

SECTION FOUR: REPORTING

News Reporting

News is whatever journalists say it is. Certainly not every new discovery, new program, new proposal, new assertion and new thought could be carried in the news media. Yet, loosely speaking, it is all news. And, in actuality, a lot of what is overlooked by journalists every day could be as newsworthy as that which does appear in the news media.

From what events they are aware of, journalists try to choose the most newsworthy to actually present to the public as “news.” They usually start off with the happenings of the day which, from experience, they presume to be of most importance or of interest to the public. These stories are also some of the easiest stories to cover with limited staffing. The journalists cover specific “beats,” gathering news from crime blotters, government meetings, speeches and press conferences, strikes and rallies, etc. Sometimes, instead of starting with an event, the journalist will start with an issue. The journalist's reporting of the issue makes it news even if no one other than that journalist has ever thought about it before.

Another alternative is to interview an individual and allow him to create the news of the day. The reporter may have no idea what the person is going to say, but for some reason he suspects the public would be interested in that individual's opinions and insights. The individual may be famous, powerful, highly credible or just interesting. But, for whatever reason, the journalist decides that person is news – almost regardless of what he says. And, of course, there are unplanned incidents and major disasters that need to be covered. Some of these fall within one reporter's “beat,” but frequently they do not. In some cases multiple reporters must be assigned to cover a major unplanned incident, such as an airplane crash, natural disaster or a governmental crisis.

The same news stories can be approached from many different perspectives. There may be literally millions of people with some expertise who could render a credible opinion. The reporter must choose. He can take a single source and interview in depth. He can talk to many sources and combine their views into one story. Or he can personally immerse himself into the story – become part of the news, reporting on what he himself may observe or experience. He can look at a problem from an industrial, consumer,

political, social, scientific or individual perspective. He can review what has happened already, what is happening right now, or what is likely to happen in the future – near or distant.

The kind of data to be gathered for news story ranges from recordings of many months of broadcast news, or stories from a hundred different countries, to just a single news clip or radio programme. Decisions on gathering a corpus of news data requires in three main areas:

- The genres are the particular kind of media content in which you are interested- news, classified advertising, game shows, weather forecasts and so forth
- The media outlets are the publications, television channels or radio stations which carry the content
- “Outputs” are what the media outlets produce- specific newscasts, advertisements or programmes- and the time period to be covered

Tools for Reporting News Story

Interviewing: Notebooks Vs Recording

Even in an age of digital voice recorders, a reporter’s notebook and pen are still necessary tools for print and online journalists. Voice recorders are great for capturing every quote accurately, but transcribing interviews from them can often take too long, especially when you’re on a tight deadline.

Still, many beginning reporters complain that with a notepad and pen they can never take down everything a source says in an interview, and they worry about writing fast enough in order to get quotes exactly right.

It's an old debate among print journalism reporters: Which works better when interviewing a source, taking notes the old-fashioned way or using a cassette or digital voice recorder? Both have their pros and cons.

Notebooks

Pros:

A reporter's notebook and a pen or pencil is the time-honored tools of the interviewing trade. Notebooks are cheap and easy to fit into a back pocket or purse. They're also

Interviews

Unobtrusive enough that they generally don't make sources nervous. A notebook is also reliable - no need to worry about it running out of batteries. And for the reporter working on a tight deadline, notebooks are the fastest way of taking down what a source says, and of accessing his or her quotes when you're writing your story.

Cons:

Unless you're a very speedy note-taker, it's hard to jot down everything a source says, especially if he or she is a fast talker. So you can miss key quotes if you're relying on note-taking. Also, it can be hard to get quotes that are totally accurate, word-for-word, using just a notebook. That may not matter much if you're doing a quick person-on-the-street interview. But it might be a problem if you're covering an event where getting the quotes exactly right is important - say, a critical speech by the president.

Recorders

Pros:

Recorders enable you to get literally everything someone says, word-for-word. You don't have to worry about missing or mangling key quotes from your source. Using a recorder can free you up to jot down things in your notes you might otherwise have missed, such as the way a source acts, their facial expressions, etc.

Cons:

Like any technical device, recorders can malfunction. Practically every reporter who's ever used a recorder has a story about the batteries dying in the middle of an important interview. Also, recorders are more time-consuming than notebooks because a recorded interview has to be played back later and transcribed in order to access the quotes. On breaking news story there just isn't enough time to do that. Finally, recorders can make some sources nervous. And some sources may even prefer that their interviews not be recorded.

The Winner?

There's no clear winner. But there are clear preferences:

Notebooks work best when you're on a tight deadline.

Recorders are good for stories where you have time to transcribe the quotes after the interview.

So many reporters rely on notebooks for breaking news stories, and use recorders for articles that have longer deadlines, such as features. Overall, notebooks are probably used more often than recorders on a daily basis. But remember: Even if you're recording an interview, always take notes anyway. Why? The Murphy's Law of journalism says that the one time you rely solely on a recorder for an interview will be the one time the recorder malfunctions.

Some tips for taking good notes.

Be Thorough - But Not Stenographic

You always want to take the most thorough notes possible. But remember, you're not a stenographer. You don't have to take down absolutely everything a source says. Keep in mind that you're probably not going to use everything they say in your story. So don't worry if you miss a few things here and there.

Jot Down the 'Good' Quotes

Watch an experienced reporter doing an interview, and you'll probably notice that she isn't constantly scribbling notes. That's because seasoned reporters learn to listen for the "good quotes" - the ones they're likely to use - and not worry about the rest. (You can read more here about what constitutes a "good quote.") The more interviews you do, the better you'll get at writing down the best quotes, and at filtering out the rest.

Be Accurate - But Don't Sweat Every Word

You always want to be as accurate as possible when taking notes. But don't worry if you miss a "the," "and," "but" or "also" here and there. No one expects you to get every quote exactly right, word-for-word, especially when you're on a tight deadline, doing interviews at the scene of a breaking news event. It is important to be accurate get the meaning of what someone says. So if they say, "I hate the new law," you certainly don't want to quote them as saying they love it. Also, when writing your story, don't be afraid to paraphrase (put in your own words) something a source says if you're not sure you got the quote exactly right.

Repeat That, Please

If an interview subject talks fast or if you think you misheard something they said, don't be afraid to ask them to repeat it. This can also be a good rule of thumb if a source says something especially provocative or controversial. "Let me get this straight – are you saying that..." is something reporters are often heard to say during interviews.

Highlight the Good Stuff

Once the interview is done, go back over your notes and use a checkmark to highlight the main points and quotes that you're most likely to use. Do this right after the interview when your notes are still fresh.

Difference between Journalist & Reporter

Journalist is a wider term. A sub-editor, a columnist, an article writer, an anchor or any person who is working as newsman or working on news desk can be called a Journalist. The term reporter applies to a journalist who covers field stories report from the site. Reporter is a specialist form of a journalist. We can say a journalist who is responsible for gathering information and present it on mass media is called a Reporter. Reporter is supposed to be the explainer of complicated issues in simple and communicative manner.

- ▶ The main role of reporter is to present news in digestible format for viewers.
- ▶ Reporters gather information in variety of ways. Tips, press releases, witness events, Interviews, Public records and other sources. Reporter covers the event which is assigned to him by his organization/Newspaper or TV Channel.
- ▶ Reporters split their time between working in the newsroom and going in the field to witness events or interview people.

QUALITIES OF REPORTER

To be a good reporter one should have special qualities. One of the basic qualities of a reporter is to have an IPTB. IPTB means "it pays to be inquisitive". He should have the quality to be curious his eyes and ears should always be in search of News. He should have the quality to sniff the news.

In life everyone has a story to tell: A reporter should have a quality to compel others to tell the newsworthy story.

- ▶ A reporter should always take care of accuracy of news.
- ▶ He should be quick to report. He also has to take care of viewer's interest in the news item.
- ▶ Reporter should be cool headed. A cool head means he should be calm, cool and collected. He must have the ability to work in an atmosphere of hurry and excitement. Reporter must be physically fit to move around.
- ▶ Reporter should have the quality of awareness (alertness). He should be quite vigilant enough. Reporter must possess technical knowledge of the application of equipment. It will help him to establish command over technical staff.
- ▶ Reporter should be a dedicated worker and have the quality of Resourcefulness. Resourcefulness is a quality of being able to cope with a difficult situation. He has an ability to deal with unusual problems.
- ▶ Reporter must take care of time management. He should utilize maximum time to achieve his goals.
- ▶ The quality of decision making on the spot is a great quality. One decision on time can save many upcoming problems.
- ▶ In-fact decision making is a process of recognizing a problem and provide an opportunity to find a solution.

Classification of Reporters

CHIEF REPORTER:

- is a journalist who is supposed to be a senior and experienced reporter.
- The Chief Reporter is in charge of a team of reporters. He has to assign them duties and regulate them as per the policy of newspaper of the television channel.

- He also plans the special coverage of the expected news and assign it to reporters.
- Chief Reporter has to see that all the activities are covered properly and nothing important is missed by the reporters.
- Most of the invitations for press conferences, public meetings, demonstrations, agitations and strikes are addressed to him. He deposes his reporters to cover these events.
- The Chief Reporter also receives a lot of information from Government handouts, press releases and other publicity material for publication. He selects and assesses their news worthiness.

THE CORRESPONDANTS

- There are different kinds of correspondents who work for newspaper and TV Channel.
 - THE LINER: The liner is not a full time journalist. From time to time he may send news stories to the newspaper. Liners are paid on the basis of lines of the news stories published in the newspaper or broadcast on a TV Network.
 - THE STRINGER: The stringer is not a full time journalist. His whole time profession is quite different. He is attached to a newspaper through a string. He is generally paid some fixed amount to retain him for the newspaper.
 - SPECIAL CORRESPONDENTS: They are generally very experienced professionals having vast and varied contacts with official sources, with opposition sources and Government sources, with diplomatic sources, with embassy sources, with fellow reporters, with private secretaries of various ministries and companies.

NEWSCASTER/NEWS PRESENTER

- News presenter is a person who presents a news show on television, radio or on web is called News Presenter.

- ➡ He can be a working journalist or simply a reader who reads news bulletin prepared by others.
- ➡ In different countries the news presenter is called by different nomenclature. Some called them “Newscaster”, “Newsreader”, “News presenter”, “News Broadcaster”.
- ➡ To be a Newscaster or Presenter you do not have to look like a movie star, but you should have the ability to perform and your appearance should be acceptable.
- ➡ Television is a close-up medium, concentrate mainly on your face. For this reason, majority of viewers recognize you by face and key to appearance is to have a unique and memorable look.
- ➡ NEWS ANCHOR: A person who presents a news show on Radio or on Television is known as an Anchor. Anchors are the one who gets the publicity. Readily rewarded or blamed instantly. News Anchor should have the good knowledge of: Politics, Sociology, Government functioning, Skilled in broadcasting technology, Computer operation and public speaking discipline. News Anchor must have the ability to write his own scripts or read what the reporters and desk staff had written. News Anchor must be detail oriented, organized, flexible and multitasking person, at a time he has to speak, listen and to read from teleprompter/Autoque. News Anchor’s behavior should be friendly, articulative and easy to watch or listen. A good professional News Anchor must have the following characteristics:
 - Educated in Journalism
 - Skills in communication
 - Knows reporting
 - Copy editing skills
 - Writing ability
 - Command on language.

REPORTING

WHAT IS REPORTING? Reporting means, to report, to tell, to inform. Information is the oxygen to think or to form an opinion or to react.

➤ Two forms of reporting are:

- ▶ General assignment reporting
 - ▶ Beats reporting or special reporting.
- ➡ Each of these areas has distinct characteristics, but their borders are tricky and over lapping. News stories do not fall into a single category. They spill over into both.

GENERAL ASSIGNMENT REPORTING:

- ✗ It ranges from crime to crops, from weather to workers.
- ✗ The most successful General Reporters are excellent workers.
- ✗ They always ask themselves how valuable it is for audience. They go as close to the gross roots as possible in an attempt to generate original material.
- ✗ Reporter is an explainer of complicated issues and the General reporters are supposed to report the facts in simple and communicative manner.
- ✗ While doing general reporting you must know that true, new and interesting factors make news. Always look for new pitch. Every reporter has a different I.Q and style.

📺 Media wise classification of Reporting:

- Print media reporting
- Radio reporting
- TV reporting
- Web reporting

➡ Other forms of reporting are:

- Soft news reporting
- Analytical reporting
- Sensational reporting

CHARACTERISTICS AND QUALITIES OF GOOD REPORTING

- o Good Reporters see the world as their journalism laboratory, a storehouse of story ideas.
- o Good Reporters prefer to discover and develop their own story ideas.
- o Good Reporters are always active to collect the information.
- o Good Reporters talk about news they live it, breathe it and dream it.
- o Organizing the news material is important part of your job
- o Good Reporters are life long reporters they love words, names and lists.
- o Good reporters always understand that news writing is a transaction between a reporter and a reader.

BEAT REPORTING

- o A beat is, in wide sense, an area of information about which the journalists are expected to look for stories which will interest viewers.
- o Beat reporters cover all happenings in their respective filed such as breaking news, news updates, flash.
- o Beat reporters should have constant contact with the sources.
- o Beat reporters cover all happening in their respective filed. They must be expert on the subject as well as skilled in news writing, editing and presenting techniques.
- o Viewers begin to know and trust beat reporter who regularly reports on a subject area.
- o Beat reporter is expected to report the stories of breaking news nature, immediately.

VVIP BEAT: means covering the activities of a person who is very very important. Normally they are President or the Prime Minister or the foreign Head of State or Government who visits other countries. Sometimes reporters accompany the VVIP to report their foreign

engagement. VVIP reporters require alertness of mind. They have to take care of security measures as well. VVIP reporter is supposed to be on call duty round the clock as he is required to be on assignments on short notice.

Methods of Gathering Information for a report

WHAT IS AN INTERVIEW?

An interview is a conversation between two or more people the interviewer and the interviewee. Interviews are exchange of information between a reporter and a source. The interview is an active method of gathering news. For a journalist, an interview is usually in a form of question and answer session. Interview is one of the most important and easy way to gather information and create content for a story. It is an efficient and easy way to prepare a news program or news show. Interview has to create a three-way interaction; a successful interview will include all these three types of people. The best interview is conversations in which the required information arises as a part of the conversation.

If the reporter asks right questions, a source becomes a window to the news. A story can fail if the reporter asks the wrong questions or not enough questions. In interview the reporter has a control over the news gathering situation. Interviewer has to focus on one central theme of interest. During interview, do not ask close ended questions (that will answer as yes or no). Remember that it is your right to ask questions but it is also the right of the other person to refuse to answer. A good interview technique requires practice so do not expect to master immediately. "Practice makes the man perfect". To be a master of interview reporter has to learn the art of interview.

He must develop research habits. Prepare questions in advance on the subject of interviews. He must plan a strategy. The tone of the interviewer should be according to the objective, such as soft tone, harsh tone, aggressive tone, hard tone, submissive tone etc. Reporter must

know the techniques of presenting the interview - He should know what comes first. Which sound bite should be quoted and how to edit the interview.

TECHNIQUES (FOR QUESTIONING)

- o Questions should be clear and to the points.
- o Ask the question don't make statements
- o No unnecessary warm up questions
- o Don't preface question with deferential words.

Interviews Basics

An interview is a special kind of conversation. It is a conversation between a journalist and a person who has facts or opinions which are likely to be newsworthy. News involves people. Whatever news story you are researching, there will be a person or some people who know what you need to know, or who have relevant opinions. They will usually be happy to tell you. Your job is to find these people, and then ask them what you want to know. That is an interview. Usually, you will hear about news first and find the details later. You may see something happening; you may hear about it during a social conversation; you may receive a press release telling you about it; you may receive a tip-off from a well-placed friend. However you first hear about the news, the next step is to find out all the details so that you can write the story. The easiest way to do this is to interview the right people.

Speaking and listening

An interview is just a conversation, although it is a particular kind of conversation. As in any conversation, you and the person you are talking to will both be involved in speaking and in listening. Think, though, about which is more important to you - to speak or to listen?

Of course you will have to speak, to put your questions and explain what you want to know. But the purpose of the interview is to hear what the other person has to say. The most important part of the interview is for you to listen to what the person has to say, and to make sure that you understand what he or she is saying.

To make sure that you understand, it may be necessary to ask further questions to clarify what has already been said. For example, you might ask: "Did you say that the building would cost \$725,000?" or "Did you mean that the members of the committee would all be sacked?" Don't interrupt, though. Let the person

finish speaking first, and make notes of what you don't fully understand. You can ask questions for clarification when it is your turn to speak.

Making friends

Everybody talks more freely when they are relaxed and like the person they are talking to. If you want to get the best out of an interview, it is up to you to make sure that your interviewee (the person you are interviewing) feels this way.

For a start, you can try to arrange the interview in an informal setting - over a beer or a meal, in a club, under a tree. Otherwise, interview the person on his or her own territory - their office or home rather than the newspaper office. This will help them to feel at ease.

Then you have to gently take control of the situation, to guide the conversation where you want it to go. How you do this depends upon the person you are interviewing - an angry villager with a grievance which he is not expressing very clearly may need firm handling; a High Court judge will need very careful and polite handling.

Young journalists in developing countries often find it difficult to take control, especially if they are interviewing somebody with high social status. Women journalists, too, find it very difficult in some cultures to take control if they are interviewing a man.

You cannot disregard the cultural setting in which you live and work, but you should remember that you are striving to be a professional person. Controlling and guiding the interview, to get the relevant information without wasting time, is an important part of your professional skill.

It is a good idea to start any interview with friendly questions, even if they are not necessary for the story you wish to write. It will help you to make friends with the interviewee. You should always look and sound interested in the answers you receive, too. If the interviewee once feels that you are not listening, he will stop bothering to answer your questions.

Save your nasty questions until last. You may have to ask a trade union leader why he has called a strike without consulting his members, or a managing director why he has sacked 25 people and thrown them out of their homes.

If you think that the interviewee will not be happy with the question, make sure you have asked everything else first. Then you can ask the difficult question - if he gets angry and tells you to leave, you have lost nothing; if he gives you an answer, you have a good story.

Visualising

One of the most important skills in interviewing is the skill of visualising.

As the person you are interviewing gives you more pieces of information, you need to add them to the picture you have in your mind.

Can you now visualise the whole story? Could you answer any question about this story if it was put to you - Who? What? Where? When? and especially Why? and How?

If there are any gaps in your understanding, this does not mean that you are at fault - it means that you lack information. Your next question should be to fill in this gap.

Some journalists write down all their questions before they begin an interview. This is not a good idea. You may write down a few very important questions in advance; but the next question you ask each time will depend on the answer you received to the question before.

Visualise the whole story throughout the interview. Be aware of the gaps in your picture. Ask the questions which will give you the information to fill those gaps.

Sometimes your interviewee will speak in reply to your question, but not answer it. This may be accidental, if they did not understand your question or lost their train of thought; or it may be deliberate, if they do not want to answer the question, but do not want to say so.

Either way, if you ever ask a question and do not receive an answer, you should ask the question again. This does not have to be rude. You may say:

"Thank you, Minister, but I'm not sure that I heard the answer to my question. I was asking you whether you agree with the World Bank recommendations."

The object is to be polite but persistent. If the interviewee does not want to answer a question, make them say so. You can then thank them, move on to the next question ... and include in your story that they declined to answer this question.

Evaluating

As well as listening and understanding what you hear, you will need to think while you are listening. Ask yourself what is the significance of what you are hearing? Is it a big news story or a small one? Is it news at all? What will be the effect of what you are hearing on people's lives?

In this way you can evaluate what is being said. When you have a picture in your mind of what the news story means, you will know the sort of question to ask next.

Recording

However good you may think your memory is, you must keep a record of what you are told. An hour later, after a lot more talk and a journey back to the office and a chat with the chief of staff on your way to your desk, your memory of what was actually said will be unclear.

Tape recorder

You may record an interview with a tape recorder. If you are working for radio, you will need to do so, but even some newspaper and magazine reporters work this way. The advantage is that you record the interview accurately, without having to worry about note-taking, and can concentrate on what the person is saying. The disadvantage is that, after the interview, you may have to play the whole tape through again, sorting out what you want to use and what you don't want. This takes a lot of time.

If you are recording an interview with a tape recorder, you will need to follow a few simple rules:

- Know your tape recorder and what all the switches do. Practise with it in the office, until you are familiar with it.
- Check that the battery is fully charged before you leave the office. The best thing is always to put the battery in the charger whenever you finish a job, so that it will be ready for the next job.
- Take a spare clean tape with you. Keep an eye on the tape recorder during the interview, so that you can change the tape before it reaches the end.
- Put the microphone in a good position to record, and the tape recorder conveniently beside you. Check before you begin the interview that it is working and that the sound levels are right.
- Set the counter to zero at the start of the interview.

Notebook

The alternative is to make notes in a notebook. This can best be done by using shorthand, so that you note the speaker's exact words while he or she is speaking them. You can then use them as a quote later, if you wish.

The advantage of such notes is that you do not bother to take a note of stuff which is boring or irrelevant, and which you know you will not use. Notes are selective and save time later.

For newspaper journalists, this is the best method. However, you will need shorthand of at least 80 words per minute, and preferably 100 words per minute, if you are to use this method effectively.

For court reporting, this is often the only method of recording which is allowed.

Combination

Journalists who do not have good shorthand, or who work in a language for which there is no good shorthand system, can use a combination of the previous two systems.

You take a tape recorder to record the whole interview, but you also make notes in a notebook.

There is no need to write down the speaker's words - they will be on tape - but you can note when he says something interesting. By noting the number on the tape counter, you will be able to find quickly the bits you want when you return to the office.

So, you may write in your notebook:

Rice	project	026
Good	quote	041
Cash	figures	063
Quote		074
Copra	drying	093
Quote		124
V. good quote		138

When you return to the office, you will be able to ignore most of the tape, and fast forward to the bits you want. Rewind the tape and reset the counter to zero. Now, when the tape counter shows 026, you will find the start of the discussion of the rice project; at 041 there is a good quote; and so on.

This has a very important advantage, that you can quote accurately what people say. This method is slower and more cumbersome than just using a notebook; but it is a very good compromise for journalists who do not have shorthand.

The interview formula

Every interview is different, depending on the person you are interviewing and what you are talking about. All the same, there is a formula which you can apply to every interview, which will help you to get the best out of it.

Preparation

Before any interview, you need to do some preparation. Talk to your colleagues and find out whatever they know about your interviewee and the background to the story. Get the cuttings out of the library and read what has been published before.

Check on the sort of story that is wanted - is it a hard news story, a background story, or a personality profile? Then make a list of the things which you need to know, so that you can ask the right questions.

Finally, make yourself look neat and tidy. Whether you dress formally or informally depends upon who you are going to interview, but you should always look clean and you should never look scruffy.

Politeness

Nobody is obliged to be interviewed by a journalist, so be grateful and be polite. At the start of every interview, introduce yourself in a clear confident voice - "Good afternoon, Mr Wingti, I'm Joe Vagi of the Niugini Courier. Thank you for agreeing to see me."

Don't be in too much of a hurry to get down to business. Take a minute or two for appropriate small talk. You might ask about his health and his family and how he is settling into his job; this will indicate that you care about him as an individual and will help to establish a rapport. Don't overdo it, though. Remember that he may be a busy man and have better things to do than discuss his family with a total stranger! It will be a matter for your judgment on each occasion how much of this small talk is appropriate.

Open questions

It may be that you know most of the details of a story, and only need two or three details from an interview. In that case you can get straight to the point. More usually, however, you will have only a sketchy idea of the story. In this case, the ideal first question is something like: "What actually happened?" or "Could you tell me about..?" This will give you the broad outlines of the story.

Avoid asking questions with a yes/no answer especially if you want a recorded interview for radio; it makes very dull listening to hear long questions from the journalist and one-word answers from the interviewee. Ask questions which invite details, not agreement or disagreement. Remember, you want to spend most of your time listening, not speaking.

Visualise

Once you have the broad outlines of the story, try to build up a picture in your mind of what happened. If there is any part of the picture which is not clear, ask for clarification. You will want to know **Who? What? Where? When? Why? and How?**

You must start with the most important areas of the story and gradually fill in the less important detail, because the interview might be brought to an end at any moment.

Don't forget to ask about the past and the future, too - what led up to the story, and what will happen as a result. Try not to interrupt.

Recap

To "recap" is short for "recapitulate". This means to go back over your notes before you let the interview end. Read them through, see if they make sense and check that no details you need are missing. Don't do all this in silence, though, or your interviewee will think you have finished. Keep talking, while most of your mind is on your notes. When you come across names, check the spelling; when there are figures, check that you have them right.

Finally, tell your interviewee what you understand the story to be. This will take time, as you tell back to the interviewee in an orderly form all that he has told you in bits and pieces. If you have got it wrong in any respect, you may be sure that he will stop you and put it right.

The final question

We are all human and fallible, so you may forget to ask something important in an interview. Or there may be something which you could not know about, which will make a good story.

For these reasons, when you have asked everything that you think you need to know, there is one more question to ask: "Is there anything else I should know?"

Before you go

You may find that you get back to your desk after an interview, start to write the story and then realise that you did not ask an important question. You then have to telephone your interviewee and put the question.

Before you leave the interview, therefore, check that you have their phone number and check that they will be available on that phone number for the next hour or two, "in case there are any other questions". If the interviewee is about to go out, try to get a number where you can contact them - most places around town have phones.

Leave your business card, if you have one, or otherwise a written note of your name, company and phone number, so that the interviewee can phone you if a thought occurs to them after you have gone.

If you think the story needs a photograph, check whether the interviewee will be available to have a picture taken, and if so when would be convenient.

Finally, say "thank you", shake the interviewee's hand (or whatever is usual in your culture) and part as friends - you may well need another interview from the same person at some future date.

TO SUMMARISE:

Work out a method of recording interviews which is best for you - tape recorder, notebook or a combination of the two.

In every interview:

- **Listen more than you speak. Control the interview gently, but don't interrupt.**
- **Be polite but persistent.**
- **Ask open-ended questions; especially avoid questions with "yes/no" answers.**
- **Visualise the story as it is revealed to you.**
- **Evaluate the news story as it is revealed to you.**
- **At the end of the interview, recap what you understand the story to be.**

Attribution is stating who said something. Attribution is essential in all the media, including radio and television. Journalists do it so that your readers or listeners can know who is speaking or where the information in the story comes from. You can use attribution for both spoken and written information, so that you attribute information gathered from interviews, speeches, reports, books, films or even other newspapers, radio or television stations. In a moment we will discuss when you need to use attribution. First, however, we will look briefly at how attribution works in reported speech.

Reported speech

In the previous chapter, we mainly looked at attribution as it applied to quotes. However, attribution should be used whenever you want your readers or listeners to know where your information comes from. For example, in reported speech the attribution is still part of the sentence, although it is not as distinct as when you use a direct quote. In both of the following sentences, we attribute the words to Ms Mar. In the first, her words are in quotes; in the second they are put into reported speech. The attribution is in italics:

QUOTE:

Ms Mar said: "Students can expect no special treatment if they go on strike."

REPORTED SPEECH:

Ms Mar said that students could expect no special treatment if they went on strike.

Notice how, in the reported speech, we had to change the verb "can" to "could" and the verb "go" to "went". This is because, although quotes must be word-for-word, reported speech is a report of something which was said in the past, so the tenses have to be changed.

The use of the linking word "that" is usually optional in reported speech. It is often left out to reduce the length of the sentence, but should be included whenever it makes the meaning of a sentence clearer. It is

often used to separate the verb of attribution from a following verb. Compare the two examples. Notice how including "that" in the second example makes the meaning clearer:

The doctor felt many women worried about their health.

The doctor felt that many women worried about their health.

How often should you use attribution?

The good journalist has to strike a balance between the need to make clear attribution of statements and the risk of boring the reader with too many phrases such as "he said".

It helps to change the word "said" occasionally, in attributing both quotes and reported speech. Some useful alternatives are "warned", "suggested", "urged", "asked" and "disclosed". But beware: each of these has a specific meaning. Check that it is the correct one for what your speaker said and the way they said it.

The phrase "according to" can be used in attributing reported speech, but do not use it more than once with any single speaker. Although it is usually a neutral term, not suggesting either belief or disbelief, if you use it too often it can give the impression that you doubt the information the speaker has given.

There are other, more obvious danger words to avoid. Words such as "stated" and "pointed out" both imply that what the speaker said is an undisputed fact. You can, for example, point out that the world is round, but you cannot point out that this cake is delicious, because that is an opinion.

Also avoid the word "claimed", which suggests that you do not believe what is being said. Be especially careful when reporting court cases. Lawyers and the police like to use the word "claimed" to throw doubt on opposition statements. You must not do the same.

The exact balance of attribution depends on the kind of story you are writing or the material you can use. If the statements are reliably factual throughout, you only need to attribute occasionally. If, however, the story is heavy with opinion or unreliable statements, you should attribute at least once every two sentences.

Attributing facts and opinions

One of the greatest dangers facing young journalist is accepting what people say as the truth. Just because someone tells you that something is a fact does not make it so.

There are some things which are universally accepted as true, for example that the world is round, that Tuesday follows Monday, that Fiji is in the Pacific. But there are also things which people want you to believe are true but which are either not provable or are lies. These people may not knowingly tell a lie, but many people are careless with the truth.

Also, situations may change, so that the truth at one moment may be wrong the next. Attribution helps you to overcome some of these problems. Attribution is the act of specifying who said what.

If you attribute the words to the person who said them, you do not have to prove or disprove the truth of their words; you simply report them. Also, people judge what is said by the person who says it. Statements made by people in authority carry more weight than statements made by other people.

Look at the following example. The attribution is the phrase said the vice-chancellor Ms Una Mar:

Striking students who miss exams will be given fail marks, said the vice-chancellor Ms Una Mar.

In this case, you may have very little doubt that this is exactly what will happen. But there is always the chance that Ms Mar will change her mind and give the students a second chance. By attributing the statement to Ms Mar, you protect yourself against this possibility. Thus, if the students do get a second chance, you can say to your critics: "We didn't say it, Ms Mar did."

In any case, your readers will be interested to know what public figures believe to be true. Even if it is later found that Ms Mar was mistaken, it is interesting to know that she once believed she would fail the students. As soon as you find out she has changed her mind, you can carry a news story saying so, recalling the previous story attributed to Ms Mar.

Clear and undisputed facts

In cases where there is undeniable evidence that something is so, you obviously do not have to attribute facts. In the following example, the weather was observable. Who is going to argue?

High winds and torrential rain lashed Port Moresby today, bringing down trees and flooding parts of Waigani Drive.

Neither do you need to attribute if you have witnessed the event yourself, for example while reporting from a court:

The National Court sitting in Kieta has sentenced a man to 12 years imprisonment with hard labour for rape.

The court has found the man guilty of rape. You saw the judge sentence him. You can state it as a fact.

There is another category of stories which appear to be true because of the reliability of the sources. These are statements made by people in authority who are in a position to know, such as the police chief telling you about an arrest or the farm manager talking about his cooperative. In such cases, you might not attribute the facts in the intro, but your readers and listeners will still want to know how reliable your information is. So you must attribute the facts further down the story:

A gang of youths ran riot through Boroko shopping centre yesterday, smashing car windscreens and shop windows.
Police said about 30 youths were involved and all are thought to be from Morata.

or:

The Pago Farm Cooperative plans to double its rice production to 200 tonnes next year. Manager Mr Irwin Neman revealed the plans yesterday at a ceremony to mark the cooperative's second anniversary.

In both cases, the sources are reliable enough for the intros to stand on their own. Attributing the information has added extra weight to them. Your readers or listeners can judge how reliable the information is.

Opinions

There is no alternative to attribution when statements made are opinions. If you do not attribute an opinion to an individual, your audience will assume that it is your own opinion - and there is no excuse for that kind of confusion in a news story.

Your problem may come in deciding what is a verifiable fact and what is only opinion. In many cases this is easy:

Localisation in the public service has been rapid, but the quality of work is still below expectations, according to Home Affairs Minister Mr Barney Kina.

With a concept as vague as "quality of work", this can only be an opinion, even expressed by a senior minister. You will often find that opinions use vague and unspecific language. (See *Chapter 56: Facts and opinion*.)

In cases where fact and opinion are not easily separated, play safe and attribute the story.

Attributing a statement to someone is no defence in a claim for defamation. If you wrongly accuse a person of being a thief, it is no excuse to say that you were just quoting someone else.

Reliable sources

In some cases, your sources of information may not want to be named, for fear of revenge. Journalists who are sure of their facts often attribute such information to "usually reliable sources", "informed sources" or "sources within the department/company".

In some cases, they use phrases like "it is widely believed that" or "it is understood that". Be warned! If your information is wrong, the blame will rest at your door. The greatest danger comes in "off the record" interviews. You must always consult your news editor or chief of staff about what you can and cannot say in such cases. (See *Chapter 59: Sources of information*.)

TO SUMMARISE:

-  **Quotes are an important tool for print journalists, but they should never be used on radio, and only as text on television.**
-  **Always attribute quotes to the speaker or source of information.**
-  **You can use alternative words to "said", but beware that they may have distinct meanings and may imply support or disbelief.**
-  **Attribute all opinions and information which is not a clear and undisputed fact.**