

INTRODUCTION TO NEWS REPORTING

This test places emphasis on writing the story, familiarity with reporting terminology and procedures, and awareness of legal and ethical issues. (3 s.h.) JOU-110-TE

This is a three-hour examination in which you must briefly define 20 terms (worth 20 points), answer 5 short questions on legal and ethical issues (worth 20 points), and write 3 news stories from the information you are given (worth 60 points). A passing score is **65** out of 100 points.

Here are the topics covered and their approximate importance on the test:

- I. WRITING THE STORY (60%)
- II. REPORTING TERMINOLOGY AND PROCEDURES (20%)
- III. LEGAL AND ETHICAL ISSUES (20%)

Textbooks to help you prepare:

Carole Rich. *Writing and Reporting News: A Coaching Method*. Current edition. Boston: Wadsworth/Cengage

Melvin Mencher. *Melvin Mencher's News Reporting and Writing*. Current edition. New York: McGraw-Hill Higher Education

Brian S. Brooks et al. *News Reporting and Writing*. Current edition. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Definitions

1. Define "feature."
2. Define "stringer."
3. Define "on the record."
4. Define "follow-up question."
5. Define "cutline."
6. Define "slug."

Legal/Ethical Issues

7. Should a reporter socialize with sources?
8. What particular care must be taken in writing an accident story?
9. What is libel?
10. Can a journalist accept "freebies" (free gifts)?
11. Name and explain two ways a reporter can protect a source.

News Stories

You will be asked to write three stories of approximately 200 words each, from information you will be given. The stories will be chosen from three of the following four topics:

- a town meeting
- a feature
- a fire
- a weather story

Each story is worth 20 points, distributed as follows:

- Getting an appropriate lead, organization according to significance of detail, and accuracy: 12 points
- Mechanics, following conventions specific to type of story, consistency of style, and spelling: 8 points

Following is a weather story fact sheet. The information in it is comparable to the kind of information you will be given in the test. Compare the information in the fact sheet to the full sample story at the end, so you understand what will be required. Correct any errors of spelling and style.

FACT SHEET

Reporter's Notes:

Wednesday, 12 January: Cleveland snow fall measured 26 inches.

Monday 1/10 city received six inches

Tuesday 1/11 city received another 12 inches

Wednesday 1/12 city received another 8 inches

2300 customers without electricity

weight of snow caused collapse of many power lines

shelters set up at all city schools

snow emergency number: 555-5555

local grocery stores running low on food – especially bread and milk

hardware stores are out of shovels and snow blowers

main roads passable / side street not

schools and non-emergency government offices closed since Monday afternoon

According to Councilman Tom Gregson, "Where possible, most schools and offices will open Friday."

Quotes:

Anthony Melendez, snow removal truck driver: "We started plowing Monday, but as soon as we plowed a street, it filled up with snow again. There's so much snow we have nowhere on land to dump it. We're dumping it in Lake Erie."

Sgt. John Smithers, Cleveland police: "We're transporting those without electricity who request it to shelters. The school shelters have electricity, a supply of food, and cots. I, myself, have moved six families."

Councilman Tom Gregson: "Despite the difficulties, everything is under control, thanks to the police and fire departments."

ANSWERS TO SAMPLE QUESTIONS

1. A soft news story that expands and enlightens the news
2. A part-time employee of a publication
3. When the person making the statement is willing to be identified, by name and by title, as the source of the quote and/or information attributed to him or her
4. A question designed to elicit more information from a source
5. A photo caption; something which explains or describes the picture
6. A word or a phrase to identify copy for an editor
7. Some journalists say good stories can be found at parties, when people are drinking and talking freely. But the majority seem to think reporters will become too friendly with sources with whom they socialize and that it is unethical to use information gathered from people who are drinking.
8. Do not imply blame, unless someone has been charged. Otherwise, you are open to a libel suit. Also, be careful not to invade peoples' privacy by publishing information about a private citizen which the public does not need to know and which that citizen may be sensitive about — e.g., the gory details of a child's injury, unless the public really needs to know those details.
9. Printed defamation. To win a case, a plaintiff must prove four points: that he/she was defamed, that the story was published, that he/she was identified, and that the newspaper is at fault either for negligence or "actual malice" (having knowingly printed a lie or having shown reckless disregard for the possibility that the story is a lie).
10. According to the Code of Ethics adopted by the American Society of Newspaper Editors, "gifts, favors, free travel, special treatment or privileges can compromise the integrity of journalists and their employers. Nothing of value should be accepted."
11. Two ways a reporter can protect a source is by respecting that source's need for accuracy and by calling on state shield laws, when necessary. A journalist can respect a source's need for accuracy by taking time with the source, getting as much information as possible in an unhurried fashion before the newspaper's deadline, and if possible, double-checking the information with the source and with another source before it is printed. When a source requests confidentiality and a governmental figure or entity insists they need to know the identity of the source, the reporter can call on whatever shield laws exist in his or her state regarding protecting sources.

Sample Weather Story

CLEVELAND BURIED IN SNOW

CLEVELAND, Jan. 12 – For the past three days it has been snowing here. The city is buried under 26 inches of snow.

Monday snowfall measured six inches, Tuesday, 18 inches, and today 26 inches.

Approximately 2300 customers are without electricity because of collapsed power lines. Main roads are passable, but side streets are not. Grocery stores are running low on food, especially bread and milk. Hardware stores are out of shovels and snow blowers.