morache’s advice regarding storytelling and teamwork. Write a two-page, double-spaced summation of your findings.
2. Select five newspaper stories. Read them closely to absorb important information about each story. Next, follow the advice for how to write a compelling lead sentence for each story you chose. First, review examples of straight news scripts and storytelling scripts in this chapter. Follow the advice to “lower your expectations” for your opening sentences and “throw up” your immediate ideas on the page rather than edit yourself before you start. Finally, write the most powerful lead sentences you can for each of the stories you chose.
3. In your everyday interactions with people, begin to recognize when you feel something about what they say or do. It may be the way an elderly widow wipes her kitchen table clean repeatedly, or how a person walks, or how he or she unself-consciously sings to himself or herself. Look for the larger meaning in these behaviors; how are they symbols you can incorporate in your stories to address larger issues?
4. Study the parking meter script in this chapter and view the story (see exercise 1). Identify the three surprises in the story and explain how each surprise is set up. In what way are the three surprises revealed through video? Interviews? Other audio? Reporter narration?

5. Watch a local television newscast. Identify how many stories do, or could, emphasize quest: someone trying to get something done. Describe what force or forces in each story oppose the story subject’s efforts to accomplish a goal.
6. Write two stories about the same subject: (1) a straight news report; (2) the same subject but told as a story that emphasizes someone’s quest for a goal. Review the city council story in this chapter before you begin.
7. Read the work of authors and journalists whose writing you admire. Make a list of telling details that appear in their writing and describe how the writers use these details as symbolism of something larger. Review the sections “The Third Horse: Character” and “Telling Details” before you begin.
8. Create a lifelong plan for ongoing education as a writer committed to developing and perfecting a unique and compelling storytelling style. Review the section “Physician, Heal Thyself” before you begin.
9. Describe in detail the tour guide philosophy of writing for video, as described in this chapter.
10. Watch a television newscast and read the first section of your local newspaper. For each medium, describe the stories that (a) moved you or made you laugh; (b) made you say “Wow!” In each instance, describe the story elements that influenced your reaction(s). Next, describe how you might share such moments with your audience in a video story.
11. Describe the qualities that define moments. How do moments differ from telling details?

CHAPTER

12

How to Improve Your Storytelling Ability

Audiences with many viewing choices expect certain standards from their favorite information sources. At the very least, they want their stories and storytellers to be interesting and appealing. Even when your intentions are noble but your work suffers, viewers can only judge what you put on the screen. In the end, nothing else matters. “The ability to appeal, whatever the subject matter, separates the successful creator from the artistic failure,” writes filmmaker and author Edward Dmytryk in his book *On Film Editing*.¹ Survival and professional advancement depend on a commitment to produce stories with a style and substance that are consistently solid, unique, and appealing, even on days when you might willingly trade your job for a dead mouse.

SEEK GRADUAL IMPROVEMENT

As you work to make your stories ever more attractive and compelling, you may notice competitors who seem more capable than you. Perhaps they have more experience and confidence, or their stories just seem more inviting. While it’s useful to study others’ techniques, it’s important to realize that you are in competition primarily with yourself to improve each new story you report.

Implicit in the process of self-improvement is the possibility of failure, a hazard that keeps some people from realizing big achievements in their careers. You can’t fail if you don’t try, after all, but neither can you succeed. “Don’t be afraid to fail,” advises KAKE’s Larry Hatteberg. “You don’t learn unless you fail.”² An occasional failure can be seen as a virtue in the journalist’s professional development, with each new success building on some past failure.

Improvement is a gradual process that creates its own frustrations. The trick, says NBC national correspondent Bob Dotson, is to go for the minor victories. “Don’t try to hit a home run every time out, just get on first base every time at bat,” says Dotson. “You find the right word, or write a phrase that works, or shoot a scene that tells the story.”³

The commitment to slow, steady development can result in significant improvements over time. Dan Rather, long-time news anchor at CBS and now HDNet, suggests that what moves a career along is doing the routine things extraordinarily well time after time.

HAVE A STORY

Often, reporters and photojournalists confuse their accounts of events with stories. Routinely they identify the story subject, but not the story itself: “My story is about consumer spending.” But as you will have discovered, a story **focus** or **commitment** is one of the storyteller’s most potent tools. The focus statement provides a way to give the story life and help drive it forward.

Typically, in a team setting, the reporter is left to identify the story, although in reality that job should fall to everyone involved. Because you may see the story differently than the **assignment editor** or the person who accompanies you into the field, whether that person is the reporter or the photographer, remember to communicate your ideas to one another so that all agree on a single focus.

Even when you work alone in the field, if you can invest just two or three minutes to develop a focus statement, you can have a stronger story and spend less time in the field. Even when the action is moving quickly all around you, and it seems as if you must purely and simply react, force yourself to take time to think. Recognize that you must be flexible enough to change your story commitment if the event changes.

INVOLVE THE CAMERA

Viewers hunger for a sense of involvement in stories. Indeed the promise of a sense of first-person experience is one reason we turn to television and web video even for news.

The involved camera helps create the experiential illusion and thereby provides a way to help differentiate your reporting from the competition. Try to involve the camera more directly in the action—to place the viewer in the very heart of the story (Figure 12.1 a, b). When you involve the camera, you involve the viewer.

Look also for unique camera angles to help tell your story and to make it more visually memorable. Avoid extreme angles that could destroy the viewer’s sense of direct involvement in the story.

SEQUENCES ADVANCE THE STORY

Sequential video produces a continuous, uninterrupted flow of action that tells much of the story, even without narration. A series of shots are edited together to create for viewers the illusion of continuity along a timeline from beginning to end. Pictures, sound bites, and natural sound communicate much of the information.

BOX 12.1 THE ESSENCE OF STORYTELLING

The essence of all storytelling is conflict. There is no very good story in the premise “He wanted her and he got her; the end.” Conflict—the quest for a goal against opposition—keeps the story going.

The eighty-two-year-old woman who nurses heroin-addicted babies back to health is engaged in one of life’s greatest conflicts: life and health over death and suffering. The runner who has

lost his leg to cancer but rides across America in a wheelchair to raise money for athletes with physical disabilities illustrates his character under pressure. Because so many journalism stories are accounts of things gone wrong, conflict and struggle are inevitable components of television news. To ignore them is to ignore the nature not only of news, but life itself. ■

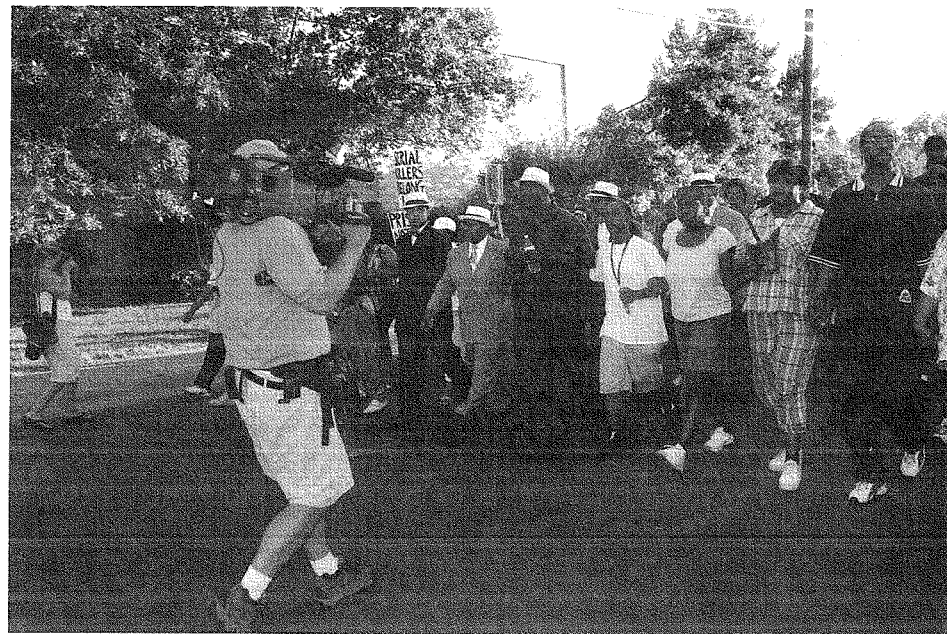
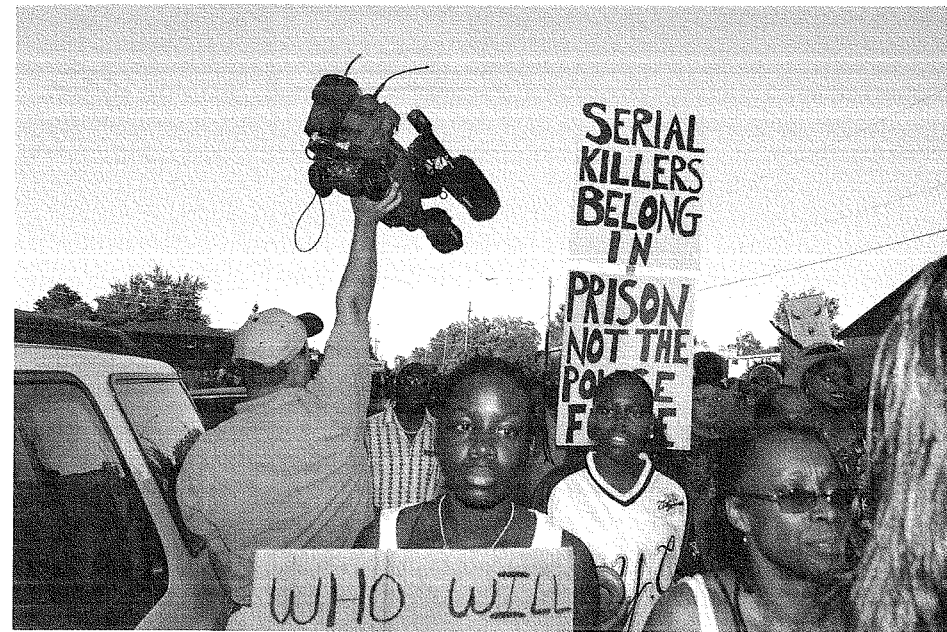


FIGURE 12.1

When the camera is involved in the action, so is the audience.

A commonly used, but much less effective, alternative is called **illustrative video**. This reporting approach simply uses video that illustrates the script, roughly in the proportion of one scene per sentence of voice-over narration. It is similar to a series

of unrelated slides or scenes with little regard for the order or rhythm or even for the meaning of individual shots working together. Illustrative video builds mostly around talk, and rarely tells a story along a timeline.

DON'T TRY TO SHOW ALL OF NEW ZEALAND

A frustration of every video reporter is the lack of airtime available to tell complex stories. "If only I had a couple more minutes," pleads the reporter. "You can have five more seconds if you'll give up a week of your summer vacation," the producer replies. At such times it is useful to remember the strong messages and nuances that can be communicated by a thirty-second or even a fifteen-second commercial. The best commercial messages are simple, yet powerful and memorable.

One approach in the face of insufficient airtime is to follow the maxim that "less is more." Photojournalist Larry Hatteberg has crystallized the concept in his advice, "Don't try to show all of New Zealand."⁴ Hatteberg forged this conviction while on assignment to portray New Zealand in a four-part series. Confronted with showing the nation's overwhelming complexity in only four two-minute reports, Hatteberg dramatically narrowed his focus. He chose a sheep rancher, a street magician, a fishing boat captain, and a railroad engineer, and told his stories through them. Still, after viewing the stories, there is a sense that we have seen all of New Zealand after all, because the treatment is both wide-ranging and powerful. Hatteberg's approach mirrors the sentiments of John Grierson, the British documentary historian and filmmaker, who once observed that while newspapers can tell the story of the entire mail service, you must make a film about one single letter.

PURSUE YOUR INTEREST IN PEOPLE

It's important to care about the people in your stories. Caring simply means that you are interested in your subject and that you listen hard to what the person has to say (Figure 12.2). This does not mean you should become emotionally or personally involved. The key is to report honestly and with appropriate feeling. "[The story] has to come from the heart if it is going to work well. For in the end, I have to feel the story if I am going to reflect it with feeling," writes television journalist Tim Fisher.⁵

MOTIVATE VIEWERS TO WATCH

In helping viewers want to watch your stories, it is important to avoid telling them everything they need to know in the voice-over script. Rarely, in the newscast built on words, will you have to watch a story to understand it. Often, you can listen from the next room with little loss in meaning. This kind of television, of course, is radio with pictures and is neither involving nor engaging.

A more powerful reporting method is to help people watch through voice-over that invites the viewer to reengage with the screen constantly. It is a "This" versus "This tea ceremony" approach. If you read the next two sentences aloud, the distinction becomes clear: "Every hiker should carry one of these in his backpack" versus "Every hiker should carry a compass in his backpack." Only the first sentence invites viewers to watch the screen.

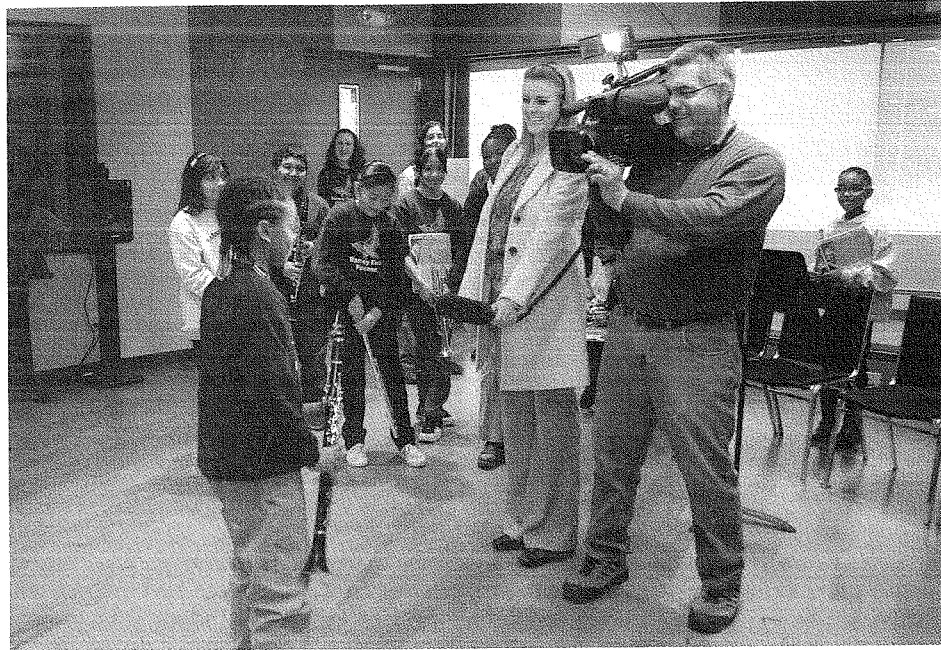


FIGURE 12.2

The strongest visual stories normally result when the journalist is interested in the subject and pays attention to what the person has to say.

DEVELOP VIDEO FLUENCY

In this word-oriented culture, the effort to express the story visually without stating it flatly, in words, is a trick easier said than done. For all its eloquence, the visual image receives short shrift among some journalists, even in the face of generations of filmmakers who have proven the power of visual communication. “Very early . . . I discovered that viewers are more attentive to silent sequences than they are to dialogue scenes,” writes filmmaker Edward Dmytryk. “When the screen talk[s], so d[oes] the viewer. Silent scenes command attention.”⁶

The same realities persist today. *Time* magazine noted that after screenings of *Ryan’s Daughter*, director David Lean was wounded by reviewers “who so often tend to listen to movies more intently than they look at them, thus missing much of [Lean’s] special grace and subtlety.”⁷ Happily, film and television viewers learn more from visual information than critics insensitive to the larger meanings and experiences that visual fluency offers. Repeatedly we learn that the television viewer would rather see it than hear about it.

At one time such advice was sufficient. But today many newsrooms require journalists to report on multiple platforms. Throughout the day the reporter may employ desktop-based editing, create computer graphics, cut voice-over tracks, post a web article, stream video, record a news tease, appear on set for an anchor debrief, create a blog or podcast, even select still photos from video for web-based articles, and broadcast story updates to mobile phones.

Today, “journalists are expected to be multimedia utility players,” says newspaper and magazine columnist Robert J. Samuelson. “Up to a point, this is valuable:

finding new ways to engage and inform. But it’s also time consuming.”⁸ Newsroom software helps enable such versatility by letting the reporter write as little as a single story but publish in various formats—as web article, news script, mobile phone broadcast—to several different platforms.⁹

The key is to learn when to use specific tools to best communicate your message in the medium at hand. It is no longer a matter of spoken words and moving images, but rather of graphics, audio only, audio with video, still photography, the spoken word meant to be heard, the written word meant to be read, text messages, and the like.

Excuses

In the face of deadline pressure, budget restraints, and equipment breakdowns, virtually every video story is imperfect in some sense, and some are outright forgettable. As a memo at a television station in Texas reminds news personnel, “We have some decent stories that we are making average.”¹⁰ Inquire at any newsroom why a particular story failed, and you may encounter The Excuse—that tendency to blame anything but ourselves.

Some excuses, of course, are legitimate. They explain something beyond our control that went wrong. Other excuses masquerade for indifference and procrastination. Note that some of the most common excuses are admissions of failure and tell of stories seldom remembered:

- “It was a dumb assignment. The producer didn’t know what he wanted.”
- “I don’t have enough time to do a good job. I have to cover six stories a day.”
- “My equipment is no good.”
- “I didn’t have time to set up the camera on a tripod.”
- “They don’t pay me enough that I have to do everything around here.”
- “You can’t shoot sequences in spot news.”
- “It’s the photographer’s job to take the pix. I don’t feel I can suggest shots.”
- “Audiences don’t expect that level of quality.”
- “It’s not my job, that’s up to the reporter.”

Professionals leave such excuses to the competition. Ultimately, on every story, the choice comes down to a simple yes or no whenever you ask yourself, “Am I going to do my best job on this story or not?”

KNOW THE COMMUNITY

The smaller a community the more journalists you find who are on their way through town to a better job. At one time market hopping may have helped further careers, but tenure in the marketplace can offer great rewards. Organizations need employees who want to live in the community and are willing to stay long enough to learn something about it. No one who arrives in town and leaves eight months later can discover much about the community, and even two years is little enough time for a video journalist to learn about an area, its politics, and its people. Generally, assuming acceptable pay and working conditions, the longer video journalists can stay in an area the better. Tenure in the marketplace allows journalists to develop more recognition and acceptance among viewers and to report stories about the community with a depth and sensitivity not found in the work of reporters on their way through town.

In a sense you are a historian for the market area you serve. You tell the stories of the soldiers, the boat builders, the archaeologists, the miners, and the musicians of

BOX 12.2 COMMUNITY-ORIENTED JOURNALISM

Traditionally, journalists have struggled to make their accounts objective, but inherent in all stories is a point of view: the job of determining *which* point of view falls to the journalist. Will a particular news story be simply an account of an event or situation, or of how the event affected people and how they responded? Will Durant, the American educator and historian, typically addressed such questions from a philosopher's perspective:

"Civilization is a stream with banks. The stream is sometimes filled with blood from

people killing, stealing, shouting and doing things historians usually record, while on the banks, unnoticed, people build homes, make love, raise children, sing songs, write poetry. The story of civilization is the story of what happened on the banks."

(Quoted in Jim Hicks, "Spry Old Team Does It Again," *Life* [October 18, 1963], 92) ■

your region. Someday, should you reach the network level, you still will tell similar stories from your travels, but share them with larger audiences.

CURIOSITY PAYS

Curiosity is a prerequisite if video journalists are to understand the market or the field they work in. One broadcast executive tells of a reporter who spent nearly eighteen months in town. A week and a half before she was to leave the state for another reporting job, she came to him to ask directions to the nearby mountains, which she had never visited. After a year and a half on the job, she had yet to explore the streets or to learn in which direction the freeways ran.

Cities and communities reveal themselves to explorers, so soon upon your arrival in town, come to know everything you can about street names, geographical oddities, regional pronunciations, community leaders, and Saturday night dances. Introduce yourself to the municipal court judge and walk along the riverfront. At restaurants, pass up the cheeseburger and sample the regional specialties like alligator tail or huckleberry pie. Attend or visit area churches and synagogues and take in a movie at the local drive-in. In short, immerse yourself in the area's history, culture, commerce, and religion, and your knowledge will lead you to become a more effective storyteller.

SEE BEYOND THE OBVIOUS

Every day, journalists reaffirm that viewers will never care more about a story than the reporter. If you can find a new way to cover the routine story, even those you have covered repeatedly over the years, then it will be more interesting and memorable for your audience.

"It's the Boy Scout motto, 'Be Prepared,'" says Art Donahue, whose awards include National Television News Photographer of the Year. "Make things look a little more interesting; try to think of everyday stories in a different way, not just as a standup and two talking heads on every story."¹¹ Donahue, a master at showing familiar subjects in a new light, once told the story of freeway traffic jams caused by a bridge under repair using only pictures and off-air sound recorded from truckers' CB radio chatter.

SHOW AUDIENCES WHAT THEY MISSED

Your obligation as a visual storyteller is to show viewers what they would have missed, even had they been eyewitnesses to the event. Search for unique story angles that other reporters may have overlooked in their rush to cover the story. While the competition is shooting the smoke and flames at the apartment house fire, look around you. Perhaps you will notice an elderly man next door trying to fight back the fire with a garden hose to save his modest home. The observant looking for a better story seem to encounter such "lucky breaks."

NBC correspondent Bob Dotson notes that after a tornado strikes, reporters seem to gravitate to the governor touring the area to ask how things look. But when Dotson covered the aftermath of a tornado in South Carolina, he found a man even more articulate than the governor. "Well, it got my teeth, but it didn't get me," the

INTERNATIONAL VIDEO JOURNALISM

Mark Carlson, an Associated Press video journalist based in Brussels, Belgium, says his occupation as a journalist has produced the most rewarding experiences in his life (Figures 12.3 and 12.4).

"I have found life to be a lot easier to understand when I listen to other people tell their stories," says Carlson. "I can't count how many times I've had someone lead me on a guided tour of their home after it has been destroyed by a natural disaster. Each time I walk through the ruins, I know that I'm not just telling a story, but sharing someone's life with the world. It is a most awesome responsibility..."¹² Below, Carlson's bio profiles his career from college to the present, and his advice on how to make it all work.

Bio (Excerpted)

I am a videographer, reporter, writer, video editor, producer, assignment editor, travel agent, and accountant for the AP. Video journalists have different responsibilities at different news organizations, but the job is the same everywhere, and it is for one person to do the work of two or three different people.

I began my career as a radio/television news broadcasting student at Southern Illinois University/Carbondale and worked there for WSIU-TV, a PBS affiliate, for four years. In my sophomore year, I also was hired at local ABC affiliate WSIL-TV as a part-time news/sports photographer and worked my way up to a one-man-band TV reporter.

I then moved on to WBIR, the NBC affiliate in Knoxville, TN, as a news/sports photographer. My next job was as a news photographer with the Fox affiliate WITI-TV in Milwaukee, WI.

After working in local TV news for nearly ten years, I began exploring jobs with broader news opportunities, and that's when I accepted the position of video journalist for the Associated Press based in Chicago. In 2010, I transferred to Brussels to cover the capital of Europe as a VJ for the AP.

I have covered the Fort Hood shootings, Gulf of Mexico oil spill, West Virginia coal mine explosion, Virginia Tech shootings, California wildfires, tropical storms, tornados, hurricanes, space shuttle launch, President Gerald Ford's funeral, the 2008 presidential election campaign in 18 states, President Obama's inauguration, Beijing and Vancouver Olympics, Super Bowls, World Series, Kentucky Derby, and Final Fours.

Whenever I go out into the field on an assignment, I am up against network TV crews with endless staff and resources. But that is not intimidating because I perform all of their jobs faster, cheaper, and more efficiently.

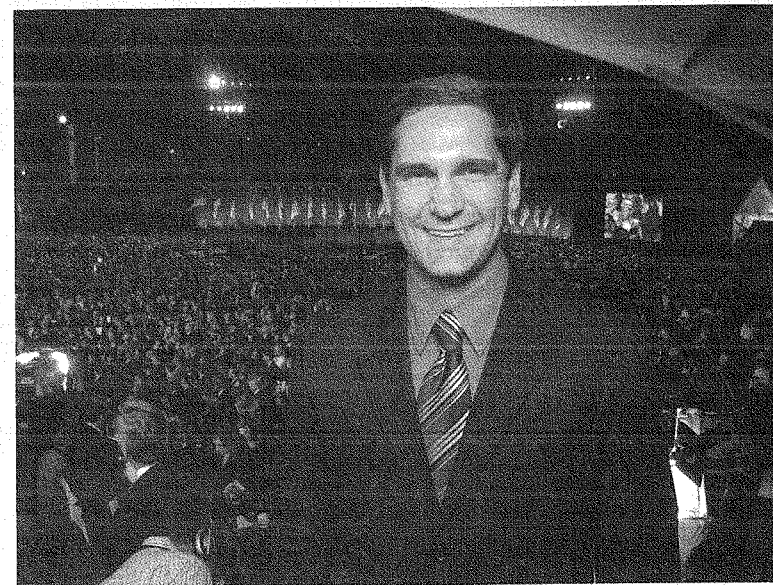
Everyone has limits on what they can and cannot do. The key to success is maximizing what you can do within those limits. Journalism is a business of competition. How does one person succeed when the competition is a crew of multiple people doing the same thing? Well, you have to figure out ways to force the competition to compete against your strengths.

—Mark Carlson ■

**FIGURE 12.3**

Video Journalist Mark Carlson on assignment to cover the Beijing Olympics.

Copyright © 2012 Mark D. Carlson

**FIGURE 12.4**

Video Journalist Mark Carlson, covering the presidential campaign, appears on camera in addition to reporting, shooting, writing, and editing the story on his own.

Copyright © 2012 Mark D. Carlson

man said. And he reached down in the debris and held up his mud-covered dentures. “This guy crystallized it for me,” says Dotson.¹³

HELP VIEWERS EXPERIENCE THE STORY AS YOU DID

Our hopes and dreams, our victories, failures, and despair, and our love, our loneliness, and faith, are woven within each of us from life’s complex fabric. We swim in a sea of commonality. A decade into the new millennium, about a billion people worldwide watched¹⁴ as rescuers pulled 33 trapped miners to safety following a mine collapse in Chile. One in every six or seven people on earth watched the unfolding story because we empathized with those miners. Their story addressed what we all feel in common about life, freedom, and wanting to see for ourselves how the story would end.

Any time you work on a news report, a reality program, or even an on-camera interview, try to stuff human experience into your work—a reconstruction of what it was like to be there. You can conduct interviews while your subjects remain focused on a familiar task in a familiar environment, perhaps talking to a tow truck driver about to repossess another luxury car in a down economy. At every turn, the key is to look for meaningful detail and capture it in images and sound that help illuminate the story subject’s life, situation, passions, and struggles.

Even adding storytelling elements to straight news reports can make facts more interesting and compelling to watch and build loyalty toward those that offer such content. Those little extra details can elevate viewer experience and help viewers better understand, remember, and relate to story content.

Gary Reaves (Figure 12.5), as senior reporter at WFAA-TV, Dallas, told the story of a woman whose 13-year-old daughter died in a ski accident. The victim’s mother hoped someday to meet the person who received her daughter’s heart. One day on the

**FIGURE 12.5**

Gary Reaves, CBS News and WFAA, Dallas, looks for ways to help viewers relate to what they see in his stories.

Copyright © 2012 by
Bernestine Singley

Internet she located the woman, a 40-year-old nurse whose heart began to fail after her second child's birth.

When the teen's mother and the heart recipient finally met and hugged one another, photojournalist Chris Mathis was recording video while reporter Gary Reaves stayed out of sight in an adjoining room. Later, back at WFAA, Reaves finished his script and handed it off to video editor Robert Hall, who created a visual and auditory narrative from that most human language of tears, hugs, and silences. On home screens, those moments conveyed a tangible sense of what each woman must be experiencing—grief and joy mingling in shared understanding for how one lost life could enable life in another. An equally poignant moment followed when the heart recipient, a nurse, handed the mother a stethoscope. Holding the scope to her ears, the mother listened to her late daughter's heart beating strong and steady in the nurse's chest.¹⁵

"On a story like that, I know from the beginning that the big payoff will come at the end. I'm trying from the first word to get viewers to the point that they feel like they are in the room with two people they care about," says Reaves. "At that point, I want to get out of the way, and let them experience it the same way I did. (Well, actually, I was in the next room peeking around the corner trying to stay out of the shot . . . but you get the point.)"¹⁶

ABC World News rebroadcast Reaves' report nationally to offer insights about organ donation from the viewpoints of the donor family and recipient.¹⁷ Imagine the power of the medium whenever viewers, too, can hear that healthy heart beating away in a stranger's chest, or any other legitimate sound that helps viewers "see with their ears."

BOX 12.3 A CONVERSATION WITH GARY REAVES

How do you describe the difference between reporting and storytelling?

Reporting is gathering and confirming information, and working at it until you have all the essential facts.

Storytelling is how you convey that information and how you make it meaningful to your audience.

I want viewers to understand and remember my stories. But I also rewrite my video stories for the web. I find it more difficult to create images off a flat piece of paper—that video script I created to tell the story with video, audio, and where I position them. I have great admiration for anyone who can convert video and sound into a compelling print or web story and make it look easy.

Then in one sense, storytelling is choosing the elements that best convey that story. Say, for example, you cover city government. What elements might turn a dull news conference with the mayor into a story that viewers will talk about the next day?

At a news conference, while everybody else is recording what the mayor says, I might turn around and look for someone in the audience. Chances are my viewers can relate to the guy with the problem and how he talks, more than to the mayor who only speaks to the problem in calculated language. As the reporter and writer, I can still define the issue and why it matters, but I can convey its essence most powerfully through a guy who looks and talks more like our viewers.

Media observers have said that print media report first to the intellect, video first to the heart, meaning it affects viewers emotionally. Many journalists try to eliminate emotion from their stories, believing it somehow biases their work. When and how do you use emotion as an element in fair and accurate visual storytelling?

In some way all stories are about people, and all people respond in some way to significant events in their lives. It's not only anger or fear. It might be joy, grief, humor, cowardice, or disdain—any legitimate

human emotion that fairly lends insight and meaning to my reporting.

Your story has to connect with viewers. Any reaction to the story is better than no reaction. I want my viewers to watch and understand, and somehow

relate to what they see. Otherwise, they're only waiting for the next reporter's story, or turning away altogether.

—A Conversation with Gary Reaves¹⁸
CBS News, WFAA Dallas ■

ADAPT YOUR REPORTING TO STORY DEMANDS

Unthinking enslavement to pictures can be just as devastating as an unreasonable loyalty to words. Strong storytelling demands that the most effective communication methods be used from moment to moment. If pictures and natural sound can best tell the story, then use them. If the story can more effectively be told through a reporter, with graphics, or through silence, then shape the story accordingly.

REPORTING THE NONVISUAL STORY

Many of the stories you are assigned will be static and nonvisual, unless you can find a way to make them move. Into this category fall city council meetings, public hearings, empty fields to be used as major building sites, and vacant buildings that have just been designated as historical landmarks. To lend essential movement and interest to such reports, several approaches can help:

- Look for preshot video, file film, and old newsreels, which show the subject in action.
- Look for life and for things that move in the scene, be they rippling flags, flying birds, or people riding by on bicycles.
- Research the story so that you have a more complete idea of the story's visual potential.
- Try to humanize the story by focusing on people, people-related subjects, or symbols of people and how they live. (In the aftermath of a house fire, perhaps the close-up of a charred photo album can remind us that fire touched people like ourselves.)
- Find a hook for the nonvisual story. Try to relate this event to a larger event or to an existing interest or issue.
- Shoot and use sequences in your report: To see is to believe, but to see sequentially is to experience.
- Use art, models, or, if ethically warranted, recreations.
- Pick out the main issue and do a story on that.
- Use digital video effects (DVE), as CBS once used in the story of a man's death after a police dispatcher had refused to send an ambulance. Through the use of a squeeze zoom, a freeze frame of the victim's house was shown on one side of the screen; a still shot of the dispatcher was shown to the other side of the frame. A graphic artist connected the two images with renderings of transmitted signals as viewers listened to a recording of the fateful interchange.
- Work a reporter standup into the story, preferably as a sequence.
- Create imagery in the mind's eye through sound.
- Write to create imagery.
- Touch feelings through little surprises and moments of real-life drama.

- Use innovative lighting that helps define the story's mood and environment.
- Pitch reporting opportunities to people in the news—let them define and describe their environment, the event, and the moment.
- Shoot pictures that share experience.
- Challenge yourself. Improve your attitude. Remember that your audience will never care more about the story than you do.

PERSONAL APPEARANCE AND CONDUCT

Whenever you are in public, you not only represent the organization for which you work, in many ways you are the organization. How you conduct yourself and how you dress can influence not only how the community thinks of your station, but even the quality of your stories. “You can gain access to stories or be denied access, based on how you dress,” says Rich Clarkson, former photographic director of *National Geographic*.¹⁹

Some TV stations and corporate or community organizations provide reporters and anchors with a wardrobe allowance because they believe personal appearance and station image matter. But aside from the typical jackets, caps, and golf shirts that display the company logo, photojournalists rarely receive such benefits. If the photographer ruins clothes covering a story, stations may pay the cleaning bills or replacement costs. If the station refuses to pay the cost, consider paying it yourself to maintain your own standards of appearance.

ETIQUETTE

Reporters around the country have made a name for themselves as pushy, rude, and aggressive. Deservedly or not, the public sometimes thinks of journalists as uncaring and unsympathetic. Competition and deadline pressures are partly to blame, but sometimes the problem can be a simple lack of sensitivity.

At funerals, or in similar stories that involve death or illness, first seek the family's permission before you shoot any video or conduct interviews. As you cover the story, conduct yourself according to the considerations you would expect from a reporter or photographer if this were your family. Dress appropriately for the occasion and try to shoot the story with a longer lens to remain as far away and inconspicuous as you can.

SHOOTING AND REPORTING SPOT NEWS

Covering spot-news or other events beyond your control is almost an art form in itself. The following discussion offers guidelines that can help you transform chaos into good storytelling.

Seconds Count

Timing can be everything when you cover spot news. Those first on the scene usually get the best video and the most awards for spot-news coverage. Early on, people are still excited (and exciting) and events are still happening.

Learn to Shoot by Instinct

Equipment familiarity is essential if you are to develop an instinct for shooting fast-moving events. The equipment should become such a natural extension of yourself

that your reactions are automatic; you don't have to stop and think about it. Practice makes perfect. During lulls in the news day, practice rack-focusing from one object to another. Imagine shots. Think about how to cover stories, even when you're at home sitting in the easy chair. And learn to listen when the interviewee speaks so you'll know whether to move in for a close shot or pull back for a shot of the speaker's husband.

Be Ready

The Scout motto “Be prepared” is the first rule in shooting and reporting uncontrolled events. That means having batteries that are charged and connected to the camera, recording media loaded and cued, camera white-balanced, and the mind switched to “think.” One photojournalist is said to have photographed five planes crashing, over the course of his career, because he's always ready.

Avoid “Sticks”

When you shoot spot news, tripods are impractical. Get off the tripod and shoot handheld, but remember the rules that affect handholding: Don't handhold on telephoto; to minimize shakiness, consider leaving the lens on wide angle; determine the near plane of focus for the lens you are using and don't go closer to your subjects than that distance.

Anticipate

Covering spot news means working ahead in your mind and asking what you will need to shoot next. Although no rehearsals are possible when you shoot spot news, you can try to understand in advance what is likely to happen or to imagine what may happen. “If you see something you like you've probably missed it,” says freelance photographer Darrell Barton. “Don't think with the camera on, think before you turn it on.”²⁰

Shoot the Essentials First

Shoot the essentials first when you cover spot news; you can't go back and ask for retakes. As you shoot, edit in your head. Previsualize and shoot what you know you'll need. Think of three shots at a time: the shot you're taking, the shot you just took, and the shot you'll take next. Remember to shoot reactions. Pick up cutaways and other shots after the event.

Shoot Sequences

Shoot sequences, especially on spot news, or you'll wind up with a slide show. You can't always shoot spot news sequentially, but you can create the illusion of sequences by shooting one firefighter's face, another firefighter's hands, and yet another firefighter's feet. Or you can photograph a basketball player shooting the ball, then cut to a CU of a basketball photographed at another time during the game as it goes through the hoop. You also can “snap zoom” while you're shooting, as discussed in Chapter 2 (a long shot, for example, followed by an instant zoom to a medium shot or a close-up). During editing, the few frames of the snap zoom can be eliminated from the scene to create the illusion of a three- or four-shot sequence.

Tell a Story through People

Impose a theme on your story. Good spot-news coverage is partly a product of the journalist's ability to show the human effects of an event. And although you don't control the event, you can shoot the essential scenes and sounds that reflect the event in meaningful symbols. Look for shots that tell us how the event affected people: the charred luggage at a plane crash, improperly installed electrical wiring at a mobile home fire, or perhaps the photograph of a child now the subject of a mountain search and rescue.

Be Considerate of Authorities at the Scene

It's the old saying that you can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar. If an official won't let you into the scene of a spot-news event, try to talk your way in. Sometimes you can begin to shoot without permission—and continue to shoot—with a statement to the police/fire/military authorities as simple as, "Let me know if I get in your way." Such a statement implies you're willing to cooperate with those in charge, and sometimes that's all they need to hear. A word of warning: Don't be intimidated; don't be shooed away from the event too easily. Many of the best scenes may occur soon after you have been told to go home.

Be Considerate of People in Spot-News Events

Spot-news subjects, be they mine rescue workers or helicopter pilots, are under intense pressure and stress. They may be experiencing grief; they may be in physical shock. Learn to "read" the physical and psychological signs of stress and fatigue to know when it's best to stop pushing.

People in spot-news events are less aware of the camera than they would be in slower-moving stories. Often, the reporting crew is the last thing on the minds of victims caught up in tragedy or in emotional, stressful events. Sometimes they will remain unaware of your presence, until someone tells them days or months later that you covered the story. Still, to avoid upsetting people, don't crowd or otherwise violate their personal space, but do work to get good close-ups, and remember to treat people—and their privacy, dignity, and emotions—the way you would want to be treated in similar circumstances.

Play It Safe

You face risks each time you cover spot news. You may encounter downed power lines, smoke, dioxin, asbestos, PCBs, bare electrical wires, high water, toxic spills and chemicals, heat, fire, cold, high winds, explosions, falling walls, ice, and people with knives, guns, and explosives. And if those don't get you, you can even be run over by a parade float while you're shooting a cutaway of the onlookers.

Carry everything you will need to cover the story, because you may be unable to return to the vehicle or helicopter for spare recording media, a first aid kit, protective clothing, a change of clothes, food, or adequate lights for night shooting. Be prepared, and remember: No story is worth your life.

Don't Try to Be an Emotional Superperson

Some spot-news and similar events are so gruesome and unimaginable they can affect you more than you might realize or admit. Such conditions are no different than soldiers

returning from the battlefield with posttraumatic stress disorder. So be conscious of your feelings, and if necessary, talk them out with somebody who understands what you've gone through. Otherwise, those experiences and memories could build up and someday overwhelm you.

Remember Good Taste

When you report spot news, show what is appropriate and nothing more. You may decide to show only a recent photo of a drowning victim rather than the covered body or a very long shot of a resuscitation effort rather than close shots. Some shots, such as a sequence of someone putting a gun into his mouth and pulling the trigger, should never make air. How does one know whether to record such footage? Some journalists make the shot, regardless of content, then decide later whether it should be aired, or else leave the decision to the producer, anchor, managing editor, or news director. Although the practice of "shoot now, decide later," often is valid, it can lead to charges of invasion of privacy and other legal entanglements (see Chapter 14, Law and the Video Journalist). Often, the best response in such situations is to follow the adage, "If you don't want it on air, don't shoot it." The competition may air shots you consciously chose not to make, but remember propriety and its role in helping you protect your credibility and the community's respect.

TOWARD A NEWS PHILOSOPHY

In the past, video reporters and storytellers have commonly defined their job as information gathering and delivery. "We deliver the information; it's up to the audience to understand," the reasoning went. Journalists could practice such elitism in the days when viewing options were limited. But today, audiences have gained control of the medium. Viewers with computers, smartphones, tablets, mobile satellite dishes, cable- and wireless-streaming TV and digital video recorders even control the program schedule. They decide whom they will watch, when, where, for how long, and on what platforms. When stories are powerful, compelling, and engaging, viewers may stick around to watch. They seldom watch dull, routine, or predictable stories. As always, the heart of captivating video remains the story, with true celebrity achieved only by mastering the visual communications process.

SUMMARY

The most successful journalists produce reports and stories that appeal to audiences, regardless of the story's subject matter. Improving storytelling ability is a gradual process of learning to do the routine things extraordinarily well time after time. Whereas some journalists seek perfection in their work, a more feasible alternative is to seek excellence.

Because storytellers need stories, a good approach is to summarize the story to be told in a simple, declarative sentence, which photojournalists call their commitment or focus statement. Once the focus or commitment is defined, the storyteller, even in journalism, must look for elements of opposition or conflict. Active conflict, such as a person's drive to overcome a handicap or fight illiteracy, helps illuminate the essence of individuals and even communities. Not every story contains conflict; some stories are merely accounts or announcements of events and fall outside this discussion.

As a photojournalist, avoid excuses. Audiences can judge your work only by what you put on the screen. Some excuses are legitimate, but they can too easily become alibis. Strong storytellers try to show familiar subjects in a new light. Some even succeed in showing viewers familiar with a subject what they have overlooked. In such endeavors, the more the camera is involved in the action, the more realistic the story will be.

Other devices to strengthen the storytelling effort include telling the story through people, the use of matched-action sequences, and narrowing story focus to a manageable level. As John Grierson, the British documentarian, observed, while newspapers can tell the story of the entire mail service, moving images are often at their best when they tell the story of a single letter.

Although words are crucial to the storytelling process, too many words can overwhelm a report. Use words, pictures, sounds, and silences sometimes by themselves, sometimes together—in whatever combinations best tell the story. Through such dedication, even so-called nonvisual stories can be made compelling and interesting.

Many of the same considerations apply to spot-news reporting, with the important proviso that reporters and photographers must anticipate fast-developing action and be extraordinarily conscious of personal safety. In the course of all conduct, television journalists are public figures. Their actions reflect not only on themselves, but also on their employers and their profession.

KEY TERMS

assignment editor	199	focus	199	sequential video	199
commitment	199	illustrative video	200	spot news	210

DISCUSSION

1. Discuss steps the photojournalist can take to make the style and substance of news stories more appealing while still preserving the story's fundamental accuracy and integrity.
2. What is the difference between excellence and perfection in the reporting process? Which of these options is the wiser pursuit?
3. Explain why it is important to identify the story you're reporting and to state it aloud, or at least sum up the story in your mind, before the reporting process begins.
4. Why is communication between the reporter and photographer so vital throughout the reporting process?
5. Discuss the role of conflict in storytelling and how the concept applies to television news stories.
6. When excuses become a habit, a way of life almost, they can erode the photojournalist's ability to produce work of consistent excellence. Identify the attitudes and personal practices that can help you avoid making excuses about your work.
7. Identify a half-dozen or more activities that can help you learn more about your community. Explain why those activities are important to help make you a better reporter, photographer, or storyteller.
8. What steps can you, as a photojournalist, take to show viewers what they might have missed, even had they been eyewitnesses to the story you're reporting?
9. Why is it important for the photojournalist to capture and transmit a sense of experience about the story being reported?
10. Discuss the approaches you can follow when you must tell complex stories briefly, yet with power.

11. Why is it important for you to care about the people in your stories, or at least to be interested in them? If you care too much about the people in your reports, can you remain detached and objective when reporting their stories?
12. Describe a good reporting method that can help make viewers watch stories by frequently inviting them to reengage with the television screen.
13. Discuss ways you can make so-called nonvisual stories more visually appealing and informative.
14. Photographers have to work in all manner of environments and weather extremes, so to what extent should they have to maintain a well-groomed, well-dressed appearance in public? As part of your answer, describe the proper attire that you believe a photographer or video journalist normally should wear on field assignment.
15. Describe effective reporting practices and considerations for personal safety when covering spot-news stories.
16. When all is said and done, what is the journalist's most important obligation in reporting the news?

EXERCISES

1. To help improve your ability to develop focus or commitment statements, choose a very simple object or phenomenon, such as a pumpkin, a Christmas tree ornament, or a spring breeze, and identify a focus statement that will help you generate a visual story about the subject. Example: "The spring breeze is a trash collector." Next, identify two or three main points you want to communicate about the subject and find visual proof for those main points. In a story centered on a car wash, for example, a main point might be, "Every time you clean something, you make something else dirty."
2. Find an ordinary subject and strive to make it more appealing through your lighting, audio, photography, or reporting.
3. Construct a television story that uses only pictures and sounds, but no voice-over narration, to tell a visual story complete with beginning, middle, and ending.
4. Study books, films, and compelling stories for the presence of conflict. Analyze the role of conflict in storytelling.
5. Take a fresh look at the community in which you live. Learn more about the area's history, culture, commerce, and religions. If you can do so safely, jog or take walks through areas of the community that are unfamiliar to you. Find a story to photograph and report based on your new awareness of some aspect of the community and its people.
6. Take a complex subject such as the issues that surround no-smoking ordinances and shoot two or three simple reports that illustrate the principle that "you can write an article about the mail service, but you must make a film about a single letter."
7. Write a script to accompany a story you have photographed and/or reported that constantly reengages viewers with the screen. Use phrases such as, "Be sure to include one of these in your backpack," rather than "Be sure to take a compass."
8. Choose a "nonvisual" story subject, such as a historic cabin or other building in your community that is open for public tours. Strive to make your photography and reporting about the subject powerful, compelling, and engaging.
9. Study spot-news stories for evidence of the video journalist's or reporting team's ability to tell such events through people. Note how often sequences are present in the spot-news stories you view. If sequences were absent, would they have been possible to photograph?
11. Interview police, fire, or sheriff's authorities and inquire about their greatest frustrations when working with video reporters and photographers.
12. Visit a federal, state, or local environmental safety official and learn more about toxic chemicals and other environmental hazards you can expect to encounter during spot-news coverage.

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Live Shots and Remotes

—Luan Akin

Television and web audiences frequently become participants in the reporting process, sometimes as knowledgeable about the developing story as the field reporter. This chapter details the live reporting process, tells how to organize and write the story in the field, and examines the traits and abilities that help make television and web reporters "live capable." (Figure 13.1)

I never will understand why I didn't spot the tornado myself. Denver's forecast on this June day called for severe weather—heavy rain, lightning, hail, and possible tornadoes. That meant the helicopter crew of pilot Mike Silva, photographer David Gregg, and I would be chasing storms. Only this time, the storm found us.

As I drove to the airport, the cloud layer overhead clamped down on the city, growing darker, lower, and more ominous. I caught up with Mike and David as they half-walked, half-ran to the helicopter. I yelled to Mike that we needed to get in the air right away. A funnel had been sighted over Denver. Without missing a beat—without even looking up—Mike jerked his index finger and pointed to the sky. A towering funnel was dead overhead.

It wasn't large by midwestern standards, but it was the biggest funnel our city had seen in a long time. It turned out to be one of seven tornadoes that hammered Denver that afternoon.

For the next four hours, we were part of a "live" marathon. Mike, David, and I did one shot after another. We were live (from a respectful distance) as a twister snapped power lines and ripped up huge trees, tossing them half a block away. When we weren't live, other CBS4 crews were. One team on the ground walked viewers through a neighborhood that had been especially hard-hit. The photographer shot "off the shoulder" as the reporter stepped over

5. For practice, record the introduction to a live report, using background notes from a newspaper or web article or a television news story. Include as much of the following information as possible in forty seconds or less: your location, what's happened, what you can see from your vantage point, and the "broader picture" that exists outside the TV frame. Qualify your information as necessary, and use terms such as "still unclear," "at this time," and "unconfirmed reports" as warranted.
6. Record the live close to a practice report, this time telling your imaginary audience what you don't know. End the close with a toss back to the studio anchor, including as part of your last line the anchor's first name.
7. Interview a Public Information Officer at a police or fire department about his or her dealings with media representatives, protocols the PIO follows during emergencies, how the command post operates, and the procedures and guidelines reporters are expected to follow. Submit a report of not more than five double-spaced pages and discuss your findings in class.
8. Record yourself delivering a :50 to :60 "thumb sucker" to camera. Play back the result and analyze your performance. Note especially the sense of urgency you communicate, how fluid and extemporaneous you sound, and your ability to develop and maintain eye contact with the audience.
9. Using your own or donated footage, produce a practice live/SOT/live report not to exceed 1:20. Play back the result and analyze your performance.
10. Using your own or donated footage, produce a live/VTR/live report. As part of your script, note the roll cue and cue back to remote for the crossroll.
11. Using the newspaper as a reference source, write a practice live report that includes editing instructions for crossroll on a spot-news story. For guidance, see pages 219–220.
12. Using your own or donated footage, produce a live/VO/SOT/live report, including all necessary roll cues for the producer. Record your own live intro and close.
13. Write the script for a spot-news package, using any source of information you wish. Prerecord all voice-over narration as though it were to be fed live back to the station. Refer to each portion of track between sound bites as "section 1, section 2..." and give a clear 3-2-1 countdown before you begin each section of track.
14. Record a practice live report from a real or imaginary newsroom. This can be a late-breaking story or one or more live updates from the newsroom.
15. Based on any of the live intros you have written for any of the exercises above, write anchor intros that flow smoothly from the anchor to your own report. Keep the anchor intro brief but specific. For additional practice, record the anchor intro on tape and use it to introduce your own live intro.
16. Ad-lib a reporter close that includes a smooth toss back to the anchor. Reference the final shots and sound in the crossroll as you tie up the story. If appropriate, refer to the next likely event or development and assure the audience, if appropriate, that you'll be following the story. Include the anchor's first name as part of the last line in your close.
17. Practice preparing and delivering three versions each of a radio voicer, a radio news wrap, and if practical, a live interview in which you report and update a spot-news story over time in the field, including interviews with significant sources.

Law and the Digital Journalist

Journalists make ethical and legal judgments every day that hinge on familiarity with First Amendment guarantees of *freedom of press and speech*, Fourth Amendment guarantees of the individual's *right to privacy*, and Sixth Amendment guarantees of the *right to a public trial by an impartial jury*. Many legal transgressions occur in the field as journalists *gather and report* the news. Journalists unfamiliar with state and federal statutes that govern news coverage remain vulnerable to anyone willing to seek compensation or other advantage through the courts. People can sue for anything, and some news sources may use their apparent command of the law to censor, influence, or otherwise profit from news reports and their timing.

The Internet raises further legal questions. Who owns the rights to published or "repurposed" material? Should journalists observe a print or a broadcast legal model, or both, when using the Internet? If a site defames an individual or institution, who is responsible? Is it the original author, the online service, and/or the journalist who quoted the information?

Some business ventures buy up blanket copyrights to the output from newspapers and other publishers, and then troll web sites and social media for material that has been reposted without their permission. "Media companies' assets are very much their copyrights," says Steve Gibson, the CEO of Righthaven, a copyright trolling firm. "These companies need to understand and appreciate that those assets have value more than merely the present advertising revenues."¹ Gibson believes infringements occur by the millions, if not billions.²

Such companies prosecute even private, obviously innocent violators, and frequently collect monetary damages. Law firms also troll the Internet in much the same way, looking for libelous reports against their clients, whether corporate or individual.³ As technology and media platforms influence how electronic journalists gather and report the news, courts struggle to answer ever-changing questions and issues.

This chapter discusses legal questions that journalists face routinely and offers guidelines to help journalists know when to seek advice. A generous application of fairness can help eliminate the need for some routine legal advice, but the guiding rule should always be "If in doubt, seek help" In no way should any part of this chapter be considered as actual legal advice or as a substitute for appropriate legal counsel.

GATHERING THE NEWS

The First Amendment usually protects the right to speak and publish, but it does not automatically protect the right to gather news. Even so, the courts have generally held that if journalists are to report news they must also have the right to gather it. As a rule when gathering news, journalists may go anywhere a person can go without special permission—so long as their equipment doesn't get in the way. Although journalists may attend a theater opening, a political rally, or a courtroom trial, they almost never can light, photograph, record, or transmit live pictures of these same events without first obtaining special permission. When it comes to gathering the news, nowhere in the law are reporters and photojournalists more likely to cost their stations money than in matters of libel (defamation) and invasion of privacy.

LIBEL

Libel (defined in the courts as malicious defamation) is the use of factual information (as opposed to opinion) that holds someone in hatred or contempt, subjects the person to ridicule, or otherwise lowers esteem for the individual. Property, businesses, and institutions can also be libeled. **Defamation** can occur as soon as you communicate a false statement of fact to a third party, even if you never broadcast the statement. Although oral defamation might qualify as **slander**, in television news it's considered libel, even if the alleged defamation is made orally.

Know the Statement Is True

Because libel is a statement of information that constitutes defamation (as opposed to a statement of opinion), an excellent protection against liability is to have good reason to believe a statement is true. Few journalists can know with certainty that a statement is false. For the most part, journalists can only know what they see in documents or hear from sources. If a reporter uses evaluative judgment words, such as, "probably," "in most people's opinion," or "any sane person can see," those words would probably fall under the heading of opinion, which cannot be false in the same sense that a statement of fact can be false. Fortunately, for journalists to be liable for defamation, they must normally know a statement is false or be aware that it is probably false. Such latitude offers a heady measure of legal protection.

In some states a common test for defamation is negligence. In other words, courts look for evidence that the journalist used "due care" in evaluating the truth of a defamatory statement. To protect yourself against charges of negligence, always adopt a higher standard than the law sets. Ask yourself, "Do I believe the statement to be true?" This is a much easier and more practical question to ask than, "Do I believe the statement to be false?"

Another test is to ask, "Whom am I talking about? Might what I report in some way lower our esteem for that person?" In applying such a test, it's important to remember that most substantive news is derogatory to someone. Still, if you can answer yes to the question "Does this look and feel authentic?" you'll probably be safe even if the statement later proves to be false. As yet another safeguard, ask yourself, "Does the public have a right to know this?" Perhaps the information addresses some aspect of public business, for example, or comes from sworn testimony or from subpoenaed information that is part of the court record.

Evaluate Sources to Eliminate Malice

Whenever someone makes derogatory statements about another person, try to evaluate the person's motives. Was he just fired? Is he bitter? Perhaps you interview a woman whose sister has been beaten to death, and the woman tells you, "Her husband was a no-good bum. He beat her for years." In that moment, you are helpless to know whether the statement is true or false.

Only if the statement is made during a live broadcast, and only if you used due care to stop it, might you escape liability should the broader standards of defamation be applied. In the previous example, the woman could make the statement; you could say what the woman told you; you could make the statement without attribution; but in all three instances the court would typically consider your responsibility for the allegation to be the same. Later you might be able to establish the woman's malice, but if you air the allegation without first evaluating your source, the court may ask whether there was something further you should have done—and there usually is—to establish the source's motives.

Note the distinction between the two concepts of malice applied in this discussion. An older, common-law version of malice applies in establishing the malice of the news source. Because of the 1964 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *New York Times v. Sullivan*, however, a second concept of malice applies to the journalist. This newer concept, called "actual malice," or the Sullivan Rule, as later modified, results from the Court's opinion that "Constitutional guarantees require, we think, a federal rule that prohibits a public official from recovering damages for a defamatory falsehood relating to his official conduct unless he proves that the statement was made with 'actual malice'—that is, with knowledge that it was false or with reckless disregard of whether it was false or not."⁴

The ruling applies to public figures or to persons who have voluntarily placed themselves in the public view. The issue of actual malice as it applies to private plaintiffs is left to state law. Some states allow reporters to repeat charges they suspect are false. Other states require that reporters investigate such charges before they repeat them.⁵ You can study a fascinating array of up-to-the-minute free speech, copyright, and invasion of privacy decisions by entering such terms in your Internet browser as you encounter them while reading this chapter. A good starting point is the College Media Adviser's site at <http://www.collegemedia.org/>. Other resources are noted throughout this chapter and within the endnotes.

Assume the Highest Standard

Actions for libel can be brought in any state in which a station's signal is received. A Pennsylvania resident libeled by a New York station could bring suit in his home state, for example, although Pennsylvania courts normally would use the libel standards that apply in New York. This offers some protection against individuals who might otherwise sue in the state with the most favorable chances for settlement. Consequently, attorneys generally advise that you assume the standard for your own state, or preferably an even higher standard.

Use Caution When Dealing with Police

Any time police serve as your primary source for potentially defamatory statements, or any time you're tempted to publish information obtained from the police radio, use caution. A street cop may tell you on the record, "This looks like it could be a gangland

drug-related shooting,” but to protect yourself check further; otherwise, simply through inference, you could be defaming an innocent person. In one libel action, a reporter aired police-supplied photographs of alleged “thieves and burglars” at a flea market. One of the persons clearly identified in the photographs had no police record and sued for libel. A court ordered the police to pay a penalty for libel.

INVASION OF PRIVACY

The Fourth Amendment to the Constitution protects the individual’s right to privacy, including the “right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects.” As defined in the courts, **invasion of privacy** is any act of intrusion that occurs without an individual’s consent, including trespass and publication of embarrassing facts (even if true), and that violates an individual’s reasonable expectation of the right to privacy (Figure 14.1).

As the concept affects journalists, it has parallels with libel law, but note the distinction about truth. Libel is actionable only if the report is false. Invasion of privacy can be actionable even if the report is true. Exceptions occur if the information is already part of the public record or if the report concerns activities that occurred in public. Such information is privileged, even though it might be false, provided it is reported completely and as accurately as it was made available to the journalist.

In gathering television news, one of the most common forms of invasion of privacy is **trespass**. Trespass occurs when you enter someone’s property or premises illegally.



FIGURE 14.1

The Fourth Amendment to the Constitution guarantees the individual’s right to privacy. Violations of state or federal privacy laws can lead to a journalist being charged with invasion of privacy, trespass, eavesdropping, and unauthorized surveillance.

Often, trespass is inadvertent. Someone with apparent authority gives you permission to enter the scene of a news event; later, someone with greater authority tells you to leave and threatens you with a lawsuit. What are the damages for walking into a person’s home and invading privacy? The answer can be anything from one dollar in actual damages to clean the carpet you soiled, to punitive damages that are anyone’s guess for causing “emotional distress.”

DEFAMATION

An area of great danger to journalists is unsuspecting defamation, which often occurs when pictures or video are used to carry most of the reporting load. Each of the following examples conceivably might lead to claims of an alleged invasion of privacy called *publicizing in a false light*.

- The camera shows a reporter on a crowded street corner, then pans over to show a hapless passerby as the reporter says, “Tax cheats cost the government billions every year.”
- Voice-over narration discusses the problem of overweight Americans while the television screen shows generic cover footage of women walking along a street. The women, through “guilt by illustration,” are implicated as being overweight.
- Reporter voice-over narration says, “Drug dealers are using their profits to buy huge homes like these.” The narration is unwittingly married with generic cover footage that shows the home of a respected commodities exchange executive. A lawsuit follows.
- Several young women walk along a street against voice-over narration that charges that the area being shown is full of prostitutes. The women, not surprisingly, sue the station.

The use of **generic video**, which some attorneys call “inadvertent cutaways,” is a dangerous journalistic practice that leads to libel and invasion of privacy suits. When suits are filed against reporters who shoot a street scene, then use it generically for two years to illustrate scripts about prostitutes, thieves, and tax evaders, judges are likely to say, “When you were talking about the mad rapist, you could be understood to have been talking about the person you showed on the screen. Let’s let the jury decide.”

USE OF THE WORD *ALLEGED*

A time-honored way to handle criminal cases is to remember the adage, “No charges, no name.” In criminal cases, a person’s identity should be withheld until charges are filed. At the point charges are filed, the word *alleged* can be one of the reporter’s most important legal protections. This is because how much you can say (and sometimes show) about anyone associated with a crime or a criminal depends on the level of that person’s involvement.

There are at least three critical levels to consider:

1. **Material witnesses:** Some people are brought in as material witnesses, nothing more.
2. **Suspects:** Other individuals are brought in as suspects, or material witnesses may become suspects.
3. **Arraignment:** Only at arraignment does actual “alleging” begin; at this point someone charged with murder becomes an *alleged* killer.

In a sense, even someone *convicted* of murder remains an alleged killer. The jury may say he was the killer, but the journalist can never know with absolute certainty. Although the conventional wisdom in many newsrooms holds that the word *alleged* is useless under the law, it may help establish the journalist's "state of mind" toward the suspect when the story was reported.

APPARENT AUTHORITY

Technically, you are liable for trespass if you're in the wrong place at the wrong time. Typically, however, courts determine a journalist's guilt or innocence based on **apparent authority**. The following examples illustrate some of the everyday challenges journalists are likely to encounter.

Fatal Fire

You seek permission to shoot video of a fatal fire at a retirement facility. The angle on your story is that many of these facilities in your area may not be fireproof. The manager is on duty and tells you, "Go on in." The fire chief, at your request, later also grants you access to enter the facility. You shoot video until the fire is almost out, but as you prepare to leave, the facility's owner arrives. The fire chief has long since left, but the owner tells you to leave immediately. The moment the owner tells you to leave, you must leave, but the most immediate question is whether you're liable for trespass for having entered the facility in the first place.

Courts generally answer this question based on apparent authority. If someone on the scene says, "I own or lease this property; come on in," and you have no reason to doubt that person's authority, it's normally safe to enter the premises. If you can't find the owner or manager and the fire chief gives you permission to enter, you may still enter the premises. However, once inside, you might still be liable for trespass or invasion of privacy if, for example, you inadvertently shoot into a private room and show an elderly resident in an embarrassing situation.

Assuming you do not invade anyone's privacy, it's probably safe to air any footage you shot while you had apparent authority to shoot, that is, from the facility's manager or from the fire chief. If the owner (the last person to arrive at the scene) tells you not to use any footage you've shot, even under the fire chief's apparent authority, it's probably still safe to air anything shot before the owner's arrival. In this example, if anyone were to be sued, it probably would be the fire chief. If in doubt, consult your station attorney.

Day Care Center

You receive permission from a city building inspector to enter a day care center that has been cited for safety violations. The city building inspector is the apparent authority, although you must leave if the manager or owner (either of whom have greater authority than the building inspector) tells you to leave.

Landlord-Tenant Dispute

You're covering a landlord-tenant group dispute. You normally may enter someone's private apartment at that person's invitation, even if the landlord tells you to leave, because in many states tenancy rights give the individual greater apparent authority than the landlord. You also may stand on public property to photograph

the apartment complex and you may be able to stand on a common area of the apartment grounds and shoot video, again with a tenant's permission.

Entering a Restaurant

You learn that your state health department may close a local restaurant if unsanitary conditions aren't corrected. As part of your report, you enter the restaurant with cameras rolling, walk to the manager, and begin to ask questions. The restaurant is open to the public, you reason, so anyone can come in. A further question is whether you're liable for what you shoot before the manager tells you to leave.

In this example, the concept of limited invitation also applies. The courts have held that in the case of restaurants (or even car dealerships), the public has a **limited invitation** (see *LeMistral, Inc. v. Columbia Broadcasting System*, 402 N.Y.S.2d 815, 817, N.Y. App. Div. 1978). The public is welcome to come in to eat at a restaurant, or buy cars at a dealership, but not to come in and shoot video. Such practices in your state may therefore fall under the heading of invasion of privacy.

Often, private homes, businesses, and institutions can assume quasi-public status because of some event. Generally, you can shoot anything your eyes can see, if you have permission to shoot in the first place. Be aware, however, that examples are simply that. Check state laws to be certain where you stand and where you can stand. In one incident, reporting crews from two television stations sought permission to enter leased land to photograph horses that were said to be starving. The crews obtained permission from the landowner but not from the individuals who had leased the land. In this case, the overriding question was whether the reporters had reasonable belief that the owner had apparent authority, an answer that will vary from one state to the next.

TECHNOLOGY

Technology has created other opportunities for trespass. The news helicopter is but one example. In numerous states, property lines are considered to extend from the boundaries of the property to the heavens. Technically, any time a helicopter or airplane flies over someone's property it may be trespassing. Practically, however, the damages of such an act are minimal—unless, of course, a news helicopter hovers for too long above a burning home and fans the flames.

As a rule, journalists have been able to record anything they could see, even with a telephoto lens and a shotgun mike, but the rules may change as more photographers acquire 1,000-mm lenses and ever-more-sensitive microphones. Although it's true no one has yet determined the maximum focal length you can use to record a news event, it's equally true that some judge, somewhere, will also ask whether subjects of the long lenses and shotgun and parabolic mikes had a reasonable expectation of privacy.

Hidden Microphones

If someone stands unclothed before an open living room window in a crowded city, that individual might be expected to know someone could be lurking in the distance with a telephoto lens. But if that individual is holding a private conversation inside the home, that same person should have a reasonable expectation to privacy, which extends to protection from "snooper" microphones or even from normal shotgun mikes, which can pick up hushed conversation from great distances.

Shotgun Microphones

In some states, intrusion with shotgun mikes can constitute eavesdropping, a transgression governed by state and federal statutes. Hence, the recording of a restaurant conversation that could be overheard passively by any third party might constitute intrusion because of the patron's reasonable expectation of privacy while dining.

However, you may get by with airing portions of the district attorney's comments you recorded at opening night of a new theater presentation, even if the DA said he didn't like the play and even though you recorded his comments without his knowledge and as a third party to his conversation.

Obviously, the use of concealed microphones for any purpose should be undertaken with great care in order to avoid lawsuits for intrusion. And no journalist should plant a microphone in a flowerpot or make secret recordings of any kind without first checking with the station attorney.

TELEPHONE RECORDINGS

Telephone recordings have great potential to cause legal problems because they can so easily be misused to invade someone's privacy. Recordings do help ensure exact quotes, and they are commonly used as the electronic equivalent of a reporter's notes (something to consider should you ever be subpoenaed), but sometimes their use can backfire (Figure 14.2).

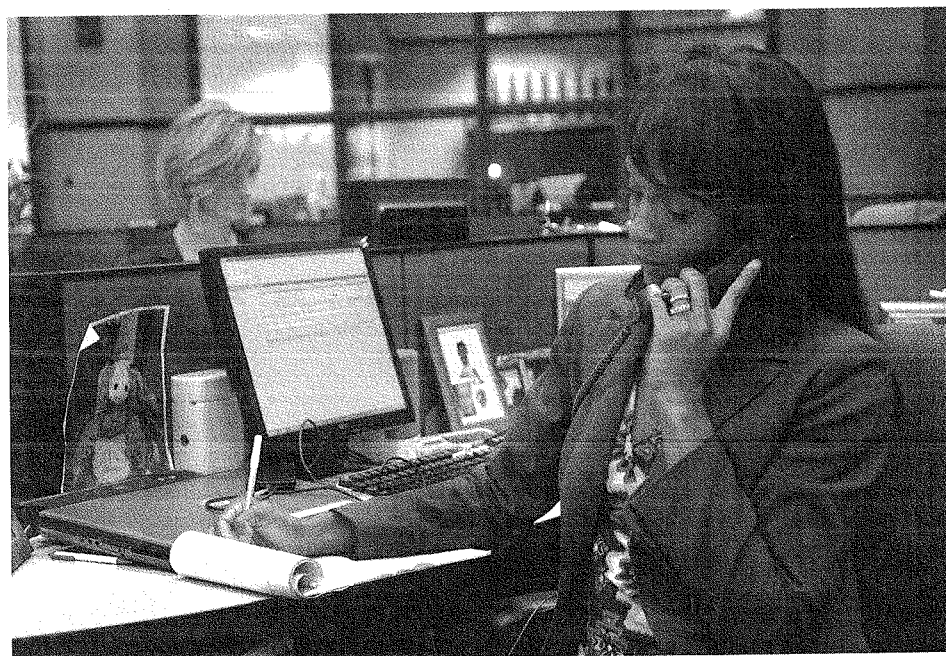


FIGURE 14.2

Even routine telephone use can lead to lawsuits for invasion of privacy. No recordings or broadcasts of a conversation can be made unless the source is so advised.

To prevent problems, it's mandatory that you always advise the person on the other end that you intend to record a conversation, regardless of who initiates the call. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) rule 47 C.F.R. 573.1206 governs the broadcast of live and recorded telephone conversations. *Before* recording a telephone conversation for a future broadcast or broadcasting a telephone call simultaneously with its occurrence (live), journalists must inform any party to the call of their intent to broadcast the conversation. It is not sufficient to give notice just before the broadcast of a recorded call. An exception exists when the party is aware, or may be presumed to be aware, that the conversation is being or likely will be broadcast, as in the call placed to a broadcast program that features call-in telephone conversations.

Even if you intend to record the conversation only for your records, you should advise the person, preferably before the conversation begins. For maximum protection, record not only your statement of intent, but also the other person's verbal consent. If you intend to use excerpts of the conversation on air, you should advise the person before the primary conversation begins—again, as near the start of the call as possible.

Surveillance in States with One-Party Consent

Title III of the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 regulates recorded conversations. The act allows law enforcement agents to conduct electronic surveillance, provided a judge has reviewed the plan and agrees. In many states and under federal law, an exception can be made for the reporter, provided the reporter doesn't intend to damage an individual's reputation falsely or to violate someone's privacy without newsworthy justification. Generally, under such laws, it is legal to monitor telephone calls or make surveillance recordings when one party to the conversation knows what is happening.

Hidden Voice Recorders

Although using a hidden voice recorder where a person has a reasonable expectation of privacy may not violate federal law, in some states the practice might add to a plaintiff's claim for invasion of privacy or trespass. In states with one-party consent and under federal law, a person acting in the reporter's place may be able to record a conversation without the reporter's presence, provided the person who carries the recorder understands what is happening. To be safe, always check with legal counsel.

Two-Party Consent

Twelve states with "two-party consent" require that all parties to conversations, even if more than two, give their consent if the conversations are recorded. Those states are California, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Massachusetts, Maryland, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, and Washington. Unless consent is obtained from all parties, severe criminal penalties are possible. Reporters who wish to record conversations in two-party consent states should seek knowledgeable counsel to avoid the possibility of severe criminal penalties. For the most recent list of one- and two-party consent states, see The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press (RCFP) web site at www.rcfp.org, or write or call RCFP, 1101 Wilson Blvd., Suite 1100, Arlington, VA 22209, 800-336-4243 or 703-807-2100.⁶

Juvenile News Sources

With some exceptions, a child is defined as anyone under the age of eighteen years. Normally, you can use juvenile names and pictures if you obtain them legally—and if the identities are already part of the public record. But to be on the safe side it's always wise to consult your state law for the exceptions.

Children's right to privacy is protected from the streets to the home to the courtroom. When a reporter wishes to interview a child on a public street, there is no guarantee of the child's legal consent to talk unless the person is at least eighteen years of age. The same caution extends to news coverage in schools. Because of the principle of limited invitation, a school principal may legally refuse a reporting crew the right to take pictures or to conduct interviews with children in the school unless the crew first obtains parental permission. Reporters are also routinely excluded from juvenile trials.

From one state to another, juvenile law varies. A juvenile charged with murder, habitual crime, or other felony may forfeit his or her right to privacy. Occasionally, stations may jointly decide not to air a child's identity, even though the child's name has been legally obtained and can legally be broadcast. When the choices are difficult and competition a factor, a guiding principle is to ask, "What does the public need to know?" and "Does the public have a right to know this child's identity?"

SUBPOENAS AND SHIELD LAWS

A reporter's notes, outtakes, and sources are normally protected because it is generally held that no one has the right to determine a reporter's editorial judgment. In a number of states, this protection is formally extended through **shield laws**. However, members of the legal community may ask a judge or jury to rule otherwise. The mildest form of **subpoena** or court order to produce documents or other information is for an on-air recording; the most severe is for a reporter's notes or the names of sources.

A reporter must never tell anyone the identities of secret sources or of the content of notes or outtakes. Once you've revealed such knowledge, you forfeit your right to withhold the same information from the courts. If your attorney or news director asks whether you have source material, you may answer that you have the material, but never divulge the contents. Attorneys and news directors are the ones paid to say, in court, "Yes, there is material, but we're not producing it."

In protecting sources, the key is never to promise a source complete confidentiality unless you're willing to go to jail indefinitely.

ACCESS LAWS

Whereas shield laws allow the journalist to protect confidential sources under certain circumstances, *access* or *sunshine laws* protect the journalist's right of access to judicial, legislative, and executive records, extraordinary school board and city council proceedings, and the like, which otherwise might be kept off limits to the public. Such open meeting and open records laws may apply to state government but not to local government.

Journalists are routinely excluded from closed sessions of sensitive personnel and legal matters at all levels of government, although some officials may invoke such exclusionary rules to bar journalists from meetings that should remain open to the public. Legal counsel may be necessary to gain permission to attend such meetings or even to learn of actions taken during meetings that should have been conducted in public.

COURTROOM TELEVISION

Because the Sixth Amendment to the Constitution guarantees defendants in criminal cases the right to a *public* trial, television journalists have fought for decades to bring television cameras into the courtroom. "We have watched wars live on television," the argument goes, "so perhaps it's time that American news viewers are able to see what happens in American courtrooms." Slowly, in state courts at least, they are winning the battle.

The Role of Cameras in the Courtroom

For years, media observers have argued that televised trials help ensure that public trials are indeed public and that they subject judges and other public officials to greater public scrutiny.⁷ Edward Estlow, as president of the E. W. Scripps Company, said, "A trial committed to videotape is a trial more accurately reported because the cameras create a record that both newspaper and broadcast representatives can then consult in order to verify their reportage."⁸

Journalists believe cameras in the courtroom help audiences better understand the judicial process (Figure 14.3). "Legal experts say that people watching the action on television are getting a glimpse of the excitement of trial work performed by articulate, competent, and hard-working attorneys," observed Harriet Chiang, as legal affairs writer for the *San Francisco Chronicle*.⁹ But Chiang and other legal

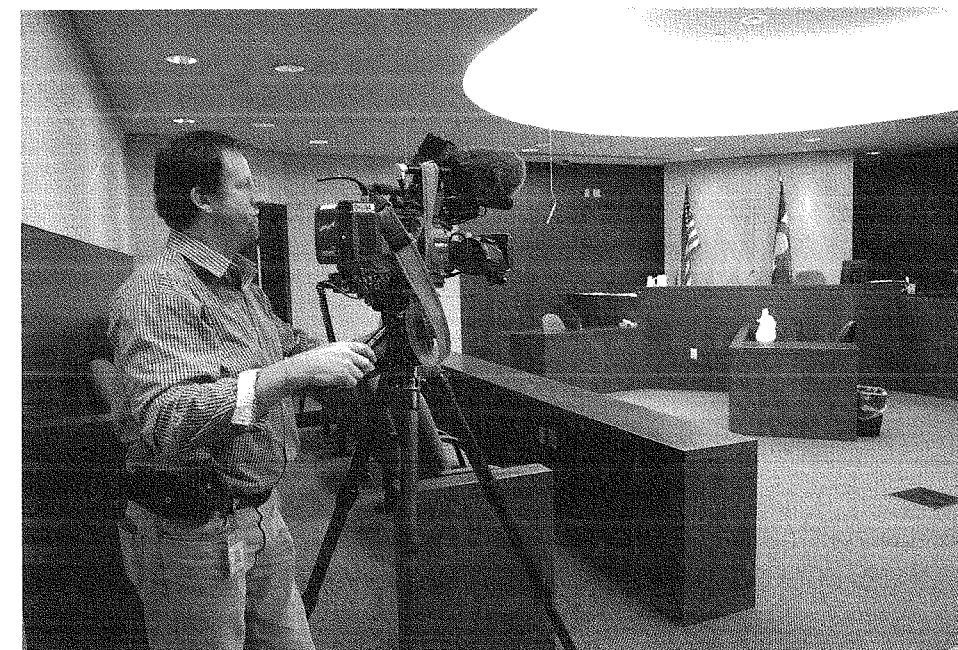


FIGURE 14.3

The Sixth Amendment to the Constitution guarantees the individual's right to a speedy and public trial by an impartial jury. The issue of free press-fair trial involves such considerations as shield laws, subpoenas, and television in the courtroom.

experts note that both sides may become preoccupied with publicity rather than the quest for justice, engaging in “sand-lot style” lawyering.¹⁰

When cameras are allowed in the courtroom, still more concerns must be answered. If the camera is within the jury’s view, will jurors be influenced as to what the reporter and photographer feel is the most newsworthy or most significant testimony? Will undercover police be publicly identified should they be called to the witness stand? Will journalists use the camera to cover only the most sensational trials or to record only the most sensational testimony (i.e., the star witness breaking down on the witness stand)? What if the rape victim’s name is inadvertently spoken, or her face shown, during a courtroom broadcast? What if a prisoner is called to testify, then later faces retribution from prison cellmates? What if perspiration on the judge’s bald head is unsightly? What if the prosecutor can’t match the defense attorney’s performance? What if...?

Most States Allow Courtroom Media Coverage

Some form of extended media coverage, meaning coverage by television, radio, or still photography, is permitted in forty-eight states, with a majority allowing cameras in a criminal trial. Consent of the presiding judge is usually required, and many states require advance written application for permission. Nearly all states prohibit coverage in cases that involve juveniles, victims of sex crimes, domestic relations cases, and trials that involve trade secrets. Coverage of jurors normally is either prohibited or restricted, to prevent juror identification. To stay abreast of changes in your state, or for a comprehensive summary of TV cameras in state courts, see <http://www.rtdna.org/pages/best-practices/freedom-of-information.php>.

Television Cameras Banned in Federal Courts

After a three-year experiment in six U.S. district courts and two appeals courts, the Judicial Conference of the United States ruled in late 1994 to ban television cameras in federal courtrooms. “[The] basic concern was the potential impact on jurors and witnesses; potential distraction of witnesses; and whether jurors were made nervous by any fear of possible harm,” said David Sellers, a spokesperson for the twenty-seven-member panel of judges that issued the ruling.¹¹

The experiment had allowed coverage of civil proceedings in the district courts of Indiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington, and in federal appeals courts in New York City and San Francisco.¹² Criminal trials were excluded from coverage, and during the first two years of the experiment, media covered only a handful of civil cases. Judges repeatedly cautioned against media apathy, warning journalists the experiment might fail unless they increased coverage of federal court proceedings.¹³ Still, the ban surprised many observers who fully believed the experiment had been a success.

In September 2010, the Judicial Conference of the United States, the policy-making arm of the federal courts, approved a pilot project lasting up to three years that permits cameras in some federal district courts. Court employees must set up and operate the cameras. The program permits coverage only of civil cases. It continues the rules that have banned cameras from federal criminal trials since 1946.

The conference also allows appeals courts to permit camera access. U.S. Appeals Courts in New York City (2nd Cir.) and San Francisco (9th Cir.) continue the practice.¹⁴

You can find continually updated information on the status of *cameras in federal courts* at the Radio Television Digital News Association (RTDNA) web site

at <http://www.rtdna.org/> or the United States Courts web site at <http://www.uscourts.gov/>; and for *state courts* at http://www.rtdna.org/pages/media_items/cameras-in-the-court-a-state-by-state-guide55.php?g=45?id=55.

Standards for Courtroom Coverage

Gradually, judges, attorneys, and journalists establish the standards that answer such questions. Today’s journalists normally operate with one television pool camera (and one still camera for combined newspaper and news service coverage). With **pool coverage**, a single camera is set up at a stationary point in the courtroom (Figure 14.4), and its signal is fed live to the station, to video recorders just outside the courtroom, or to a central receiving location elsewhere within the courthouse. All stations that wish to cover the trial are provided access to the video signal from the courtroom camera, a method designed to create the least distraction. Sound can be supplied simply by tapping into the public address system found in most courtrooms.

Cameras normally are excluded from pretrial hearings in criminal cases, from voir dire (a preliminary examination to establish a prospective juror’s competence and suitability), and from proceedings in the judge’s chambers. Depending on the state and the judge, cameras may be allowed at other proceedings such as trial hearings, sentencing, resentencing, and the like (Figure 14.5).

In many states, the judge is the absolute authority when it comes to cameras in the courtroom. Each judge handles the procedures differently. Some judges will not allow zooms or camera movement. Others will allow zooms, but not pans—so as not

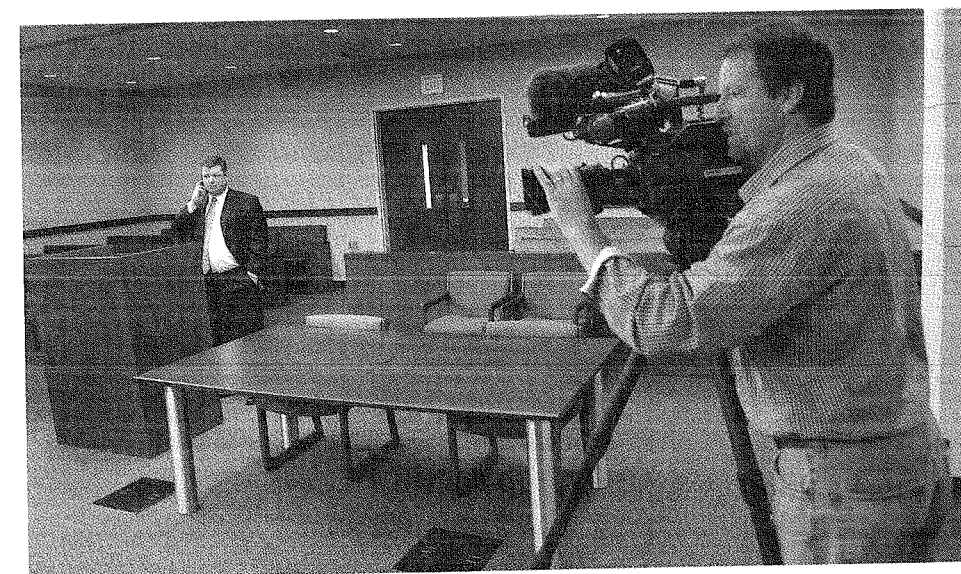


FIGURE 14.4

Pool coverage minimizes disruptions in the courtroom by using a single camera to feed signals to all stations that wish to cover the proceedings.

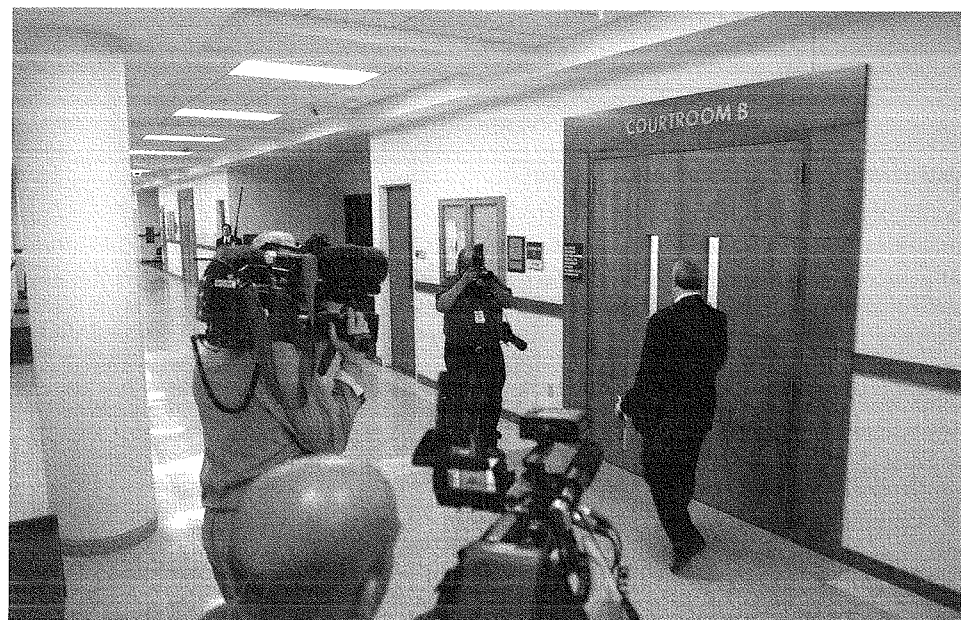


FIGURE 14.5

Television hardware and its sometimes-intrusive nature have caused resistance to cameras in the courtroom. In the future, less distracting technology may lead to more video trial coverage.

to distract the jury with camera movement. The judge may require the photographer and reporter to wear a coat and tie or other suitable dress. Some judges require that once set up, the photographer and reporter remain in the courtroom—even though the next three days of testimony may not make a newsworthy story—so jurors won't be influenced by the reporter and photographer's judgment about the most newsworthy or most significant testimony. At any point in the trial, a judge may terminate coverage if it hinders the judicial process or appears to jeopardize an individual's right to a fair trial.

Where new courtroom facilities are under construction, spaces to conceal the television camera are an ordinary part of courtroom blueprints. Two-way windows at the back of the courtroom conceal the camera so no one in the courtroom is aware of its presence. If cameras cannot be seen it is more difficult for them to influence the trial's outcome, though it is possible, especially if courtroom participants know the proceedings are being televised. However, almost without exception, the camera's presence is quickly forgotten, becoming as common a fixture as the gavel or the witness stand.¹⁵

Some Do's and Don'ts

When a broadcast news organization wishes to originate trial coverage, the first step is to submit a written request for camera coverage to the judge at least twenty-four hours in advance. If the judge denies access, the judge's word is final: There usually is no appeal process. If the judge allows trial coverage, rules will almost certainly be

imposed—undoubtedly similar to those that follow.¹⁶ You can find specific regulations for any state regarding cameras in the courtrooms and how to gain approval for media coverage, at the National Center for State Courts web site, <http://www.ncsc.org/information-and-resources/browse-by-state.aspx>. This site also lists Court Media Centers, where you can access news releases, recent orders and opinions, alerts, cases of interest, and other useful information.

Cameras in the Courtroom

Do's:

- Do pool all TV and audio coverage.
- Do use only one operator for TV coverage using only one camera set in one location.
- Do dress and conduct yourself in a manner consistent with the dignity and decorum of the courtroom.
- Do use the existing court audio system for sound recording if technically feasible.

Don'ts:

- Don't leave media identification on cameras or clothes.
- Don't take close-ups of jury members.
- Don't use auxiliary TV lights.
- Don't take audio recordings of attorney-client conversations or conferences held at the bench.
- Don't change tape or disk drives while court is in session.
- Don't use portable voice recorders.
- Don't ask the judge to referee a media dispute, such as over pooling.

After the Verdict Is In

Once the verdict is in and the jury has been dismissed, courthouse reporters traditionally have been free to question jurors about the verdict, their secret deliberations, and why they voted as they did. Still, individuals called to jury duty remain private citizens, and today some courts extend the right to privacy to jurors as they return to everyday life. In *re Express - News Corp.*, 695 F.2d 807 (5th Cir, 1982) the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that "jurors, even after completing their duty, are entitled to privacy and to protection against harassment."

Should attorneys appeal the verdict in a televised trial, their first request may be for video recordings of the trial. The stations' own rules should apply in governing whether to honor the request. Some stations might supply whatever footage has been aired, but no outtakes. Other stations might supply nothing at all—even in the face of a subpoena. The reasoning is that if pool coverage is allowed, bar associations, watchdog groups, and attorneys can record the trial themselves, unless coverage is limited to news organizations as it sometimes is.

THE DIGITAL MILLENNIUM COPYRIGHT ACT OF 1998¹⁷

The Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) is the outgrowth of a 1997 Supreme Court decision that gives the Internet the same free speech protections as print media. The Internet is the first electronic medium afforded such protections (opposed to news programs broadcast over public airwaves, for example) because it's easy to access and has so many voices, many of them unedited.¹⁸

Copyright Defined

The United States Copyright Office defines **copyright** as “a form of protection provided by [U.S. law] (title 17, U. S. Code) to the authors of ‘original works of authorship,’ including literary, dramatic, musical, artistic, and certain other intellectual works. This protection is available to both published and unpublished works.”

If you own the copyright, you can do whatever you want with the work, whether it’s an audio recording, a book manuscript, video or video script, an original photo, video story or publication, slideshow, drawing, artwork, poem, or sheet music. You can duplicate your original work; rent, lease, or sell it; put it on the Internet; or otherwise show or display it publically. You are protected when the work is created and “fixed in a physical form.” You also can transfer ownership to someone else.

Duration of Copyright

Copyright protection typically extends for the author’s life plus an additional 70 years beyond the author’s death. If two or more authors created the work, copyright continues for 70 years after the last surviving author dies. Exceptions to copyright eligibility include, in the copyright offices’ exact language, the following¹⁹:

- “Works that have not been fixed in a tangible form of expression (for example, choreographic works that have not been notated or recorded, or improvisational speeches or performances that have not been written or recorded)
- “Titles, names, short phrases, and slogans; familiar symbols or designs; mere variations of typographic ornamentation, lettering, or coloring; mere listings of ingredients or contents
- “Ideas, procedures, methods, systems, processes, concepts, principles, discoveries, or devices, as distinguished from a description, explanation, or illustration
- “Works consisting entirely of information that is common property and containing no original authorship (for example: standard calendars, height and weight charts, tape measures and rulers, and lists or tables taken from public documents or other common sources).”

Copyright Notice

Beginning March 1, 1989, you are not required to register or publish anything you created in order to establish copyright.²⁰ Such copyright is conferred automatically. Note, however, that registration *is* necessary if you were to sue someone for using your work without permission. Legal protection is greatest when you register your work within 90 days after first publication, rather than after you discover someone is using your work without permission.

Without registration, you may be able to recover only actual damages—which are usually tough to prove—and/or what profits the defendant(s) realized from infringing your work. Timely registration may also help you recover significant statutory damages and attorney fees.

Registration Proves You Own the Work

Registration provides a public record of proof that you own the work, and that your copyright is valid. A formal copyright notice identifies you, the year of first publication, and tells the public your work is protected by copyright.²¹

How to Register Copyright²²

If you place a formal copyright notice on “visually perceptible” works such as video, scripts, graphics, or magazine articles, the notice must contain three elements:

- Either the symbol ©, the word Copyright, or the abbreviation Copr.
- The year the work was first published. (Exceptions occur when the picture, graphic, or even a sculpture is reproduced on jewelry, stationary, postcards, or similar items.)
- The name or an abbreviation that identifies the owner.

Thus, any of the following forms of copyright notice would suffice:

© 2012 Hans Jensen
Copyright 2012 Hans Jensen
Copr. 2012 Hans Jensen

Notice of copyright on sound recordings uses the symbol “P” in a circle (the designation for phonorecord, i. e., © 2012 Wowza Records Inc.) rather than the copyright symbol ©.

You can register your work at <http://www.copyright.gov/eco/index.html>, either electronically or using paper forms. See www.copyright.gov for information regarding your specific work and the number of copies to submit. You can download the most common copyright forms at <http://www.copyright.gov/forms/formco2d.pdf>

(You also can access either site to register online or by mail. Simply photograph the appropriate tag below on your smartphone, using an app such as Mobiletag or Scanlife.)

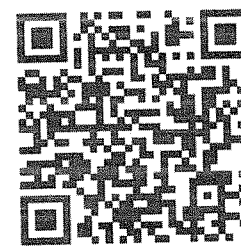


FIGURE 14.6A
Register Copyright Online

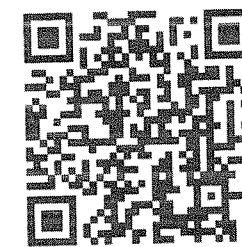


FIGURE 14.6B
Register Copyright by Mail

What You Own

If you (or an organization) wanted to hold a yard or tag sale to sell or give away some books, old newspapers, magazines, CDs, DVDs, film reels, phonograph records, and VHS tapes, you could. While you don’t own the content (it’s copyrighted), you do own the recording media (printed materials, DVDs, and video cassettes). Moreover, the publisher or other creator has already received a payment or royalty for every item you wish to sell.

Under the DMCA, it’s a different story with content you download from the Internet. You could not sell that downloaded content, whether you bought an e-book novel or e-textbook, a Netflix movie streamed to your computer or TV, a digital copy

of a *Chicago Tribune* or *Time* article, or copies of music from iTunes or Amazon.com. That's because *such items are copies of the original*. Just as you can't copy and distribute entire books, DVDs, CDs, magazines, newspapers, video or cassette tapes, and phonograph records in physical form, neither can you copy and distribute them in digital form.

Nothing on the Internet, other than a live webcast, is in its original physical form. While it's true that physical media are rarely available in their original form either, *the issue is whether the content originator is fairly compensated for copies downloaded from the Internet*. Anyone who copies and distributes digital media illegally deprives artists, writers, musicians, and other copyright holders of lawful income.

FAIR USE

The doctrine of *fair use* provides a defense against copyright infringement. As a television reporter, web journalist, or video journalist, you may wish to show, quote, or otherwise display part of someone else's work. You might quote part of an article or a book, for example, or show clips from a theatrical film as part of your critique of a copyrighted work. You might include a photo or two in your report from a touring exhibit. Copyright law allows publication of representative examples, or "fair use" of such materials, without permission from the copyright owner, provided you credit the work and its author(s). The "Fair Use" doctrine assumes that the public and the copyright owner potentially benefit from such limited but "enhanced" publication.

Section 107 of the United States Copyright Law extends "fair comment and criticism" to "news reporting, teaching, scholarship, and research." Still, how do you know whether a particular use is fair? Section 107 sets out four factors to help you decide²³:

1. the purpose and character of the use, including whether such use is of commercial nature or is for nonprofit educational purposes
2. the nature of the copyrighted work
3. amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole
4. the effect of the use upon the potential market for or value of the copyrighted work.

In the words of Section 107, "...distinction between 'fair use' and infringement may be unclear and not easily defined. No specific number of words, lines, or notes that may safely be taken without permission. General guides for brevity, or how much work you can fairly copy without permission. Acknowledging the source of the copyrighted material does not substitute for obtaining permission."²⁴

If you were to innocently include more content than fair use would allow in a story, you could put yourself, your employer, its owners, and its web host at risk. Whenever you're in doubt, even in private or semi-public communication, hesitate. You can't always know what to do regarding copyright and fair use, but you can always ask for legal guidance. As the Knight Citizen News Network notes, "Newspapers, magazines, and broadcast networks typically have their own lawyers. But citizen media outlets, bloggers, social network members and other Internet users generally don't have lawyers on standby."²⁵ Beyond such guidance lies yet another backup plan: "If in doubt, you must leave it out."

GENERAL FAIR USE GUIDELINES FOR EDUCATION AND PUBLISHING

Definitions for fair use vary, but the educational and publishing communities have generally agreed on guidelines from the Report of the House Committee on the Judiciary (H.R. 94-1476). Guidelines appear on numerous university web sites. You can find a representative example at the University of Pittsburg²⁶:

Prose:

A complete article, story, or essay of less than 2,500 words

OR

An excerpt from any prose work of not more than 1,000 words or 10 percent of the work, whichever is less, but not less than 500 words

Illustration:

One chart, graph, diagram, drawing, cartoon, or picture per book or per periodical issue ■

Internet Service Providers

Section 512 protects the Internet Service Provider (ISP) from liability if it simply serves as a "passive conduit" for illegal or copyrighted content that a client or other user uploads. Protections vary according to the type of service the ISP offers. If it provides storage for caches, web hosting, or hyperlinking, then it must comply with a provision called "notice and take-down."²⁷ This provision requires that any online service provider must take down infringing material when the copyright owner gives notice of its presence on the provider's service.^{28, 29}

Plagiarism

The doctrine of fair use has an evil twin called **plagiarism**, the act of representing someone else's work as your own. Anyone who appropriates copyrighted material without identifying the source is guilty of plagiarism. Stealing another's work is as simple as copying and pasting material off the Internet. It represents an ethical and moral lapse and can lead to litigation. Even unintentional plagiarism can get you fired. Telling the boss you acted innocently probably won't help much.³⁰

You can avoid plagiarism if you simply attribute other people's work. No matter the source, attribute the material, whether you quote something from a book or a newspaper article, show a video clip or a web page, use a line from a song, or even use a direct or paraphrased quote from a conversation with another person. Also remember to attribute the source of ideas, opinions, and claims that others originate.

Even content that appears to reside in the public domain may have copyright protection. This includes e-mail, postings to social sites, and stories derived from or based on an existing work. You must also cite information that has passed out of copyright and that now exists in the public domain.

It's unnecessary to attribute common knowledge, such as the medical consensus that smoking is dangerous, or the popularity of gambling in Atlantic City and Las Vegas.

Chip Scanlan at the Poynter Institute offers a handy guide to help you avoid plagiarism at <http://www.poynter.org/uncategorized/3323/the-first-peril-fabrication/> (To access Scanlan's guide, you can photograph the QR code in Figure 14.7 with your smartphone, using an app such as Mabletag or Scanlife.)

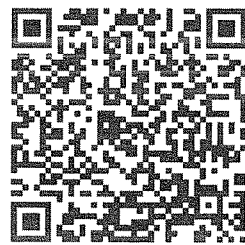


FIGURE 14.7

Obtain Rights When Necessary

Universities commonly notify faculty, staff, and students to first obtain the rights to use copyrighted material that exceeds fair use guidelines. You can find information about *protecting yourself* at many university web sites, including, for example, Indiana University.³¹

You can access information about *obtaining permission to use copyrighted works*, including the following works, at web sites such as the U.S. Copyright Office (Circular 22),³² the Poynter Institute,³³ the University of California,³⁴ and eHow.com.³⁵

- Works in Print
- Online Works
- Musical Works
- Images/Pictures
- Motion Pictures
- Software
- Syndicated Cartoons
- Syndicated Editorials
- Religious Works

Government Publications³⁶

As a rule, works produced by the United States government have no copyright protection. Title 17 of the United States Code (17 USC § 105) states, “Copyright protection under this title is not available for any work of the United States Government, but the United States Government is not precluded from receiving and holding copyrights transferred to it by assignment, bequest, or otherwise.”³⁷ (Note that all works without copyright must still be attributed.) The government has no obligation to make *all* works publically available, and it can deny access to even non-copyrighted works for reasons of national security, export control, and patent applications.

Sometimes the federal government acquires ownership of copyrighted works, which continue to retain their original copyright protection. The government does own copyright to the work, however, if an independent contractor assigns copyright back to the government. Hence, government works, such as public service announcements, sometimes carry copyright notice.³⁸

Outside contractors may own copyright to the work they produce for the federal government, so it can be difficult to know which documents are in the “public domain” and which are not. Furthermore, the government doesn’t have to give notice

that its works carry no U.S. copyright, and it or its agencies may still copyright the works in other countries.^{39, 40}

Freedom of Information Requests

If you believe your local, state, or federal government is withholding information in the public interest, but that would cause no harm other than to those who would deny its publication, you can file to see the document under Freedom of Information for disclosure of government information.

The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press offers the *Federal Government Guide* to open records and meetings laws, how to file requests for documents and records, and typical response times at <http://www.rcfp.org/fogg/index.php>

RCFP also offers the *State Open Government Guide* regarding open records and meetings laws in your state, and how to request such information, at <http://www.rcfp.org/ogg/index.php>

See also a state-to-state guide for access to government data at “Access to Electronic Records, <http://www.rcfp.org/elecaccess/>.”

Municipal regulations, such as access to city council records, will be handled locally. Consult your local government for that information.

Using Information from Government Web Sites

Government web sites are not subject to copyright protection in the United States, provided government employees created the work as part of their official duties.⁴¹ The rules change if a contractor develops or maintains a government web site. Then, any qualifying work the contractor created has copyright protection. Copyrighted work that others own but post to a government site carries similar protection.⁴²

State and Local Government Copyright

Note that guidance up to this point refers only to the United States government and provisions of Title 17 of the United States Code. Assume that nothing covered herein applies when it comes to state and local governments. These entities often claim copyright to works they create, and they can demand, prohibit, or even restrict copyright on the works their agencies produce.⁴³ Your best protection is knowing how your state and local governments approach copyright practices, or at least know where to look on short notice.

Works Made for Hire

Your employer owns the copyright should you create or prepare a work as an employee, through you, the author. Neither would you own copyright if you signed a contract to create a “work for hire,” nor would you own copyright for your contributions to a collective work, motion picture, or audio recording.⁴⁴

In the case of works made for hire, and for anonymous and pseudonymous works (“unless the author’s identity is revealed in Copyright Office records”), the duration of copyright extends for the shorter of 95 years from publication or 120 years from creation.^{45, 46}

You will avoid copyright issues if you respect every creative individual’s contributions through fair and accurate attribution, and if necessary, by seeking permission to use that person’s copyrighted material.

A Legal Perspective

Questions about the law and its interpretations confront every journalist, frequently under the pressures and deadlines of field reporting. Whereas legal counsel may not be immediately available, every journalist can rely on a powerful ally called common sense. The answer to many legal questions is a product of nothing more than a sense of good judgment, fairness, taste, and a concern for the dignity—and privacy—of others. Treat others as you would expect to be treated in the same situation and, above all, remember: When in doubt, consult an authority—either station or legal.

SUMMARY

Self-interest requires that journalists stay abreast of laws that apply to the reporting process. Although the act of reporting the news can lead to legal challenges, many legal transgressions occur in the field during the process of gathering the news. Even when journalists are on solid legal ground, defending against lawsuits can be costly and time-consuming and tends to make reporters overly cautious in covering subsequent stories.

Two of the most important areas of concern to journalists are libel and invasion of privacy. Libel is the use of factual information, as opposed to opinion, that holds someone in hatred or contempt, subjects the person to ridicule, or otherwise lowers our esteem for the individual. Invasion of privacy is any act of intrusion, including trespass and publication of embarrassing facts, even if true, that violates an individual's reasonable expectation of a right to privacy.

Normally, to be liable for defamation, journalists must know that a statement is false or be aware it probably is false. An excellent protection against libel, therefore, is to have good reason to broadcast only statements you believe to be true, and to use due care in evaluating the truth of defamatory information. Another problem area is unsuspecting defamation, which can occur when generic or file video is used to illustrate a script that carries most of the reporting load.

One of the most common forms of invasion of privacy is trespass. The guiding rule is to obtain permission to enter any private or semiprivate area before you shoot, not afterward. Often, trespass is inadvertent and occurs because someone with apparent authority, perhaps a police officer or fire official, gives the photojournalist permission to shoot. Generally, the footage can be aired up to the point that someone with greater authority, perhaps the building owner, arrives and tells the photographer to leave.

The principle of limited invitation prohibits journalists from freely entering quasi-public businesses and institutions, such as restaurants and supermarkets, to report and take pictures.

Technology has created new opportunities for trespass and eavesdropping. Telephoto lenses and tiny microphones that can pick up hushed conversations from great distances are but two examples. In no case should you attempt to use concealed microphones or cameras, or make secret recordings without first obtaining competent legal counsel.

Telephone recordings can easily be used to invade an individual's privacy. Always advise the person on the other end that you intend to record the conversation, even if you intend to record it only for your records.

Some states require that both parties to conversations give their consent if the conversations are to be recorded. In other states a person acting in the reporter's place

may be able to record a conversation, provided the person who carries the recorder understands what is happening.

Courts are extra sensitive about protecting children's rights to privacy. Be especially cautious about broadcasting children's names, pictures, or other information that would allow them to be identified, even when such information already is part of the public record.

Shield laws help protect the reporter's confidential sources, conversations, notes, and outtakes, but attorneys routinely try to subpoena such information. For maximum protection, tell no one the identities of secret sources or of the content of notes or outtakes. Once you reveal such knowledge, even to your supervisor, you forfeit your right to withhold the same information from the courts. When protecting sources, never promise a source complete confidentiality unless you're willing to go to jail indefinitely.

Whereas shield laws allow the journalist to protect confidential sources under certain circumstances, access or sunshine laws protect the journalist's ability to inspect records and other vital information that otherwise might be kept off-limits to the public.

Although most states allow television cameras and microphones into trial courts, permission normally is granted at the sole discretion of the trial judge, who may also require the defendant's or the attorney's consent. To help preserve the right to televise courtroom trials, reporters and photographers are obliged to dress appropriately to the courtroom environment, and they must strive to create the fewest distractions possible and follow the judge's rules and instructions to the letter.

Copyright is conferred automatically on works created after March 1, 1989. Neither publication nor copyright registration is required. Registration is required if you sue someone for using your work without permission. Legal protection is greatest if you register a work within 90 days of first publication, an action that could help you recover not only actual damages but significant statutory damages and attorney fees.

Fair use allows publication of representative samples of work, such as a quote, a video scene, a book passage, or one or two photos from a touring exhibit, without obtaining the copyright owner's permission, although what constitutes "fair use" is open to debate. Some firms that buy up others' copyrights troll the Internet, hoping to reach lucrative settlements even for innocent infringements.

Generally, United States publications carry no copyright, although such works may still be copyrighted in other countries, and some publications may be withheld for reasons of national security, patent applications, and export control. The federal government does own the copyright to some donated works and whenever an independent contractor assigns copyright back to the government. Whether a work is copyrighted or not, it must be attributed.

Copyright for works that employees create belongs to the employer, or by virtue of a freelance contract to create a "work for hire." You would not own copyright for contributions to a collective work, motion picture, or audio recording.

Plagiarism is the act of representing someone else's work as your own. To avoid the problem, seek permission to use the work, and be certain to attribute it. Otherwise, follow fair use guidelines and always attribute.

In all matters regarding law and the gathering and reporting of news, the best guide to the proper course of action is to be found in good judgment, fairness, taste, and a concern for the dignity and privacy of others. Beyond these considerations, remember the adage "When in doubt, seek help."

KEY TERMS

apparent authority 242	invasion of privacy 240	shield laws 246
copyright 252	law 238	slander 238
defamation 238	libel 238	subpoena 246
fair use 254	limited invitation 243	trespass 240
generic video 241	plagiarism 255	
Internet 237	pool coverage 249	

DISCUSSION

1. At what point during the reporting process must journalists be concerned about considerations of law? Explain your answer.
2. Discuss the potential chilling effect that litigation or the threat of litigation can have on video content. Provide an example or two as part of your response.
3. What right, if any, does the journalist have to gather the news?
4. Explain the customary definition of libel as it applies to digital journalists. Is it possible to “visually libel” a person with the video camera or through a television graphic?
5. What actions on the part of video journalists might constitute invasion of privacy?
6. What steps can the journalist take to avoid libel suits?
7. What are the most important actions a journalist can take to protect against charges of negligence in libel suits?
8. Discuss the Sullivan Rule as it applies to public figures or persons who have voluntarily placed themselves in the public view.
9. Why is it important to use caution when using police information as the main source of potentially defamatory statements?
10. Discuss the potentially dangerous journalistic practice of using generic video, also known as inadvertent cutaways, which can lead to libel and invasion of privacy suits. Suggest alternatives that can help the journalist avoid unsuspecting defamation or “guilt by illustration.”
11. Discuss the principle of apparent authority as it applies to invasion of privacy.
12. Explain the role of technology in creating new opportunities for trespass and invasion of privacy.
13. Even routine telephone use can lead to lawsuits for invasion of privacy. Describe steps the journalist can take to avoid legal problems, especially when making telephone recordings.
14. What precautions are essential for the journalist to observe in reporting news that involves children or juveniles?
15. Although shield laws may help the journalist protect a source’s identity, that right can easily be forfeited. Explain how.
16. Discuss sunshine laws and the degree of protection they typically afford journalists and the public.
17. Discuss your views about the role of television in the courtroom. To what extent do you believe journalists should have an unqualified right to record and report courtroom trials? How do you respond to the Judicial Conference of the United States ruling in late 1994 to ban television cameras in federal courtrooms?
18. What standards of conduct and dress should the photojournalist observe when photographing courtroom trials?
19. What considerations should govern a journalist’s relationship with jurors both during and after the trial?
20. When is it legal to use other people’s music, images, and words without their permission under the doctrine of fair use?
21. Discuss common limitations on what constitutes acceptable length or duration of material cited or used under provisions of fair use.

EXERCISES

1. Invite a television news director, general manager, or public relations manager to discuss steps the organization routinely takes to avoid libel suits and other legal challenges. A number of stations conduct ongoing legal seminars to help news employees stay sensitive to legal issues and aware of changes in the law. Some stations may allow you to attend such seminars.
2. Seek to identify and interview a newspaper or television reporter whose story has resulted in litigation.
3. You can request personal copies of pocket-sized legal references from many state bar, press, and broadcast associations. Such references commonly cover libel and invasion of privacy laws (including trespass and eavesdropping), and state laws that help protect the journalist’s right of access to public records.
4. Attend a trial where television cameras are allowed in the courtroom and observe the procedures that reporters and photographers follow.
5. Watch television or cable newscasts for the use of generic video or inadvertent cutaways that might potentially lead to libel or invasion of privacy suits.
6. Write a short letter to an imaginary trial judge requesting permission to shoot video at an upcoming criminal trial. Attempt to anticipate and answer whatever objections a judge might have to your request.
7. Suggest reporter guidelines for recognizing where the limitations of “fair use” become “infringement of copyright.”

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CHAPTER

15

Journalistic Ethics

Numerous journalists make unethical decisions during their careers, sometimes further diminishing public trust and confidence in the profession. Some journalists use deception to expose deception, citing occasions when it may be both necessary and ethical to break the law to expose a larger wrongdoing—to obtain false identities, for example, to show how easily false documents can be obtained. Others might practice misrepresentation to gather evidence of nursing home fraud, for example, by posing as a patient's relative. Still other journalists, equally committed to serving the public good, may leap from concealed areas with cameras rolling to ambush unsuspecting adversaries. Later they may march with those same cameras, unannounced, into offices, businesses, and other private property.

The defense for such practices can be persuasive. "How else could we prove fraudulent practices at the cancer clinic unless we posed as cancer patients ourselves?" they ask. "If I hadn't sneaked a look at documents in the DA's office, our community might never have learned of prostitution kickbacks to local police," another maintains. "Television is a visual medium; how else can we demonstrate the national problem of illegally obtained passports unless we misrepresent the identities of crew and misrepresent the reasons we're shooting this footage?"

DEFINITION OF ETHICS

As such discussion implies, law and ethics are intertwined. Often, unethical activities also are illegal. Breaking and entering, theft, trespass, and intentional libel are but a few examples. However, ethics is a branch of philosophy, not of law, and the distinction between the two is clear. Whereas laws are rules of living and conduct enforced by an external authority (usually by means of penalties), ethics are the rules of living and conduct that you impose on yourself, or that your profession strongly suggests you should impose on yourself, and few enforceable penalties exist. At its core, ethics include your own determination of what is fair, truthful, accurate, compassionate, and responsible conduct.

EFFECTS OF COMPETITION

Many ethical problems that reporters encounter come from knowing the competition is in head-to-head combat—and pushing hard (Figure 15.1). In their zeal to be first with the best story, some reporters overstep the boundaries that define ethical behavior. Every few years

a reporter gains national notoriety for faking news stories or plagiarizing the work of other reporters. Other reporters trample lawns, snoop in mailboxes, misrepresent their identities, speak falsehoods to reticent news sources to force responses, stage news events, and generally conduct themselves unprofessionally. The public takes note of such transgressions and, over time, journalists and their profession lose credibility because of it.

In the 1980s a third of U.S. citizens believed news reports were often inaccurate. In 2000 that number jumped to almost two-thirds of those polled, primarily because of the post-presidential election controversy in Florida that year. Gallup Poll interviews since then find that nearly 60 percent of those interviewed rated news stories as "often inaccurate," with 36 percent rating them "accurate."¹ A CBS News/New York Times Poll conducted in 2006 found that only about half the respondents said they trusted the media "most of the time," whereas more than a third said they believe news media tell the truth "only some of the time."² Again in a 2010 Gallup survey on media use and evaluation, only 12 percent of respondents said they had a great deal of trust in newspapers, television and radio news, while 57 percent said they trusted those media not very much or not at all.³ Confidence in newspapers and television news has reached near record lows, with only 1 in 4 Americans having "a great deal or quite a lot" of confidence in those media.⁴ The journalist's most valuable asset is



FIGURE 15.1

The pressures of competition to be first with the best story can significantly influence the journalist's ethical and professional conduct. Copyright © 2012 Scott Rensberger

not simply the headline-making story, but credibility itself. If the audience does not find the journalism profession credible, little else matters.

SITUATIONAL ETHICS

One story after another invites the reporter and photojournalist to redefine ethical conduct. The practice of judging a situation based on the good that will likely come from a particular course of action is called **situational ethics**. As a philosophical theory, situational ethics can either help or harm the journalist. Will coverage of a suicide attempt illuminate the helplessness of unemployment, or is the journalist's first obligation to save the person's life? Is it the photographer's duty to rescue victims from an overturned school bus or to shoot footage of the rescue for a story addressing the larger issue of school bus safety? The answers to such questions inevitably vary according to the story, its treatment, and the journalist covering the story.

Given that journalists as a class adhere to no universally accepted code of ethics, who then regulates the journalist's conduct and establishes the norms for competence and ethical behavior? Traditionally, individuals and institutions throughout most levels of society have searched for methods to force journalists to conduct themselves ethically and to license them, if necessary, to achieve that objective.

LICENSING

The call to license journalists might even sound reasonable. Before doctors or lawyers can practice their professions, they must complete rigorous study, demonstrate their competence before peers, and be licensed in the state in which they practice. By contrast, anyone can become a journalist by assigning oneself the title; no license or formal review of competence is required. Yet journalists remain as accountable to their clients as lawyers and doctors, and their ethical behavior must be equally above reproach. Why, then, should journalists not have to meet the same standards as other professionals?

In the United States, a predominant attitude has been that journalists cannot be licensed, because to do so would be to license their ideas. Only journalists who disseminated an approved doctrine might qualify for licenses. If a journalist's point of view differs from that of a review board, who can reasonably say such difference constitutes "incompetence"?

Because every administration and special interest group wants to cast itself in the most favorable light, and wants its views heard above all others, concepts like "competence" and "official doctrine" vary according to who is in power. If licensing were imposed, whose versions of truth should be used as the foundations on which to license journalists? Republicans? Democrats? Socialists? Protestants? Muslims? Jews? White supremacists? Abortion rights advocates? Right-to-life advocates? Hunting groups? Environmentalists? Conservative courts? Liberal courts? The most reasonable answer would seem to advocate the responsible dissemination of all ideas. Ultimately, the engine that drives a democracy is precisely the freedom to debate and to adopt and promote differing philosophies and points of view.

CONTRACT WITH THE PUBLIC

In the end, a far more powerful review board than any public agency or congressional law governs journalistic conduct in the United States. Each hour of each day, this same entity—the public—extends and renews the journalist's license to operate, by virtue

of its patronage. David Halberstam, former *New York Times* correspondent who received the Pulitzer Prize for his Vietnam War reporting, once likened the journalist's press card to a social credit card that is subject to periodic renewal. While this social credit card is not a formal document, it represents an extension of trust that viewers can withdraw at will and without advance notice. Even when the public overlooks a journalist's indiscretions, there remains a group of peers, employers, and even advertisers who can bring powerful sanctions against that journalist.

As the CBS reporter Edward R. Murrow once observed, "to be believable, [journalists] must be credible." Today, as suspicions of malpractice increase, magazine and newspaper advertisements ask why reporters don't at least practice the Code of Ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists (Sigma Delta Chi), a code outsiders sometimes view as a rough equivalent of the Hippocratic Oath for physicians. However, no code of ethics could answer every dilemma the journalist faces in covering the news.

AT ISSUE: IMAGE MANIPULATION

Photographs have the kind of authority over imagination today, which the printed word had yesterday, and the spoken word before that. They seem utterly real. They come, we imagine, directly to us without human meddling, and they are the most effortless food for the mind conceivable.

Walter Lippman
Public Opinion

Cultural values may have led earlier generations to believe in the inherent fairness and accuracy of reality-based video. Sometimes this category includes content on sites such as YouTube, Facebook, and *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. Such sites feature content ranging from comedy to satire, commentary, drama, personal perspectives, and political entertainment. They may turn to riveting and accurate news reporting and analysis from time to time, provided it builds ratings or enhances their brand. In the main, however, their primary emphasis is on peer-to-peer communication, advertising, entertainment, satire and comedy.

Note the distinction between reality-based video and reality-based programming. Today's so-called reality programs may stage events; direct participants to perform certain activities; or imply through word, deed and omission that what you're watching is reality. Such programs may feature ordinary people in supposedly unscripted situations, but their primary emphasis is on entertainment and sensationalism.

By contrast, legitimate video *news organizations and comparable outlets* strive to present accurate, fair and impartial news content. They place primary emphasis on reporting, packaging and disseminating accurate visual reports *and stories* of news, public affairs, and extended formats such as investigative specials and documentaries.

We expect news organizations, then, never to omit essential information and to avoid all fraudulence, manipulation, deception, and misrepresentation. Their obligation is to fairly reconstruct or represent what actually happened, or to fairly portray the person or issue in question. This may require alerting viewers they're watching a staged or reenacted event, but that it fairly and accurately depicts what happened.

Not all communication is true, of course. Reporters make mistakes, misunderstand what they see and hear, omit vital facts or main points, trust inaccurate information they've confirmed with multiple sources, or accept at face value what police and political sources tell them. Producers, assignment editors and news directors

sometimes influence story angles and content via personal bias, reliance upon assumptions or amended facts, or their inability to keep up with what's happening in the field.

What to Do?

Despite our best intentions, technology sometimes outwits us. High definition television brings viewers face to face with people's physical imperfections. With clarity roughly six times greater than analog television,⁵ high-def cameras magnify everything from acne scars to wrinkles, bags under the eyes, and poor makeup jobs. High-def studio lighting and adjustments in make-up help hide those imperfections for news anchors, but without similar lighting adjustments in the field an anchor, reporter or virtually anyone else can suddenly appear ten years older.⁶ Field lighting thus takes on greater importance than ever.

BOX 15.1 CLASSIC VIEWS OF ETHICAL NEWS PHOTOGRAPHY IN JOURNALISM

"Journalism," says *Toledo Blade* ombudsman Jack Lessenberry, "is supposed to show the world as it is, not as we would like it to be. That is perfectly understood by anyone who gets into the business. To do otherwise is to lie not only to your boss, but to your market—the public you serve."⁷

"Multimedia journalism demands that you learn how to gather and edit audio and video content, and write web-based articles, create podcasts, and sometimes produce blogs. Such multi-tasking invites journalists to create troublesome shortcuts," says Rich Beckman, 'new journalism educator' and Knight Chair in Visual Journalism at the University of Miami. "We need ambient sound, but lack the time to record it on location. Why not just use stock sound available on-line or from the station's audio library, or transfer an audio track from one soccer game and use it in another? The point is, 'borrowed' sound never amounts to actual content recorded at the source. It never existed until you created it. It is an inaccurate representation."⁸

The same considerations apply to digitally altered still photographs and video. While such editing may make an image, whether still or moving, more esthetically pleasing, it still amounts to falsification, writes Donald R. Winslow, editor of *Photographer Magazine*. Purists may argue that composition, exposure, even the photographic angle itself amount to editorial manipulation, thus impacting viewer perceptions of content and meaning. Audiences need to

know they are watching reconstructions of actual events, rather than recreations embellished to create greater viewer appeal. For such reasons, respectable media organizations avoid image manipulation.⁹

"It's never okay to digitally alter news photographs, even for the supposed purpose of 'good taste,'" says *News Photographer* editor Donald Winslow.¹⁰

Make Your Case About Digital Manipulation

In the main, either an employer provides ethical guidelines to follow, or else you must decide for yourself what is right or wrong. The following questions can help you define, perhaps challenge, your ethical viewpoints regarding digital manipulation. As you answer each question, please assume your mandate is to present accurate, fair and impartial news content at all times.

1. It's often said, "Perception is reality." How do you define the differences?
2. Consider the different meanings of "reality" and "perception, and "a reality." To what extent do the terms represent any similarities?
3. Do you believe it's possible to capture what really happened with a single still or video camera, or even several cameras? Please explain your viewpoint.
4. In your experience, is it reasonable to assume every photographer will photograph or otherwise document the same event from the same

locations, angles, focal length lens settings, camera settings, composition, time, or lighting conditions? If yes, please explain why you so believe. If you believe such an outcome is statistically impossible, explain how such differences in approach might impact the viewer's perception of reality.

5. Do you believe you have or will encounter situations in your own life where you must earn and keep the public trust? If yes, please list five representative situations that might require your most ethical conduct while gathering, photographing, writing and editing the content in question.
6. As a professional in a competitive media environment, is it possible to capture reality, or only to reconstruct a reasonable characterization of how you saw and photographed something?
7. If two photographers cover the same event or issue, what might prevent audiences from coming away with the same perceptions of what happened or was considered? Could a still or video editor, graphic artist, or even a writer, similarly impact meanings through choice of words, artwork or typography? Explain how or why not.
8. Are not images much the same as words whose meanings people perceive subjectively, according to their own teaching, prior experience and emotional makeup?
9. To what extent does the still camera capture "truth"—that is, can a single photo capture an accurate, representative portrayal of reality—whether of a subject, event, or issue—in a single photograph? Explain either how that might be possible, or why it's impossible. Provide an image that proves your point.
10. Is it possible to lie about or misrepresent reality with a still camera? With a video camera? Please explain your viewpoint.
11. Assume you're the manager at a newspaper, magazine or web production facility. The photo editor asks you to rule on a photo showing a winsome woman with facial blemishes. "They create too many distractions," says the photo editor. "You'd never notice her blemishes in person, but they dominate the photo." Do you tell editor

to leave the photo as is, or to remove the blemishes with software? You might either decide, "Leave the photo as is," or "Let's make her look the same as she does in real life. That should harm no one." As manager, what do you tell the photo editor, and how do you justify your decision to her?

12. As a photographer, explain how you could manipulate viewer feelings (emotional responses) with a still or video camera. Further, explain how you could influence viewer feelings by manipulating images or video using software.
13. Do you believe images or video can ever convey the same meaning as words? Why or why not?
14. Is one picture ever worth a thousand words? If no, why not? If yes, how so?
15. Is one word ever worth a thousand pictures? Please explain your viewpoint.
16. It's said that images most often report to the heart, while the printed word reports first to the intellect. Do you believe that a viewer's emotional reaction originates from something in the images you recorded, or in how you recorded them—or both? Explain your reasoning.
17. To what extent do you believe it's acceptable for a legitimate news organization to manipulate a still image using Adobe Photoshop™ or InDesign™? How about manipulating video in Final Cut Pro™; Avid™; or Adobe Premiere™, or similar software?
18. Is a still photograph more accurate if you eliminate distractions that occurred naturally or unavoidably in the still photo you will show viewers? Assume, for example, you want to show a high school scoreboard but eliminate some tennis shoes that belong to students standing behind the scoreboard? Your editor says 'change nothing.' How do you make a case that it's fair to eliminate unnecessary distractions, whether in writing or in images? Contrast your answer with the notion that journalists omit much of what they observe in written reports. Are not their omissions made to reinforce clarity? In what ways is the written report different from editing a photo to enhance clarity or eliminate distractions and the non-essential?

19. Do you believe it's acceptable to use software to change the exposure or contrast in a photo?
20. Back to the scoreboard: what will you say and do if the same editor who told you not to eliminate legs and feet, now wants you to enhance the same shot's exposure and contrast so viewers can see minute but important detail that otherwise would remain invisible? What if the winning coach could see game time remaining, but the losing coach couldn't see the scoreboard against the sun's glare? If the story hinges on the losing coach's inability to see the scoreboard, what should the image show? If the story hinges on the winning coach's advantage, what should the image show? Which best represents "reality" or what actually happened?
21. Composition sometimes is defined as showing viewers what you want them to see. Is it acceptable to recompose a shot with your camera while in the field?
22. Is it ever acceptable to crop or recompose a shot with software after you return from the field?
23. Is it acceptable while in the field to soften contrast or color if you only use lens filters or change exposure? How about using software after you return from the field? What do you say if a team member or superior demands that your still photo or video is "too harsh—make it look like it really was just before dawn"?
24. Long focal length lenses, wide apertures, and long distances between a subject and your camera can result in backgrounds that appear out of focus. Should you ever use a certain focal length lens, or perhaps change distance between the camera and subject to place viewer attention where you want it within the frame? To sharpen focus or soften it? Is it acceptable to use software to manipulate depth of field in the image after you return from the field? Why or why not? Under what conditions, if any?
25. Is composing a shot or scene in the field with the zoom lens more ethical than recomposing or cropping it with computer software? If so, in what way?
26. Zooming in no way replicates how viewers see an event. The human eye never zooms. Is a zoom therefore ethically permissible in video shots? Why or why not?
27. The human eye cannot pan a scene like a video camera does. The eye looks here, then there, and forms a composite of all the "shots" it takes. Is a panning movement therefore ethically prohibited? Why or why not?
28. Assume that a person photographed under indoor fluorescent light shows up on screen with a greenish skin tone. Later in a video story or photo spread, a different person photographed under incandescent light appears orangish-yellow. In both cases, the photographer forgot about color balance. Is it ethically warranted to digitally manipulate these shots to more accurately portray a person as they appear in real life? Please explain your position. Does your answer conflict with anything you've said elsewhere in this section?
29. A renowned media ethicist conducts an ethics workshop at your organization. During the presentation, he shows two video network news stories, both identical except for one difference. The original photographer produced both videos, using the same equipment, with the same settings and composition, and edited them identically. The first video tells the story on a sunny day; the second video shows the story on a rainy, fog-shrouded day. Viewers saw only one story, not both. In your view, does one version distort the "truth" more than another? Could viewers watch either video and come away with the same understanding and sense of place? **A)** Please explain why or why not. (Note: You may have read elsewhere that the heart of most good stories lies in how story subjects react to situations that confront them. **B)** Could both stories convey the journalist's identical message and focus, or would the weather—and changes in mood and subject reaction—alter what viewers remember about the story and the central character? ■

CASE STUDIES IN ETHICAL DILEMMAS

With few opportunities to define ethical standards under the pressure of deadlines and instant reporting, journalists must establish solid editorial and ethical philosophies before those dilemmas arise. The following situations are offered to help the reporter and photojournalist accomplish that objective. They encompass such situations as trespass, illegal surveillance, and invasion of privacy. As in most ethical deliberations, there are few answers, mostly questions.

As you consider the following ethical situations,¹¹ you might want to know that professional journalists were divided in roughly equal numbers about whether to proceed in such circumstances or to avoid becoming involved. Panels that addressed these issues convened at the NPPA Television News-Video Workshop. Panel members included news directors, photographers, and reporters. Videos of the first four panels are available from the National Press Photographers Association, 3200 Croasdaile Drive, Suite 306, Durham, NC 27705. Also, see <http://nppa.org/>. The legal principles raised here are addressed in Chapter 14, Law and the Digital Journalist. *You'll find a discussion of each situation at the end of this chapter.* For more case studies, see <http://journalism.indiana.edu/resources/ethics/>

Trespass

Case 1. Safety officials have condemned an abandoned, privately owned building and posted it as unfit for human habitation. The owner has constructed a fence to keep out transients and children who might otherwise enter. "No trespassing" signs are prominently posted.

Last evening a child died and two others were injured when a stairway collapsed inside the building. A community citizens group says the building is one of dozens that pose such dangers. You are assigned to shoot video and a reporter standup inside the building. You can't locate the owner to obtain permission to enter the building, but police suggest they might look the other way should you decide to trespass. Will you enter the building illegally or stay out?

Case 2. You are researching an investigative report about a palm reader who is said to con elderly people out of their life savings. You visit the palm reader at her place of business and she tells you to get lost. Later you decide to visit her at her residence. A "No trespassing" sign is posted on the front gate of the fence around her property. Will you go up to her house and knock on the door? Will you jump the fence if the gate is locked?

Surveillance Photography

The palm reader regularly invites elderly people to her residence, where you believe she conducts many of her con operations. One night you notice she has left the curtains open and the shades up, and you can see her sitting at a table with people who appear to be clients. Will you stand on the street and photograph the woman's activities through the open window? Will you try to obtain sound with a shotgun or parabolic microphone?

Hostage Coverage

Case 1. An emotionally disturbed man holds hostages inside a sleazy bar. He says he'll kill one of the hostages unless he can broadcast a message to his wife. Police ask you to loan them your video camera so two of their officers can pose as a

reporter-photographer crew to gain entry to the bar. You don't have time to contact the assignment desk or news director for advice. What will you decide?

Case 2. A distraught father holds his children hostage in a private home.

Through the window, he can see your camera. He opens the door and shouts that he'll kill himself unless you leave the area. Unknown to the man, police plan to rush the house in about fifteen minutes, and your assignment editor has told you not to miss the action. Do you retreat? When police rush the house, do you follow right behind them to photograph this dramatic, if unpredictable and possibly dangerous, moment?

Entrapment

To show how easy it is for minors to buy liquor, you send a seventeen-year-old minor into a couple of liquor stores, record video of the purchases through the store windows with a long lens from a van across the street, then walk into both stores, camera rolling, to interview the clerks. The clerks protest that you are guilty of entrapment and ambush journalism. How do you reply?

Invasion of Privacy

You wish to document a historic medical procedure in which your cameras would peer inside the patient's body. The patient is too ill to respond to your request. The doctors will give their approval, provided the patient's family doesn't object. You tell the family your audience has the right to see this moment of history unfolding. The family says, "Sorry, but we don't want our relative to become a sideshow for TV news people. Permission denied." What should you (and your station) do next?

Violence

Case 1. You cover a demonstration that turns violent. Four persons are injured.

Your camera is rolling as a demonstrator steps into the frame, shoots, and kills a police dog. Police club some demonstrators. Elsewhere, demonstrators threaten police officers with baseball bats. Will you show this violence on the evening news to give the audience an accurate portrayal of the event?

Case 2. You're photographing a federal informer as he walks along a courthouse hallway between two marshals. Suddenly a man steps from a telephone booth and shoots the informer dead. You capture the event on video. Will you show the scene of the killing on tonight's news? If your competition shows it?

Protecting Confidential Sources

You're preparing a story on a radical terrorist group. You promise not to reveal sources or confidential information when you first talk with the terrorist leader. Later he tells you the group has lost control of one of its members who plans to bomb the federal court building tomorrow night. Will you go to the police or FBI with your information?

Breaking and Entering

You're producing a half-hour special on drug use in your city and have learned the address of a drug dealer. You go to the house, but no one answers when you knock on the door. You then notice that a window is open. You determine the house is vacant. Will you climb inside to check out the place or will you not enter the house?

Destroying Police Evidence

A person has been stabbed to death in a hotel. You arrive with your camera just as police arrive. The detective, an old acquaintance, tells you to go in, shoot your video, and leave before crime lab technicians arrive. He says if you don't act now, the technicians won't let you in for fear you might disturb evidence, perhaps even destroy clues to the murderer's identity. The detective doesn't seem all that worried that your presence inside the room might destroy evidence. Do you shoot the murder scene or not enter the room at all?

Televising Executions

Your state has approved your right to televise live broadcasts of executions. Your news director believes the public is ready for live broadcasts, but he wants to record the execution for broadcast during the late evening news for the event's "deterrent value." The general manager also has endorsed a delayed broadcast of the execution, citing her belief that if a society endorses capital punishment, then citizens should see the consequences. What do you say—and do?

Covering Suicide Attempts

Case 1. You're en route to work when your assignment editor calls you about a woman who's threatened to jump from a bridge with her one-year-old child in her arms unless her estranged husband returns immediately and makes up his arrears in alimony. You're one of the first people on the scene. When you arrive, the mother makes a further demand that your station broadcast a live appeal from her to her husband. A woman who identifies herself as the distraught woman's mother runs up to her daughter, clutches her, and says to you, "Put down that damn camera and help me grab her!" Do you put down your camera, or do you continue to record video?

Case 2. A man who is emotionally disturbed has perched himself atop an office building and says he plans to jump to his death because his protracted unemployment has made it impossible for him to provide for his family. He's telephoned your station and competing stations to advise newsrooms of his planned suicide. Do you cover the event?

Illegally Obtained Information

You're at the district attorney's office. He leaves the room to find some information you've requested. While you wait, you notice an interesting file folder lying open on his desk. Do you look at the top page? The top three or four pages? Do you make notes if the information appears to be of interest? If the file folder is closed, would you open it, especially if you believe it could provide information important to a story you're doing?

Yielding Editorial Control of News Content

A truck carrying nuclear warheads overturns on a highway in your area. The defense department prohibits any photographers at the area on grounds of safety and national security. Defense department officials say they will escort reporters into the area and permit them to photograph selected views of the accident, on condition they submit all video recordings for defense department screening before they are aired. Should you agree to these conditions to obtain footage?

Cooperating with Police

Inside an office building, now surrounded by a SWAT team, an armed man has shot out several windows and asked for a live television interview so he can broadcast his message to the public. Officers say that unless they can impersonate your crew, they may have to storm the building with resulting injury or loss of life. They promise you can air any of the footage they manage to record. If you hand over your credentials and camera to the police, will you air any footage or interviews the police manage to shoot? If you don't hand over your camera, would you use video the police later shot with their own camera?

Private Lives of Public Officials

What will you do if you are the first to confirm information that a prominent individual, perhaps a state senator, is having an affair? Has been diagnosed as having a serious but not life-threatening illness? Is undergoing psychiatric counseling for marital difficulties? Is showing early signs of senility in everyday conduct, which, although not evident to the public, is readily apparent to a loyal staff? Is an alcoholic or abuses other drugs? Is gay or lesbian?

Misrepresentation

Case 1. You are sitting in a bar where you happen to engage in a conversation with the new city attorney. The attorney thinks you're just another person at the bar and begins to open up, pouring out information that would make a great story. At this point, do you tell the attorney you're a journalist or do you hide the fact?

Case 2. You're investigating the death of a person who has died under mysterious circumstances. Relatives won't talk, but someone in the newsroom suggests you obtain information from the victim's relatives by posing as a coroner's assistant. Will you act on this suggestion?

Accepting Favors

Few news operations allow their journalists to accept favors from news sources. In the past such favors have included free airline, sporting event, and concert tickets; books; meals; magazine subscriptions; taxi fares; and limousine service. Freebies are dangerous precisely because of their intent: to obligate journalists to news sources in the hope of at least some coverage or more favorable coverage.

Today the general wisdom is that if the public pays, so does the journalist. If the story is newsworthy, the station can afford to cover it. Most journalists would agree that it is permissible to accept something as insignificant in value as a cup of coffee or an hors d'oeuvre at a charity ball that is equally free to the public.

Reporting in Context

The television camera is notorious for its ability to isolate events from the larger environments in which they exist. The camera, focusing naturally on the drama and the spontaneous evolution of a news event, can turn the reality of a few flooded streets into the illusion of a flood-ravaged city. It can make the angry faces of a few hundred protesters seem like a mob of thousands, or the towering flames of an apartment house fire seem like a reenactment of the burning of Atlanta.

No news report makes its journey into the minds of all viewers intact, and the potential for misunderstanding increases when events are reported out of context.

The next time protesters chain themselves to a railroad track to keep trains from carrying nuclear warheads through an urban area, it may be appropriate to contrast the protester's viewpoint with the majority opinion of the rest of the city's residents. Although it is important to show the event, and to provide a vicarious experience of what happened, it is equally important to place the story in perspective.

REVERSE-ANGLE QUESTIONS

As in all questions of ethics, the overriding precaution is to do nothing that would unjustifiably inflict damage on others or that anyone could misperceive and later use to damage the journalist's credibility. The advice applies to the practice of shooting reverse-angle questions after the interviewee has left the scene. Perhaps the reporter has phrased the question ineptly and wishes to restate it more articulately, this time on camera, or perhaps the reverse-angle question will be employed as an editing device to condense the interview with no loss of visual continuity.

To preserve one's journalistic integrity, reverse-angle questions must be asked while the interviewee is still present. The reporter may wish to give the interviewee a simple explanation of the need for such a shot. Otherwise, accusations may surface that the interview was edited out of context or that the interviewee was made to appear to say things he or she never said and does not believe.

STAGED NEWS EVENTS

Occasionally you may need to stage an event to be photographed. In fact, numerous news events are staged. Interviews and news conferences are among those events in which the time, location, and even the content and context are determined in advance (Figure 15.2). This form of staging is normally acceptable because it's so apparent to the viewer. The audience recognizes that no one can force interviewees to answer questions against their will, although unethical reporters have been known to coach persons to answer interview questions with predetermined answers. When we stage unfairly, we create something that did not exist. It would not have happened in our absence. When we stage fairly, we recreate what already existed—what would have happened even in our absence.

Not every instance of staging needs to be identified. No breach of ethics should occur if you ask subjects to perform some action common to their everyday routine that, even in your absence, they would normally perform anyway. You might, for example, wish to ask a person to come through the door to her office again, so you can reshoot the scene from a more appropriate angle. Perhaps an artist is not working in her studio the day you wish to shoot. No loss of public confidence should result if you ask the artist to sit down in the studio and paint for a few minutes, so you can shoot some video for your story. It is perhaps less ethical to tell the artist where to sit, how to sit, or what to paint, or to rearrange any part of the studio or any other environment to create a more pleasing composition for your own shots.

REENACTMENTS

Reenactment also is occasionally permissible. Perhaps you want to show how psychiatrists treat child abuse victims, but don't wish to interrupt therapy or invade the actual victim's privacy. Use reenactments sparingly, and anytime you do reenact an



FIGURE 15.2

News conferences are one example of stories that are staged in the sense that the time, location, and even the general content and context of the event are determined in advance.

event, tell your audience. They will respect your candor, and their belief in what you show and tell them will increase.

Another example of reenactment, potentially far more damaging to the reporter's credibility, is illustrated in the following scenario:

Reporting crews from three television stations have just arrived to interview a presidential candidate's state campaign manager the morning after the candidate's victory in the New Hampshire primary.

While the crews are still setting up but not yet rolling, they hear the campaign manager tell someone on the telephone, "I think we're going to take this state as easily as we took New Hampshire." All three stations miss the bite, but start rolling in hopes they can capture a similar statement before the campaign manager hangs up.

The conversation continues, but now the campaign manager is voicing a series of "uh huh's" into the telephone. Finally, one reporter hands the campaign manager a note that reads, "Talk about New Hampshire."

Finally, the campaign manager tells the person on the other end of the telephone, "Some reporters here want me to talk to you about New Hampshire," and he proceeds to talk about the previous day's primary victory. That night, some of the stations air the comments as if they were made during a spontaneous telephone conversation.

Of the numerous questions that surround such reporting methods, two are paramount. First, should the reporter have prompted the campaign manager to restate his original comments? Second, should reporters from the other stations have aired those comments as if they originated spontaneously? Does the note differ in its intent, had another journalist prompted the campaign manager verbally, using the same words?

Beyond the general subject, does the note suggest in any way what the campaign manager should say?

Some reporters would air the comments. Others would avoid airing them altogether. Still others answer the first two questions by asking a third: Would the audience have approved if it could have peered over the reporter's shoulder as he handed the campaign manager that note?

FILE VIDEO

Always identify file video to prevent any possibility that viewers believe the old video is current. Many stations label such video "File," "File Video," or "Library Footage" and often include the date it first aired. Often, you may have only a few crucial seconds of video to illustrate a story that advances over time (stale footage showing the aftermath of an airline crash as the investigation advances over weeks, months, or even years, for example, or perhaps old footage of a murder suspect walking to court as the trial, sentencing, and appeal processes run their course). Ideally, use such file video sparingly and try to advance it over time to avoid endless repetition.

MATERIAL PROVIDED BY OUTSIDE SOURCES

Equally important is the need to identify all video that comes from any source outside your newsroom. Normally, the origin of network and news syndication stories is self-evident. In everything from mike flags, screen graphics, and reporter signoffs, the authorship and logos of network and syndication services receive obvious and prominent treatment. The biggest problem occurs with video news releases and footage from businesses, public relations firms, government agencies, and other special interest groups. Such stories arrive at the station free of cost, and reduced budgets make their use tempting. Stations frequently produce their own stories from such footage, updating and localizing the material as warranted, and may use their own reporters and anchors to voice such stories from the studio.¹² Unless stations identify the source, audiences have no way to know the story may represent a special interest point of view.

TOWARD AN INDIVIDUAL CODE OF ETHICS

Ethics can be thought of as promoting fair play, even for those individuals and institutions we dislike. Often the best response to a news situation is detachment, the hallmark on which objective reporting is founded. But ethical reporting is more than the simple transmission of facts and truth, and it is more than fairness and accuracy. It is also the dedication to good taste and to a regard for human dignity and life. Not infrequently, ethical reporting is possible only when the journalist has made a much broader ethical commitment to be sensitive in reporting how others live, believe, and behave.¹³ Sensitivity and compassion are not frequently mentioned as journalistic virtues or as prerequisites for employment, but they are qualities the public can rightfully demand from a profession often noted, and occasionally disdained, for its cynicism.

As you develop a personal code of ethics, you may wish to consider the following guidelines. They form the basis for many individual codes of ethics in journalism:

- Broadcast only information that you know to be accurate, fair, and complete.
- Tell your audience what you don't know.

- If you make a mistake, tell your audience.
- Respect the privacy of others.
- Do nothing to misrepresent your identity.
- Whenever you disclose information that damages a person's reputation, disclose the source.
- Leave the making of secret recordings to authorized officials.
- Respect the right of all individuals to a fair trial.
- Promise confidentiality to a source only if you are willing to be jailed to protect the source.
- Pay for your own meals, travel, special events tickets, books, music, personal items, and services.
- Accept only gifts, admissions, and services that are free of obligation and equally available to the public.
- Avoid outside employment or other activities that might damage your ability to report fairly or might appear to influence your ability to be fair.
- Avoid making endorsements of products or institutions.
- Guard against arrogance and bad taste in your reports.
- Stay out of bushes and dark doorways.
- Never break a law to expose a wrong.

Many news organizations also encourage employees to follow the guidelines in the Radio Television Digital News Association (RTDNA) and National Press Photographers Association (NPPA) codes of ethics.

BOX 15.2 CODE OF ETHICS AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

Radio Television Digital News Association

The Radio Television Digital News Association, wishing to foster the highest professional standards of electronic journalism, promote public understanding of and confidence in electronic journalism, and strengthen principles of journalistic freedom to gather and disseminate information, establishes this Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct.

Preamble

Professional electronic journalists should operate as trustees of the public, seek the truth, report it fairly and with integrity and independence, and stand accountable for their actions.

Public Trust

Professional electronic journalists should recognize that their first obligation is to the public.

Professional electronic journalists should:

- Understand that any commitment other than service to the public undermines trust and credibility.

- Recognize that service in the public interest creates an obligation to reflect the diversity of the community and guard against oversimplification of issues or events.
- Provide a full range of information to enable the public to make enlightened decisions.
- Fight to ensure that the public's business is conducted in public.

Truth

Professional electronic journalists should pursue truth aggressively and present the news accurately, in context, and as completely as possible.

Professional electronic journalists should:

- Continuously seek the truth.
- Resist distortions that obscure the importance of events.
- Clearly disclose the origin of information and label all material provided by outsiders.

Professional electronic journalists should not:

- Report anything known to be false.
- Manipulate images or sounds in any way that is misleading.
- Plagiarize.
- Present images or sounds that are reenacted without informing the public.

Fairness

Professional electronic journalists should present the news fairly and impartially, placing primary value on significance and relevance.

Professional electronic journalists should:

- Treat all subjects of news coverage with respect and dignity, showing particular compassion to victims of crime or tragedy.
- Exercise special care when children are involved in a story and give children greater privacy protection than adults.
- Seek to understand the diversity of their community and inform the public without bias or stereotype.
- Present a diversity of expressions, opinions, and ideas in context.
- Present analytical reporting based on professional perspective, not personal bias.
- Respect the right to a fair trial.

Integrity

Professional electronic journalists should present the news with integrity and decency, avoiding real or perceived conflicts of interest, and respect the dignity and intelligence of the audience as well as the subjects of news.

Professional electronic journalists should:

- Identify sources whenever possible. Confidential sources should be used only when it is clearly in the public interest to gather or convey important information or when a person providing information might be harmed. Journalists should keep all commitments to protect a confidential source.
- Clearly label opinion and commentary.
- Guard against extended coverage of events or individuals that fails to significantly advance a story, place the event in context, or add to the public knowledge.

- Refrain from contacting participants in violent situations while the situation is in progress.
- Use technological tools with skill and thoughtfulness, avoiding techniques that skew facts, distort reality, or sensationalize events.
- Use surreptitious newsgathering techniques, including hidden cameras or microphones, only if there is no other way to obtain stories of significant public importance and only if the technique is explained to the audience.
- Disseminate the private transmissions of other news organizations only with permission.

Professional electronic journalists should not:

- Pay news sources who have a vested interest in a story.
- Accept gifts, favors, or compensation from those who might seek to influence coverage.
- Engage in activities that may compromise their integrity or independence.

Independence

Professional electronic journalists should defend the independence of all journalists from those seeking influence or control over news content.

Professional electronic journalists should:

- Gather and report news without fear or favor, and vigorously resist undue influence from any outside forces, including advertisers, sources, story subjects, powerful individuals, and special interest groups.
- Resist those who would seek to buy or politically influence news content or who would seek to intimidate those who gather and disseminate the news.
- Determine news content solely through editorial judgment and not as the result of outside influence.
- Resist any self-interest or peer pressure that might erode journalistic duty and service to the public.
- Recognize that sponsorship of the news will not be used in any way to determine, restrict, or manipulate content.
- Refuse to allow the interests of ownership or management to influence news judgment and content inappropriately.

- Defend the rights of the free press for all journalists, recognizing that any professional or government licensing of journalists is a violation of that freedom.

Accountability

Professional electronic journalists should recognize that they are accountable for their actions to the public, the profession, and themselves.

Professional electronic journalists should:

- Actively encourage adherence to these standards by all journalists and their employers.
- Respond to public concerns. Investigate complaints and correct errors promptly and with as much prominence as the original report.
- Explain journalistic processes to the public, especially when practices spark questions or controversy.
- Recognize that professional electronic journalists are duty-bound to conduct themselves ethically.

- Refrain from ordering or encouraging courses of action that would force employees to commit an unethical act.
- Carefully listen to employees who raise ethical objections and create environments in which such objections and discussions are encouraged.
- Seek support for and provide opportunities to train employees in ethical decision-making.

In meeting its responsibility to the profession of electronic journalism, RTNDA has created this code to identify important issues, to serve as a guide for its members, to facilitate self-scrutiny, and to shape future debate.

Source: Adopted at RTNDA 2000 in Minneapolis, MN, September 14, 2000. Reprinted by permission of the Radio-Television News Directors Association (renamed in 2009 as the Radio Television Digital News Association (RTDNA).

BOX 15.3 CODE OF ETHICS

National Press Photographers Association

Preamble

The National Press Photographers Association, a professional society that promotes the highest standards in photojournalism, acknowledges concern for every person's need both to be fully informed about public events and to be recognized as part of the world in which we live.

Photojournalists operate as trustees of the public. Our primary role is to report visually on the significant events and on the varied viewpoints in our common world. Our primary goal is the faithful and comprehensive depiction of the subject at hand. As photojournalists, we have the responsibility to document society and to preserve its history through images.

Photographic and video images can reveal great truths, expose wrongdoing and neglect, inspire hope and understanding and connect people around the globe through the language of visual understanding. Photographs can also cause great harm if they are callously intrusive or are manipulated.

This code is intended to promote the highest quality in all forms of photojournalism and to strengthen public confidence in the profession. It is also meant to serve as an educational tool both for those who practice and for those who appreciate photojournalism. To that end, The National Press Photographers Association sets forth the following Code of Ethics:

Code of Ethics

Photojournalists and those who manage visual news productions are accountable for upholding the following standards in their daily work:

1. Be accurate and comprehensive in the representation of subjects.
2. Resist being manipulated by staged photo opportunities.
3. Be complete and provide context when photographing or recording subjects. Avoid stereotyping individuals and groups. Recognize and work to avoid presenting one's own biases in the work.

4. Treat all subjects with respect and dignity. Give special consideration to vulnerable subjects and compassion to victims of crime or tragedy. Intrude on private moments of grief only when the public has an overriding and justifiable need to see.
5. While photographing subjects do not intentionally contribute to, alter, or seek to alter or influence events.
6. Editing should maintain the integrity of the photographic images' content and context. Do not manipulate images or add or alter sound in any way that can mislead viewers or misrepresent subjects.
7. Do not pay sources or subjects or reward them materially for information or participation.
8. Do not accept gifts, favors, or compensation from those who might seek to influence coverage.
9. Do not intentionally sabotage the efforts of other journalists.

Ideally, photojournalists should:

1. Strive to ensure that the public's business is conducted in public. Defend the rights of access for all journalists.
2. Think proactively, as a student of psychology, sociology, politics and art to develop a unique

vision and presentation. Work with a voracious appetite for current events and contemporary visual media.

3. Strive for total and unrestricted access to subjects, recommend alternatives to shallow or rushed opportunities, seek a diversity of viewpoints, and work to show unpopular or unnoticed points of view.
4. Avoid political, civic, and business involvements or other employment that compromise or give the appearance of compromising one's own journalistic independence.
5. Strive to be unobtrusive and humble in dealing with subjects.
6. Respect the integrity of the photographic moment.
7. Strive by example and influence to maintain the spirit and high standards expressed in this code. When confronted with situations in which the proper action is not clear, seek the counsel of those who exhibit the highest standards of the profession. Photojournalists should continuously study their craft and the ethics that guide it.

Source: Reprinted by permission of the National Press Photographers Association (NPPA).

SUMMARY

Ethics are rules of living and conduct that you impose on yourself or those your profession strongly suggests you should follow. Laws, by contrast, are rules of living and conduct that are enforced by an external authority, usually by means of penalties.

The pressures of competition tempt some journalists to commit unethical practices. Sooner or later, however, such acts end up reflecting unfavorably on the profession at large. Other problems can result when journalists practice situational ethics, the practice of determining what to do from one situation to the next on the basis of the good that will likely result from a particular course of action.

In the absence of a universally accepted code of ethics, it falls to the individual journalist to determine what is good and bad, right and wrong, fair and unfair. Given the indiscretions of some journalists, ranging from accepting favors and staging news to trespass and entrapment, some groups and individuals would seek to impose their own notions of ethical behavior on journalists and to license them. However, ideas, unlike pharmaceuticals and vending machines, are difficult to license.

In the end, the public extends to journalists somewhat the equivalent of a license to operate through its trust and patronage. Without these fundamental components in place, no journalist can be heard.

KEY TERMS

ethics 264
NPPA 278

RTDNA 278
situational ethics 266

DISCUSSION

1. Describe the essential differences between ethics and law.
2. Based on your observations of news coverage and promotion, discuss how competitive pressures can influence the journalist's ethical decisions.
3. Discuss what role situational ethics should play in your professional career.
4. Describe from personal observation any reporting practices with which you disagree.
5. Discuss your views about the wisdom of licensing journalists to (a) certify journalistic competency and (b) help ensure fairness in reporting.
6. In the absence of review boards and licensing boards for journalists, what other forces exist to help ensure that the journalist reports fairly and competently?
7. Under what circumstances, if any, are reenactments of stories ethically defensible?
8. Should a journalist refuse all gifts or just those above a certain value (ten dollars and higher? twenty-five dollars and up)? What about a cup of coffee at a restaurant? A drink at a bar? A meal? A movie ticket?
9. Under what circumstances is it acceptable for a journalist to hold another paying job, say as a speechwriter for a public relations company or as a video editor for an industrial telecommunications company?
10. As a journalist, when is it permissible for you to accept pay from a special interest group for a speech you make? To shoot video for a paid political spot?
11. When is it acceptable for you to publish information about a public official that you learned secondhand because your spouse or friend works in close association with that public official?
12. Under what circumstances, if any, is secret recording ethical?

EXERCISES

1. Respond to your choice of any five of the ethical conflict situations that begin on page 271 of this chapter, and defend your answers.
2. Choose five individuals to play the roles of (1) assignment editor, (2) news director, (3) person in the news, (4) photographer, and (5) reporter. Ask penetrating questions to prompt the various individuals to respond to the ethical conflict situations beginning on page 271 and lead them to defend their responses.
3. Invite working journalists, perhaps a reporter-photographer team from a local station, to describe how they would react to the ethical conflict situations outlined in this chapter.
4. Make a list of favors you would accept without reservation from news sources and those you would refuse to accept under any circumstances. Explain your decisions.
5. Construct a personal code of journalistic ethics that you will follow as a working professional.

DISCUSSION OF ETHICAL CONFLICT SITUATIONS

Following are discussions of possible scenarios in response to the ethical conflict situations posed on pages 271–275. Your answers may vary, and you can expect a spirited defense of differing points of view whether you raise these issues in class discussion or with working professionals. In the end, there is no “right” answer, unless the response you advocate runs counter to humanitarian considerations; would harm an individual's safety, reputation, or mental well-being; results in the breaking of a law; or runs contrary to your station's ethical guidelines.

Trespass

Case 1. Discussion. You could be guilty of trespassing unless you obtain permission to enter the building. If you are unable to locate the owner, ask a police officer to give you permission to enter the building. If you are later challenged, you can at least cite your decision to act based on “apparent authority.”

Case 2. Even with a “No trespassing” sign on the front gate, there would seem to be little harm in knocking on the woman's door. You have virtually no other way to announce your presence. If the gate is locked and you jump the fence, however, you may be guilty of trespassing.

Surveillance Photography

If the palm reader leaves her curtains open and her shades up, she might be expected to know that someone might attempt to take a picture. If you attempt to record sound with a shotgun or parabolic mike, however, the judge might rule that the palm reader had a reasonable expectation to privacy in her private conversations, even though her windows were open.

Hostage Coverage

Case 1. In this instance, the police have chosen to misrepresent their identity. If you hand over your camera, you have chosen only to lend the police a camera. If the man holding hostages calls your station to confirm that the individuals with your camera are station employees, not police, serious harm could result to the hostages, especially if the assignment desk or news director is uninformed of your decision.

Case 2. In the first instance, retreat. Don't endanger the man's life or his children's lives. In the second instance, when police do rush the house, your decision to follow immediately behind the police involves your own safety. No story is worth your life.

Entrapment

You have asked a minor to break the law by purchasing liquor, a common example of breaking the law to expose a wrongdoing. This job may better be left to police. You can then record the purchase through the window with a long lens from a van parked across the street, because generally you can photograph anything that you can see from a public location. The tactic of walking, unannounced, into the liquor store with camera rolling is less ethical. Ambush journalism gives interview subjects no time to collect their thoughts or to respond to questions in a rational, thoughtful way.

Invasion of Privacy

Honor the family's wishes. Wait for another day and another time when you do have permission. If you are convinced your cause is right, state your case once again, gently.

Violence

Case 1. The violence is the most eloquent statement you have to communicate the essence of this story. To edit it out would be to portray the demonstration as far more benign than it was. Be cautious, however, to avoid showing activities that would violate ordinary sensibilities and good taste.

Case 2. Some stations air such footage, others convert it to a still-frame graphic or substitute a still photograph obtained from a newspaper photographer. Some viewers will expect to see the actual footage; other viewers will be outraged if you show it. The judgment call is yours.

Protecting Confidential Sources

The first step could be for you to plead with your source to inform the police or FBI himself. Otherwise, you might notify the police anonymously, without naming your source or his group, although such action would violate your promise not to reveal confidential information. You might also wish to inform your source of your decision to call police. If you fail to tell police, your decision could result in property damage and injury or death to innocent persons.

Breaking and Entering

Stay outside. Call police. Cover the action if they decide to enter the premises.

Destroying Police Evidence

You are better off staying outside. Murder trials can be lost over allegations of destruction of evidence.

Televising Executions

If viewers are given sufficient warning and time to prepare for a delayed broadcast, then they can choose to watch or tune away from the broadcast as they wish. Unsuspecting viewers, however, may still tune into the delayed broadcast. To broadcast the execution live might capitalize on the event more nearly for sensational or shock value, because an understanding of capital punishment and its deterrent value is far more complex than watching a person being put to death on live television.

Covering Suicide Attempts

Case 1. Delay the woman by calling the station. Do what you can to help save her and her child. Human decency and compassion take precedence over this story.

Case 2. Do not cover the story. If you do, you will be subject to this form of modified "hostage taking" for months to come. Anyone with a message could threaten suicide and expect you to come running.

Illegally Obtained Information

Keep your eyes where they belong. Curiosity might kill the cat in this case, especially if the DA has planted the folder for your benefit anyway. Even if the information was accurate, it would be illegally or at least unethically obtained.

Yielding Editorial Control of News Content

Air the footage, provided you tell viewers how it was obtained. Later, you may want to do a follow-up story to show the potential consequences of moving hazardous materials through populated areas.

Cooperating with Police

Air the footage and interviews, provided you inform your audience how the footage was obtained.

Private Lives of Public Officials

If the official's situation affects his or her ability to conduct the office, report it. Otherwise, let the information remain private. If the competition reports information that you believe should be kept private, refrain from reporting it. Most members of your audience will respect your decision.

Misrepresentation

Case 1. Inform the city attorney of your identity when he first begins to take you into his confidence.

Case 2. The misrepresentation of a journalist's identity may lead viewers to discredit the honor and integrity of all journalists. Don't pose as the coroner's assistant.

NOTES

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2. "CBS News/New York Times Poll. Jan. 20–25, 2006," www.pollingreport.com/media.htm (accessed June 8, 2007).
3. Gallup, "Media Use and Evaluation," <http://www.gallup.com/poll/1663/media-use-evaluation.aspx> (accessed December 28, 2010).
4. Gallup, "In U.S., Confidence in Newspapers, TV News Remains a Rarity," August 13, 2010, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/142133/Confidence-Newspapers-News-Remains-Rarity.aspx> (accessed December 28, 2010).
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8. Rich Beckman, "Those Who Put Us At Risk," *News Photographer*, (May 2007), 14–15.
9. Donald R. Winslow, "Truth Will Out: Allen Detrich & The Toledo Blade," *News Photographer*, (May 2007), 43–53.
10. Ibid, 12
11. Excerpted from a panel participation seminar, "Situation Ethics for the TV News Photographer," presented by Dr. Carl C. Monk, then dean of Washburn University School of Law (Topeka, KS), at the National Press Photographers 24th Annual Television News-Video Workshop, Norman, OK, March 22, 1984, and drawing on discussions among professional journalists in similar sessions held at the workshop since then.
12. Jim Redmond, Frederick Shook, Dan Lattimore, and Laurie Lattimore-Volkman, *The Broadcast News Process*, 7th ed. (Englewood, CO: Morton, 2005).
13. Gene Goodwin, "The Ethics of Compassion," *The Quill* (November 1983), 38–40.

5. Explain how focal length affects lens perspective, image size, and depth of field.
6. Explain the relationship between lens aperture size and *f*/stop number.
7. Describe steps the photographer can take to achieve shallow depth of field and great depth of field.
8. Explain why duplicate copies of digital recordings show very little loss in quality.

EXERCISES

1. Practice handholding the camera until you can hold it rock steady.
2. Using a television field camera or home video camera, white-balance the camera for sunlight and, without further adjustment, record one scene under fluorescent light, a second scene indoors under artificial quartz lights, and a third scene outdoors under normal sunlight. Now repeat the process, but this time balance the camera for artificial quartz light. Play back the scenes and compare the camera's response to varying degrees of color temperature.
3. Study the aperture on a camera lens as you change *f*/stop settings. Notice the relationship between large aperture sizes and small *f*/stop numbers and vice versa.
4. Position a subject in front of a window or other source of strong illumination. Allow the camera metering system to determine proper exposure. Notice how the subject tends to silhouette unless supplementary light is added to the front of the subject.
5. Allow camera circuitry to determine the proper exposure in a scene, then purposefully underexpose and overexpose the scene by one-half *f*/stop, next by one full *f*/stop, and finally by two full *f*/stops. Identify each stage of over- or underexposure by speaking into the camera microphone as you record the shots on video, or else use a small slate in the scene on which you have written +1/2 stop, +1 stop, etc. Notice the effect of over- and underexposure on colors and contrasts within the scene.
6. Without changing camera position, shoot a wide-angle shot of a subject, then a telephoto shot of the same subject. Notice the effect of focal-length setting on image size, depth of field, and emphasis on subject matter.
7. Shoot a subject in silhouette against a window, the sky, or other bright light source. Record the scene using the camera's automatic exposure meter. Next, switch the camera to manual exposure setting and record the scene two more times: first, so the subject is correctly exposed; second, so the background is correctly exposed. Play back the video and compare the three shots you have made, paying particular attention to variations in exposure, color reproduction, and fineness of detail between the respective scenes.
8. To become more familiar with the perspective produced at various lens focal settings, first shoot a series of shots with the camera in a fixed position. Make five individual shots, without zooming the lens during any individual shot, at the following or similar focal lengths: 15 mm, 30 mm, 50 mm, 75 mm, and 100 mm. Now, set and keep the focal length at normal perspective for the camera you are using and make five more shots, this time beginning at least 100 feet from a subject and then physically moving the camera ten footsteps closer each time you make a shot. Compare the lack of real change in perspective when the camera is left in one position and the true change in perspective that results when you physically move the camera.
9. Focus the camera on a scene in which a number of highlights are visible. Purposefully but gradually throw the scene out of focus and notice how elements within the scene are reproduced as ever-larger circles of confusion.
10. To become more familiar with the influences that affect depth of field, attach the camera to a tripod in a fixed location and shoot five shots of a subject at the following or similar focal lengths: 15 mm, 30 mm, 50 mm, 75 mm, and 100 mm. Do not move the camera between shots. Next, set the lens on the widest focal-length setting and make five more shots, this time physically moving the camera so that each shot is made approximately equidistant from the previous shot. Repeat the process, this time with the lens set on a long or telephoto length setting. Notice how depth of field decreases the closer the camera is to the subject and the longer the focal-length setting becomes.

APPENDIX B

Improving Performance in Field Reporting

Day after day, the video journalist's job description includes producing compelling and informative standups. The good news is that except for smell, on-camera presentations incorporate most aspects of human communication. When you master these principles, you will be more comfortable in front of the camera and microphone, more appealing to your managers and viewers, and perceived as a more polished and professional reporter. Ultimately, such qualities will make you a better and more marketable journalist and a better communicator every time you interact with others.

DEVELOP QUALITIES THAT MAKE YOU INTERESTING AND INTERESTED

One of the most difficult questions to answer about yourself is, "What makes me interesting?" Part of the answer lies in your appearance and physique. Perhaps you are tall and have freckles. Maybe you drag out the vowels in your words and clip your consonants. Maybe you scowl or blink too much or always wear a friendly smile. How you dress will make a difference. Where you grew up, and with whom, also matter, as do your personal beliefs and convictions, your education, your value system, and your life experiences. In a word, you are unique. That is the first quality that makes you interesting.

To be interesting, you also must be interested. To learn to care more intensely about every story that you report, you can use a model that Barry Nash, a Dallas-based talent development consultant, shares with field reporters and news anchors throughout the country. "Ask of every story you report whether the community wins or loses with this event," says Nash.¹ Using this approach, every story is about winning or losing. To some extent then, every story is about communicating that win or loss.

REASONS FOR STANDUPS

"Why do standups?"

"Why must we?"

"Do I have to?"

BOX B.1 AD-LIB YOUR STANDUPS

You generally appear most natural on camera when you ad-lib your standups, rather than memorize them, because you will deliver them with appropriate thoughtfulness, emphasis, and pausing. Because most standups are but two or three sentences, write the two or three main points on a 3-by-5 card for security and ad-lib the material. Sometimes you may want to memorize the script or use notes with complicated or unavoidably exact information, such as official or potentially libelous information. Otherwise, when you memorize, you may sound like you're reading aloud from a script. Why read something to your viewers when you can just as easily be conversational?

How to Prove Close Knowledge

Sometimes on-camera reporters ask, "How do I prove authority and credibility if I don't talk loudly or speak sternly?" Content drives everything you do, including your best performances. LOUD, S-T-E-R-N, and fast count for next to nothing in standups, unless they arise naturally from content. Simply speak with good energy as you would in a normal conversation in which the other person is 3 to 5 feet away from you. A better way to prove your close knowledge on-camera is to understand the topic, think through what it means, and then deliver your standup ad-lib with conversational emphasis and

pausing. Natural emphasis and pausing occur instinctively when we speak with authority and close knowledge. That same state of grace helps you naturally achieve appropriate levels of energy, emotion, pitch, pace, and volume in your delivery.

Often, you will speak into a lavalier microphone, which lies on your chest. The resulting audio sounds so intimate it's like letting your collective audience place its ear on your chest. Even if you speak into a hand-held microphone, it will be close to your mouth (about 10 inches or so), which means you can still speak at conversational volume. Sometimes you may see the camera in the distance and think you must shout to be heard, but remember: the lavalier mic is on your chest or the hand-held mic is but 10 inches from your mouth. There's no need to shout.

Avoid Rushed Delivery

Additionally, you will want to avoid rushing your delivery. Sometimes, given time restraints, you may feel tempted to "overwrite" so you can stuff as many facts as possible into your standup and voice-over copy. The result resembles trying to stuff 10 pounds of facts into a 5-pound bag. You delivered the facts all right, but no one remembers what you said. Furthermore, folks who talk too fast lose credibility. ■

You hear such questions now and again at newsrooms around the country. Some journalists hate standups. Others embrace them as a chance to appear on television at every opportunity, sometimes on multiple occasions within a story without justification. The main reason we do standups, of course, is to communicate information in visual, compelling ways through a one-to-one relationship with viewers or on-set anchors.

Sometimes you can just stand and talk through the facts, but so could the anchor back at the station. Audiences almost universally regard anchors as the best informed and most knowledgeable about the stories they present. Audiences assume that anchors make the most money and have the greatest experience, and they can see for themselves that anchors occupy the most coveted chairs on the set. Therefore, viewers usually prefer that anchors deliver all the news all the time, except when a reporter can report more powerfully or tell a better story. Otherwise, why would a station pay you for reporting what audiences believe their favorite anchor or personality can do better?

Why does the newsroom send you into the field? To report and show things in ways no one back at the station could manage. Or, to confirm, update, or add new information and perspectives the anchor and producer cannot access from the studio.

Standups enhance otherwise nonvisual stories. At other times, in the absence of appropriate visuals, they may offer the best way to communicate. Standups also help establish the reporter's credibility. Reporters who have been first-person, on-site observers can be assumed to know more about the story than those who get their facts from third-party sources without ever having set foot in the field. Without your standups, viewers may assume the anchors do most of the field reporting.

Even the people who sign your paychecks need to be reminded occasionally who's out there on the "front line." At contract renewal time, recognition of you and of your work is vital. Whereas not every story needs a standup, many stories and almost every career can benefit from standups incorporated judiciously into the reporting process.

Keep Your Attention on the Story

Look for ways to show something or do something during the standup, and thereby transfer focus from your performance to the camera. It's natural to wonder, "How do I look?" "Is my hair okay?" "Are my earrings too bold?" or "How can this sweater look so good in real life, yet so hideous on TV?" Always remember, the reporter is never the story, nor is your standup a fashion show or statement.

Cosmetically, your appearance and wardrobe are like the music in a film—audiences should never leave a theater humming the soundtrack or turn away from your story to talk about that gosh-awful tie or blouse. If they do, the music—your "music"—has become a distraction. The same principle applies to your wardrobe and cosmetics.

Give Yourself Something to Do

Even in field settings, some reporters may not sound or appear natural, comfortable, and relaxed. The problem may worsen during on-set appearances in the studio or whenever reporters cut voice-overs in the audio booth. To solve such problems, it may help to give yourself something to do or explain when you are on camera or in front of the microphone. This approach can help you transfer focus from yourself back onto the story and relieve your anxiety by giving your natural tension somewhere to go. Your on-camera appearance and narration tracks will thus be more comfortable and natural.

When you show or do something on camera, you can often provide visual proof of one or more of the story's main points. This creates a range of justifiable uses for standups, and a motive for reporters to plan informative and compelling ones. Happily, reporters can be interesting people in people stories and reports, too.

Justifiable Reasons for Standups

1. To show viewers what you look like—why remain anonymous?
2. To prove to viewers you were on location and therefore know more about the story than the audience or the anchor otherwise could.
3. As a bridge between unrelated segments of your story.
4. To comment on physical experiences in the environment.
5. To show viewers something the anchor can't. For example, a location reporter says, his breath visible as he talks, "Search and rescue teams believe the boy could have survived overnight if he found adequate shelter and stayed put, out of the wind."

6. To confirm a viewer's reaction to news content through your own reactions. For example, describing the growing courthouse suspense as a murder suspect awaits sentencing.
7. To justify your presence in the story by showing or explaining something to viewers that otherwise could not have been shown.

Five Common Standups²

Following are the five most common types of standups, those in which you show or demonstrate something. These are in addition to the "standupper," in which a person simply stands before the camera and talks. Even then, be aware of your body. Natural gestures help animate your upper body and make you more interesting to watch. When you're less active, hold your arms naturally at your side. Angle your body toward the camera, rather than confront your audience straight on and perhaps come across as somewhat adversarial.

Various newsrooms may use slightly different terminology for the following standups, but the concepts are the same.

1. Reference or location standup
2. Reveal or transition standup
3. Prop standup
4. Demonstration standup
5. Effects standup

Reference or Location Standup

Reporters use the reference or location standup to create a tie-in between the story subject and the background. In such standups, reporters stand in front of the courthouse and talk about the trial under way inside or the sentence about to be handed down. Words may not match the video.

In a live shot, the reporter might stand outside the mine entrance where miners are trapped deep underground. This location may be your best or only option on short notice. At least it proves you're at the scene, with the unspoken implication that you should know more than someone far removed. In such standups, it's good to acknowledge the background, even to turn your back to the camera as you do, to show viewers where to look—and to tell viewers what you see offscreen that would be interesting or important to them.

Reveal or Transition Standup

Beyond the simple reference standup is the reveal or transition standup. Here, the reporter might be standing on a beach as the standup begins, telling viewers that high bacteria levels make swimming unsafe. The reporter now moves out of frame and into a new frame to finish the standup by a "Beach Closed Until Further Notice" sign. The reporter also could walk the few steps from where the standup began over to the sign.

Movement can help make the story come to life, but the movement has to make sense. Just like your scripts and ad-libs, your movement and delivery need to be crisp and conversational. Any movement should be natural, too. If it feels awkward or forced, odds are it will look that way.

Check out all the reporters who do the "walk to nowhere" in standups, and you'll get the idea. Walking from Point A to Point B in a standup for no reason except

to add movement makes little sense. Walking from Point A, where a runaway truck swerved to avoid kids in a crosswalk, to Point B, where the truck overturned, looks natural and helps viewers better understand the story. Standups must come across as natural, honest, and spontaneous—just as if you were showing someone in real life something important.

Prop Standup

The prop standup is just as simple as the reveal standup. The reporter holds something and shows it to viewers, often as part of a long shot, medium shot, close-up, matched-action sequence. The object you show offers proof of a story's main point. Examples are:

1. "Golf-ball-sized hail fell across the Fenimore farm." (Show a handful of golf-ball-sized hail)
2. "The complaint is only two pages long, but it calls for \$2 million in damages." (Hold up, and look at, a copy of the legal complaint)
3. "Authorities say this baseball may be worth \$1.5 million." (Show the baseball and look at it in your hand)

Avoid using prop standups if real people in the news could show the object more effectively. Perhaps the defense counsel can show the legal complaint to camera, Farmer Fenimore can show us the golf-ball-sized hail, or the person who caught the 756th home run can show us the ball himself. Again, another cardinal rule is: The reporter is never the story.

Demonstration Standup

Work to make every standup a visual story and commit yourself physically and mentally to selling that story. Where appropriate, strive to be physically and actively involved in its telling, a technique called the performance or **demonstration standup** (Figure B.1). The standup activity can be something as simple as a reporter pointing out the rusted bolts and flaking paint on an old bridge for a story on highway safety. Or it can be something as complex as huffing and puffing your way up a steep mountain road to illustrate the difficulty of reaching a recluse in a story about the healing power of solitude.

When you do standups, allow yourself to look at the environment, to interact with it, and even to turn your back to the camera as appropriate. In a feature story, if you have followed itinerant farmworkers on their rounds for most of a long, hot, grueling day, perhaps it will be appropriate for you to do a "sit-down" standup as you remove your hat and conclude for the audience that no one would work such long hours for such low pay if other employment were available.

To demonstrate the difficulty of balancing the federal budget, ABC senior political correspondent Jonathan Karl borrowed an idea from computer programmer Mathias Shapiro, who specializes in visualizing complex information. You can find examples of Shapiro's work at YouTube.com.

Using \$100 in pennies (10,000 pennies), Karl covered a large conference table with 2,000 stacks of five pennies—each stack representing \$2 billion in government spending, each penny thus worth \$400 million. He divided the table of pennies into pie-like slices to illustrate defense spending and entitlements such as social security and Medicare; interest on government debt; and discretionary spending.

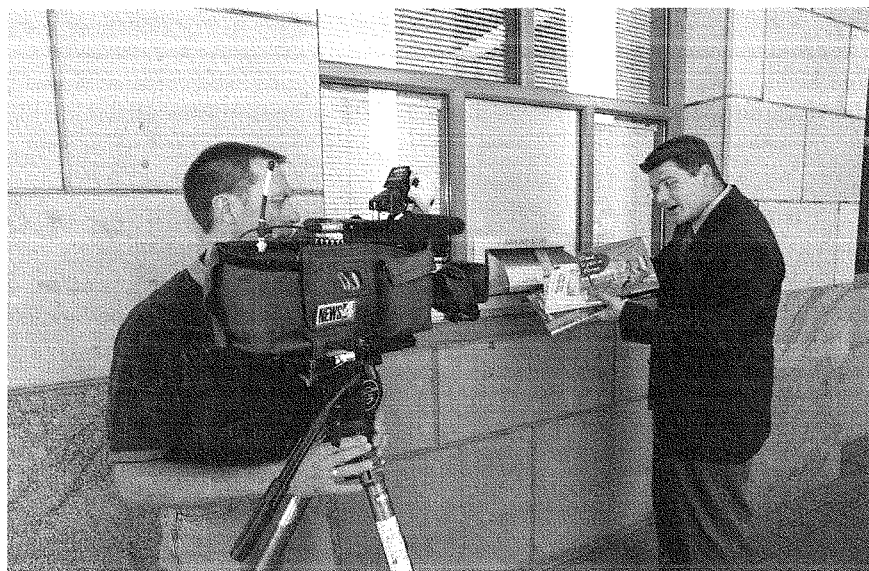


FIGURE B.1

Reporters can give themselves something to do when they are on camera as a way to transfer focus from themselves to the story they are telling. The technique is called a demonstration or performance standup. In this standup, the reporter shows a community book depository.

In the 1:34 standup, Karl shows that to date, Congress and the President have been willing to address only one slice of the pie representing discretionary spending, and even then proposed cuts in community action programs amount to one-third of a cent, which he represents by cutting off a third of a penny.

To watch the video, see <http://www.mediaite.com/tv/abc-reporter-attempts-to-explain-the-budget-with-100-in-pennies/>

Avoid melodrama in demonstration standups. The point is to communicate meaning, and to have a good time doing it. Make your time on camera relaxed, natural, and easy to watch, and use every action to help illustrate the story.

A good way to evaluate your standups is to ask yourself two questions: “Did my audience enjoy watching it?” and “Did I enjoy doing it?” When standups are most successful, the answer to both questions is *yes*. Another way to determine whether your standups are working is to look at them without sound. If you look like someone we’d like to watch, even with the sound off, your standup probably works.

Regardless of the activity you give yourself in demonstration standups, the cardinal advice against staging still applies: Your presence should never change the story. If, in your standup, you operate the controls on a ham radio and speak to the eyewitness of a volcanic eruption in Alaska, then your activities as a reporter have become the story. The story has been altered because the event is no longer what it would have been in your absence. On the other hand, no harm should result if you merely pause to shake the loose railing on a rusty old bridge as a way to show how fragile and dangerous the bridge has become.

Provided the reporter has the viewers’ best interests at heart and is not simply posturing on camera, demonstration standups can be most interesting and educational for viewers. They also can advance a reporter’s career. Using the medium to its fullest potential is a guaranteed way to build credibility and prove close knowledge. It also honors the adage that “content drives all performance.”

Effects Standups

Some reporters use effects standups—computer-generated graphic and visual effects—to demonstrate otherwise abstract information. An effects standup might show the statistical chance of winning the lottery or what has to happen for shuttle astronauts to reenter the atmosphere safely.

For a standup in Houston, reporter Charles Hadlock began his standup showing black and white film of the two main actors driving along in the old TV show *Route 66*. Hadlock then dissolved into a color shot in which he drove a similar Chevy Corvette up to an old service station sitting alongside the abandoned highway, commenting as he sat in the driver’s seat, “Buzz and Todd took a wrong turn in 1964, and were never seen again. I don’t suppose they ever made it to Conway, Texas, but if they did, they probably stopped here. We stopped here to see Cecil and Zelma Walker.” A sound bite with Zelma Walker follows.

Effects standups require creativity and time to plan, but they give reporters a way to show what most viewers could not otherwise know or see for themselves.

SEEK REACTION

Some folks may fear their reactions will impose an editorial bias on content, even lead viewers in how to think about content. But when you react legitimately to content, you come across as honest, natural, and thoughtful. Once again, audiences expect to see legitimate reactions from professional communicators.

The main reason we tell anybody anything is to elicit a response, to see how the other person will react. Yet, when you present information to the television camera, the lens gives you no reaction. To improve your performance in front of the camera, begin to treat the lens as if it were a person. Use whatever device works best for you. Maybe you tape a picture of your best friend to the camera lens and talk to that one person. Perhaps you imagine someone in the viewing audience and speak through the lens to that one individual. Whatever you do, believe that someone is there to react to you and to your story.

The key to eliciting audience reaction is simple: Learn to predict in your mind’s eye how the audience is going to react to you and to your story. Remember that anchors and on-camera reporters lead audience reaction by demonstrating how they want the audience to react. If you want viewers to smile, for example, you must smile. If you say, “We’re glad you could join us,” then visually you have to prove to your audience that you really are glad for their presence, especially through your facial expressions.

COMMUNICATE WHAT YOU FEEL ABOUT THE STORY

Much of the energy in your reporting comes from what you feel about the story, both from the standpoint of your emotions and your sensory experiences. Expressing your *emotional experience* is valid, so long as you report honestly and with appropriate feeling. However, *extreme emotion* is unwarranted. It would be inappropriate, for example, to show extreme emotion, such as crying or anger, when reporting a story in which someone you know has died or been seriously injured.

From the standpoint of *sensory experience*, what you feel can be more important than what you do in reporting that story. “The important thing is the feeling, the experience of the moment,” says Nash, “and the sensory experience is vital.” To communicate that vital sense of experience to your audience, you must first understand the event in all its dimensions. Imagine for a moment that you have been assigned to report the outcome of a hockey game. Ask the following questions of yourself for this exercise—and for every story you cover.

1. **What do I SEE?** Perhaps you see tons of fans yelling, sweating, drinking, and cursing. You see the spray of powder as skate blades knife across the ice. You see the rhythm of the skaters and the grimaces on their faces. You see the scoreboard, and you see the puck skitter across the ice before it glances off a goalpost.
2. **What do I HEAR?** Now you hear the echo of the public address system, the crash and grunts of players. The crowd screams and there are occasional obscenities. “PEANUTS, get your red hot PEANUTS,” a vendor in the crowd yells. “That son of a bitch!” the coach yells, and in the background music with a heavy beat blares through speakers.
3. **What do I SMELL?** Waves of scent wash over us from the beer, the player’s sweat, and the popcorn. The air smells cold and crisp. The aftershave on the fellow next to you shouts for your attention. On the other side of you, a woman’s perfume lingers.
4. **What do I FEEL?** Now, almost subconsciously, you become aware that your face is cold and you feel goose bumps on your arms. You feel adrenaline pumping through your body and you are flushed with excitement. Beneath your coat you feel, for the most part, cozy and warm.
5. **What do I TASTE?** You taste the afterbite and maltiness of the beer. There is the sharp, acid taste of the mustard on your hot dog and the crunchy, toasted flavor of the almonds in your chocolate bar.

DELIVERING FROM THE STUDIO

As an anchor or anytime you appear *on set* as a reporter, you will face two immediate problems:

1. if you are an anchor, making sense of other people’s writing
2. sounding spontaneous and conversational when you read copy, even your own

To overcome these problems you will have to understand the story, know how to draw on your energy, and learn to talk to the audience with your whole self.

Words are your first ally, because the way words are built helps convey their meaning. Just for a moment, say the words *bowling ball* aloud. Roll the sounds around in your mouth, and as you say them aloud, throw the ball down an imaginary bowling alley. Notice how “heavy” the words sound when compared, for example, to the words *Ping-Pong ball*. Now say *Ping-Pong ball* aloud and toss it lightly as you “hold” it in your hand.

Having gone through this exercise, were you now to stand before a camera and say these words aloud, you could make your audience feel the difference because you’ve given your words some thought. You’ve felt the meaning of the words before you tried to communicate them. There is no right or wrong way to deliver words to an audience, only degrees of commitment and involvement in how you report stories that can distinguish you from your competition.

PUT EXPERIENCE INTO YOUR REPORTS

When you understand the experiences of a moment or an event, you can use words and actions to communicate what the pictures don’t. It is a technique that NBC correspondent Bob Dotson has called “writing to the corners” of the picture. It is a descriptive form of reporting, sensual and tactile, which transcends two-dimensional imagery. “You could smell the storm’s path before you could see it,” Dotson once wrote in describing the path of a hurricane that had snapped tall pine trees and released their resinous fragrance.³ Writing to the corners of the picture can help improve any story with static images or shots of aftermath.

When you set out to make your reporting experiential, create accurate mental pictures and experiences and speak to your audience of those moments. Try to make your story a report of what we see, hear, smell, taste, and touch. Largely your excellence as a video journalist lies in your ability to capture the moment and to communicate the texture of that moment, for when viewers experience an event they are more likely to understand and remember it.

MULTIDIMENSIONAL REPORTING

So often, reporters concern themselves more with how they look and sound in front of the camera than with how well they understand the story. However, the secret to being great lies in how effectively you communicate the story through **multidimensional reporting**. This means that you communicate with every reporting tool available—the camera, the microphone, the spoken word, the video editing process, and even by portraying the actions and behaviors of news subjects as warranted.

Audiences become interested in the story when they see you think about the story, interpret, and react to it. If viewers don’t see your interest, they may wonder whether you like people, your job, or even if they can trust what you say. So, be *visually aggressive*. Use your body to communicate your interest and enthusiasm for the story and your audience. If you have reason to be sitting on-camera in a report or interview, sit on the edge of your chair and incline toward the camera with your body. Gesture with your hands when appropriate (see Figure B.2 A & B), and react in suitable ways, especially with facial expressions.

MARKING COPY

Whenever we speak, our natural inclination is to emphasize contrasts and new ideas. When we emphasize a word, we imply a contrast. We subdue old and less important ideas by deemphasizing them in our delivery. One of the quickest ways to improve your voice performance, then, is to go through your copy and underline the *ideas that contrast* (“angry crowd”—“did not react”; “human labor”—“machine-made goods”), as well as new *ideas*.

Some other considerations:⁴

- Never stress pronouns, unless they’re used for contrast. EXAMPLE: “They voted for *you*, not *him*.”
- Don’t stress any word you can eliminate without changing the meaning. EXAMPLE: “The course you recommend leads to *progress*, but the policy he sanctions leads to *disaster*.”
- When an adjective modifies a noun, it’s often more reasonable to stress the adjective. EXAMPLE: “It was the *smallest* turnout in the county’s *history*.”



FIGURE B.2 A & B

Handheld microphones can impede the reporter's ability to gesture and interact spontaneously with the story subject or environment. More natural and spontaneous standups can result when the reporter uses an inconspicuous lavalier microphone, ideally in combination with a wireless transmitter-receiver system.

- Seldom stress anything in a parenthetical expression. EXAMPLE: "He was (said the chair) the last to leave the meeting."
- When you read a construction that contains a preposition with a personal pronoun for its object, stress the word before the preposition, perhaps stress the preposition, and subdue the pronoun. EXAMPLE: "A night in jail will be *good* for him."

Some exceptions:

- When the pronoun is followed by a restrictive modifier. EXAMPLE: "They *sent* for *him* before the votes had been counted."
- When the object of the pronoun is compound. EXAMPLE: "We have reporters standing by *here* and *there*."
- Normally you would not stress when the word immediately preceding the preposition is a personal pronoun or some other word. EXAMPLE: "Take it *with* you."
- Stress verbs infrequently.

As a rule, try not to let either your momentum or your inflection drop when reading copy. When either flags, so does audience attention. As you read copy, let your voice stay up and keep it up until you've completed your thought. Regardless of your inflection, pitch, or volume, the key is to maintain your energy through the ends of thoughts and sentences.

LEARN HOW TO RELAX

To communicate effectively on camera, you must feel comfortable and relaxed. You must relish everything you do and say, and not rush the delivery. Pause now for a moment and reestablish an awareness of your body. If your muscles are tense, relax. Tense muscles tell your brain, "Hey, I'm really tense," and your on-camera performance will suffer.

Pause also to become aware of how you breathe. One secret to performance success is to let your tummy pooch. Breathe with your diaphragm instead of your chest. You may notice that you tend to breathe differently when you sleep and after you first awake than during the rest of the day. If you do, begin work to establish more effective breathing patterns that will help you relax.

DEVELOP CONVERSATIONAL DELIVERY

Whether you are before a field or studio camera or sitting at a microphone in an audio booth, one of your primary obligations is to establish an intimate connection with your audience. Television can place the reporter visually closer to an audience than the reporter could approach in real life. "Television puts you as close to your audience as if you were kissing them with their eyes open," says Barry Nash. When you are that close to an audience, your voice will have to be close to an ideal level in conversational delivery, a process made easier if you follow three rules of thumb:

- The pitch of your voice goes up when you tense, so strive to relax.
- The pitch of your voice goes up as volume increases, so lower the volume of your delivery.
- The message we communicate has to do with how we think about others, not with how we think about ourselves. Think about the meaning of your words and the story's content, rather than what you look and sound like on camera.

To help reporters keep vocal pitch at conversational levels, voice coaches often have them read a real script into the microphone. As the practice session begins, the voice coach advises using a lower volume to keep pitch at conversational levels. As script delivery progresses, the voice coach may urge, "Softer, still softer, down-down-down" or may even recommend that the reporter read the script in a half or full whisper. Whispering serves two purposes in this exercise: First, it emphasizes the need to lower volume in order to lower pitch; second, it helps to reveal the nature of intimacy. We sometimes tend to pay more attention to people who whisper than to those who shout.

Another valuable exercise is to practice standup delivery at varying distances from the field camera. The farther you are from the camera, the greater the danger that you'll try to yell to it. This is true even when the field mike is clipped to your lapel. When yelling occurs, up goes tension, up goes pitch, and out goes intimacy. The problem occurs in part because we are "talking to the camera," not to the audience. Outside, you may have to yell if there's a bulldozer at work behind you, but in that case the environment will tell you what to do.

In standups, just as when you write voice over, remember to keep it conversational and to incorporate moments of silence or "white space." You can be silent if you're doing something meaningful. If you taste a new food, it is acceptable to taste, savor, swallow, react, and then speak.

To communicate intimately with your audience, keep your focus off yourself. The messages we communicate have to do not with how we think about ourselves, but with

how we think about others. If you wish to make an audience laugh, it will work better to tell yourself “I’m going to make the audience laugh” than to say, “This is funny.” The goal is to have a relationship with the unseen audience and to elicit a response.

YOUR APPEARANCE

Although it may seem that set design, clothing, cosmetics, hairstyles, and accessories have little to do with journalism, they mimic problems that confront print journalists in newspaper layout, design, and format. If newspaper layout is sloppy, confusing, or unattractive, it can damage the story’s very message. On television, the story is just as vulnerable to errors in personal appearance.

Even the length and style of your hair will influence how the audience perceives you. Generally, women can dress the part of the professional, which means choosing clothing that is both feminine and elegant—blouses and silks, for example, and clothing with softer lines. Mindful of prevailing hair styles, younger women may want to ask their stylists how to achieve a more mature, credible look.

Avoid Distractions in Wardrobe and Accessories

In television the cardinal rule is to focus attention on your face, not on your clothes or accessories (Figure B.3). Accessories for men and women reporters should be subdued so as not to draw the viewer’s attention away from the face. If eyeglasses are a problem, consider substituting contact lenses. Remember that the camera comes so close to you that sometimes all you have to communicate is what’s in your eyes. Eyeglasses



FIGURE B.3

Dressing appropriately from one story environment to the next is a good way for reporters to enhance their credibility. In all on-camera appearances, an important consideration is to choose clothing and accessories that will help keep attention on the face.

add another filter to distract the audience and yet another barrier through which you must project yourself.

Whenever you appear on camera, dress appropriately for the story. This advice is important to all television reporters, male or female, because if viewers worry about your tie or scarf, they will miss the story. If you report from a recycling plant, you may want to loosen your neckwear and hold your jacket over your arm or shoulder, or ditch it altogether. If you report from the ski slopes, trade your wool coat for a ski jacket. On skid row, a silk business suit may be out of place, both because it doesn’t fit in and because it may psychologically distance you from your news sources.

Colors and Cut Matter

This same advice applies when you conduct interviews: Dress to reinforce your credibility. If the moment is relaxed and informal, your demeanor and the way you dress should help reinforce a sense of informality, so take off your coat and roll up your sleeves. If the story is investigative and confrontational, professional clothing in darker tones may help reinforce the sense of your story. If the setting is a hospital lab, you may want to wear a lab coat so that you don’t look out of place.

Whatever you do, dress to avoid “disappearing into the background.” If the background of trash against which you appear at the landfill is bland and brown, a jacket of the same tone will do you no favors. Similar problems arise if you wear “cool” colors for an appearance on a “cool” set. If you know in advance what colors are present, you can dress to create at least some contrast between you and the background. Remember, too, to consider textures when you dress. Some texture in clothing helps create visual interest.

FIELD LIGHTING FOR HDTV

High-definition television brings viewers face to face with people’s physical imperfections. With a clarity roughly six times greater than analog television⁵ high-def cameras magnify everything from acne scars to wrinkles, bags under the eyes, and poor makeup jobs. High-def studio lighting and adjustments in makeup help hide those imperfections for news anchors, but without similar lighting adjustments in the field an anchor, reporter or virtually anyone else can suddenly appear 10 years older.⁶ Field lighting thus takes on greater importance than ever.

LET THE AUDIENCE KNOW YOU AS A FRIEND

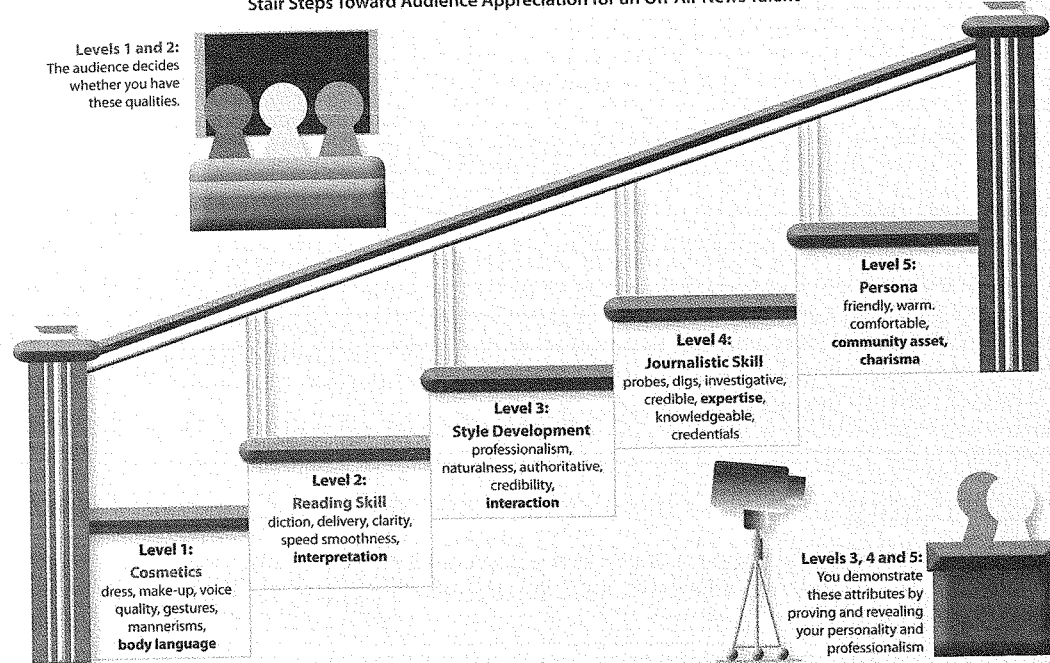
Over time, viewers will evaluate you the same way they evaluate their best friends. When we first meet strangers at parties, part of our evaluation is based on their appearance. If you were asked to talk about your best friend, you could describe your friend’s voice, dress, manner, and speech patterns. You could tell us something about your friend’s birthplace and background and his or her age and approximate income. All these things we come to know about people we like. And all these things help make each of us unique.

Your individuality, then, is one of your greatest strengths in a medium that communicates through people. To really succeed, you must risk letting the audience come to know you as a friend. To do that you will have to let the things that make you unique come through. Such a task takes time and can hardly occur if you are a “market hopper” who moves from one job to another every year or so. The

BOX B.2 TALENT GROWTH MODEL

The Talent Growth Model

Stair Steps Toward Audience Appreciation for an On-Air News Talent



The Talent Growth Model represents the process on-air personalities undergo in developing a relationship with the viewing audience. Many anchors are unable to establish more than a surface relationship with viewers. It takes time, dedication to the process, and patience to achieve the ultimate relationship with viewers.

The Talent Growth Model is divided into five phases of growth, each phase evolving and expanding from the other.

- Viewers first notice appearance. The audience reacts to the on-air person visually (Level 1). What does he or she look like? Included here are such things as hair, make-up, clothing and overall appearance. When the viewer accepts the anchor or reporter visually, he or she is ready to move on to the next level.
- Next, viewers listen. The developing anchor or reporter works to improve delivery (Level 2). Is the voice pleasant and easy to listen to, with no

apparent impediments? It is important to read copy smoothly, using conversational pacing, vocal variety and inflection, appropriate volume, and good diction.

The anchor or reporter needs to sound relaxed, comfortable, and friendly.

- “S/he’s so professional.” Being comfortable and confident in his/her role epitomizes what a professional should be (Level 3). The anchor or reporter looks and acts like a journalist and can be seen to do ‘journalistic’ activities. Viewers accept the person’s apparent authority in the absence of contrary actions. The viewer also perceives talent to have an exciting job, and finds it off-putting if the anchor seems bored or uninvolved. Many anchors never progress beyond this point. Those who themselves road blocked at Level 3 often exit the profession.
- Being involved in community activities reinforces success. (Level 3 and 4) Making personal appearances, doing public speaking engagements, and

letting the audience see the anchor as a “real person” participating in “real life” activities is essential in continuing the growth of the relationship.

- Respected Journalist. Despite all the remarks within the industry about pretty or handsome “blow-dried talking heads,” viewers appreciate responsible, capable journalists. At Level 4, the anchor or reporter has earned true authority, having served the community long and well. Level 4 talent show insight and can analyze complex issues in understandable ways. S/he must appear knowledgeable about current events in the community and country. Doing important stories and series, being seen as a working journalist, helps. A fine anchor or well recognized and respected reporter can reach this level.
- The chosen few. A few anchors manage to reach Level 5. They become Community Assets. The anchor has reached this level when viewers see him/her as a trusted friend who is invited into

their homes each evening. Viewers turn to this person because they depend on him/her to help them get through the day and make their lives better. Longevity in a market is a major factor in reaching this phase, and it definitely takes time to get to this level. At this stage, viewers are forgiving of the less-than-perfect qualities that block an anchor’s growth in the beginning stages.

The Anchor Growth Model represents how the anchor develops this relationship. Whether he/she is able to implement the ideas depends on self-motivation, effort, and a strong desire to succeed in the business. However, even such dedication does not guarantee hitting the bull’s-eye. To be seen as the trusted friend – an asset to the community – often depends upon a charismatic bond between an anchor and the viewer.

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community in which you work is equally special; it, too, will require some time to reveal itself and for you to come to know it. Tenure in the marketplace, up to two years even in small markets, is thus important if you are to build this special relationship with the community—and it with you. Soon your reporting will take on added depth and show evidence of close, authoritative knowledge about the people, issues, and events in your community.

IMPACT HOW PEOPLE PERCEIVE YOUR INTERVIEW SOURCES

Body language, whether purposeful or inadvertent, influences how viewers perceive the people you interview. If you “open up” the interview, both visually and physically, the interview will appear to be more casual and relaxed. If, through body language, you communicate your friendship for and concern about the news source, your audience will more likely feel a sense of friendship and concern toward the person.

As a rule, interviews carry a more “adversarial” tone when the following visual elements are present:

- Reporter and interviewee wear coats and ties or other business attire.
- Something physical separates the news source from the reporter. The object may be as obvious as an office desk or something as seemingly innocent as a handheld stick mike.
- Physical distance is great between reporter and interviewer.

- Interviewee appears to be “trapped” or “pinned” behind a desk in a corner or against a wall, with nowhere to go.
- Reporter and interviewer face each other squarely, almost head-on.

Conversely, reporters and interviewees appear to be more relaxed and friendly when the opposite visual elements are present:

- Reporter and/or interviewee take off coats or at least unbutton them.
- Reporter sits beside the interviewee with nothing between them, not even a stick mike.
- Physical distance between reporter and interviewer is comfortably close.
- Interview is taken outside where the visual message is a sense of freedom, a clear impression that the interviewee has agreed to the interview of his or her own free will.
- Reporter angles in toward the other person, rather than facing the individual straight on in a confrontational manner.

Influencing how the audience perceives a news source may seem to smack of bias and staging, but in television or any form of human expression, there is no such thing as a neutral transaction. If an interviewee is kind at heart, honest, and friendly, no purpose will be served by inadvertently communicating an opposite impression. Unlike with newspapers, people interact with television. No matter how hard we strive to be objective and unbiased, it is well to remember that in television news, and in all human communication, even no action is a reaction.

Rather than failing to react, the key to being objective is to cover all sides of an issue with equal energy. Aggressively pursue all sides of the story so that your delivery remains committed and energetic throughout coverage of all the issues. If the story is about taxes going up, you may observe that it's great news for folks who live on the east side of town where new schools are needed, but bad news on the west side where elderly people need that money to pay their medical bills.

POSTURE MATTERS

Your posture—how you hold your body—is obvious to the audience and will affect how viewers perceive you and your reporting ability. Often, you can improve your posture by concentrating on how you hold your head and shoulders: Stand, run, and walk as if a string attached to the very crown of your head is lifting you—almost as if you were a puppet. This technique helps you keep your chin down and in, helps make the crown of your head go up, and helps prevent the appearance of “leading” with your head as if you're about to fall forward when you walk. Remember, too, to keep your shoulders down and rounded. You should feel relaxed and natural whenever you are on camera, and your appearance should reflect that feeling. Study the appearance of reporters you respect; often, you will discover that their posture is impeccable.

SPLIT-FOCUS PRESENTATION

Throughout your on-set interaction with an anchor, the audience normally will look at whichever of you is speaking. While the anchor talks, you should also look at the anchor. When you speak, the anchor should look at you. As you speak, remember

to divide your attention between the anchor and the audience, a practice known as **split-focus presentation**, which helps make the audience part of your conversation. This technique is vastly preferable to the method in which both anchor and reporter resolutely face the camera and take turns speaking without ever turning their heads to acknowledge one another.

THE ANCHOR DEBRIEF

Going into your report, the anchor normally will set up your story with a brief remark or two, then turn toward you and comment briefly so that the two of you can interact. When you finish interacting with the anchor on set, be looking at the camera as you begin your introduction to the story. After your report has aired, you will need to return control of the show to the anchor. When transitioning back to the anchor as you finish your presentation, look at the anchor. At this point the anchor normally will ask a follow-up question or two, a form of debriefing that serves to reestablish the anchor's command of the show. This interchange is known as the **anchor debrief**.

Most often, you will be expected to have a question for the anchor to ask when you come out of a story back to the set. In formulating your questions, remember that good anchors will want to ask questions that represent the viewers' interests as well as the community's perspective. Ideally, you will take time to discuss your anticipated responses briefly with the anchor prior to airtime.

WHEN YOU ARE BEFORE THE CAMERA

Anytime you are before the camera, whether in the studio or the field, your work will demonstrate to your viewers the extent to which you are well groomed, conversational, professional, and incisive. Resolve, therefore, to develop a consistent and recognizable visual style and prove that you are a good journalist who knows what your audience needs to know about the stories you report. As *Time* columnist Hugh Sidey observed, “Journalists were originally created to enlighten, not to threaten; to inform, not to perform; to know, not to show.”⁷

Ask questions, process information, show that you are a team player, and prove that you care about the community in which you work. Finally, show us that you care about us as viewers and, yes, even that you like us. If you do all these things, you may become the person in your market that viewers most often seek out as their most authoritative and likable news source.

HOW REPORTERS EVOLVE INTO ANCHORS

For most reporters the dream of becoming an anchor remains just that, although reporters who aim their careers can sometimes evolve into anchors. If management thinks of you primarily as a reporter, your aspirations may come to nothing, so the first trick is to give yourself opportunities to demonstrate your anchor potential. This can most easily be accomplished by producing stories that need on-set or split screen follow-up and amplification. Whenever practical, suggest to the producer that your story justifies putting you on-set to discuss it with newscast anchors. Further, anchors can react to the story and prove their own close knowledge about the topic. When

you make it on-set or split screen, your performance will be crucial, so follow the pros' advice:

- Hone in on the anchor with your eyes and ears.
- Listen intently.
- Gesture appropriately, perhaps with a pencil, and even tap on the desk to make your point.
- Be natural and energetic.
- Be interested and interesting.
- Remember to focus on something outside yourself rather than your performance, and to enjoy what you're doing.

SUMMARY

Video journalists often communicate certain story elements through the reporter's on-camera performances in the field. Routinely, the most effective and memorable standups occur when performance originates as a natural outgrowth of story content. To be interesting on camera, the reporter must be interested—in stories, in the subjects of stories, and in the community and its residents—and be photographed in such a way that home viewers see the interest.

Most communication attempts to elicit a response. Yet the camera and microphone never respond to the journalist. Some good ways to seek a response are to treat the lens as if it were a person, imagine that you're talking to a friend, and/or envision in your mind's eye how the audience will react to you and your story.

Video journalists further enhance the story by capturing related sensory experiences—the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures—and to fill in with words and actions what the pictures don't communicate. Audiences become more interested in the story when they see you think, react, or otherwise do something interesting on camera. Also try to capture the reporter's honest reactions during field interviews and other appropriate moments.

Reporters can use body language to communicate interest and enthusiasm for the story and the audience. To be more visually aggressive, the reporter can sit on the edge of the chair or other object, lean forward toward the camera or interview subject, make hand gestures, and alter facial expressions as appropriate. Note that gestures are more spontaneous and easy to make with a lavalier microphone than while holding a hand mike (Figure B.2).

Effective performance depends on thorough knowledge of the story and its subjects. You can improve voice delivery by studying and practicing with words and by giving their sounds and meaning some thought. The way words are built helps to convey their meaning: "For years, citrus growers have likened the tang of Texas grapefruit juice to the crisp smack of an ocean wave." For natural voice delivery, emphasize contrasts and new ideas, and mark copy accordingly.

Whereas it's important to relax on camera, it's also important to project a sense of energy. Proper breathing and vocal techniques can help the reporter achieve energetic yet conversational delivery. A valuable exercise is to practice standup delivery at varying distances from the field camera. The goal is to overcome any tendency to yell to the camera, even when it is some distance away. When yelling occurs, tension and vocal pitch increase, while intimate connection with the audience decreases.

Even in standups it is acceptable for the reporter to stop talking occasionally in order to do something meaningful, such as show a padlocked gate or taste and savor a

food. Demonstration standups, in which the reporter has an activity to perform while on camera, can help the reporter appear more natural and relaxed. However, no story should be altered by a reporter's presence in a standup.

Beyond their ability to enhance otherwise nonvisual stories, standups help establish the reporter's credibility and remind viewers who does the actual field reporting. Viewers might otherwise mistakenly credit anchors for originating many of the reports they see. Reporters and photographers can work as a team to help make standups visually reinforce the story to be told.

It is important for the reporter to dress appropriately for the story and to dress to keep attention on the face rather than on clothing, hair, or jewelry. Accessories should be subdued, and the reporter may want to avoid eyeglasses altogether. To succeed as an on-air reporter, you must allow the audience to come to know you as a friend and see the qualities that make you special.

Some reporters may evolve into anchors more quickly by producing stories that need on-set or split screen follow-up and amplification. When practical, suggest to the producer that you should appear on-set to discuss your report or related issues with the anchor. Techniques for interaction with the anchor include split-focus presentation and the anchor debrief.

Finally, photographers and reporters should strive to understand the people who watch reports. You are better qualified to serve audiences when you know their needs, interests, concerns, and aspirations. Likewise, tenure in the marketplace serves most reporters well. After serving for years as a trusted friend in the community, most reporters are welcomed as authoritative and likable sources for relevant yet interesting stories.

KEY TERMS

anchor debrief 313 multidimensional reporting 305
demonstration standup 301 split-focus presentation 313

NOTES

1. Barry Nash is a professional talent consultant. A majority of remarks in this chapter are derived from his work with students at Colorado State University and with professional talent in markets of all sizes throughout the country. He is a partner in The Coaching Company, Dallas, TX (www.coachingcompany.com).
2. Greg Luft, unpublished manuscript shared with the principal author, Colorado State University, circa 2001.
3. *NBC Nightly News*, March 29, 1984. Reporters still "borrow" this line. The principal author has heard it parroted in Texas, Maryland, Louisiana, and Colorado.
4. The "Guide to Marking Copy" used as a general reference for this chapter was provided courtesy of Barry Nash, The Coaching Company, Dallas, TX.
5. Hugh Sidey, "The Mick Jagers of Journalism," *Time* (October 5, 1987), 28.
6. *Ibid*
7. Diane Holloway, "That's Harsh: Hi-def TV is changing our views of the stars," Cox News Services, 29 March 2007.