

FROM  
JOURNALISTS  
TO  
JOURNALISTS

2007

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**T**he British Council would like to use the opportunity to thank those whose input made the printing of this unique book possible. Given the pressing deadlines, existing borders between the team of journalists from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, and the limited means of communication, we are amazed with this creative, hands-on product they have produced. Certainly this would not have been achieved without their genuine dedication and enthusiasm, for which British Council would like to express its gratitude. They reassured us and many others in the possibility of team work across the borders and the value of the regional cooperation.

These efforts were made possible by the generous financial support of the British Government and the UNDP Office in Armenia. We would like to thank them not only for their financial contribution but also for the open and considerate approach, which gave us the flexibility of readjusting the activities upon necessity and maximising the impact.

We also want to thank other organisations, who gladly offered their professional support and advice during the implementation of the project and the publication of this book. The list includes but is not limited to: Internews office in Armenia, IREX office in Armenia, "International Centre for Human Development" Armenian NGO, Georgian Institute for Public Affairs and its Caucasus School of Journalism and Media Management, American journalism trainers Paul Quinn-Judge, Margaret Freaney and Stephanie Gruner, International Centre for Journalists' Knight International Journalism Fellowships Program.

Throughout this project, the spirit of commitment and cooperation was amazing and inspiring, which contributed to the overall success of the project.

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# JOURNALISTS HANDBOOK

## FOREWORD

**C**ooperation or opposition - this is the dilemma that authorities and the media often face in regard to the enlightenment of the public about the government activities, especially when speaking about sensitive issues. Both parties appreciate the role of media in shaping opinions and attitudes of the society. Government officials recognise the power of media in building public trust towards their activities. At the same time they acknowledge that the media is a leading force for keeping officials accountable through monitoring government performance, ensuring transparency of their activities and exposing abuses. In the meantime, the media is an essential tool for providing a platform through which ordinary citizens can voice their opinions, discuss public issues and raise their concerns.

Given the crucial role that the media plays in democratic societies, the question of the quality of the media outlets in presenting accurate, fair and comprehensive information becomes very essential.

In April 2006, British Council launched a project entitled "Raising Role of Media in Monitoring Government Programmes", the aim of which is to develop the skills of mass media representatives in monitoring government programmes and enhancing effective cooperation between the media and the public officials. The Project is implemented in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia and is funded by the British Government. In Armenia, the project is co-funded by the UNDP Office in Yerevan within the framework of its Project entitled "Strengthening Awareness and Response in Exposure of Corruption in Armenia". In Georgia, the project is implemented in partnership with the Caucasus School of Journalism and Media Management, GIPA, with in-kind contributions from the Knight International Press Fellowship programme.

The project started with a study visit to London by 30 journalists from the three South Caucasus countries, during which they were familiarised with the experience of British journalists on monitoring government programmes, got acquainted with the European standards of analysing and reporting the news, visited British leading media outlets, like BBC, CNBC, Reuters, Dow Jones, The Sun, News of the World, etc. The visit was organised by Public Administration International, in cooperation with Irving International.

This project is unique by the fact that it empowered the team of the journalists to cascade down their experience and the knowledge gained in the UK to their colleagues in their respective countries. They organised a series of training programmes as well as summarised their experience in a book, which is an exceptional gift from journalists to journalists.

We express hope that both the local and regional networks established through this project will maintain and enlarge in future and that we will see many more journalists willing to work in line with internationally accepted professional and moral standards.

**British Council**

# MESSAGE FROM JOURNALISTS TO JOURNALISTS

Dear Colleagues,

Our group of journalists is happy to present you with this handbook, which is one of the achievements of the Project "Raising the Role of the Media in Monitoring Government Programmes".

In the middle of July of 2006, within the framework of the above mentioned project, we, 30 practising journalists from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, met in London. We were there to discuss with our British colleagues the problems of modern journalism within the context of monitoring activities of government structures and organisations in the South Caucasus and in the wider world.

At the request of the British Council, the British organisation Public Administration International (PAI) took care of all the arrangements during our visit in London. They were able to accommodate almost all the requests from our group of journalists. The study programme was divided into two parts - theoretical and practical. The lead trainers of the programme were two very experienced British professional journalists - Keith Hayes and Graham Addicott. Throughout our programme, our relationship was not of a traditional professor-student type, but rather of colleagues who want to learn from each other as much as possible. This may be why our discussions of current problems in modern journalism were almost always carried out in a lively interactive atmosphere. By the end of the training programme, our friends-professors admitted that they had learned a lot from us, which they will use in their future work. Each day we had visits from representatives of various organisations, including journalists, heads of NGOs, former press secretaries of government departments and people who are directly dealing with problems in the South Caucasus. They answered all of our questions in a frank and friendly manner and at the same time enquired about the situation in different spheres in our countries.

The practical part of the programme included visits to leading media outlets in the UK, including the BBC, Reuters and Dow Jones and national newspapers such as the News of the World. In these editorial offices we had a wonderful opportunity to see how their work was organised in practice and to compare it with the situation in our countries.

Another, no less important objective of the programme was the creation of conditions for future cooperation between journalists from the three South Caucasus countries. Practical exercises by groups of 3 journalists, each representing their respective country, proved this cooperation to be completely possible. This exercise provided us with an opportunity for intensive cooperation. We learned more about each other, shared the problems existing in each country, completed the exercise together and wrote materials. Many of the participants became friends and this friendship continues till today.

The knowledge obtained during the study visit soon proved to be useful when we were given an opportunity to pass it on to colleagues on our return home. To start with, similar training manuals were developed according to the specifications of each country, so that training programmes in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia were conducted within a similar framework. Then a series of training programmes was held for journalists from regional media outlets, where we ourselves acted as trainers. As a result, hundreds of journalists from the South Caucasus became active participants in a professional network created out of our UK experience. But we do not consider this enough. We think that as many journalists as possible - beginners and experienced - must adhere to international standards of journalism. This book is one of the means of passing this knowledge to our colleagues.

This book is unique in itself in having been developed by journalists for journalists. All three countries worked in parallel on this book. Every detail of the book was mutually agreed. This is thus a joint work of many professional journalists from the South Caucasus. It may not reflect how things actually are at present because we want to show how we would like to see journalism and journalists in our countries. This is also an attempt to put together the knowledge that we obtained during our relationship with each other and with our British colleagues. This is proof, if such is needed, that it is possible to forget about borders, conflicts and prejudices and do good work together. As this experience shows, only one thing is needed for that - a clear intention, and our intention is a very important one - to share experience, to pass on knowledge, to enlighten.

# 1 CHAPTER

# PRINCIPLES OF JOURNALISM

Self evidently, journalism in each country in the world has its own specific problems and tasks, but many of them are common. Media outlets in the countries of South Caucasus are part of the world media. Therefore, the principles of world journalism are very important for Armenian, Azeri and Georgian journalists.

## Nine Principles

In 1997, a group of influential American journalists, concerned about adverse pressures and declining public trust in the news media, formed the Committee of Concerned Journalists. During the next several years, the committee conducted a series of meetings, seminars, and surveys of journalists, editors and readers. More than 3000 people took part in these discussions. Drawing on that effort, they defined nine basic principles for journalism in today's world. They are:

1. Journalism's first obligation is to the truth.
2. Its first loyalty is to citizens.
3. Its essence is a discipline of verification.
4. Its practitioners must maintain an independence from those they cover.
5. It must serve as an independent monitor of power.
6. It must provide a forum for public criticism and compromise.
7. It must strive to make the significant interesting and relevant.
8. It must keep the news comprehensive and proportional.
9. Its practitioners must be allowed to exercise their personal conscience.

Why these nine? Some readers will think items are missing here. Where is fairness? Where is balance? After synthesizing what we learned, it became clear that a number of familiar and even useful ideas - including fairness and balance - are too vague to rise to the level of essential elements of the profession. Others may say this list is nothing new. On the contrary, we discovered that many ideas about the main elements of journalism are wrapped in myth and misconception. The notion that journalists should be protected by a wall between business and news is one myth. That independence requires journalists to be neutral is another. The concept of objectivity has been so mangled it is now usually used to describe the very problem it was conceived to correct. There is probably nothing like objective journalism. Objective jour-

nalism - completely independent of a creator - is a myth. Like all human beings, journalists have prejudices and biases. But the professional journalist knows how to use the standards of his or her profession to overcome those prejudices and biases. The journalist aims at balance rather than objectivity.

This is not the first time that the way we get news has gone through momentous changes. It has happened each time there is a period of significant, social, economic, and technological change. It is occurring now with the advent of cable followed by the Internet. However, the collision this time may be more dramatic. For the first time in history, the news is increasingly produced by companies outside journalism, and this new economic organization is important. We are facing the possibility that independent news will be replaced by self-interested commercialism posing as news. If that occurs, we will lose the press as an independent institution, free to monitor the other powerful forces and institutions in society.

In this new century, one of the most profound questions for democratic society is whether an independent press survives. The answer will depend on whether journalists have the clarity and conviction to articulate what an independent press means, and whether, as citizens, the rest of us care.

## What is truth?

When discussing journalism, the issues of objectivity and truth are invariably raised. What is objectivity or truth? What does it look like? Religions have their own truths. But which religion is most truthful? Philosophers also have their own truths; every philosophy has offered its own theory of truth. So, how can journalists figure out, what is the truth?

In journalistic practice, a truth should be perceived rather as precision of facts. Therefore it is important to distinguish between fact and opinion.

## What is a fact?

*"Fact: A thing that has actually happened or is true; a thing that has been or is." (Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary)*

Journalism's first responsibility is to report facts to its readers, viewers

or listeners. A news organization may offer analysis of the news and may also present opinion, either its own or that of commentators. But facts are a journalist's first priority. For that reason, every journalist must begin with a clear, disciplined understanding of what is fact, what is analysis, and what is opinion, and what makes each different from the others. Facts in a news story can be an event or action or circumstance that the reporter witnessed and is certain of, a statement made to or available to the reporter or something which is common knowledge (although in this case the journalist must be very careful).

The majority of facts in most news stories are in the second category - information supplied to the reporter by someone else - that is, a source. Remember, the fact is that SOMEONE said SOMETHING. What he or she said may be accurate, or it may not. If the police say two persons were hurt in an accident, you KNOW what the police said, but you DON'T know that two people were hurt, unless you went to the scene and saw for yourself.

The journalist's job is to come as close to verified truth as possible. That means we have to do more than just report accurately what someone has said. We also evaluate the source. Was the source an eyewitness? Or is the information second-hand or fifth-hand? Is the source a neutral observer or does he or she have a reason to omit or twist information?

Not only should you evaluate the source; you should make it possible for readers to do so too. That is why sources should be named, as a general rule, unless there is a strong and unavoidable reason to withhold someone's identity. You should indicate why a source may be credible or if the source may have a partisan viewpoint. In this way, without going beyond the facts, you show the readers why they should believe (or possibly doubt) the statements you have reported. This makes your story more credible. When a statement expresses one side of an issue that is in dispute, you must make every effort to present the opposite side to your readers as well.

Analysis, according to the dictionary, means "separating or breaking up of any whole into its parts so as to find out their nature, proportion, function, relationship, etc... the tracing of things to their source."

Note that analysis is based on fact. You use your knowledge and judgment in making the connections or explanations, but the material you present is still factual. Fact and analysis may often be combined in

news stories (when an article is heavily analytical, it may be labelled "analysis" or "news analysis"). But in the tradition of fact-based journalism, opinion is kept separate from news reports.

## What is an opinion?

Opinion is a statement of something that is believed, not something that is known to be true. The most common types of opinion are editorials and columns. An editorial is an article or essay expressing the newspaper's point of view on a specific subject. It can be written by the editor-in-chief or another, usually senior, staff journalist. An opinion column is a signed article reflecting the views of its author, either a staff or non-staff writer or a non-staff expert. A professional media outlet labels its opinion. It enables customers (readers, viewers) easily to identify facts and opinions. It expresses preference, approval or disapproval. Reporters are expected strictly to avoid expressing their opinions in news articles. That doesn't mean only avoiding an explicit statement of what you think about the subject of your story. You should also avoid using words that imply an opinion.

The standard for factual accuracy remains the same, whether you are writing editorials or commentaries or news stories. Respect for facts is what makes the difference between opinion journalism and propaganda. Any statement of fact must be careful, accurate and verifiable. Facts must not be used to mislead, for example, by reporting certain facts and leaving out others. The reader should be able to trust facts reported in the newspaper, no matter what page they are published on.

## What is the news?

ALL stories should include what is sometimes called '5-W-H'.

That is: **What**, **Where**, **When**, **Who**, **Why** and **How**.

To elaborate: **What** is happening. **Where** is it happening? **When** did it happen? **Who** is involved? **Why** is it happening & **How** has it come about?

ALL news stories should try to answer ALL these questions.

News is generally categorised as being HARD or SOFT. "Hard news" is stories about events or conflicts that have just happened or are about to happen, such as crimes, fires, meetings, demonstrations, speeches,

court cases. They are reported as an account of what happened, why it happened and how the audience is affected. "Soft news" is stories which are intended to entertain or inform. There is often an emphasis on human interest or novelty. They may focus on people, places or issues that affect the life of members of the audience.

News has been described as "the first rough draft of history" and "the immediate, the important, the things that have an impact on our lives". There are obviously many different types of news stories, but in simple terms, most of them will fit into the following categories:

**PROXIMITY & RELEVANCE.** For a story to have impact it should be relevant and one of the key things to make it relevant is that it has proximity. Things that happen nearby are more likely to interest us than things that happen a long way away. The greater the effect something has on viewers lives, their income or emotions, the more important an item will appear to them.

**IMMEDIACY.** News is what is happening now. What happened yesterday is 'dead' unless there is something new to say. News is only news while it is NEW.

**INTEREST.** News should make you sit up and take notice. Stories must have a wide appeal or most of the audience will switch off. The skill of the journalist is to draw out the relevance and present it clearly, factually and in an interesting way. The audience will find out what it needs to know as well as what it wants to know.

**DRAMA.** Violent crimes, car chases, amazing rescues are the things that popular movies are made of. The danger, adventure and conflict attract most people's attention.

**ENTERTAINMENT.** Although it depends on the style of the programme, many news professionals now feel that it is possible to entertain as well as inform. The idea of leaving the audience smiling with a lighter piece of news at the end of a bulletin (often called the "and finally") is now popular with many broadcasters.

**SPECIAL INTEREST.** These are stories that appeal to people's specific interests, such as science, business or religion, or that appeal to certain groups such as women, minorities, disabled people etc.

**ANALYSIS.** Stories which explain the meaning of events.

## What is covered?

There are five major segments of media coverage: government, business, unions, non-government organizations and individuals. Any issue usually represents a mixture of those segments. In addition, each media outlet can have its own special targets, for example, the newspaper Caspian Business News mostly covers regional business and economic news related to the oil and gas sector as well as the banking sector. However, readers also get political, social, sport and entertainment news in the same paper.

## What is professionalism for journalists?

Professional journalism should be factual, honest, fair, complete and consistent.

Being factual means giving preference to facts over opinion in the preparation of news stories. It also means being precise, accurate and authentic - getting the facts right, but also getting the right facts.

Being honest means being free from fraud and deception. Bending facts must never be tolerated, and errors must never go uncorrected.

Being fair means recognizing and controlling self-interest, prejudices or favouritism. Bias must never be permitted to influence reporting of the news.

Being complete means providing background, context, balance and perspective, capturing the tone, language, experiences and emotions.

Being consistent means showing steady conformity to the standards of the journalistic profession.

### Practical advice on news making

- Write only if you have something to say.
- Write in the same way as you speak - clear and comprehensive for everybody.
- Use adjectives and adverbs reasonably and sparingly.
- Write the article so that the reader understands it on the first reading.
- Show, do not tell.
- Avoid long, complicated sentences.

- Use words which you know the meaning of.
- Never give the editor material which, in your opinion, still needs polishing.
- In news reports, the main idea must be expressed in the first paragraph. In material written in the style of an article, the main idea should be presented no later than in the fifth or sixth paragraph.
- Standard paragraphs are made of three-four sentences, that is, the paragraph is no more than 40-50 words.
- Use words of action. They make the material active and emotional.
- Journalism is an art of selection. Take out unnecessary material and leave only the best, building the news according to its level of importance. This is one of the key elements of professionalism.

## Useful information

The international declaration adopted by the 1954 World Congress of the International Federation of Journalists and amended by the 1986 World Congress is widely proclaimed as a standard of professional conduct for journalists engaged in gathering, transmitting, disseminating and commenting on news and information. It runs as follows:

1. Respect for truth and for the right of the public to truth is the first duty of the journalist.
2. In pursuance of this duty, the journalist shall at all times defend the principles of freedom in the honest collection and publication of news, and of the right to fair comment and criticism.
3. The journalist shall report only in accordance with facts of which he/she knows the origin. The journalist shall not suppress essential information or falsify documents.
4. The journalist shall only use fair methods to obtain news, photographs and documents.
5. The journalist shall do the utmost to rectify any published information which is found to be harmfully inaccurate.
6. The journalist shall observe professional secrecy regarding the source of information obtained in confidence.

7. The journalist shall be alert to the danger of discrimination being furthered by media, and shall do the utmost to avoid facilitating such discrimination based on, among other things, race, gender, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinions, and national or social origins.
8. The journalist shall regard as grave professional offenses the following: plagiarism; malicious misinterpretation; calumny; libel; slander; unfounded accusations; acceptance of a bribe in any form in consideration of either publication or suppression.
9. Journalists worthy of the name shall deem it their duty to observe faithfully the principles stated above. Within the general law of each country the journalist shall recognize in professional matters the jurisdiction of colleagues only, to the exclusion of any kind of interference by governments or others.

**References:**

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# 2 CHAPTER

## ETHICS OF JOURNALISM

In most countries in the modern world there are journalism organizations which unite professionals under the same ethical approach. These press clubs, unions and other organizations usually prepare the code of ethics for all their members. These codes are usually of a recommended and not obligatory nature. The situation is different in large media outlets, which have their own code of ethics and which is obligatory for all journalists and editors who work there. As with the principles of journalism, ethical norms in different countries and media outlets can show some differences, but most of them are common. This means that journalists around the world belong to one family, where each member learns everything possible from one another.

The *Code of Ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ)* is produced by the large international association of journalists that has thousands of members around the world. This Code is very typical of many journalism organizations. The Code is voluntarily embraced by thousands of writers, editors and other news professionals. The present version of the code was adopted at the 1996 SPJ National Convention, after months of study and debate among the Society's members. The key elements of this code are as follows.

## 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 specialities 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 behaviour 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 whenever feasible. The public is entitled to as much information as possible on sources' reliability.
- Always question sources' motives before promising anonymity. Clarify conditions attached to any promise made in exchange for information. Keep promises.
- 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 high-light incidents out of context.
- Never distort the content of news photos or video. Image enhancement for technical clarity is always permissible. Label montages and photo illustrations.
- Avoid misleading re-enactments or staged news events. If re-enactment is necessary to tell a story, label it.
- Avoid undercover or other surreptitious methods of gathering information except when traditional open methods will not yield information vital to the public. Use of such methods should be explained as part of the story.
- Never plagiarize.
- Tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience boldly, even when it is unpopular to do so.
- Examine their own cultural values and avoid imposing those values on others.
- 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 labelled and not misrepresent fact or context.
- Distinguish news from advertising and shun hybrids that blur the lines between the two.

- 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 for 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.
- Be cautious about identifying juvenile suspects or victims of sex crimes.
- Be judicious about naming criminal suspects before the formal filing of charges.
- Balance a criminal suspect's fair trial rights with the public's right to be informed.

## Act Independently

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

Journalists should:

- Avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived.
- Remain free of associations and activities that may compromise integrity or damage credibility.

- Refuse gifts, favours, 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 favoured treatment to advertisers and special interests and resist their pressure to influence news coverage.
- Be wary of sources offering information for favours 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 invite 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 hold others.

## Journalism Ethics in the South Caucasus

Journalism organizations in the countries of the South Caucasus have similar codes to the above. There are also some media outlets that have their own codes. The first national medium in **Armenia** to publish its norms of professional conduct was the leading "*Aravot*" daily newspaper. On September 8, 2005 in a front page editorial, "*Aravot*" published its Code of Professional Ethics. This document was developed by the creative staff of the daily and adopted by consensus on September 6. The free-lance correspondents of the newspaper also expressed their consent to these norms of professional conduct.

The Code of Ethics of the "*Aravot*" daily has just 8 clauses, stipulating in particular:

- to clearly distinguish between fact and opinion;
- to ensure accuracy and objectivity in publication;
- to provide the right to respond by people criticized or accused in the newspaper;
- to avoid insult and libel;
- not to criticize other media or journalists on the pages of "Aravot" and not to respond to criticism of the latter;
- to observe the confidentiality of information sources;
- not to publish information about the private lives of people, unless it refers to the revenues of officials or facts of corruption.

In addition, the Code states that "Aravot" does not express the opinion of any political group, and the comment in the front page editorial is the personal opinion of an author, not reflecting the stance of the daily and not influencing the focus of other pieces.

In the recent history of **South Caucasus** countries, journalism organizations from all three countries have produced a united Code of Ethics. This was through the "Crossroads" TV programme, a corporate production of Internews Europe and the Internews offices based in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. The resulting "Crossroads" Code of Ethics is as follows:

"We, the representatives of independent television in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, have launched a project with the participation of each of our respective countries, and hereby declare our commitment to maintaining and upholding universally accepted norms of professionalism and journalistic ethics.

We will take into consideration the characteristics of our region, and take on the responsibility of viewers in each of our three countries, with the understanding that any imprudent word may offer a pretext for new conflict and human tragedy.

We accept the following principles as a basis for our cooperation:

- Tolerance: human, religious, national, and political;
- Mutual respect: for each other's nation, culture, history, and religion;
- Refusal to apply labels and expressions that insult national and human dignity;

- Use of restraint in the coverage of conflicts and other controversial issues;
- Incompatibility of the programme journalists' professional activities with direct participation in any military actions;
- Inadmissibility of preparing stories 'by someone's order';
- We will use television not only as a source of information, but with the aim to achieve peace and mutual understanding in our region."

In March 2001 the Independent Association of **Georgian** Journalists, a member of the International Federation of Journalists, prepared and adopted its Code of Journalistic Ethics. In this document all internationally recognized principles of the journalistic profession are taken into account.

In **Azerbaijan**, the Journalists' Trade Union prepared and published the following Code of Ethics:

1. Respect for truth and for the right of the public to truth is the first duty of the journalist.
2. In pursuance of this duty, the journalist shall at all times defend the principles of freedom in the honest collection and publication of news, and of the right to fair comment and criticism.
3. The journalist shall report only in accordance with facts of which he/she knows the origin. The journalist shall not suppress essential information or falsify documents.
4. Subject to the justification of over-riding consideration of public interest, a journalist shall do nothing which entails intrusion into private grief and distress.
5. The journalist shall do the utmost to rectify any published information which is found to be harmfully inaccurate.
6. The journalist shall observe professional secrecy regarding the source of information obtained in confidence.
7. The journalist shall be aware of the danger of discrimination being furthered by the media, and shall do the utmost to avoid facilitating such discrimination based on, among other things, race, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinions, and national or social origins.

8. The journalist shall regard as grave professional offences the following:
  - plagiarism;
  - malicious misrepresentation;
  - calumny, slander, libel, unfounded accusations;
  - the acceptance of a bribe in any form in consideration of either publication or suppression.
9. Journalists worthy of that name shall deem it their duty to observe faithfully the principles stated above. Within the general law of each country the journalist shall recognize in professional matters the jurisdiction of colleagues only, to the exclusion of every kind of interference by governments or others.

## Gathering the News

As can be seen, ethical norms in different countries are rather similar. But we must not forget the problems. Journalists may face many difficulties whilst gathering the information they need for their publications. This can happen with authorities, public officials, celebrities etc. In this situation, the journalist has to decide how best to get their sources to talk. The following advice is from the New York Times:

- We treat news sources fairly and professionally. We do not inquire pointlessly into someone's personal life. We do not threaten to damage uncooperative sources, nor do we promise favourable coverage in return for cooperation. We do not pay for interviews or unpublished documents: to do so would create an incentive for sources to falsify material and would cast into doubt the genuineness of much that we publish.
- Staff members and others on assignment for us should disclose their identity to people they cover, though they need not always announce their occupation when seeking information normally available to the public. Those working for us as journalists may not pose as anyone they are not - for example, police officers or lawyers.
- Critics and other writers who review performances or goods and services offered to the public may conceal their press identity, but they may not normally assert a false identity or affiliation. As an exception, restaurant critics may make reservations in false

names to avoid special treatment. For that same reason, restaurant critics and travel writers should conceal their affiliation.

TV journalists face other different ethical problems to print journalists. They have to decide what pictures to show if a topic is sensitive. If, for example, a soldier dies in battle, the journalist has to choose whether to show a close-up of that or not. The UK's BBC always follows the same ethical standard of never showing close-ups of deceased people. Neither do they show close-up shots of violence (clashes, hitting etc). Ultimately however, taking into account all the above-mentioned standards, every journalist must conduct himself or herself according to his or her personal principles. And, it is true that there are many journalists around the world who don't like any rule and feel free to work in any way they want. Everyone has the right to choose.



# 3 CHAPTER

## FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND MEDIA LAW

**F**reedom of expression, comprising the freedom to hold opinions and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers, is one of the essential foundations of a democratic society. It has been widely recognized as crucial for the enjoyment of other human rights. Without a broad guarantee of the right to freedom of expression protected by independent and impartial courts, there is no free country, there is no democracy.

## Freedom of information

Freedom of information is an integral part of freedom of expression. It is often referred to as the public's right to know and a right to access government-held (or official) information, and has been widely recognized by a number of international bodies with a mandate to promote and protect human rights. The right to access information is the key to democracy and development; it lays the foundation upon which to build good governance, transparency, accountability and participation, and to eliminate corruption. A good freedom of information regime builds a relationship of trust between the public and government, in which the public has the right to access and freely discuss official information, and government creates a favourable environment for an informed political debate and for involving the general public in shaping state policies and agendas that affect their lives.

The right to seek, receive and impart information is unique among all freedoms. It is an integral part of freedom of expression - one of the key human rights, which is the foundation of a democratic society, one of the basic conditions for progress and for the development of every individual. It is applicable not only to information or to ideas that are favourably received or regarded as inoffensive or as a matter of indifference, but also to those that offend, shock or disturb the state or any sector of the population. Such are the demands of pluralism, tolerance and broadmindedness, without which there is no democratic society.

At present media freedom is protected by many constitutions and by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). Freedom of the media is an integral part of freedom of expression. The ECtHR has observed that the principles applicable to freedom of expression are of particular importance to the media. The media receives particularly strong protection because it has a duty to impart, in a manner consistent with its obligations and responsibilities, information and ideas on all matters of public interest. The press plays a pre-eminent role in a state governed by the rule of law.

Freedom to impart information and ideas is of the greatest importance for a democratic political process. Meaningful free elections are not possible in the absence of this freedom. Moreover, a full exercise of this freedom allows for criticism of the government, which is the main indicator of democratic governance. The freedom to criticize the officials is incumbent on the press: to impart information and ideas on political issues, as on those in other areas of public concern. Not only does the press have the task of imparting such information and ideas, the public also has a right to receive them. In order for the media to perform all the functions outlined above, governments not only have an obligation to abstain from interference, but also to promote pluralism of the media, through the creation of a favourable economic and legal climate.

### The role of the media

Most people rely on the media to keep themselves informed about important developments and events, especially because the media closely follow parliamentary sessions and have access to court trials. Any interference with the right of journalists to seek, receive and impart information is, therefore, an interference with the public's right to know. However, the media do not have a special right to information; rather it is a right pertaining to all people. Nevertheless, the media are key players in exercising this right. It is a powerful tool for journalists who are developing stories that require government information.

The media are a vital force in the democratic system of checks and balances because they take a leading role in shaping public opinion. They help expose corruption and malpractice. Only with unobstructed access to government-held information can the media stimulate political debate and function as a communication channel between the authorities and the public. Where freedom of information laws cover not only government in the narrow sense but also other actors performing public functions, the media will help to ensure accountability of such other actors as private businesses and civil society institutions. It is a general principle that everyone should have information made available to them in a speedy manner. This is particularly important to the media as it enables them to provide timely coverage of issues in the public interest, and thus perform their role of a public "watchdog" in a democratic society, scrutinize government activities and expose wrongdoing and corruption.

An advanced freedom of information regime, with a comprehensive freedom of information law at its core, provides a number of benefits to society and government by:

- underpinning all other human rights;
- supporting people-centred policy making and its effective implementation;
- building public trust in government;
- challenging corruption;
- making electoral democracy meaningful;
- boosting media capacity;
- creating a transparent and competitive economic environment and increasing accountability of private actors.

Information is the lifeblood of the media and effective laws on access to information are crucial to their ability to perform their role as the "defenders of public interest" in a democratic society. The media should therefore play a full role in the adoption and implementation the process of the law, and, once implemented, they should be among the primary users of the law. In a "closed" environment, with persisting state control over the media, journalists often rely on personal luck and leaks of information or depend on press releases and voluntary disclosures by the very people they are seeking to investigate. The lack of access to information also leaves journalists open to government allegations that their stories are inaccurate and reliant on unverified information instead of facts.

## South Caucasian experience

There has been a steady growth of freedom of information legislation in this region. Georgia was in the forefront in standard-setting as it was the first country in the South Caucasus to adopt a comprehensive Freedom of Information (FOI) Law in 1999. Armenia is the only country in the region with a detailed strategy for the implementation of its FOI Law, developed by three Armenian civil society groups.

Many of the issues and problems are common to all three South Caucasus states. In Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia various categories of information are barely accessible to the media (including information on the state of the environment, on health care, budget, education, contact information for public bodies, and on national security-

related issues). Access to information for the media often turns into a hurdle race. The major obstacles to accessing official information by the media in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia include:

- Lack of procedures and mechanisms for access to information, or the lack of appropriate legislation (as in Azerbaijan), which create an environment of arbitrary refusal, manipulation of information, and, in extreme cases, even release of false information by officials;
- Lack of awareness among journalists of their legal rights;
- A soviet-style attitude and tradition of secrecy amongst officials;
- Lack of professionalism and solidarity among the media;
- Even where there is awareness of rights and the provision in local FOI legislation guaranteeing those rights, there is no tradition among the media of going to court to defend their rights, mainly due to skepticism about the fair administration of justice, and lengthy court proceedings;
- When refused access to requested information, media professionals often use alternative sources of information.

Experts say that the countries of South Caucasus have all made significant progress in ensuring freedom of expression and freedom of information since they became independent after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, by including guarantees in their constitutions and developing a number of specialized laws.

The Constitutions of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia adopted at the time contain guarantees of freedom of expression. While provision of freedom of information appears in the same article in Armenia's Constitution, the Constitutions of Azerbaijan and Georgia provide for the right to seek and receive information in separate articles. The Constitutions of Azerbaijan and Georgia include guarantees of the freedom of the media and ban censorship. The Georgian Constitution goes further in that it prohibits monopolization of the media. All three States have Human Rights Commissioners (Ombudsman institutions).

As signatories to a number of significant international human rights treaties, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia have binding obligations under international law to respect freedom of expression and freedom of information.

Georgia and Armenia have adopted comprehensive laws on access to information held by government bodies. The law provides a right of access generally consistent with international standards, but is hampered by broad exemptions, resistance from officials, poor implementation and a lack of external oversight bodies. In Azerbaijan, a 1998 act promotes freedom of information but does not include substantive procedural rights.

The media laws in the three countries provide some rights and protections for the media. The 2004 Georgian law is the most progressive, adopting many international media standards. Only the Azerbaijani Law provides for specific rights of access to information by the media. However, the laws also provide for limitation on publishing certain categories of information such as state secrets and information relating to an individual's personal life.

Media self-regulation mechanisms are immature in Azerbaijan and Georgia, while in Armenia they do not exist at all. The Azerbaijani Press Council, established in February 2003, spends a large amount of time as a "defense mechanism" tackling violence against journalists. Professional standards for the media in Georgia were also adopted in 2003, resulting from coordinated activities by the Liberty Institute, when major print and electronic media as well as free-lance journalists signed a Code of Ethics. The implementation of self-regulatory mechanisms for the media remains problematic due to disagreements between media associations and media outlets. Low demand for professional standards among editors and publishers weakens the implementation of professional standards in Georgia. A Media Council is due to be formed in the near future. In Armenia an initiative group has been formed under the guidance of the Yerevan Press Club; they are exploring the grounds for establishing a self-regulatory model in the country.

## Armenia

The "Law on Freedom of Information" was approved by the Armenian Parliament in September 2003. It came into force in November 2003. The general principles of the law are: to define unified procedures to record, classify, and maintain information; to ensure freedom to seek and receive information; to allow free access to information; and to publicize information. The law allows any person to demand information from state and local bodies, state offices, organizations financed under

the state budget, private organizations of public importance and state officials, by a written request. Public bodies are obliged to ensure information access, record and maintain information, provide truthful and complete answers, define procedures and appoint an official responsible for access. They must also publish, at least annually, information relating to their activities and services, budget, forms, lists of personnel (including education and salary), recruitment procedures, lists of other types of official information in their possession, programmes of public events, and information on the use of the Act. If the body has an official website, then they must publish the information on this site.

The "Mass Communication Law" of Armenia provides for a general right of journalists who work for mass media organizations to operate without unreasonable restrictions. It reaffirms the constitutional right to seek, receive and disseminate information. It prohibits censorship, interfering with "the legitimate professional activities of a journalist", disclosure of sources without a court order for revealing serious crimes, and it requires that government bodies do not favour some journalists over others.

Under Article 164 of the Criminal Code, it is an offence to interfere with the legal professional activities of a journalist, including forcing them to publish or not publish information. Officials can be imprisoned for up to three years for violating the Article.

## Azerbaijan

In Azerbaijan the "Law on Freedom of Information" states that every person has the right to search, obtain, transfer, produce and expand any information. The law was accepted on June 19, 1998. According to media law experts, this Law consists essentially of declarations and is not an effective law of access, having no specified procedures.

The "Law on Obtaining Information", which was accepted and came into force in September 2005, is an important step forward for the establishment of open and transparent public governance. When this law was enacted, it became the primary and principal law for media because the Law on "Freedom of Information" lost its validity.

The "Law on Obtaining Information" of Azerbaijan consists of 58 articles. One of its innovations is creation of an Ombudsman post for affairs concerning information, which has responsibility for ensuring

implementation of the law. According to article 57, the Ombudsman must be selected within 6 months after enactment of the law, but an Ombudsman has not been selected to date.

The "Law on Mass Media" is also a very important piece of legislation, enabling the media to demand information from public bodies. The law states that "mass information" is free from restrictions and reaffirms the right of citizens to seek, prepare and disseminate information. Article 8 provides that the media have the "right to gain quickly reliable information about the economic, political, public and social situation in the country, the activity of organs of state, municipalities, enterprises, plants and organizations, public associations, political parties and officials." The law also provides that sources should be protected. Civil, administrative, and criminal penalties can be applied to those who interfere with a journalist's right of access or who censor the mass media.

## Georgia

The "Law on Freedom of Information" was adopted as Chapter III of the General Administrative Code of Georgia in 1999 and amended in 2001. The law creates a general presumption that information kept, received or held by an administrative agency should be open. Agencies are required to enter information into a public register within two days and must appoint an official to be in charge of allowing access to this information. The law gives anyone the right to submit a written request for public information regardless of the form that information takes and without having to state the reasons for the request.

The "Law on Freedom of Speech and Expression" of Georgia is one of the most progressive media laws in the world, incorporating some of the best practices from around the world. The law protects freedom of speech and expression, including the right to search, receive, create, store, process and distribute information and ideas in any form; prohibits censorship; gives journalists the right to protect sources; and protects whistleblowers. It does not give any additional rights to journalists to demand information from government bodies.

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# 4 CHAPTER

## THE MEDIA AND STATE PROGRAMMES MONITORING

Every year, the government of each country in the South Caucasus allocates large sums of money from the state budget to education, health, culture and social maintenance for the purpose of solving socio-economic problems. Any information about misuse or misappropriation of these funds should be reported in the media, either directly or with the help of those state programmes. All state programmes which are supposed to reveal and solve problems should be monitored by the government itself as well as by civil society institutions. Media outlets and journalists bear a substantial responsibility in this area, as a key sector in civil society.

To help answer the question of how journalists participate in this process, we must first look more closely at the concepts of state programmes, indicators and monitoring.

### State programmes and transparency

The use of public funds should be transparent and subject to public scrutiny. This is not necessarily the case in the South Caucasus. The openness and transparency of state administration, which experience elsewhere indicates is central to democratic development, is much discussed but is not necessarily a standard feature of state programmes.

Currently, the process of globalization has increased the attention of international financial institutions on transparency of financial processes. Misappropriation of large sums of state funds, increase in corruption and as a result increase in poverty, have obliged international organizations to focus their attention on this field. The prevention of corruption and misappropriation of public money, plus provision of transparency in the use of resources, are a key issue in poverty reduction in poorer countries.

The principles expressed in the "Manual on Fiscal Transparency" published in 1998 by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were based on the experience of member countries. The manual offers guidelines on financial-credit policy, addressed to the governments of countries which are members of the IMF. It states that initiatives to increase transparency in financial processes are not only the responsibility of financial institutions and government but also of civil society.

Budget formulation, the use of non-budgetary public funds (e.g. Oil Fund, Social Protection Fund) and the utilization of all public resources

is clearly within the public interest and it is the responsibility of the media to ensure that these issues remain the focus of public attention. One way of doing this is by monitoring state programmes.

This role is undertaken by both state and non-governmental institutions. The media have a key part to play in this, which must remain central. In order to do this, increased information about - and training in - monitoring is necessary.

### What is a state programme?

A *state programme* is any activity directed to achieving a concrete aim, in particular changing a specific situation, using resources assigned beforehand or for a specified period. It thus has 3 main elements: time, resources and aim, and should unite all three. Absence of any one of these elements means an incomplete programme - there must be a specific aim to be achieved within a specific timeframe with a specified range and volume of resources. Government programmes invariably involve large sums of money and should be targeted on solving a specific problem. Therefore, resources cannot be squandered.

Since the programme is aimed at solving a particular social problem, it begins in the preparation phase with specification and analysis of the problem and identification of key areas to be changed, in other words solution of the problem. Such problems could be, for example, poverty reduction, reduction of the number of homeless people, improvement in levels of education, improvement in public health etc.

The structure of every state programme thus consists of the following:

- aim
- duties
- expected outcome
- actions
- resources
- risks and judgments

Programme procedure consists of 4 subcomponents - mission, aim, duty, activity. The mission or strategic mission of the programme identifies the general direction. Implementation of the mission depends partly on those carrying it out and partly on a range of external factors.

## What is monitoring?

No programme should be undertaken without procedures in place for monitoring its progress and identifying its results. These functions are *monitoring and evaluation*.

**Monitoring** is the regular assessment of indicators of implementation and achievement plus success and effectiveness of outcomes. During monitoring, the key question is: *Is there any progress?* This question is answered by frequent observation of the situation on the ground and comparison of work in progress with the original plan.

The following aspects should be observed during monitoring:

- Utilization of input (in compliance with the plan);
- The process of programme implementation (compliance of content and duration of work with the execution schedule; observation of technologies, methods, procedures);
- Outcomes (how far the set aims have been achieved);
- Impact (how the programme influences the situation; what is that influence?).

Monitoring contributes to improved implementation, more effective use of resources and evaluation of quality, as well as providing feedback to interested parties. Monitoring also allows the person or government responsible for the programme to evaluate the quality of work of programme executors.

## What are indicators?

**Indicators** are set after the programme aim has been established. They derive from the aim and help evaluate implementation, outcome and impact. They help standardize procedures during monitoring and allow comparisons to be made to help identify and assess trends. Key areas where indicators are used are:

**Input:** All financial and physical resources used during implementation of the programme.

**Output:** The product and all services gained as a result of the input.

**Outcome:** The level of benefit to the end-user of the output and services.

**Impact:** The final effect of the programme according to factors such as welfare of the general population, poverty reduction, awareness of change, security etc.

The preparation of appropriate indicators for social programmes requires a clear understanding of the problem and the approach to solving it. Selection of indicators is a key element in monitoring state programmes as only by selecting appropriate indicators is it possible to evaluate the progress and impact of the programme.

Sometimes monitoring and evaluation are confused. From a general point of view they are essentially the same, as both can apply to both progress and final achievement. In principle however, monitoring looks at progress of implementation, comparing actual achievement with planned achievement. Evaluation is more concerned with outcomes and the reasons for them. Whereas monitoring is on-going, evaluation is periodic and usually more detailed. In international programmes from 2-10% of the total budget may be allocated for monitoring and evaluation.

## Media and monitoring

As part of civil society, the media can participate in monitoring state programmes, alongside NGOs. There are, in fact, 3 interested parties in monitoring state programmes, each with its own specific concerns:

1. **Government**
  - to focus the activity
  - to identify priorities
  - to assess outcomes
2. **Civil society (media, NGOs, social parties etc.)**
  - to provide transparency and accountability
  - to make public the outcomes
3. **International organizations:**
  - to assess need and identify future project areas
  - to assess the development and outcome of current projects
  - to assess impact of the programme on policy.

Media participation is either directly, through reporting, or indirectly through association with another part of civil society, for example, with

NGOs. The government should encourage media participation in monitoring state programmes and should support their role in this field through, for example, competitions on journalistic research on specific social issues such as corruption, transparency, the socio-economic situation of the population, or, indeed, implementation of state programmes. Not only the government but also NGOs and international donor organizations could encourage or organize such competitions. Several international donor organizations have already done this. Public debate, round tables, press conferences and TV debates are all other ways in which the media can participate in monitoring.

The range of sources a journalist commonly draws on in monitoring includes:

- press conferences;
- round tables, seminars, public lectures;
- official publications of state organizations (newspapers, bulletins, brochures etc.)
- official internet sites;
- interviews;
- publications of other press organizations;
- official surveys;
- statistical bulletins.

An important role for government is to ensure that journalists are able to access sources in time for them to be of use. Equally, it is important for journalists to acknowledge all sources used. This is an important indicator of professionalism as well as increasing the reliability of the information.

Journalistic methods normally used in monitoring include:

- examination of official documents;
- examination of the legislative base;
- investigation of statistical information;
- conducting interviews;
- conducting surveys;
- monitoring of publications, articles, information published in the press;
- studying reports of international organizations;
- preparation of report articles.

Examination of official documents includes all official publications (newspapers, journals, bulletins, brochures, Internet sites) of those implementing the programme. Examination of the legislative base covers laws, legal decisions, regulations and other relevant legal aspects. Statistical information might include, for example, the number of people living in an area to be monitored, their gender, age, ethnicity, plus specific target groups intended to benefit from the programme. It is also possible to get information about income, the number of schools and hospitals, the number of unemployed people etc. All of this can be obtained through interviews and formal surveys, for example, interviews with both the person responsible for implementing the programme and members of the target group living in the area.

The journalist can also submit an official enquiry or request to government. It is advisable to mention in the enquiry the law on the rights of the media to obtain information through surveys or interviews. Impact surveys can be either comprehensive or a representative sample. Such surveys can help identify any differences or discrepancies between official published information and the impact actually felt by the intended beneficiaries.

Reports from international organizations are another good source of information. Sometimes there is a discrepancy between the information of international organizations and government information. See, for example, the differences between information from the State Statistics Committee on child mortality and information published by the World Health Organization. See also, the discrepancy between information given by the government and that given by the IMF on current levels of inflation. The final stage of monitoring is preparation of the report articles and then publication.

A detailed **example** of monitoring concerns the recent poverty reduction initiative in Armenia. The Millennium Challenge Corporation (USA) signed a five-year, \$235.65 million Compact with the Government of Armenia. Although the programme is financed by MCC, local authorities will carry out implementation of the programme. The head of the governing council is the Prime Minister of Armenia. The aim of the programme is Poverty Reduction through Growth. To increase transparency, the Government of Armenia sponsored a process that resulted in three NGOs being named as observers to the Government's MCA Board of Trustees - an inter-governmental body, chaired by the Prime

Minister, and responsible for overseeing the Compact development process. Under the Compact, a Stakeholders' Committee has been formed to represent the beneficiaries of the Programme. Members of Armenia's NGO sector will serve alongside the government's representatives on the Governing Council of MCA-Armenia. The civil sector is thus fully engaged in this programme and the media can monitor every step of the process.

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# 5 CHAPTER

## RESEARCH AND INVESTIGATION IN JOURNALISM

In 1964, the Pulitzer Prize, the most coveted award in newspaper journalism, went to the Philadelphia Bulletin in a new reporting category. The award honoured the Bulletin for revealing that police officers in that city were involved in running a numbers racket, a kind of illegal lotto game, out of their station house. The story presaged what would become a new wave of scrutiny of police corruption in American cities. The award had one other significance as well. It marked formal recognition by the press establishment of a new era in American journalism.

The new Pulitzer category was called Investigative Reporting. The newspaper executives from around the country who run the Pulitzer under the auspices of Columbia University had added it in place of an older designation that they decided no longer required special recognition, Local Reporting. They were putting new emphasis on the role of the press as activist, reformer, and exposé.

In doing so, the journalism establishment was acknowledging the kind of work increasingly carried out in recent years by a new generation of journalists. Eight years later, when Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein helped uncover the Watergate scandal inside the Nixon White House, investigative reporting would suddenly gain celebrity and sex appeal and redefine the image of the profession. All journalism changed.

Today, research and investigation are very important and obligatory parts of journalism all over the world.

## How to work on an investigation

Journalistic investigation represents a sequence of articles, which are different from ordinary or analytical articles in style, length or form. For example, if gathering information for ordinary articles is relatively straightforward from press conferences, meetings, briefings, press releases and so forth, then journalistic investigation is pursuing information which cannot be obtained through open meetings or other standard procedures. If this were not the case, it would not be called an investigation. In other words, investigative journalists, unlike other reporters, do not follow someone else's agenda; they dig deeper to find solid, profound answers to the question "How did something happen?"

The term "investigation" means exactly what it says - journalists have to find out something new and important. However, initially, what we inves-

tigate has to be important and of contemporary relevance to society.

The forms of journalistic investigation can be divided into three types: *difficult/hard*, *simple/research*, and *informational projects*. These forms are self-explanatory and it is easy to guess which ones are harder to write.

The first type (*difficult*) means long and hard work. It means finding out every detail, every nuance, so that the reader has no questions left regarding the issue after reading the story. Such stories include all kinds of data, statistics, documentation, history, background - in short, everything. As journalists we must know that documented evidence matters the most. So, if we have documents which prove something and clearly show that what society thought was one way turns out to be different, it means we have conducted an investigation. We always have to remember that the aim of an investigation is to clarify and prove something. Initially, when we start work on a story, we must know why we are doing it, what we want to prove or disclose.

*Journalistic research* is a lighter form of investigation, similar to an analytical article. We choose a topic that is new to society and research it. We study every angle of the topic and provide information previously unknown to the public. We analyze facts, involve experts and possibly disclose a specific violation or illegal act.

Research has to include news which astonishes readers. Readers find out information which they could not have imagined. As before, the aim is to leave the audience with no unanswered questions at the end. Research is different from investigation in that there is no need to follow it through to a conclusion. You research the topic, provided facts, then possibly acknowledge that you could follow it up. If you do, it becomes an investigation.

As the term *informational investigation* suggests, this means gathering information, including analysis, which has something new about it. This type of investigation could be even shorter than research, which itself usually takes less time than a full investigation. Ideas for such an investigation could even come from relevant rumours, but information still needs to be checked and verified by a minimum of three sources and, of course, it has to be balanced.

Investigation is often quite a long process. One of the reasons is that it can take a long time to obtain the necessary documents. The form of

writing is called investigation because we try to find out something that has been concealed and its disclosure may not be in the interests of certain people, who may create obstacles and difficulties.

One such difficulty is blocking access to information or providing it too late. When we are working on an investigation, it is necessary to send official letters to obtain public information. By law, such requests should be responded to within maximum 10 days. We need to keep copies of requests for information because they are the proof of our request. Meanwhile, during these 10 days we can work with other sources. If eventually we are denied access to the information, this is also evidence, which we can use in our story. However, it is unlikely that repeated requests are never responded to.

It is not necessary to use every possible source of information in an investigation. If one source trusts us and provides good information, then we can check details and start our research. For example, if something happens in one of the ministries, a person who works there will know most about it. That is why it is necessary to have a network of contacts who trust us and who therefore might be willing to provide information and documents. The source can be any person. It is not necessary for this person to be a high official. The purpose is for the source to provide information. We have to use it accordingly.

## How to choose investigative topics

Choosing topics is the core of investigative journalism, because if the topic is not interesting to people, it will not bring any results and will just stay on the page. The topic we choose should meet the following criteria:

- it has to be timely, important and problematic;
- we have to assess for how many people and of which category it will be interesting;
- we have to consider where the article will be published - in the central or regional press. If the topic is relevant to the capital, then it has fewer chances of working in the regions. In this case it is better to work on another topic;
- we also have to consider the time that a proper investigation will probably take and assess whether the topic will still be relevant after this period or not.

Often, we could work indefinitely on a journalistic investigation. A fully fledged investigation rarely takes less than a month. It is also common to find that after we have been working on the investigation for the agreed length of time, and think we have scheduled our final interview, we then discover something which may need a new investigation and additional information. It is not impossible that we need to devote even 6-8 months or more to the investigation. But, since investigations can be long-term, good record keeping, organization and indexing of information plus clear records of all interviews are essential.

## Results of journalistic investigation

An investigation may have different results, positive or negative. It is not necessary that somebody is imprisoned, fired or sentenced after publishing our piece; our research may uncover facts, which dramatically change the lives of certain people by improving them or just helping people understand something better.

## Planning an investigation

The first stage of any journalistic investigation is planning. Only when an investigation has been planned correctly can it bring success both to the author and to the whole media outlet. Before materials are gathered and the process of selecting appropriate information starts, journalists work out a plan which they adhere to till the end of the investigation.

The following example is of a general plan for an investigation into reform of public schools prepared for a novice journalist. Answers to these questions will help him/her to organize material properly and determine the importance or worthiness of the project at an early stage, before too much effort is expended:

- **Title** of the project (this helps to define what you want to tell your readers through your story);
- **Topic** of the project (for example, the way schools operate);
- **Relevance** of the topic for the readers; possible reaction to the story; benefit that consumers (readers), the author and media outlet could gain as a result of this investigation;
- **Methods:** How will the journalist act? How will he/she gather relevant information and what does he/she need to consider prior to starting the investigation?

- **Cost:** What resources will this investigation need? Will one person be enough for conducting it? Will he/she need to travel a lot?
- Expected **results** and reactions.

When such a plan exists, it provides a fuller picture of the investigative project, clarifying goals and making it easier to begin the whole process.

## Research

Before starting to collect material, the reporter sets a thesis of investigation. For example, if the investigation concerns a crime, then the thesis will be the explanation of why the crime happened, who was involved etc. The journalist may then conclude that the crime has an economic basis and continue by gathering and organizing material in this direction. The key to a successful investigation is constant double-checking of the initial thesis, which means meeting and talking to a lot of people.

How do we gather and systematize material related to our investigation? Before the journalist conducts interviews with key sources or gets hold of the main documents, he/she has to gather a lot of supplementary information to help clarify exactly what are the key areas to investigate. For example, if a journalist is investigating whether ham products contain substances dangerous to our health, he/she will need to visit all the agencies which certificate such products, all the competitors of the firm under investigation and get the views of medical experts, then review the conclusions. Only after gathering this preliminary information, can the plan of investigation be drawn up and information organized into a systematic format.

James Steele and Donald Barlett, investigative journalists of the Philadelphia Inquirer, said that the key to investigative projects is the "documents' state of mind," which also implies a specific technique of "working from the outside in." This means that a reporter starts collecting data from secondary sources, then moves to primary documents and only after that goes to interview people - prepared with a clear thesis and plan of the project and with informed questions.

When a reporter starts systematic implementation of his/her investigation plan, answers to simple questions can often be found in stories that

have already been published or broadcast. These are most readily found in libraries, where back copies of newspapers are kept, at television stations, or online, whenever these are available. These stories can serve as a good starting point. Among the secondary sources may be many other publications - magazines, newsletters, research reports, specialist publications, reference books, such as encyclopedias or biographical listings. The internet and online databases can serve as vital reference sources for an investigation. Commercial databases, although sometimes expensive, offer much more than their printed counterparts. For example, conducting a word search might produce many more results online than in any outdated print resource. Many reporters use computer-assisted information gathering. This requires specific skills plus a willingness to manage the volume of digital information so that it becomes searchable, accessible and most important, easily retrievable.

The most useful aspect of secondary sources is that they may lead to primary documents and sources. The author of those stories might have done a good job reporting the facts and may refer to highly relevant financial reports, insurance policies, governmental decrees, lawsuits, etc. All of these help an investigator to find the primary documents. Documents can deceive as much as any human source, but they are out there for reporters to find and use. "Documents' state of mind" reminds an investigative reporter that records must exist somewhere, since no one, neither an individual nor an organization, can exist without being registered at some point by some official body. People have birth certificates, go to schools, universities, work at different organizations and each of these bodies has its own records. Organizations need to be registered, they show up in different contexts over time and their appearance can be documented not only in the newspapers, but also in printed reports, presentational material etc.

Besides providing the reporter with facts, documents also help in finding human sources. Human sources are vital in any kind of story. However, reporters often only go to the obvious ones, who are currently occupying appropriate positions and may neglect predecessors, who, despite possibly having their own agenda, sometimes tell a reporter facts he/she did not previously know. These "formers" might not be as easy to find as the "currents." They may not live in the same city any more, they are not working at the same organization, but the organization may still have some kind of record. If they can't help, it is

always worthwhile to check in a city phonebook. The "formers" can also often explain the primary documents very well - tell the investigator what is written in these documents, why and how.

Proper interpretation of documents is one of the hardest and the most important parts of any journalistic investigation. Investigative reporters must go to human sources with specific questions as they may get only one chance to interview that person. Therefore, if he/she finds some relevant document later, after the interview, there may never be the opportunity to obtain comment on it from this source. The result is an incomplete or unbalanced investigation that leaves readers with a number of questions, and all because the reporter didn't take enough time, persistence and patience to study all the relevant documents around the issue.

Today, some investigative reporters use social research methods in their investigative projects. This is a way of getting evidence from groups of people who are part of the issue. A survey with properly worded questions can bring a reporter answers from people who otherwise might have refused to be interviewed. Also, the larger the number of people surveyed, the more the evidence on the issue.

No matter how much information comes the investigator's way, it is always necessary to organize it properly. One of the most helpful and easy ways is to put material in chronological order - either on the computer, or in folders. Another good practice is to make separate files according to topics or subheads. For example, all kinds of statistics, figures, and charts could go in one folder, longer interviews with the main characters in a separate folder, short comments from different sources, which may be significant, in another, then comments from experts, descriptive and background material etc. Sometimes the whole investigation can depend on specific documents, which provide an accurate story in themselves if they are organized and presented to the readers correctly.

It might not be very difficult to gather information for the investigation, but quite hard to organize it. This is a process of editing - identifying the core information and putting the rest aside. Journalists sometimes become confused by the variety of information available, so lose focus. Organizing materials systematically makes it much easier to start work on writing the story. It is much easier to identify and use information of core value when everything is gathered and the reporter can see all the

possible angles. Unused material can always be used in a different, completely new story or a follow up on the same issue.

## Sources of information

Journalists look for news, information and issues that are interesting, contemporary or concealed, anywhere, any time. That is why when we are talking about different sources of information we do not only mean documents and press releases but everything seen, heard and felt by the journalist.

A source of information is the starting point for any story, irrespective of whether it is a short news item or a feature story. Initially, novice journalists have to search for topics, but after a while the themes knock at their doors. Previous sources become the suppliers of new ideas for stories, the number of contacts in the journalist's notebook grows, and the richer the experience of the journalist, the better his/her stories will be, with more reliable and interesting sources.

Working on any story starts with gathering information. As the idea appears and a topic is determined, the journalist makes a plan in his or her mind about possible sources. Even if he or she has insufficient time to interview all necessary sources, s/he tries to get information and arguments at least from each side, especially if the issue is controversial. According to standards of international professional journalism, all information received from one source should be checked and it is better to have more than one source and not be limited to attending one briefing or conference. Ideally, even when reporting daily news, journalists should research and investigate the issue through finding additional sources, interviewing people and checking received facts. However, journalists often break this "rule" because of lack of time or through professional irresponsibility.

Investigative projects require much more time, effort and research than reporting daily news. Documents, internet, the library, people, and experience of colleagues help journalists create investigative stories. They give us the opportunity of not only spending more time working with our sources but also choosing them on our initiative, rather than following any official agenda. Sometimes, an ordinary village resident is much more open-minded about problems in the region than the local administrator; a worker who lost his job may give you information you would never obtain from the office.

This is the main difference between a professional investigative journalist, who is an initiator of issues, who finds concealed problems and violations and chooses their sources, and those who merely use the information presented and prepared by various organizations in a form that is most profitable for them. If for some reporters an official statement about the launch of a new programme plus a few comments are sufficient for creating news, for investigative reporters this is just the starting point. Investigative journalism turns the media from a channel for spreading officially sanctioned information into the watchdog and defender of democracy and society's interests. Investigative journalism can raise issues and offer proofs which mobilize the public voice. But, it takes time, maybe one month or three or a year to gather information for a good investigative story. The more sources we use and more time we spend on them then the more reliable will be the information we present. For investigative journalists, "time equals truth".

## Documents

Journalists undertaking an investigation turn from being a passive listener into active participants. They have to be able to gather information from primary sources. These could be court decisions, decrees, reports, official letters, different registries, etc. This needs time, effort and specific skills. Only a few phrases, if any, from a document might be quoted in the story and the rest turned into everyday language or used for further investigation.

Statistical data and figures are often very effective, useful and important sources of information. However, understanding and translating it into meaningful information requires the journalist to know how to make these numbers "talk to" him/her. Journalists need to know how to work with figures presented in different ways in different types of (financial) document. In these cases the assistance of someone who can tell the journalist what is really hidden behind the figures might be helpful. However, it is always better to develop such knowledge oneself.

Comparing different sources with each other can also open up many interesting leads. Finding the documents is only the first step which has to be followed up by analysis. Nevertheless, documents remain one of the most important means of proving and ensuring the validity of information received from other sources. Using original documents in the story makes the publication reliable and credible and helps journalists

claim their rights in court. Professional journalists try to gather and keep as many copies of documents as possible during their investigation.

## Internet

Today the internet enables journalists to gather ideas, facts, information on public figures, view the history of this or that company and so on, with no delay. It allows journalists to find easily quotes from speeches, announcements or letters released on official web-sites. However, it is crucial to consider what kind of web sites can be used and whether they are reliable and credible enough to use for a story.

Many international investigative reporters have access to online databases, such as, LexisNexis. These help find information about individuals and companies as well as identifying secondary sources. Such commercial databases are rarely used by South Caucasus journalists, and very few of them have information about businesses or politicians in these countries. They can be useful for gathering information about western companies entering the market or finding links between local businesses and western corporations.

## Direct observation

Journalists are witnesses of many of the events they cover. Reporters use all their senses when on the scene. They want to make their readers feel the scene they have witnessed. A good reporter is also a good writer, able to use details, sensations and description to evoke an atmosphere which will help readers to understand the issue better. It is very important not just to find out something from sources, but also to get closer to the subjects of the story and see, feel and hear for oneself. It is impossible to write about the difficult situation in prisons without visiting them or tell about illegal felling of forests and not describe the situation in the national parks.

Professional ethics require journalists to identify themselves before addressing a potential informant. However, sometimes, this would mean not getting any information at all and in these circumstances journalists sometimes break this rule. They "change their profession," hide that they are reporters and play different roles to uncover corruption or misbehaviour. It is an important ethical question how best to proceed if the issue is very important for society and the only way to open up the truth is to lie. This issue has raised dispute and discussion among jour-

nalists and lawyers. On one hand, it is one of the best ways to create a report full of personal experience and to get real insight into the situation; on the other hand, using information received from people who did not know your profession is a violation of their rights. Before "changing their profession", journalists should know their rights and the rights of their sources and whenever possible avoid violation of others' rights during an investigation.

## People

Despite the technological revolution a "live source" is still the main source for journalists. Without people, their opinions, emotions and feelings, a story rarely raises interest among readers. People's views and comments add reliability to a story without which it is all too easily regarded as merely the writer's opinion.

There is nothing wrong in talking to different potential sources, just as there is nothing wrong in talking to knowledgeable sources, who the reporter already knows will only take a positive view of an issue. Sometimes, for example, people trying to highlight some official's generosity will reveal information regarding big spending, which the reporter has never seen in any records. Anecdotes revealing good qualities of a person will also help to balance the story.

Many journalists readily find sources among officials currently working in certain positions, but have a harder time finding former employees, who can be very valuable sources of information. Journalists should always consider talking to both the "currents" and the "formers". Both may have their bias and be unreliable, but that is no reason for ignoring former executives or employees.

## How to interview

The dictionary defines a question as, "a sentence in an interrogative form, addressed to someone in order to get information in reply." The root of the word is quest, which is a "search or pursuit made in order to find or obtain something." If reporters aren't proficient at asking the right questions at the right time, they will miss on accuracy, fall short on context, and stumble on fairness.

You can make predictions about an interview but not absolute ones

because interviewing involves human beings who don't always behave in predictable ways.

Interviewing experts, victims and abusers are the core of the whole investigation. The investigative story covers the facts and issues about violations, corruption and unfair politicians or businesses. The appearance of such a story in a newspaper is against the interests of the person or group who are the abusers. However, even those whose rights have been violated or who were a victim sometimes avoid talking to journalists. So, investigative reporters should know how to arrange an interview and how to lead it in order to obtain necessary information.

Akaki Gogichaishvili, one of the most experienced investigative reporters in Georgia, advises not to mention "investigation" while setting up an interview because mentioning it can scare the respondents. It is better just to explain the issue you would like to talk about and general areas you will cover. Do not tell potential respondents the main question you would like to ask. It is also recommended to explain to them why it is in their interest to talk to you.

It goes without question that a journalist should be well prepared for the interview. Thinking of the interview must be part of your news-gathering process. Before you move to the stage where you need to interview the key persons, think about what you've learned about these people. No one is all bad - they have to have some positive personal qualities as well. They may have hobbies, achievements, something you can find in common, something you may be able to use to set a friendly atmosphere. It is always better to meet with respondents face-to-face and to start the interview with an "ice-breaker" question to help the source relax and to create an atmosphere of trust and openness. For example if you are doing an interview about privatization during which there were many violations, it is better to start talking with the Minister for Economic Development with questions about achievements or the process of privatization. Be friendly, communicable and an interesting person to talk to, help your respondent to be open-minded. Only after the interviewee feels relaxed and comfortable then move to more challenging questions. Very often investigative reporters engage in too much baiting, accusing and ambushing; they make too many statements and express too many of their own opinions. Remember that reporters who go into interviews prepared merely to ask neutral, open-ended questions get the best material.

## Tough interviews

Investigative reporters never assume that sources won't talk to them. Setting your mind to getting positive results is something that usually helps the outcome. Use your imagination, plan a successful interview, and be confident. If you have done your homework, have put aside biases, emotions and assumptions, then you will be at the stage where you need people to explain certain things - what and how something happened. You have every reason to be confident and no reasons to be confrontational to your source of information.

Very often officials refuse to meet with the journalist and ask to be provided with questions in written form. An experienced journalist can persuade even the most reluctant official to agree to an interview by anticipating the excuses. The *Handbook of Independent Journalism* offers the following advice in countering standard ways of avoiding a face-to-face interview:

- They don't have time. The reporter can offer to meet at the most convenient time or place for the person they want to speak with. Limiting the amount of time requested also may help.
- They are afraid because they think the story will make them look bad. Treating people with respect and telling them precisely why you want to talk with them will help sources be less anxious.
- They don't know what to say. Reporters need to be clear about why the story needs a particular person's point of view.
- They are hard to reach. Reporters often have to go through a secretary or public relations officer to contact the person they want to interview. If they suspect that their request is not being forwarded, some reporters will write a letter to the source, or call during lunch or after business hours in an effort to get through.

Interviews may have different purposes, sometimes you need to ask a person a "killer" question even if the subject quits the interview after that. But most of the time investigative reporters need information rather than just statements. So, before going to the interview, you need to decide what you need to get out of it and make a list of the most difficult questions. Some journalists prefer to write down every question in advance, others only step in with a couple of tough questions they need to get answers to. Each way is fine if it works for you, whichever is more convenient. The only mistake is to leave without answers to questions you needed to ask.

It is recommended to record all your conversations, interviews as well as phone calls. At worst, if you are unable to get hold of an official because his secretary always says that he is not at his place of work or some other reasons, you should explain to your readers why there is no comment from this authority. In addition, although officials may refuse to give an interview, an experienced journalist can use the opportunity to talk to them by phone and obtain valuable information in the short time available. That is why it is useful to record, unless of course there has been a request to talk off the record, and to keep these recordings.

### Anonymous sources

There are other types of interview besides the most frequent "on record" interviews.

If the person who is going to talk with a reporter refuses to be identified, this is a "not for attribution" interview. The person can be quoted directly although he or she cannot be named in your story.

A "background" interview that is given to journalists "off the record" cannot be quoted in the story. As a rule the most valuable information given by officials or experts is offered off the record. Journalists should not refuse meetings with such sources because it can give them in-depth knowledge of the issue which can help start or structure the story. In addition sometimes sources can change their opinion in the middle or at the end of the interview. Some sources change their mind and agree to be quoted after a journalist shows what he or she intends to quote.

Some journalists advise not to agree to withhold information if an interviewee announces in the middle of the interview that you can't use some information mentioned. If this is to be the case, it is recommended to warn the source in advance.

Anonymous sources often provide journalists with valuable and exclusive information and are frequently used in investigative journalism. However, anonymous sources have become a very convenient way of spreading false or inaccurate information by irresponsible reporters. Using such kinds of source is often connected with lack of professional skill or standards of the journalists concerned.

The oldest and most reliable news organizations have realized the cost to public trust and have a specific policy for their reporters regarding the

use of anonymous sources. Most of them have a basic principle of using anonymous sources only in cases where it is impossible to obtain the information from other sources, and if it is vital that the information should be published.

*"The use of unidentified sources is reserved for situations in which the newspaper could not otherwise print information it considers reliable and newsworthy. When we use such sources, we accept an obligation not only to convince a reader of their reliability but also to convey what we can learn of their motivation."* So says *The New York Times newspaper*, which experienced several scandals in recent times but is known for having published its own detailed Code of Conduct. The former executive editor Joseph Lelyveld even developed a special test for using anonymous sources. There are two questions journalists should check before they decide whether it worth using the source:

1. How much direct knowledge does the source have of the event?
2. What, if any, motive might the source have for misleading us, "spinning" the story or hiding important facts that might alter our impressions of the information?

Associated Press prohibits its reporters from using opinions from such sources because of the danger that sources may try to use the reporter as a channel for spreading false information or for attacking his or her opponent or competitor. In this instance, journalists are able to defend their sources as there is no danger that the source will be accused of spreading rumour or false accusations.

Journalists must do their best to persuade the person to agree to an on record interview. But again this does not mean using hidden recorders or using attributed quotes without agreement of the source. If the source won't agree to be named and the information is very valuable, journalists should try other ways and sources for verifying the information. Journalists unable to find other sources or verify information often have to refuse to use unattributed statements.

If a journalist has decided to use an unnamed source in a story s/he should realize that there is an obligation to protect this identity as well as being very aware of the type of information being used. In some cases a journalist may even risk prosecution rather than reveal information about a confidential source. Journalists must therefore know the consequences of using anonymous sources as there is then a profes-

sional obligation to protect that source. Otherwise, the journalist will lose the trust not only of the person concerned but also of other sources and access to exclusive information. Such cases also reflect on the professional reputation of the media.

## Note taking

While gathering information from interviews, research and references, reporters take notes. Almost no one can recall everything, especially exact names, titles, dates or any other specific information. If an investigative reporter is a weak note-taker, he/she should use a tape-recorder. Many reporters trust tape-recorders, but you never know when something may go wrong and the technology malfunction. Journalism textbooks advise taking very full notes, but experienced journalists often don't agree. Only the most inexperienced or hopelessly confused reporter writes down everything. Experienced reporters have their own shorthand, meaning they shorten words and abbreviate in a way that is readable later. Reporters do not write down every word, only the most important parts, and if they are experienced, they easily recognize which these are. The trick in gathering information is to know the focus of the story. After completing an interview, take time to go through your notes and mark the main points; mark other important information you want to follow up with a different sign. This annotation of your notes will help organize materials more easily, especially when there is large amount of information to be handled.

If you cannot keep up with your subject, occasionally you can ask him/her to repeat what he/she just said. Another tactic is to ask the subject a throwaway question and complete your notes while he/she talks about something not directly related to the main issue.

## Fact checking

This part of the investigation is undeniably the most important one. Even one mistake is enough to put into question the whole investigation. Neglecting even one apparently unimportant fact might cast in doubt other information verified several times over. In this case, the best way is to apply one of the main golden rules of journalism -verify the information with at least three sources. Although it may appear that a source has provided honest and truthful information, a professional journalist remains skeptical towards even the most credible source.

The *New York Times* says, "Don't trust anybody on anything that is checkable." This rule applies even to the most trustworthy sources, because simply they can make mistakes. The point of verifying or confirming material is to try to guarantee its truth for the readers. Accuracy and attribution are important, but not enough, especially in investigative projects.

## Fact versus opinion

*"Remember the fundamental principles of international journalism are impartiality, fairness and accuracy. These goals can only be delivered through careful selection of your sources. The golden rule of sourcing is that to treat something as publishable you need to confirm at least two reliable and independent sources,"* (International War and Peace Reporting Handbook on Sourcing for Journalists).

Investigative reporting is most frequently concerned with revealing facts which somebody has tried to hide from society. It can result in an official being dismissed, initiation of a court case or even imprisonment of the subject of your story. But journalists are not judges or prosecutors. The real investigative story should alert the readers' attention to the issue, show them the whole picture and offer ways to solve the problem, but give them the opportunity to draw their own conclusions.

Journalists have no right to state something that only represents their personal attitude towards offenders or victims in the story. Moreover, very emotional quotations used unreasonably can "spoil" the story and reduce the level of trust among readers. All sides should not only be represented but there should be balance between them. Otherwise, readers may feel that a journalist is not reporting but lobbying for the interests of one party.

Information-gathering, reporting, interviewing, organizing material and writing techniques mean little if the underlying logic of the investigation is faulty. Too many investigative reporters accept the conventional wisdom about an individual, institution or issue. Journalists should look for answers to questions about how and why things are the way they are and confront their own assumptions. During an investigation, everything should be questioned.

As an **example** of an investigation, let us look at a story published in the Georgian newspaper *Rezonansi* on January 23-30, 2006. It con-

cerned events in the Vani region. It was claimed that the President's Trustee in the region and the MP were blackmailing the governor, Tamaz Akhvlediani, demanding that he appoint their favoured candidate to a position, otherwise he was threatened with jail.

Akhvlediani approached a journalist, shared the story and asked for help. He brought certain documents with him. The governor claimed: *"On December 2004, at midnight Gia Getsadze, the President's Trustee in Imereti Region, called and told me to call an MP Paata Lezhava who would in turn tell me who to appoint to the vacancy of the first vice-governor. I met Lezhava's prot?g?, talked to him and decided he was not fit. I told Getsadze about it and suggested to appoint him as a simple vice-chairman. The Trustee didn't like the idea and demanded I appoint him immediately."*

According to the respondent, he refused to comply and was subsequently pressured. He was ordered to resign: "Getsadze ordered me to leave the post. I was forced to do it, but I wrote a long letter, explaining in detail what has become the basis for my resignation. They didn't like it and started to pursue me. They knew they couldn't catch me by putting drugs into my car, so they started to send the Chamber of Control to the office. I was checked and examined several times. It's true that they couldn't find anything there, but the prosecutor's office has already summoned me and I know I will be jailed as soon as I get there."

This was the initial information that the respondent provided to the journalist. According to the respondent, he wasn't safe and so the journalist decided to investigate.

The first person contacted was MP Lezhava. He didn't hide that he wanted to promote his prot?g? and that he had met Akhvlediani with this request. However, he said that he didn't know anything about Getsadze's role in the process since, according to him, the region's Presidential Trustee was David Mumladze at the time and probably Mumladze was the one who talked to Akhvlediani.

Therefore, Mumladze needed to be involved in the story as well. He provided documents proving that he wasn't a Trustee at that period and didn't contact Akhvlediani. It was clear that Lezhava was lying, trying to cover up Getsadze's involvement. The journalist contacted Getsadze, who admitted he was also promoting the same prot?g?; however, he said nothing about blackmail or threat.

Since Akhvlediani claimed that the chamber of control had entered his office, the journalist asked for access to the monitoring documents, where he found inconsistency in their final conclusions. One said that small violations existed and the other claimed that no violations were found. An expert review concluded that the finding of no violations was correct. According to the rules for appointing governors, the Trustee had no right to be involved in the process in any way. In addition, the journalist found out that the court traded Akhvlediani his freedom in exchange for money. The journalist contacted the prosecutor of Akhvlediani's case, but the latter refused to comment. When the prosecutor became convinced that the journalist was determined to discover the truth, he decided it was enough. Akhvlediani was left alone, the case was closed and after publishing the investigative story no one bothered him again.

The result of this investigation was that it saved an innocent person from being sent to jail. It is true that the story didn't have any important impact on society as a whole, but society was reassured. It is also interesting that the story caught the attention of several international organizations and it even won a prize.

The two main documents that the journalist used for this investigation were the law on appointment of governors and the findings of the Chamber of Control. These documents were enough to prove that the violation and illegal act had occurred.

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# 6 CHAPTER

## SOURCES OF INFORMATION

**J**ournalism is an art of details. After defining the field, the second issue is clarification of sources for gathering information.

Usually, sources of information are either official or non-official, which in their turn can be oral or written. In Armenia official information can be obtained from the websites of the relevant bodies and departments. However, usually these do not satisfy journalists. Information about the decrees of the President of the Republic, his visits, official receptions, government sessions, decisions, visits of the Prime-Minister, work of the National Assembly can be found on the websites of those departments. Activities of ministries and other state institutions are also reflected in the official websites. However, seldom can we find answers on those sites to the issues that are of most concern to our audience, society.

There are cases when through their questions and calls journalists make the official "sources" work. Sometimes there are even amusing cases when officials learn from journalists about events that concern their field. For example, in calling to clarify details about an accident or crime, a journalist may be told by the Police Information Service that this is the first information they had about it and thanked for it. Only after the second or third call might a journalist manage to get information and even then not answers to all the questions that he or she may have. This is the reason that journalists often prefer to use non-official sources. The information provided by the latter is often more complete and useful than that e.g. on internet sites. In the journalist's work, building a network of reliable personal sources and working with them is highly important. From the very first days of his/her work, the journalist forms acquaintances and ties with people from the field he/she reports on, who afterwards can become reliable sources of information.

Different approaches are needed for using public figures and ordinary citizens as a source. Usually, officials and civil servants are not ready to provide valuable information to a journalist, no matter how friendly their relations are. This is the reason why journalists need to be careful and try to understand why a source may be providing valuable information. It is also desirable that the journalist verifies the information provided by his/her source with at least one or two other sources. Our colleagues in the regions inform us that, for obtaining information about any local or central government body in Armenia they often approach a

former official who worked in that organization. Such sources may then be willing to talk about things he or she knew while doing the job, but was unable to reveal. For example, one journalist mentioned that information he couldn't get from the city's chief architect he eventually obtained from the predecessor. However, information obtained from a former official cannot always be used because often the source asks not to be disclosed. This phenomenon exists not only in the regions but in the capital city as well. For example, after leaving his position, a former mayor accused the incumbent President and other high ranking officials of putting pressure on him to carry out illegal land distribution.

It is preferable to receive information from politicians and civil servants in a written form, so that they cannot deny later that they have provided that information. The initiative for making written sources of information public property belongs to Sweden. According to the Law on Freedom of Information adopted in Sweden in 1966, everybody in that country, no matter if he/she is a journalist or not, can get any information from any organisation without introducing himself/herself or stating the purpose for requesting that information. As mentioned in the chapter on FOI, now most countries have laws on Freedom of Information and the Media.

Undeniably however, it is easier to work with an ordinary citizen as a source of information. The citizen is usually the interested party, who wants his or her concern to become the issue of public debate and only does not want to disclose him or herself when he or she feels in personal danger. This means that it is not always the case that a journalist can publish information possessed or disclose the source of that information. There are also many cases when sources prefer to remain anonymous. They agree to provide information only on condition that they will not be revealed, because in this case they are free of responsibility. The anonymous source can only be justified if information which is very important and factual is impossible to obtain from any other source. A journalist can use anonymous information only when it is a fact and not an opinion or a personal statement.

This often places journalists in a difficult situation. In the legislation and the media code of conduct of a number of countries, it is explicitly stated that "protection of secret sources of information is the moral responsibility of the media". Indeed, several leading journalists have chosen to be imprisoned rather than reveal their secret sources. Disclosure could

cause significant damage not only to the source and the journalist concerned but also to the credibility of whole world of journalism.

The principle of protection of sources of information is also enforced in Article 5, point 1 of the Law on Mass Media of Armenia: "Journalists and those carrying out journalist activities are not obliged to reveal the source of information with an exception of cases mentioned in point 2 of the same Article". Point 2 of Article 5 states: "Disclosure of a source may be enforced on journalists and those carrying out journalist activities only through the court decision in regard to a criminal case for the investigation of a serious crime if the necessity for the protection of public criminal-legal interests is of more importance than the public interest of not disclosing the secret source, and all other ways of protection of public interest are invalid. In this case, at the request of the journalist the court examination is closed to the public".

The laws on state secrets are very similar in all three countries of the **South Caucasus**. All three laws give the authorities nearly unlimited discretion to classify information relating to the military, economy, scientific endeavours, foreign relations, intelligence and law and order. They create three categories of secret: Of Special Importance (Extraordinary Importance in Georgia), Top Secret and Secret. The laws of Armenia and Azerbaijan allow information to be classified for thirty years initially, while Georgia limits it to twenty. Similarly, the criminal codes also provide heavy penalties for disclosing state and other specific types of secret. Penalties can also be found in the civil codes. All three countries have implemented a variety of laws covering business secrets, civil code provisions and limitation on disclosure of certain types of information.

There are numerous provisions in the **Armenian** Criminal Code imposing restrictions on disclosing specific types of information, including that relating to personal or family life, medical secrets, privacy of communications, espionage, state secrets, breach of rules for handling state secrets, and divulging data from an inquiry or investigation.

The "Law on State and Official Secrets" of Armenia sets up a comprehensive system for classifying and protecting secret information. Information can be protected if it relates to military affairs, including strategies and operations plans, mobilisation of armed forces, programmes of the military-industrial complex, the organisational structure and location of the armed forces; external affairs and foreign econom-

ic activity; economics, science and technology relating to defense programmes and arms production, precious metals and stones, reserves, government finances and budget policy; and intelligence including counterintelligence, informants, encryption and protection of state and official secrets.

When using information, journalists must evaluate whether the information provided by the source contradicts the provisions of Article 8 of the Law on Freedom of Information, since freedom of information is limited in the following cases:

- if it involves state, service, bank or commercial secrets;
- if it damages the privacy of the personal or family life of an individual, including privacy of letters, phone conversations, postal, telegraph and other communications;
- if it contains facts relevant to a preliminary examination not yet subject to publication;
- if it reveals facts subject to accessibility limitations related to professional activities (medical, notary, judiciary);
- if it violates an author's creative rights or other related rights.

Article 7 of the "Law on Mass Communication" of Armenia defines limits on publishing certain types of information, including that which is legally defined as secret, or which advocates criminal or illegal acts or violates the right to individual privacy, plus information obtained by video or audio recording conducted without notifying the person of the fact or recording, unless "it is necessary for the protection of the public interest."

In **Azerbaijan** Article 2 of the "Law on Freedom of Information" (FOI) states that FOI must not lead to violations of the legal rights of individuals, but limits on FOI are only found in The Constitution. Article 10 of the law sets limits on access to information relating to state, professional, and commercial secrets, personal and family life, formal investigations, terrorist actions and judicial information.

Article 10 of the Mass Media law prohibits the publication of a number of categories of information including state secrets and confidential information protected by the legislation. It also prohibits publication under the title of an authoritative source hearsay or incorrect information which would impinge on the honour or dignity of citizens, including pornographic material and slander.

The "Law on State Secrets" defines state secrets as information relating to military, foreign policy, economic, scientific intelligence, counter-intelligence and investigatory activities which, if divulged, could damage the security of the Republic. The law prohibits the following information from being classified as a state secret: information about natural disasters and other emergencies and their consequences; the state of the environment, public health, sanitation, demography, education, and crime; the privileges and compensation given to citizens, officials, enterprises, offices and organisations; violations of human rights and freedoms of citizens; the health of top officials; and violations of laws by state bodies and their functionaries.

Article 11 of the Azerbaijani "Law on Combating Terrorism" states that the public release of information during action against terrorism shall be determined by the operational chief of staff. There are prohibitions on disseminating the following information: information relating to anti-terrorist tactics and technical measures; information that would threaten the lives and health of people in the zone of operation; information justifying terrorism or propaganda; and information about persons participating in the operation or supporting it.

In **Georgia**, Article 27 of the "Law on Freedom of Information" has exemptions for information considered a state, commercial, professional or personal secret. Commercial and professional secrets can be classified for an unlimited period. Personal secrets are classified for the lifetime of the individual. Names of some public servants participating in an official decision can be withheld under executive privilege, but the papers can be released.

Article 11 of the General Administrative Code of Georgia prohibits public servants who are involved in an administrative proceeding from disclosing or using secret information without authorisation and holds them liable for use or disclosure of such information. Article 23 prohibits experts from disclosing secret information.

The "Law on State Secrets" of Georgia sets rules for the classification of information where "disclosure or loss of which may inflict harm on the sovereignty, constitutional framework or political and economic interests of Georgia." The law also defines a number of areas where information cannot be classified as a state secret. This includes information that would prejudice or restrict basic human rights and freedoms or may cause harm to the health and safety of the population; most normative

acts; maps (except special military maps); information on natural disasters and catastrophes; environmental conditions; corruption, unlawful actions by officials and crime statistics; privileges, compensations and benefits provided by the state to citizens, officials and others; information on the state monetary fund and national gold reserve; and information on the health status of top officials.

The "Law on Freedom of Speech and Expression" of Georgia allows for restrictions on freedom of speech and expression if "the restriction is transparent and predictable, narrowly assigned by law, and the public good protected by the restriction is greater than the damage caused." It allows for the regulation of speech relating to state, commercial, private or professional secrets. Professional information which is confidential shall not be disclosed without the permission of the owner or by a court. The source of a secret is given absolute privilege.

An example of how this operates in practice can be cited from experience in Armenia, in the criminal case filed against Nikol Pashinyan, Chief Editor of the *Haykakan Zhamanak* (*Armenian Times*) daily. Without disclosing the source, the newspaper published a report that the wife of one of the opposition leaders tried illegally to take diamonds and gold out of the country, hidden in her lingerie. After publication of the article, the Chief Editor of Haykakan Zhamanak and the political figure concerned appeared in court. The newspaper was obliged to disclose its source. The information was provided by a former employee of the Customs Service, who came to court and partially confirmed the newspaper's story. In this case, the information published by the newspaper was not upheld by the court. That is, the journalist should not have excluded the source of information, who may have had some ulterior motive.

It is also an important precondition that when gathering information, journalists use only honest means and do not undertake concealed listening, taping and recording, change of identity, faking of documents or bribing of sources. Exceptions are cases where information necessary to the public interest cannot otherwise be obtained. This type of approach is only justified in cases where the journalist can present material which reveals a concealed truth and helps the public to understand more fully the real situation.

Another, more comprehensive **example** can be cited from Armenia. In 2003, an unusual event occurred in the history of media-government

relations. The Association of Investigative Journalists approached the Yerevan municipality and requested all the decrees of previous mayors for the period of 1997-2000 on land allocations in the Circular Park area, especially near the Opera House. The request of the Association was rejected. After complaining to the Prime Minister, the Association of Investigative Journalists was obliged to submit an appeal to the court and go through all judicial procedures. The court case against the Yerevan municipality was concluded in 2004 with victory for the Association of Investigative Journalists. The court compelled the municipality to provide the public documents requested, and the Ministry of Finance and Economy to pay 300 thousand AMD to the Association of Investigative Journalists in damages. On 16 June 2006, The Association of Investigative Journalists received the documents they had requested as well as the 300 thousand AMD. This case readily serves as an example both for journalists who are refused access to essential information and for those public officials who refuse access to public documents. The latter can clearly see that such refusal may cause financial damage to the state budget and to themselves.

**References:**

*ARTICLE 19: Under lock and key - Freedom of information and the media in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia (2005)*

# 7 CHAPTER

# PRACTICAL SKILLS

This chapter offers practical advice from several experienced British and American journalists on topics such as newsgathering, writing, reporting, interviewing, verification and accuracy. We are sure these skills will be useful for both beginners and practising journalists, who can use it to check their own style of working.

## News

Broadcasters, TV stations and TV news operations differ both within countries and from country to country. While many general news principles apply to both electronic media and print, there are obvious differences between the ways they operate. Print or text (which includes wire services and news agencies) also differ domestically and across international borders. But there is one thing they all have in common, and on which they all agree - the staff of a news operation must all be aiming for the same thing and have a common set of editorial standards (and visual standards in the case of television) to which they all must work.

In other words, the news staff - journalists, presenters, producers, reporters, sub-editors, researchers, camera people, editors, sound, graphics etc must all share a common goal and, more importantly, work to an agreed house "style" - a way of shooting, cutting, writing, using sound bites, still picture (photograph) choice and all the other functions of newspapers, television and radio that is consistent across all news bulletins, day to day, week to week. Obviously, the choice of style and how a programme or publication looks will vary from station to station, newspaper to newspaper, and is often dictated by what kind of audience, what age group etc the news enterprise is aiming at.

This document therefore is not going to try to set out a style to be adopted, but rather to set out a few guidelines and rules that are the commonly accepted minimum standards to which any serious news operation should aspire.

## The self-evident truth

The three most important factors that anyone working in news must take account of are:

1. The audience
2. The audience
3. THE AUDIENCE

Without an audience (readership) there is little reason for our existence. Furthermore, never forget that the audience pays our salaries (whether by taxes, by buying products that are advertised, or by a licence fee). We work - ultimately - for them. So we must make sure at all times that news items and bulletins are relevant to our audience.

## The basics of news

News has been described as "the first rough draft of history" and "the immediate, the important, the things that have an impact on our lives". There are obviously many different types of news stories, but in simple terms, most of them will fit into the following categories:

**Proximity & Relevance.** For a story to have impact it should be relevant and one of the key things to make it relevant is that it has to have proximity. Things that happen nearby are more likely to interest us than things that happen a long way away.

The greater the effect something has on viewers lives, their income and emotions, the more important an item will appear to them.

**Immediacy.** News is what is happening now. What happened yesterday is 'dead' unless there is something new to say. News is only news while it is NEW.

**Interest.** News should make you sit up and take notice. Stories must have a wide appeal or most of the audience will switch off. The skill of the journalist is to draw out the relevance and present it clearly, factually and in an interesting way.

The audience will find out what it needs to know as well as what it wants to know.

**Drama.** Violent crimes, car chases, amazing rescues are the things that popular movies are made of. The danger, adventure and conflict attract most people's attention.

**Entertainment.** Although it depends on the style of the programme, many news professionals now feel that it is possible to entertain as well as inform. The idea of leaving the audience smiling with a lighter piece of news at the end of a bulletin (often called the "and finally") is now popular with many broadcasters.

**Special interest.** Stories that appeal to people's interests, such as science, business or religion, or that appeal to specific groups such as women, minorities, disabled people etc.

**Analysis.** Stories which explain the meaning of events.

## The types of news

News is generally categorised as being Hard or Soft.

**Hard news.** Stories about events or conflicts that have just happened or are about to happen, such as crimes, fires, meetings, demonstrations, speeches, court cases.

They are reported as an account of what happened, why it happened and how the audience is affected.

**Soft news.** Stories which are intended to entertain or inform. There is often an emphasis on human interest or novelty. They may focus on people, places or issues that directly affect people's lives.

**Emergencies.** These are the high points of human drama - fires, sea or mountain rescues etc. In fact, any time where human life is at risk there is a story.

**Local & National Government.** Decisions made by governments that affect a large number of people are news. However, governments are always keen to get (good) publicity and the journalist should be the one to decide whether a government decision has impact or whether a politician or a political party is just seeking publicity.

**Building.** Local building developments such as roads, leisure complexes, shopping malls and centres, housing schemes etc will have an impact on an area. They will offer new facilities but may also cause disruption.

**Conflict & Controversy.** This can be a physical clash in the streets or a conflict of ideas. Every issue in the public eye has people who are for it and those who are against. By putting both sides of the argument, the audience can make up its own mind about important issues.

**Pressure groups.** People who have a strong view about an issue will form themselves into a group to get their argument across. They either want something or are opposed to it and if the issue affects enough people they can provide a source of news.

**Industry & business.** Employment is a major factor in most people's lives so developments in industry make big news. This applies both when jobs are lost or created.

**Health.** This can be anything from an outbreak of illness to a shortage of blood, a new cure, a problem with the health services, births, deaths etc.

**Human Interest.** Something extraordinary that happens to an ordinary person. This could be either positive or negative, such as winning a large prize, suffering a tragedy or an outstanding personal achievement.

**Personalities.** A visit by a film star, a member of royalty, or even a (well-known) politician will always create interest.

**Sport.** Results and achievements.

**Seasonal News.** New Year celebrations, the tourist season, summer or winter weather. Also, trends that show patterns or changes - such as increases/decreases in crime etc.

**Weather & Travel.** These affect the way we live - what to wear, whether we will be delayed on a journey. Many local stations (particularly in radio) owe their audiences to the fact that they can provide up-to-the-minute relevant information on weather and travel conditions.

**Animals.** Few items get greater reactions than 'cuddly' animal stories such as, for example, a newly born Panda in Peking Zoo. They make ideal "and finally" stories.

## Reporting and Writing

### Reporting: Some Tricks of the Trade

*Don't forget those essentials.* Remember the Five Ws: Who, What, When, Where,

Why and How. Even the most experienced reporters, distracted by an interesting angle, have forgotten to answer one or two of them on occasion. One way to avoid that is to write the five Ws in your notebook, with lots of blank space between them before you head out of the door. Before finishing an interview or meeting, go down that list and make sure the blanks are filled in.

**Silence is golden.** This adage can apply to reporters. There are few more offensive people than loudmouth know-it-all reporters who want everyone to know how well informed they are. Sources respond to a listener and will open up to a reporter who is willing to say: "I don't know, so please help me with this information."

**Be prepared.** Perhaps the only reporter more offensive than the know-it-all is the one who knows nothing. Never go to an event or interview without doing your homework. It is all right to say, "I don't know," about information that is new, but there is no excuse for a reporter's ignorance of commonplace information, especially the correct spelling of an official's name.

**Taking notes.** For those who don't know standard shorthand, it is best to work out your own. *E.g.: yr own sys of abrs, wch u en us w/o stpng t thnk and w/o stpng to lk at ppr.* Translation: *Your own system of abbreviations, which you can use without stopping to think and without stopping to look at the paper.* It is disconcerting for a source to be talking to someone who is constantly bent over a notebook. Practice taking quick, abbreviated notes.

**Avoid jargon.** Don't let the jargon get into your notebook. Avoid words, expressions and phrases that are known only to people with specific knowledge or interests.

**Keep the colour in.** Keep the colourful details that give life to the story. It's not only what people say that's important, but also how they say it. Consider this: "Asked how he would handle council members who disagreed with him, Smith looked his questioner straight in the eye, grinned and formed his right hand in the shape of a gun, letting his thumb drop like a hammer. He didn't say a word."

**Be empathetic.** Be sensitive to people in grief. Reporting with our senses implies being sensitive to the conditions, circumstances and nuances of specific situations.

**Report both (all) sides.** Every story has more than one side to it. In the interest of balance and fairness, talk to all parties concerned and report their views.

### Writing Guidelines

1. Identify your subject and stick to it. Be clear which question or questions you are trying to answer. If a piece of information does not help in answering them, leave it out.
2. After writing each phrase or sentence, look at it through the reader's eyes and ask yourself, is it clear? Does it say what it was intended to say? Have you given the readers the necessary information to understand what you are telling them?

3. Think whether an expression, reference or name will be understood by your readers, or whether you need to define, explain, or identify.
4. Vary the length of sentences. However, remember, short sentences are usually clearer.
5. Make sentences active, not passive.
6. Use examples. They make a story more interesting, and put information into a form readers can grasp more easily than abstract terms. Don't say a crowd "responded favourably" (or unfavourably) to a politician's speech; describe people cheering or booing or not paying attention, get quotes that show the listeners' approval or disapproval.
7. Think of yourself as using a zoom lens: go from wide focus (broad theme or information) to narrow focus (example or detail).
8. Answer the question "So what?" Tell readers why the story is significant or interesting, what it will mean for them, and why it is worth reading. One journalist puts it this way: "Imagine yourself in the reader's shoes and ask, does it help me? Does it hurt me? Does it cost me money? Will it help my life? Would I get from it joy, pain, excitement, interest, misery, anything?"
9. Keep the "voice" consistent. Don't use a very colloquial style in one place and formal language in another. News writing customarily is conversational but formal - that is, it uses formal grammar and vocabulary, but should sound conversational rather than academic.
10. Use familiar, common words; avoid technical terms and jargon.
11. Concrete words are always better than abstract words.
12. Descriptive verbs are better than bland, general verbs ("he plodded" or "he darted" instead of "he walked"; "he shouted" or "he murmured" instead of "he said").
13. Be specific ("he took a taxi" or "he took a train" instead of "he went").
14. Use quotes to add emotion and colourful language to your story.
15. Make every sentence count, don't repeat information.
16. Eliminate unnecessary words.

17. News writing ordinarily does not use first person at all. In an essay or commentary that is written in the first person, you should use the pronouns "I" and "me" sparingly. They should appear often enough to establish a consistent voice (don't write half an essay without it and then suddenly introduce a sentence with "I"; it is disconcerting) but you should find ways to avoid repeating them any more often than is absolutely necessary to convey your meaning.
18. Put events, ideas, and quotes in logical order.
19. Try to write transitions from one theme to the next so the story flows smoothly instead of jumping from subject to subject.

## Leads

*Why leads are vital:* Don Frey, noted writing teacher, puts it well: the lead to a story "grabs the reader, informs the reader, and teaches the reader how to read the rest of the story." Author John McPhee says the lead is the "flashlight that shines into a story." One other key point: A newspaper reader is likely to spend only a few seconds deciding whether to read a story or not. If the lead does not grab the reader, the writer's work is in vain.

*Types of leads:* There are two types of lead: direct (hard) and indirect (soft). Generally, use the direct lead for news stories, and the indirect lead for features. However, this is only a guideline. Whatever the form, the reader is looking for news; don't delay it long. There are other kinds of leads: the question, the quote, the one-word, the anecdote (made popular by the Wall Street Journal). They all have their place, but use sparingly.

*Start early:* While covering an event or interviewing a person, think about what is important. Strive to focus a story as you report it. Circle key elements in your notebook. As you return to the office, talk to yourself about the story and block out a lead in your mind.

*Sweat it:* Rewrite the lead until it is right, or at least the best that you can produce on deadline. Hang loose. Play with the words and the ideas. You can always rely on the 5 Ws, but can you be more imaginative?

*Be honest:* You want to hook the reader, but don't hype the lead, promising more than you deliver. "The lead is a contract with the reader,"

says Don Murray, an excellent writing coach. "The story must document the lead."

*Keep it tight:* Short leads are more likely to snag a reader. If your lead is over 35 words, it probably is too long. Review the lead. Are you packing too much into it?

*When stuck:* Sometimes, the lead refuses to be born. Don't panic. Try some of these tricks:

- Review the basics. What, in simple, ABC terms, is the story about? What is the main news angle? If you were telling the story to a friend, how would you start it?
- Write an imperfect lead, give the piece a sense of direction, and repair the lead later. This ploy can work well.
- Take a walk. Go for coffee. Even a short break can help.
- Skip the lead, and write it later. Most of us need a "top" on the story to give it direction, but sometimes the delaying tactic can work.

*Finally:* Don't be a slave to guidelines. They can all be violated for good reason.

## Interviewing

Before doing an interview, it is very important to **research** your subject thoroughly and **choose** your interviewee carefully. You are looking for an interviewee who can think clearly, concisely and with authority.

However, it is not always possible to select an interviewee. It might be the person who is the main subject of your story who *must* be interviewed and who might also turn out to be totally inarticulate. So *be prepared!*

Research is important because it enables you to **focus** the interview. An interview should be to the point; it should not be long and rambling (particularly for news items).

**Control.** No matter how important the interviewee is, once the interview has been granted, the **journalist** is in control. You decide how to do the interview, what the environment should be (at a crash site or at a boardroom table). You decide where the interviewee will sit/stand, and - most importantly - you decide the **agenda** of the interview and the **questions**.

Sometimes interviewees, particularly politicians and government officials, may want to know the questions beforehand. Obviously, each case has to be dealt with on its merits, but in general do not give an interviewee the exact questions. Try to get away with telling them perhaps the first question in detail and then the general areas you want to cover. Apart from anything else, if they know the exact questions, they will start to rehearse the answers in their heads and when they finally come to doing the interview, their replies may simply be predetermined answers, which don't help you at all.

Above all else, listen to the answer. An interview isn't a series of predetermined questions, but an attempt to find out what the story is about, to elicit information.

### The confrontational interview

This is an interview with a politician, an activist, a trade union leader, or anyone who represents an interest group or a party in a dispute/conflict.

The interviewer must **balance** the interview, by putting the opposite point of view and making the interviewee justify, explain and defend his/her position. The interviewer should not let the interviewee use the interview for his/her own purposes, e.g. to put across propaganda. The interviewer should be **assertive** in asking questions, but should avoid becoming **aggressive**, which can damage the journalist's authority (particularly in a face-to-face interview).

### The "expert" interview

This could be with a professor, an academic, an analyst, a journalist. The aim is to extract **information, explanation, analysis**. The interview is not confrontational - the expert is being used to try to help the audience better understand the story.

### "Ordinary people"

For example, an ad hoc **survey** on a particular issue - when you ask ordinary people in the streets or on the phone for their opinion on a topical issue; or an interview with an ordinary person when they have had an unusual experience. Because ordinary people are not experienced in doing press interviews, it is best to keep your questions simple.

## Preparation for scheduled interviews

- Have an idea what your story subject will be.
- Get background information on your subject and on the person you will interview.
- Prepare the key questions and especially the opening question. Think about follow-up questions.
- Make sure you have a notebook and extra pen and if you use a tape recorder, check to see that it is in working order. Even if you are taping the interview, always take notes as well.
- If you are recording or have a photographer, think about how you can assure good sound quality (don't meet in a cafe with loud music!) and a good location for photos.

## Opening the interview

- Thank the source for giving you his or her time.
- If it is an unscheduled interview (e.g. you are doing "man-on-the-street" interviews or interviewing a witness to some event) clearly identify yourself and your media.
- When you interview someone about a war or disaster or a personal tragedy, tell him you are sorry for what has happened and glad he or she has survived.
- Be sure you have the correct spelling of the subject's name.
- Explain what subjects you will be asking about. However, leave it open-ended enough so you can pursue other subjects that may arise.
- Try to establish a comfortable but professional atmosphere.
- Don't volunteer to put anything off the record. Unless the source specifically asks not to be quoted, anything said in the interview can be published.

## Conducting the interview

- Ask questions in a logical order.
- Be sure you understand the answers.
- Use questions to make information more specific (a pensioner says he has not received his pension payments; you ask, "How

many months since you were paid?" A politician says he will fight against corruption; you ask, "Give some examples of what actions you will take")

- Except for the simplest questions, ask twice, in different words, and listen for any change in the answers.
- Ask how your source knows what he is telling you. Ask, "Did you see this yourself? Or did you hear it from someone else?" "Did you see this document, or did someone tell you?"
- Take good notes, but don't try to write down every word. Listen for a colorful or important quote and make sure you have it accurately in your notes. If necessary, say to the subject, "please, wait a second, I want to get this down correctly" or ask him or her to repeat a word or phrase.
- As you are taking notes, put an X or circle or otherwise mark anything that needs to be checked or that you don't quite understand.
- Pay attention to details, such as the subject's appearance, speaking voice, gestures, and the surrounding scene.
- Don't argue with your source or express your opinions. Maintain a calm, professional attitude even if the source becomes angry or excited. Just listen and politely and calmly ask the next question.
- Listen for the idea or fact that will be the lead for your story.
- Save the hardest or most sensitive questions for the end.

*Remember:* Almost always, people will talk most willingly when they feel that someone is truly interested in what they say. Train yourself to be curious, to really listen, and to be open to new information and ideas, to genuinely try to understand the viewpoint and experiences of the person you are speaking to.

### Ending the interview

- Look back at the X's in your notes and try to clear up or double-check anything you were unsure about.
- Ask, "Do you have any answers for which I failed to ask the question?"

- Get the subject's phone number and ask if it will be all right to call if you think of any other questions. If you will be writing right away, make sure you get a home phone number or know where the source can be reached.

## Verification

### **Never add anything that was not there**

Do not add means, simply, do not add things that did not happen. This goes further than "never invent" or make things up, it also encompasses rearranging events in time or place or conflating characters or events. If a siren rings out during the taping of a TV story, and for dramatic effect it is moved from one scene to another, it has been added to that second place. What was once a fact has become a fiction.

### **Never deceive the audience**

Do not deceive means never mislead the audience. Fooling people is a form of lying and mocks the idea that journalism is committed to truthfulness. It is closely related to "do not add." If you move the sound of the siren and do not tell the audience, you are deceiving them. If acknowledging what you've done would make it unpalatable to the audience, then it is self-evidently improper. This is a useful check.

Do not deceive means that if one is going to engage in any narrative or storytelling techniques that vary from the most literal form of eyewitness reporting, the audience should know. In quoting people, a survey of journalists that we conducted found broad agreement on this point. Except for word changes to correct grammar, the overwhelming majority of journalists believe that some signal should be sent to audiences - such as ellipses or brackets - if words inside quotation marks are changed or phrases deleted for clarity.

## The Rule of Transparency

Be as transparent as possible about your reporting methods and motives. If journalists are truth seekers, it must follow that they be honest and truthful with their audiences, too - that they be truth presenters. If nothing else, this responsibility means journalists be as open and honest with audiences as they can about what they know and what they don't.

In practice, the only way to be completely honest with people about what you know is to reveal as much as possible about sources and methods. How do you know what you know? Who are your sources? How direct is their knowledge? What biases might they have? Are there conflicting accounts? What don't we know? Call it the rule of transparency. We consider it the most important single element in creating a better discipline of verification.

Most of the limitations journalists face in trying to move from accuracy to truth are addressed, if not overcome, by being honest about the nature of our knowledge, why we trust it, what efforts we make to learn more.

Transparency has a second important virtue: it signals the journalist's respect for the audience. It allows the audience to judge the validity of the information, the process by which it was secured and the motives and biases of the journalist providing it. This makes transparency the best protection against errors and deception by sources. If the best information a journalist has comes from a potentially biased source, naming the source will reveal to the audience the possible bias of information - and may inhibit the source from deceiving as well.

It is the same principle that governs scientific method: explain how you learned something and why you believe it - so the audience can do the same. In science, the reliability of an experiment, or its objectivity, is defined by whether someone else could replicate the experiment. In journalism, only by explaining how we know what we know can we approximate this idea of people being able, if they are of a mind to, to replicate the reporting. This is what is meant by objectivity of method in science, or in journalism.

### **Transparency and Dealing with Sources**

The Rule of Transparency also suggests something about the way journalists deal with their sources. Obviously journalists should not lie to or mislead their sources in the process of trying to tell the truth to their audiences.

Unfortunately, journalists, without having thought the principle through, all too often have failed to see this. Bluffing sources, failing to level with sources about the real point of the story, even simply lying to sources about the point of stories are all techniques some journalists have applied - in the name of truth seeking. While at first glance candour may

seem like handcuffs on reporters, in most cases it won't be. Many reporters have come to find that it can win them enormous influence. "I've found it is always better to level with sources, tell them what I'm doing and where I'm going," then Boston Globe political correspondent Jill Zuckman told us. Washington Post reporter Jay Matthews makes a habit of showing sources drafts of stories. He believes it increases the accuracy and nuance of his pieces.

At the same time, journalists should expect veracity from their sources. A growing number of journalists believe that if a source who has been granted anonymity is found to have misled the reporter, the source's identity should be revealed. Part of the bargain for anonymity is truthfulness.

### **Originality: Rely on Your Own Reporting**

Beyond demanding more transparency from journalists, citizens and journalists can also look for something else in judging the value of a news report. Michael Oreskes, the former Washington bureau chief of the New York Times, has offered this deceptively simple but powerful idea in the discipline for pursuing truth: Do your own work.

### **Keep an Open Mind: Humility**

One way journalists can err is by assuming they understand too much. Journalists should not only be skeptical of what they see and hear, but also about their ability to know what it really means. In other words, journalists need to recognize their own fallibility, the limitations of their knowledge. They should avoid false omniscience. They should acknowledge to themselves what they are unsure of, or only think they understand - and then check it out. This makes their judgment more precise and their reporting more incisive. It avoids fudging.

Several journalists have advocated similar ideas. Jack Fuller, the author, novelist, editor, and newspaper executive, has suggested that journalists need to show "modesty in their judgment" about what they know and how they know it.

Gregory Fauve, the long-time editor in Sacramento and Chicago, says his rule is simple. Do not print one iota beyond what you know.

First, you have to be honest about what you know, versus what you assume you know, or think you know. A key way to avoid misrepresenting events is a disciplined honesty about the limits of one's knowledge and the power of one's perception.

## Accuracy

### Guarding against errors

In school, one can be 80 percent correct and get a decent grade (called marks in some parts of the world). In journalism, however, there is no such leniency. Even if you're 90 percent correct, you've failed. News stories must be 100 percent correct.

Avoiding errors isn't easy, because there are so many different types of them to avoid. They range from simple typos, spelling slips, misplaced headlines, captions and pictures, to grave miscalculations that could be disastrous to both the news organization and its audience. How can such errors be avoided? Here are some tips:

- Primary responsibility for accuracy of any news report falls on the reporter/writer. Don't hand in your story before you're 100 percent sure of every figure, fact, name and address.
- Go back to the sources you used for the story to double check facts, figures, the spelling of a name, the accuracy of a quotation, the meaning of a term or phrase or any other point that may be unclear or misleading.
- Consult with your professional peers to make sure that what you've written makes sense. See if they agree (or disagree) and what they have to say about it. They may point to some holes or raise questions that would require some additional research. --- Consult a dictionary to ensure correct spelling of words, grammar and usage.
- After editing the story, a final reading by the reporter/writer provides a last opportunity to guard against errors before the story is published.
- If you're an assignment editor, let the junior reporters start with the simple and less complicated stories until they learn what it means to make a serious mistake.
- When it comes to financial figures, one has to be doubly careful. There have been times when a wrong figure has caused major financial disasters and greatly undermined the credibility of news organizations.
- Make sure that your figures add up correctly and that your percentages are correct and meaningful. It may be a fact that the salary of a bank manager in Tokyo is 40 percent higher than his

counterpart in Dhaka, Bangladesh. However, this would remain meaningless if we don't explain how the living conditions compare in the two cities.

- The same can be said about averages. Can you imagine a man drowning in a river that "averaged" one foot in depth?
- Since mistakes are unavoidable, adopt a serious correction policy that is prompt and systematic.

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