

## Chapter 12 Journalism Today

### Interviews

- The interview is a basic tool of the journalist.
- No matter what kind of story a reporter writes, it usually will require one or more interviews.
- Successful interviews do not just happen; they are the product of thought and planning by reporters.

### Preparing for the Interview

- Reporters planning to interview a source should ask themselves, "Why am I conducting this interview? What kind of story will I write from this information?"
- The answers will determine what kind of questions they ask, what kinds of sources they seek and how they conduct themselves during an interview.
- Most often reporters are seeking information for one of three types of stories:
  - The news story
    - There is generally a need to interview several individuals to gather relevant information.
    - Reporters must interview sources who will provide the following:
      - Facts and details, including dates, names, locations and costs.
      - A chronology showing the unfolding of events.
      - Relationships among the people, organizations or issues involved.
      - Context and perspective, including the significance of events or issues and their relationships to other issues.
      - Anecdotes that illuminate events or issues and make them more dramatic and understandable for readers or viewers.
  - The feature story
    - Reporters need everything they would need to write a news story plus descriptions of the following:
      - The environment in which the subject lives or works.
      - How the subject appears and dresses.
      - The subject's mannerisms.
      - Smells, sounds and textures associated with the subject's home or work, using every sense to create an image of the interview subject.
  - The investigative story
    - The purpose of investigative stories is to expose wrongdoing.

- Reporters working on the investigative story must obtain the same information as those working on more routine news stories or personality profiles plus some additional data:
  - The subject's version of events, which may differ from that of other sources and records.
  - Explanations of contradictions.
  - Replies to charges and allegations.
- Many reporters think of an interview as a conversation, but it is a conversation with a specific purpose: gathering information for an unseen audience of readers, listeners or viewers.
- Reporters must maintain control of the conversation by planning for the interview.
- Plan using several steps:
  - Define the purpose
  - Decide whom to interview
  - Assess the character of the interviewee
  - Identify the areas of inquiry
  - Anticipate possible answers to questions

#### Selecting the Sources to Interview

- If reporters are preparing a personality profile of a prominent person, the subject of that profile and his or her friends, enemies and co-workers should be interviewed.
- When the story is about an issue or an event, the reporters may have to figure out which people have the information necessary to write the story.
- Reporters working on deadline must be more selective in whom they interview.
- Sources should:
  - Possess knowledge
  - Possess expertise or insight relevant to the story
  - Be articulate
  - Sometimes the best available source is a document or record rather than a person.
- How many sources are enough?
  - The answer depends on at least four factors:
    - Deadline pressure
      - When stories involve breaking news, reporters lack the luxury of searching widely for sources and information.
      - If a reporter cannot interview a key source before the deadline, the story should say so clearly.
    - The expertise of the sources
      - If sources possess broad expertise in a topic, three or four might be enough.

- If they have more limited experience, reporters might need to speak to dozens.
- The degree of controversy raised by a topic
  - If a topic is not controversial, then one source may be sufficient.
  - If it is more controversial, more should be included.
- The complexity of a topic
  - As a story becomes more complex, the number of sources needed will grow.
- No matter how many sources reporters talk to, they must evaluate those sources.

#### Researching Sources and Topics

- Reporters who have conducted thorough research have the following advantages:
  - They will not waste time by asking about issues that have already been widely publicized.
  - They will have more interesting questions.
  - They are more likely to have documented all relevant facts.
  - They will not embarrass themselves by appearing ignorant.
  - They are more likely to recognize newsworthy statements and ask intelligent follow-up questions about them.
  - They are more likely to spot inconsistencies and evasions in a source's responses.
  - They learn about secondary sources, people who are familiar with the main source and who might have insights and information that will help reporters interview the main source.
  - They are less likely to have to reinterview the main source.
  - They encourage their sources to speak more freely, because sources are more likely to trust reporters who seem knowledgeable.

#### Preparing Questions for the Interview

- Good questions elicit interesting quotations and details.
- Reporters begin the process of constructing good questions when they select a unifying central point for their story.
- It is enough to jot down a word or phrase to remind the reporter what to ask.
- Reporters craft their questions to elicit as much information as possible.
- Ask open-ended rather than closed-ended questions (can be answered with yes/no)
- Ask "how did you feel" instead of a question that asked if they were feeling a certain emotion.
- When interviewees have a story to tell, reporter should simply let that person tell the story.
- When reporters seek more specific details, they choose questions that will elicit