UNIT - 6 : CONCEPT OF REPORTING

UNIT STRUCTURE

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6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- Define reporting
- Describe the qualities of a good reporter.
- Describe the responsibilities of a good reporter.

6.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit you have learnt about news and the basic concepts related to news. In this unit you will learn about news gathering and its presentation, i.e., news reporting.

As you already know, it is the reporter who reports. But reporting is not a very simple task. A reporter needs to be well versed in the concept and process of reporting and should possess certain qualities to be able to fulfill the task with ease and efficiency. It is also important for a good reporter to be aware of his responsibilities. So in this unit, you will be introduced to the concept of reporting and the qualities and responsibilities of a good reporter.

I hope that after going through this unit you will not only know what reporting is all about, but also be able to judge for yourself whether you have the qualities necessary to become a good reporter and be encouraged to inculcate those qualities in you.

6.3 CONCEPT OF REPORTING

Reporting is the journalist's word for research, for the collection of data, for the gathering of facts. In every news organization, there are reporters whose task is to go to the field and collect information. When an incident occurs in a place, the reporter is sent to gather facts relating to that incident. He then comes back to the office and finally makes a report or news story by compiling the gathered information.

The reporter, while on field, collects information that he or she finds on the spot, interviews the people who probably have seen the event that happened and if the need be, goes deeper to find out more information so that an interesting news report can be produced. Therefore, in other words, reporting may also mean an act of research. The way a researcher does extensive study on any given topic and finally comes to a conclusion, the reporter, too, has to make an exhaustive study of the event before coming to a conclusion in the form of news. But what is important to remember is that this research has to be manifold. Until the facts are rigged out and all the points are established the reporter must carry out his or her investigation before arriving at a finality.

WHERE REPORTERS WORK

Reporters can be employed in a number of different organizations. The important amongst them are:

1. Newspapers: Newspapers employ reporters to gather news for their own use and deliver the news directly to the readers.
2. Wire Services/ News agencies/ News Bureaus: Wire services or news agencies like the Associated Press, Reuters, UNI, PTI etc. also employ reporters. These reporters gather news on behalf of

the agency which distributes it to media houses that subscribe to its services.

3. Broadcasters: Broadcasters like TV and radio networks employ reporters for gathering news for distribution to network affiliates. Local radio and TV stations also employ their own news reporters for covering different news events.

4. Supplemental News services: Some newspapers have supplemental news services which apart from gathering news for their parent organization, also gather news for distribution to other newspapers. For example The New York Times News Service, Washington Post News Service etc. This concept is relatively new to India.

5. Magazines and periodicals: News magazines and periodicals also employ a large number of reporters.

6. Public Relation Firms and Corporate Communication wings of different agencies: This is another field which requires a huge news-gathering and news distribution network. Business, industry, Government, social service agencies, associations, special interest groups and educational institutions employ reporters for gathering news and writing stories about their own activities for distribution to newspapers.



Scoop : a news story, particularly a new or developing story with aspects of importance and excitement, and certainly an exclusive for the newspaper involved.
Remember that all scoops are exclusive but all exclusives are not necessarily scoops.
Exclusives are more concerned about immediacy and the term is used for managing to get a special fact about some ongoing issue.
Scoops on the other hand, can be out of nowhere, like sudden interesting discoveries.

Exclusive news:

Exclusive news is the news published in only one newspaper or broadcasted by only one radio or television channel, which the other newspapers or other channels are yet to pick up. Exclusive news is the credibility of the newsmen as well as the media organizations. If a newspaper is able get a **scoop** or exclusive news, which other news organizations have failed to manage, then the credibility of the newspaper increases. It also enhances the credibility of the reporter in the organization itself, who has netted the scoop in the air before it could nestle in the hands of other reporters working for other media organizations.

Exclusive news is really an added feather in the hat of the reporter. In contemporary situation, when every media organization is vying for achieving

niche in the market, the concept of exclusivity earns more prominence. Because, it is only through publishing or broadcasting more and more exclusive news that the news organizations can enhance their image. And in the process it ensures their place in the market. Otherwise, it becomes difficult for the news organizations to survive in the rat race, where there are too many competitors levering for success and making a name their own.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS – A

1. Define the terms:
    a. Reporter
    b. Reporting
    c. Exclusive News



ACTIVITY – A

1. Meet a staff reporter of a local newspaper and find out (about his job profile) from him what does the job of a reporter involve?
2. Set up an appointment with a newspaper reporter and accompany him for a day as he goes about carrying out his assignments. Observe his activities and make a note of it at the end of the day.

2.4 THE NEWS REPORTER

Reporters are the first infantry men, who go to the field to gather information in order to compile news. They are the foot soldiers of the news world. They are the representatives of newspapers, news magazines, wire services, radio and television stations and the networks. They are the primary news source for the media organizations. They go out to the world and bring back the news of the day. They are the eyes and ears of the media organizations.

They have to remain alert and keep their eyes and ears open to spot any development taking place in the society. Therefore, in addition to what we have discussed above, there are other qualities expected of reporters so that they can serve the organization they are working for better and also the society of which they are a part.

2.4.1 Qualities

News sense :

The first and foremost requirement of a reporter is news sense. He or she should be able to distinguish between news and non news. The quality of news sense should prevail all the time, both when he is on the field hunting for information and also when he is preparing the news while in office. He should be able to churn out public interests from publicity stunts. For instance on many occasions the business entities call for press conferences to ensure their visibility in the media and to promote their sale. But they often do so in the guise of indulging in a social cause so that their image is projected positively before the people while at the same time their sale is boosted. Therefore, ultimately it turns out to be a publicity stunt rather than a case of larger public interest and a clever reporter can easily find it out. He can distinguish a news from a non-news if he possesses the required news sense.

Clarity of expression :

Clarity of expression comes with clarity of mind. If the reporter is himself confused, there is every possibility that he may confuse others. Therefore, the reporter should be clear about what he has in his hands in terms of facts. The golden rule is that 'whenever in doubt just leave it out'.

Having clarified the facts and figures collected from the field the reporter should be capable of bringing out a clear copy, without leaving any doubts in the minds of the readers. Adhering to a logical sequence is very important while dealing with copies. The reporter may have bundles of ideas woven in his mind, but giving a clear expression to those

ideas are also equally important so that meanings may be perceived by the readers in the best comprehensible manner.

Objectivity :

We have already discussed the importance of being objective. Objectivity counts in the profession of journalism. It is the duty of the reporter to present the truth for the people. This holds true equally for the news organizations, whose responsibility lies in digging out the truth for the society. But if the reporter becomes biased and does malicious reporting by diluting it with personal views and partial comments then the entire mission of journalism as a profession becomes a failure.

Accuracy :

Being accurate in terms of facts is of utmost importance in the profession of journalism. Tampering with facts is considered to be a moral crime in this profession. People have every right to know the truth and it is the duty of the reporter to bring it out for them, the way it exists. Therefore, the reporter should be careful while dealing with facts and figures. So truthfulness and moral integrity are necessary if one wants to become a journalist in the truest spirit of the term. Sometime, the reporter may unconsciously make silly errors while writing the copy although he may have collected correct information from the field. This could mislead the public. Therefore, he should be extremely cautious about what he is writing and double check for errors so that accurate information can be imparted to the people.



Beat :
A particular area of news assigned to a reporter, for example, the culture beat or the courtroom beat.



Deadline :
The stipulated time during which the assigned work should be finished at all accounts by the professionals.

Alertness:

The reporter has to remain alert presumably in all situations. It helps to catch the scoop before it reaches the fin of another reporter. It also helps to keep abreast with all the happenings that are taking place in the jurisdiction of the **beat** one is working in.

Speed :

The journalists always have to work under tremendous pressure. On the one hand there is a pressure of meeting the **deadline** of submitting the copy and on the other hand there is the pressure of being completely

objective, unbiased and accurate. The pressure also mounts when the reporter has to submit many stories within the deadline. Being lazy will definitely hamper his effective delivering of the assigned jobs. Therefore, the reporter should be able to work fast under any kind of situation.

Calmness :

This is also another quality that helps the reporter to serve better in any kind of situations. The reporter should be able withstand the mounting pressure of long and erratic work schedules and maintain his cool even amidst trying conditions. He or she should be able to handle any kind of professional hazards and maintain composure.

Curiosity :

Journalism is a profession where one deals with new happenings and developments all the time. Unless one has the lust for information he/she can not dig out good stories. A curious mind enables one to unearth facts on the basis of which he may produce authentic reports. Remember that news stories are not made in the air and they need an ever curious reporter to bring them before the readers. Only a curious mind can grasp good stories, supplement it with proper investigation and make interesting reports.

Punctuality :

Reaching on time or, in fact, before time is very important in this profession. When news breaks out, the reporter should be able to reach the spot instantly. This enables him to catch the event better, without missing out on relevant facts. Punctuality also helps in building a faithful bondage with the sources. Sources are to be groomed with great care. If the reporter fails the sources by reaching late on a number of occasions, the chances are that the reporter will have to lose the trust vested upon him by his source and in the process also dilutes his credibility. Reaching the office on time and submitting copies on time may help the reporter earn a good image among the fellow employees in the office as well.

Patience :

As mentioned earlier the reporter has to work at odd hours and under odd working environment and most of the time under loads of pressure. Therefore, keeping cool, and not losing patience would definitely help him to discharge his duties and responsibilities in the best professional manner.

Imagination :

A reporter is a real story teller and he should posses the skills to narrate the story for the readers in the most interesting manner. For this he has to be extremely creative and imaginative. Imagination helps in proper creation. As a journalist you will have to design your story in a clever manner so that the reader's curiosity and attention remain intact till the last breath of the story.

Farsightedness :

A reporter with farsightedness can envisage the future. It helps the reporters to identify the processes and people that will be important in future. It is one quality that helps in determining the importance of an event and enables him to think ahead of time and prepare accordingly.

Self-discipline :

Imposing self discipline while at work helps the reporter in many ways. It enhances his rapport in the office, on the field and also among his sources.

Integrity :

It implies strong sense of honesty and strict adherence to a stern code of ethics. Since the reporters are more exposed to unethical practices and temptations in the field as compared to other professionals, therefore, this quality helps the reporter to do away with all the immoral influences prevailing in the field.

Fearlessness and frankness :

The professions of journalism demands fearless and frank reporters, who are willing to go anywhere, face anybody and ask any kind of questions (even unpleasant ones) to get the information right and expose wrong do ers in front of the people with proper grit and frankness.

Tactfulness :

The reporters should be capable of handling any kind of situation skillfully and deal with all kinds of people. A reporter should have flexible and sociable personality and should have a nature that relishes a variety of experiences. He should have an understanding of human behavior and emotions. This will help him/her in developing contacts that are very essential for news gathering.

Mobility and outgoing nature:

The mobility should come with ease for a reporter as it is the job of a reporter to move around in search of news. The lust for news may require him/her to move along the gruesome terrains, climb the steepest mountains, journey past the deepest jungles, plunge into the ocean, walk along the hottest desert, or for that matter go to any corner above the ground. Therefore, the reporter should love to travel or love to move around. This will really help him to go anywhere to spot news, especially **breaking news or news flash**.



Breaking News/ Flash News: Unexpected, unplanned occurrences, a train accident for instance. A story that has to be covered urgently, quickly and without any advance preparation.

Diligence :

The reporters have to be diligent workers. Their jobs require painstaking exertion of effort, alertness and dedication. They should seek perfection, love their jobs and work hard to deliver spotless pieces of work.



News Bulletin :
A brief update or summary of current news, as on television or radio or in a newspaper.

Team spirit :

A newspaper is a product of contribution of many people. The same goes for a television or radio **news bulletin.** Therefore, the reporter should have the zeal to work in a team. As a member of the team he/

she should know in clear terms, the role and responsibilities vested upon him and deliver them in the best way possible. All his actions should be oriented towards strengthening the output of the team, in the process ensuring individual as well as collective growth of the entire organization.

Well read :

A reporter must have adequate knowledge about the surroundings and the society he lives in. Especially in contemporary scenario one has to be better read or well informed about the surrounding in order to tap the changing attitudes of the society and changing media situation. He/she should be aware of the past, present and also should be able to predict upcoming social trends.

Command over the language :

To be a good reporter one needs to have a good grasp over the language. In fact, this is the most essential requirement for everybody working in the field of journalism, not only the reporters. Because journalism is the profession in which control over the 'pen' counts the most, no matter whether you are working in print or electronic media and in whichever language media you are working in. Needless to mention that since the reporters are all the time writing news stories, they should have commendable hold over language in order to create worthy copies.

2.4.2 Responsibilities

As a member of the press, certain responsibilities are vested on the shoulders of the reporter. And the reporters are expected to carry them out in the finest manner. Now, let us discuss about the responsibilities that lie on the reporters.

In all respect a reporter has three types of responsibilities.

1. Responsibilities towards the organization
2. Responsibilities towards the source and
3. Responsibilities towards the society

Responsibility towards the organization :

Like any other organizations media houses are also bound by policies, rules and regulations. All the members of the organization, including the reporters, are supposed to follow the organizational dictum. As an employee of the organization the reporter has the mammoth responsibility to reflect the organizational behavior through his dedication towards work and loyalty towards the organization.

Responsibility towards the sources :

A reporter's responsibility towards his source lies in keeping them in good faith, maintaining a cordial relationship and shouldering their responsibilities when asked for. It may not always be an easy task, since the reporter has to maintain a huge network of sources. However, the reporter has to do his best to keep their trust. Once the source loses faith on the reporter, he/she will never come again to help in future. Therefore, utmost care is to be taken while dealing with sources.

Responsibility towards the society :

In this field of journalism one works for the larger interest of the society. And as a member of the media, a reporter should pay utmost importance to serve the society better in the true sense of the term. It is his duty to maintain the trust and credibility imposed upon him by the readers. Therefore, as a reporter, one should always attempt to reflect his sense of responsibility towards his readers and the society through his credible and authentic work. As a reporter your responsibility towards the society lies in being accurate, unbiased and factual. Apart from that, the reporter should also try to create awareness by coming up with good stories on development issues.



LET US KNOW

There are different types of reporters:

1. Beat Reporter : assigned to cover a particular beat or place such as police station, court, hospital, secretariat, stock market etc.
2. General Assignment Reporter – waits in the newspaper office for news breaks like speeches, interviews with visiting celebrities, a development relayed by a beat reporter etc. and reports as and when assigned.
3. Special Assignment reporters : given a specific assignment to conduct an investigation or develop a series of articles.
4. Rewrite Reporter : duties include taking notes from another reporter over phone and writing the story or rewriting another reporter's poorly written story etc.



LET US KNOW

The terms **'reporter'** and **'correspondent'** are often used interchangeably. However, there is a difference between the two terms. Reporters of staff reporters are regular employees who locally cover news and write the news for a publication or a broadcast outlet. Correspondents on the other hand are regular employees of a publication or any agency who are stationed in different locations of the state or the country or eve the world for gathering news and they deliver the copy of the editor by wire, fax or e-mail.

A **stringer** is someone who reports or writes for a newspaper on an assignment basis, i.e. paid for what is published rather than as a full time salaried member. The term 'stringer' comes from the old time custom of measuring a correspondent's total inches or stories with a string a certain length to determine the pay.

Another related term is **liner**. The liner lives in a small town and is not a full time journalist. While his main profession is sometimes else, he also sends reports to a newspaper which pays him on the basis of the number of lines of the news item published in the newspaper.

Then there are the **freelancers** who, like stringers and liners, are also part time journalists who are paid on assignments basis, but they have the freedom to supply the news reporter to more than one newspaper. Stringers and liners, on the other hand, have to maintain their loyalty to a single client alone.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS – B

1. Enlist the qualities required for becoming a good reporter?

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2. What do you mean by news sense?

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3. What are the three basic responsibilities of a reporter?

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ACTIVITY – B

1. Read through the list of qualities of a good reporter. As you read, stop after each point to analyze which qualities you have in yourself and which you will have to cultivate. Make a note of your analysis.

2.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have been introduced to the concept of news reporting. Let us go over to what we have learnt in this unit once again:

News is collected from the field by the newsmen, who are called **reporters** and the process is called **reporting**. Reporters are skilled people who move around the field and gather information.

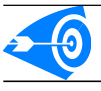
There are certain qualities required to become a reporter. News sense, objectivity, discipline, swiftness, command over the language, patience, diligence, punctuality, integrity, mobility, tactfulness, creativity, etc. are a few of the qualities that the reporter should posses.

Another important thing a reporter should have is a sense of responsibility towards the organization he/she is working for, towards the society he/she belongs to or serving for and towards the sources he/she builds in due course of time, who share valuable information with him/her.



2.6 FURTHER READINGS

- **Essentials of Practical Journalism** — *Vir Bala Agarwal, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi.*
- **Handbook of Journalism and Mass Communication** — *Vir Bala Agarwal and V.S. Gupta, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi.*
- ***The Journalist's Handbook*** *– M. V. Kamath, Vikas Publishing Houses, New Delhi.*



2.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS - A

1) a. A reporter is a person who gathers information from different fields and writes reports for publication in a newspaper, magazine, etc.

b. Reporting simply means to report. Reporting is the journalistic term for research in which the reporter has to deal with an event, investigate on it and find out the relevant information surrounding that particular event.

c. Exclusive news is the news published in only one newspaper or broadcast by only one radio or television channel, which the other newspapers or other channels in the race have failed to catch.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS - B

1) The qualities required for becoming a good news reporter are — News sense, objectivity, discipline, swiftness, command over the language, patience, diligence, punctuality, integrity, mobility, tactfulness, creativity, etc.

2) News Sense is the basic quality of a reporter by virtue of which a journalist can identify an event having news value and differentiate between news items and non-news items.

3) The three basic responsibilities of a reporter are towards his
a. Organisation b. Society c. Sources.

2.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

1. What do you mean by reporting? What is its significance for a media organization?
2. 'The news reporter has to inculcate a number of qualities in order to qualify as a good reporter.' Justify.
3. What are the qualities of a good news reporter?
4. The job of a news reporter brings along with it a host of responsibilities. Explain.
5. What are the different places where reporters can be employed?
6. What is the difference between the terms reporter, correspondent and stringer?
7. Is it correct to use the terms reporter and correspondent interchangeably? Why?