

Chapter 15 Journalism Today

Speeches and Meetings

Reporters assigned to cover a speech or a meeting usually write two kinds of stories

- Advance Stories- Alerts readers to a soon-to-happen event
 - Most advance stories are published the day a speech or meeting is announced or shortly thereafter.
 - As a reminder to their audiences, news organizations may publish a second advance story a day or two the day before a speech or meeting.
 - News organizations may publish several advance stories about events of unusual importance.
 - All advance stories emphasize the same basic facts:
 - What will happen.
 - When and where it will happen.
 - Who will be involved.
 - Advance stories for speeches identify the speakers, report the times and places they will speak and describe their topics
 - Stories announcing meetings identify the groups scheduled to meet, report the times and places of the meetings and summarize the agendas.
 - Advance stories also may mention the event's purpose or sponsor, whether the public is invited, whether those who attend will have an opportunity to participate and whether there will be a charge for admission.
 - The leads for advance stories should emphasize what is important and unusual.
 - Advance stories are short and specific --> Three to four paragraphs.
- Covering the Speech or Meeting
 - Covering meetings effectively requires perfecting some basic reporting skills
 - Advance preparation
 - Sound new judgment
 - Accuracy
 - An ear for interesting quotations
 - An eye for compelling details
 - In larger communities, a city council might vote on issues without discussing them at its regular meeting because all the discussion occurred in committee meetings days or weeks earlier.
 - Reporters usually try to learn as much as possible about the participants and issues before a speech or meeting.
 - Reporters who cover meetings should learn all the participants' names beforehand to identify the people who are speaking

and making decisions.

- Reporters should learn as much as possible about every item on the agenda.
- Reporters prepare for confusing issues brought up during a meeting by requesting a meeting with the leading participants to ask follow-up questions after the meeting adjourns.
- Groups that sponsor speeches will sometimes accommodate reporters by scheduling press conferences with speakers before or after the speech.
- Reporters can also get copies of the speech.
- Some steps reporters take are common to covering both speeches and meetings:
 - They arrive early and find seats that will allow them to hear and see as much as possible.
 - They introduce themselves to speakers, if possible, or the participants in the meeting, if they had never covered the group before.
 - They take detailed notes.
 - As they listen to a speech or meeting, they try to think of groups or individuals who might have different points of view or who might be affected by any actions taken.
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- Follow Stories- Describes that event for people who were unable to attend it in person.
 - Published after speeches or meetings and report on those events in detail.
 - Longer than advance stories and harder to write.
 - Like any story, a speech or meeting story needs a central point --> Sometimes difficult to identify.
 - Organizing the Story
 - Writing speech and meeting stories requires reporters to make quick decisions about which of many elements is most newsworthy
 - Usually reporters select one idea or issue from a speech or meeting as the central point for the story.
 - Here are three solutions to the problem of organizing a story about a speech or meeting:
 - If a speech or meeting involves several major topics, select the one or two most important topics and summarize them in the lead. Summarize the remaining topics in the second and third paragraphs.
 - If a speech or meeting involves several major topics, select the most important and summarize it in the lead. Provide a short transition and briefly describe

the meeting's other major topics. Put in parallel form.

- If a speech or meeting involves one major topic and several minor topics, begin with the major topic and, after thoroughly reporting it, use bullets or numbers to introduce summaries of the minor topics in the story's final paragraphs.
- Never simply report in a story's final paragraph that a speaker or group "discussed" or "considered" another topic.

Writing Effective Leads

- Inexperienced reporters often err by writing leads for stories about speeches and meetings that are so broad they contain no news.
- Usually leads for follow stories emphasize the most newsworthy information to emerge from a speech or meeting.
- Anecdotal or other delayed leads offer an opportunity to hook readers with a bit of narrative or description.

Solving Problems of Sequence and Attribution

- Two common weaknesses in speech and meeting stories are:
 - Reporting events in chronological order
 - Failing to vary the location of the attribution
- Experienced reporters write most follow stories in the inverted-pyramid style, presenting information in the order of its importance.

Writing Transition

- Transitions shift a story from one idea to another
- A good transition will show readers how two ideas connect and will arouse readers interest in the topic being introduced.
- The transition should function as a secondary lead, summarizing the new topic by giving its most interesting and important details.

Remember Your Readers

- Reporters should write with their readers in mind, clarifying issues so that readers can understand how they will affect them.
- Reporters need to clarify jargon.

Check Facts

- The reporter has an obligation to go beyond what is said or done at the speech or meeting to check fact, find opposing points of view and get additional information and comments.
- Websites like PolitiFact and FactCheck can help reporters spot and correct error in speeches because often the distortions spoken by one politician will be repeated by others.
- Reporters must be especially diligent about double-checking personal attacks in order to avoid libel suits.

Adding Color

Report What You Hear

- Quotations, direct and indirect, help the writer describe debates that take place in a public meeting.