

Understanding News Media: What is Journalism?

Many media messages use fact-based information but not all in the same way. Marketing professionals and PR firms use facts to promote companies or products in advertisements. Novelists use facts as the basis for biographies or books of fiction. A journalist's use of factual information is different.

Professional journalists wade through the available information and determine not only what is interesting and important but they also verify that it is accurate. Articles must be relevant and balance not only what readers want to know but what they need to know. Journalists seek out credible sources and make every attempt to present the known facts to provide a complete picture without influence from their own perceptions or anyone else's. Reporters attempt to avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived in an effort to maintain integrity and transparency. Journalists priority in their work is to their readers – average citizens. The stories they report ideally are a direct reflection of the community they serve including multiple and diverse points of view. Journalists try very hard to always report the truth. If a report is proven to be wrong, to be fully accountable to the public, it is the reporter's responsibility to publish a correction to set the record straight as soon as possible.

With changes in information technology and the increase in media channels it isn't always easy to discern what is journalism and who is a journalist. News consumers should look for news that is verifiable, independent and accountable.

Next installment: *Informational Graphics*

◆ Journalism ◆

The investigation and reporting of events, issues and trends of all topics that is verifiable, independent, impartial, and accountable to the public.

Newspaper Activities:

- ◆ Find examples of the different uses of fact-based information. Rank each on credibility, transparency, verifiability, independence and accountability.
- ◆ Look through the newspaper, print or electronic, for examples of journalism that reflects multiple and diverse points of view. If a journalist were not accountable to their readers, how might news coverage be different?