



WASHINGTON STATE YOUTH & GOVERNMENT

Introduction to the Media

The press is sometimes referred to as the "fourth estate," an important check on government power, but not an official branch of government. The relationship between the media and the Legislature is complex, but at its most simple, it comes to this: the press tells the public what the Legislature is doing.

Any Legislature, including the Youth Legislature, does more in one day than a normal person cares to hear. The press has to pick what is important and explain it. When a controversial idea comes to a vote in the Senate, the public wants to know not only about the idea, but who voted, how they voted, and why. The press also has the power to find less obvious stories and highlight them. A bill that is receiving little attention might change some people's lives greatly, and the media can reveal that. It can also make leaders seem more human by telling their stories, or holding them accountable by reporting their decisions and actions.

Often, the relationship is good for everyone. Legislators can tell their voters about laws that might affect them through the press, and the public can see how its elected leaders are representing them. The press is not an ally of the Legislature, however, and the Legislature is no good friend of the press. Like referees and players, reporters and politicians have clearly defined roles and don't cross certain lines.

The news media must honestly report news, and should not become a proponent or opponent of an idea or bill. Even when the act is universally shunned, the media must be fair. Everyone agrees bribing elected officials is wrong for instance, but news accounts should seek to tell the known facts about a politician accused of accepting bribes, not prosecute the politician on the front page.

The press also should report information lawmakers or the government want to keep secret if there is an important reason to doing so. For instance, the New York Times and the Washington Post both published stories about a secret report explaining how the United States escalated the Vietnam War without telling the public, even though President Richard Nixon argued publishing the report would threaten national security.

The way the public views the Legislature is shaped quite a bit by the press, so the bottom line is journalists must always be careful to get the story right, and get the right stories.

--Adam Wilson
The Olympian
Youth Legislature
Program Alumni

Welcome to the Washington YMCA Youth & Government Media. You will have a unique opportunity ahead of you throughout the Youth Legislature -- to observe the activities of the session and report your observations to more than 425 of your colleagues, to advisors and to audiences beyond the Youth & Government program. Along with your privileged vantage-point, you will have responsibilities to your readers:

- * to present accurate accounts of Youth & Government activities
- * to create high-quality stories that inform your readers
- * to provide information that readers want to know and need to know
- * to discern between "hard news" and "fluff" and clearly keep each category separate when reporting the news
- * to organize the sections of the news appropriately
- * to create daily editions in a timely, consistent manner

The media is a record of the Youth & Government program -- as reporters, editors and leaders of the media, you have been entrusted with keeping that record.

As you prepare your stories, keep the writing process in mind: *pre-write, write, edit, rewrite, publish/broadcast*. This process will be vital for producing good stories.

The materials that follow will assist you as you embark on your media experience.

Journalistic Ethics

(Modified from the Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics)

PREAMBLE

Members of the Society of Professional Journalists believe that public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy. The duty of the journalist is to further those ends by seeking truth and providing a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues. Conscientious journalists from all media and specialties strive to serve the public with thoroughness and honesty. Professional integrity is the cornerstone of a journalist's credibility. Members of the Society share a dedication to ethical behavior and adopt this code to declare the Society's principles and standards of practice.

SEEK TRUTH AND REPORT IT

Journalists should be honest, fair and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information. Journalists should:

- * Test the accuracy of information from all sources and exercise care to avoid inadvertent error. Deliberate distortion is never permissible.
- * Diligently seek out subjects of news stories to give them the opportunity to respond to allegations of wrongdoing.
- * Identify sources when feasible. The public is entitled to as much information as possible on a source's reliability.
- * Make certain that headlines, news teases and promotional material, photos, video, audio, graphics, sound bites and quotations do not misrepresent. They should not oversimplify or highlight incidents out of context.
- * Never plagiarize.
- * Tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience boldly, even when it is unpopular to do so.
- * Avoid stereotyping by race, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, geography, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance or social status.
- * Support the open exchange of views, even views they find repugnant.
- * Give voice to the voiceless; official and unofficial sources of information can be equally valid.
- * Distinguish between advocacy and news reporting. Analysis and commentary should be labeled and not misrepresent fact or context.
- * Recognize a special obligation to ensure that the public's business is conducted in the open and that government records are open to inspection.

MINIMIZE HARM

Ethical journalists treat sources, subjects and colleagues as human beings deserving of respect. Journalists should:

- * Show compassion to those who may be affected adversely by news coverage. Use special sensitivity when dealing with children and inexperienced sources or subjects.
- * Be sensitive when seeking or using interviews or photographs of those affected by tragedy or grief.
- * Recognize that gathering and reporting information may cause harm or discomfort. Pursuit of the news is not a license for arrogance.
- * Recognize that private people have a greater right to control information about themselves than do public officials and others who seek power, influence or attention. Only an overriding public need can justify intrusion into anyone's privacy.
- * Show good taste. Avoid pandering to lurid curiosity.

ACT INDEPENDENTLY

Journalists should be free of obligation to any interests other than the public's right to know. Journalists should:

- * Avoid conflict of interest, real or perceived.
- * Remain free of associations and activities that may compromise integrity or damage credibility.
- * Refuse gifts, favors, fees, free travel and special treatment, and shun secondary employment, political involvement, public office and service in community organizations if they compromise journalistic integrity.
- * Disclose unavoidable conflicts.
- * Be vigilant and courageous about holding those with power accountable.
- * Deny favored treatment to advertisers and special interests and resist their pressure to influence news coverage.
- * Be wary of sources offering information for favors or money; avoid bidding for news.

BE ACCOUNTABLE

Journalists are accountable to their readers, listeners, viewers and each other. Journalists should:

- * Clarify and explain news coverage and invited dialogue with the public over journalistic conduct.
- * Encourage the public to voice grievances against the news media.
- * Admit mistakes and correct them promptly.
- * Expose unethical practices of journalists and the news media.
- * Abide by the same high standards to which they would hold others.

What Makes the Public Pay Attention?

There seem to be five principal elements which make the public pay attention. These forces work together and against each other to provide the excitement and satisfaction we find in interesting news.

Information. The audience hungers for *specific* information. The more concrete and detailed the information, the more it will interest the public who delight in facts, statistics and brief quotations. Precise descriptions which satisfy the public's curiosity and give the impression of authority and provide the public with information they can pass on to someone else. The media must satisfy the public's appetite for specifics but media should also be responsible and make sure the specifics are accurate and used in an appropriate context.

Significance. The audience wants to know the meaning of the information they receive and how it affects them. They are particularly interested when media reveal surprising connections between pieces of information. These connections make the biggest impact when the public recognizes the significance of a connection they felt but had not articulated themselves.

People. Audiences want to see people, hear them talk, watch them in dramatic action and reaction with other people. They like to see anecdotes, the little scenes in which people reveal both themselves and the subject. Audiences want to meet people with whom they can identify and often they become, for a few moments, the person on the news and so extend their experiences by living another life. Audiences also enjoy a strong sense of place and time; they like to see the people they hear about in their world -- to be shown as well as told.

Order. Audiences enjoy writing which has a firmly built structure and provides them with a sense of order. Reading is satisfying because, as Frost said of poetry, it provides "a momentary stay against confusion." Writing gives shape to experience. Readers want writing to have resolution, a sense of completion. Above all, an audience's questions must be anticipated and answered in a well-made piece of writing.

Voice. People respond to the voice of media, one individual speaking to another individual. Audiences pay attention to a voice which has authority, concern and energy.

Taken from English Journal, May 1979.

The Qualities of Good Writing

**This piece is similar to the previous one but with a few changes and so is worth reading for the conciseness of the points it makes.

Meaning. There must be content in an effective piece of news. It must add up to something. This is the most important element in good newscasting, but although it must be listed first it is often discovered last through the process of providing news.

Authority. Good news is filled with specific, honest information. The audience is persuaded through authoritative information that the journalist knows the subject.

Voice. Good news is marked by an individual voice. The media persons voice may be the most significant element in distinguishing memorable news from good news.

Development. The journalist satisfies the audiences hunger for information. The beginning journalist almost always overestimates the audiences hunger for language and underestimates the audiences hunger for information.

Design. A good piece of news is elegant in the mathematical sense. It has form, structure, order, focus and coherence. It gives the audience a sense of completeness.

Clarity. Creating good news is marked by a simplicity which is appropriate to the subject. The media person has searched for and found the right word, the effective verb, the clarifying phrase. The journalist has removed himself/herself so that the intended receiver of the news sees through the journalist's style to the subject, which is clarified and simplified.

Process of Gathering News

* **Who is the audience?** Determine the audience, which will in turn determine the subject of the story, what points it covers, and how it is written.

* **Who will be your sources?** Information has to come from people or documents, not "what everyone knows" or what you think. Who will be the best source of information for the subject of the story? Who will be most knowledgeable and credible? What documents are available to back up what the sources say?

* **Ask yourself "Why is this person lying to me?"** While no one may deliberately lie to you, they may be telling you only part of the truth, or the truth from their perspective because they have a particular idea that they want to get across or an agenda that they want to put forward.

* **What is the purpose of the story?** Is it to inform the readers, challenge the sources, give a preview, review the course of events? This will determine how it is written and how the information is used.

* **There is no such thing as news.** Long before the newspaper hits the street, or your story hits the 6:00 news, people will already know the facts. What will your story add to the discussion? Will it be an analysis piece? Will it put the subject in an historical context? Will it provide commentary from the people affected by the subject?

What to Write or Broadcast About?

One of the most significant challenges to the student journalist is deciding what to write or report about. Below are several topics covered in previous Youth & Government media stories. Some stories have appeared consistently over the years, while others were good ideas that only made it once. This list is not even close to exhaustive -- don't let this limit your creativity.

- *Governor's Ball
- * Delegation Meetings
- *Leadership Training
- *Downtown Olympia and the surrounding area
- *Op/Ed pieces on specific bills or court cases (either pro or con)
- *Hotel and Capitol staff profile
- *News features from "the real world"
- *Officer/Appointed Official profile
- *Delegation profile
- *Restaurant Reviews
- *Movie Reviews
- *Music Reviews
- *Book Reviews
- *Committees
- *Opening Session
- *Closing Session
- *Youth Governors Platforms/News Conferences
- *YMCA History
- *OpEd (must be cleared with student leaders and must appear consistently)
- *Session Recap and Officer Interviews
- *Student Representatives on Board of Directors Profile
- *Student Representative on Program Committee Profile
- *"Coming Up Tomorrow at Youth & Government"
- *National Affairs Conference Profile
- *Info for Youth & Government Rookies
- *Advisor Profile
- *Page Program
- *Lead Area Advisors Profiles
- *Youth & Government Traditions (red vines, practice sessions, bowling)
- *Options for Off-Site Evening Activities (Friday evening)
- *Resources Available to Delegates
- *Big Delegations vs. Small Delegations
- *Top 10 Lists/In and Out Lists
- *Status of Bills
- *Secretary of State and Attorney General Offices
- *General conference information that readers will want to know
- * Legislative, Lobbyist, Cabinet, Media and Page Program Proceeding

Steps to Interviewing

I. DECIDE ON PURPOSE

- * To report the facts
- * To feature

II. DEVELOP QUESTIONS

- * Ask questions, don't make statements
- * Keep questions simple but avoid yes/no
- * Remain neutral
- * Ask only one question at a time
- * If working on a pro/con piece, ask pro questions first
- * Develop questions that require some thought
- * Ask more than you think necessary
- * Ask questions in a logical order
 - fact to opinion
 - general to specific
 - easy to difficult

III. SCHEDULE AN APPOINTMENT

- * Identify yourself
- * Decide on appropriate place and time
- * Be prompt and polite

IV. THE INTERVIEW

- * Note reactions of person you are interviewing
- * Note surroundings (if interesting or important)
- * Notice direction of interview
 - keep on track or go where it takes you
- * Don't be nervous or uncomfortable
- * Take accurate notes
 - ask to make certain you understand
 - Cardinal Sin of reporting - misquoting people - quotes must be verbatim
 - Check numbers, names, titles & spellings

V. SIX WAYS TO ASK QUESTIONS

1. Compare/Contrast - ask for similarities or differences
2. Example/Illustration - ask for description
3. Criticism - ask about positive first, then be tactful
4. Discussion - ask for detailed explanation
5. Definition - ask for definition
6. Observation - ask for thoughts, feelings, beliefs

Question Starters

FACTS

| | |
|----------|-----------|
| name | locate |
| define | relate |
| memorize | know |
| repeat | match |
| record | state |
| list | write |
| recall | recognize |

COMPREHENSION

| | |
|---------------|-----------|
| discuss | identify |
| describe | infer |
| estimate | report |
| give examples | review |
| explain | summarize |
| restate | predict |
| express | draw |

APPLICATION

| | |
|-------------|------------|
| translate | practice |
| interpret | illustrate |
| apply | operate |
| use | shop |
| employ | sketch |
| dramatize | schedule |
| demonstrate | solve |
| | show |

ANALYSIS

| | |
|---------------|-----------|
| classify | contrast |
| distinguish | diagram |
| sort | inspect |
| categorize | debate |
| differentiate | inventory |
| calculate | question |
| experiment | relate |
| compare | examine |
| test | criticize |
| solve | |

SYNTHESIS

| | |
|-----------|-----------|
| compose | construct |
| plan | collect |
| propose | set up |
| create | develop |
| design | organize |
| formulate | manage |
| arrange | produce |
| assemble | revise |
| prepare | originate |

EVALUATION

| | |
|----------|-----------|
| appraise | score |
| evaluate | select |
| rate | assess |
| value | estimate |
| measure | justify |
| revise | discuss |
| decide | debate |
| choose | recommend |

Steps to Creating a Story

I. DECIDE WHAT KIND OF STORY IT IS!

II. PLAN IT

- * Decide main points
- * Decide on organization
 - inverted pyramid
 - lead plus relevant facts
 - chronological
 - narrative
 - other??
- * What is the point of the story?
- * What is the central idea?
- * What is the appropriate focus for emphasis?

III. CREATE A LEAD

- * Lead - first paragraph of a story
- * Must attract peoples attention
- * Quick round-up of major facts of a story -- as short as possible

IV. SIX TYPES OF LEADS AND THEIR USES

1. **Summary of "5 W's"**
 - Who, what, where, when, why
 - Don't forget "how" - important for any analysis
 - list most important facts
 - *use when creating news*
2. **Quotation**
 - interesting, attention-grabber
 - *use when creating feature news*
3. **Punch or astonisher**
 - shocking statement or fact
 - *use when reporting tragedies or disasters*
4. **Contrast**
 - link two seemingly separate events or ideas
 - *use in pure analysis - seldom used*

5. **Question**
 - ask question that makes audience want to find answer
 - *use in feature news creation*
6. **Descriptive or Narrative**
 - describe background of an event
 - *use in feature news creation*

V. KEEP THESE POINTS IN MIND WHEN CREATING YOUR LEAD

- * Make it concise
- * Use simple sentences
- * Use strong verbs
- * Don't begin with "When" or "Where"
- * Don use cliches
- * **BE CREATIVE - TRY TO DO SOMETHING THAT HAS NOT BEEN DONE BEFORE!!**

VI. TYPES OF STORIES

- * News Stories - fact-based stories
- * Human Interest Stories/Features - created in the style of short fiction
- * Editorials - statement that gives personal views or tries to persuade audience

VII. FIVE TYPES OF FEATURE STORIES

1. Human Interest - people and their troubles or successes
2. Personality - semi-biographical
3. Historical - past related to present
4. Explanatory - explain how/why something has happened
4. Analytical - dissect a problem

An Approach to Style

1. Place yourself in the background.
2. Work from a suitable design.
3. Create with nouns and verbs.
4. Revise and rewrite.
5. Do not overwrite.
6. Do not overstate.
7. Avoid the use of qualifiers.
8. Do not affect a breezy manner.
9. Be creative.
10. Do not explain too much.
11. Have fun creating your story.
12. Make sure the audience knows who is "speaking".
13. Avoid fancy words.
14. Do not use dialect unless your ear is good.
15. Be clear.
16. Do not inject opinion (unless the piece is an editorial or OpEd).
17. Use figures of speech sparingly.
18. Do not take shortcuts at the cost of clarity.
19. Avoid foreign languages.
20. Prefer the standard to the offbeat.

Modified from The Elements of Style by William Strunk and E.B. White

How to Avoid a Sighing Editor

I. AVOID USING UNNECESSARY WORDS

* in excess of = **more than**

* in order to = **to**

* during the time that = **while**

* in the near future = **soon**

* for the purpose of = **for**

* in addition to = **also**

* in the vicinity of = **near**

VIII. AVOID "-ING" WORDS

- * The orchestra will be playing for the dance -- The orchestra will play . . .
- * Hearing the news, Sue rushed to tell her mother -- Sue heard the news and . . .

IX. AVOID INACCURACIES & EXAGGERATION

- * His resignation was the result of ill health.
(Death could be a result of ill health but could a resignation?)
- * The president appointed a committee that, hopefully, will raise the money.
(Who hopes - the president, the committee or someone else?)

X. AVOID PASSIVE VOICE

- * The program was planned by the students. -- The students planned . . .
- * The refreshments were enjoyed by the students. -- The students enjoyed . . .

Checklist for Stories

1. Pre-write -- brainstorm and plan the story.
2. Obtain Editorial Approval.
3. Develop ideas and identify angles, actors, issues and importance.
4. Write down questions you need to have answered.
5. Identify contacts and make appointments for interviews.
6. Research -- read, interview, observe, etc.
(including documentation and notes, especially for quotes)
7. Plan the story -- write an outline and then write the story.
8. Reread the story -- have a friend or colleague read, as well.
9. Revise the story -- take a fresh look at your product. Is it the best it can be?
10. Re-write the story -- make drastic changes now (this is the hardest part).
11. Type up the story.
12. Print and proofread -- include style and format in proofreading.
Have a friend or colleague proofread, as well.
13. Make corrections and get ready to report it!

OTHER ISSUES TO CONSIDER WHEN PROOFREADING THE STORY

- * **Lead** -- is it short, to the point, and include the relevant information about the story?

* **Is there a nut graph** -- have I written a specific paragraph in the story that explains the basic theme of the story, summarizing all the relevant issues?

* **Sources** -- is the information from verified sources? Did I put all the facts "into someone's mouth?"

* **Accuracy** -- have the facts been checked? Did I check the numbers I used, and spellings of names and unfamiliar titles or words? Are the quotes accurate?

* **Completeness** -- have I answered all the questions that a reader may have about this subject, or the people about whom I have written?

* **Clarity** -- have I explained complex issues? Is there any confusion about timelines or definitions that have been eliminated?