

Understanding News Media: What Makes News?

What makes some information worthy of becoming “news?” The answer is, it depends. Newsworthiness relies heavily on the intended audience. A water main break in downtown Detroit isn’t very likely to make headlines in a newspaper in New

◆ News ◆

A report of recent events or previously unknown information.

York State but a similar event in your hometown is bound to be front page news. When editors make decisions on what to include in a single edition, they consider and weigh key factors which can be remembered using the mnemonic device, **NITPIC** - Novelty (uniqueness), Impact, Timeliness, Proximity, Interest and Conflict.

To be “news,” information needs to be interesting or unique. Or no one would spend time reading it. Impact could refer to the number of people effected or the magnitude of a given event. Timeliness relates to how recent the event is. “Breaking news” may be reported first on a newspaper’s website with a follow-up story offering more details in the next day’s print edition. The earlier example of the water main break is a matter of proximity. It’s human nature to be interested in conflict or issues that involve controversy or public debate. The stronger each factor is for any given story the more likely it is to be published. Additionally, the more factors an issue touches on, the greater the probability it would become a prominent headline.

News can be hard or soft. “Hard” news is essentially the big news of the day – the type of story that is timely, impacts a lot of people and involves controversy. A front page headline story is an example of hard news. “Soft” news is generally interesting and unique but without immediacy. Waiting a day or even a week to publish this type of news article doesn’t significantly alter the story’s appeal. Life style and human-interest stories are examples of soft news. So, what makes “news?” The answer is reflected in the ongoing coverage of news channels – print, broadcast and internet.

Next installment: *What is Journalism?*

Newspaper Activities:

- ◆ Look through the newspaper for examples of “hard” and “soft” news stories. On a scale from 1-10, 10 being the highest, rank the news factors (novelty (uniqueness), impact, timeliness, proximity, interest and conflict) for each example you choose. Do you see any patterns?
- ◆ Predict what information and events from today will make tomorrow’s front page? Write down your predictions and check tomorrow’s print or electronic edition to see if you were correct. Why might it be different?