UNIT - 8 : NEWS EDITING

UNIT STRUCTURE

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8.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- Define editing
- Explain the principles of news editing
- Describe the newsroom set up and the newsroom personnel
- Analyze the functions of each person
- Describe the process of photo editing
- Define the photo editing terminologies

8.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous units we have discussed news reporting and news writing in detail. There is, however, another very important aspect of news publication, which we have not discussed yet. It is the final stage of processing of news, i.e., editing. In this unit we shall introduce you to the concept of news editing. A person enters the journalism profession either as a reporter or as a desk person. While reporters are responsible for the collection of news, the

responsibility of selection and arrangement of news lies with the editorial team. In this unit we will discuss this chunk of people who comprise the editorial desk and their job which we call 'editing'.

Here, we shall discuss what is news editing, why editing of news is necessary and what principles are to be followed while editing news. We shall also learn about the news room set up in a news organization, the different editors and the roles played by the editors in the final presentation of news in a newspaper. Another important aspect of editing – photo editing - will also be discussed in this unit. So let us start with the concept of editing.

8.3 CONCEPT OF NEWS EDITING

In order to understand the term 'editing', we first need to know what we are editing, and why we are doing so. If you think properly, you will realize that all we edit is information. Every information or communication is edited for effect, so that they are better expressed and consequently, better understood. The information can be for publication or for broadcasting. It can be the content of a book, a magazine, a newspaper in case of print media. And in case of electronic media, it can be the content of radio, television, cinema or a website.

The Advanced Learner' Dictionary of Current English defines editing as 'preparing,(another person's writing) for publication (especially in a newspaper or other periodical); doing the work of planning and directing the publication of a newspaper, magazine, encyclopedia etc; preparing a cinema film, tape recording by putting together parts in a suitable sequence. '

Prominent American theorist and Editor-at-large of American monthly magazine 'commentary' Norman Podhoretz says 'editing is to improve an essentially well-written piece or to turn a clumsily written one into, at the very least, a beautifully shaped effective essay which remains true to the author's intention and which realizes that intention more fully than he himself is able to do.'

Here, in this unit, we shall discuss editing only in the context of print media journalism, i.e., we shall discuss news editing in print media. Many people misunderstand the term editing. They think that editing is only removing the typographic mistakes in a text. But news editing is certainly a lot more than this. As veteran journalist Dasu krishnamoorty puts it, 'Editing is a whole concept around which a message is conceived, perceived, designed and communicated.'

It is a chain of activities that starts with the assigning of beats to the reporters and culminates in the final publication of the newspaper. News editing is all about building bridges with mass audiences by eliminating blocks in that process. Editing makes the copy suitable for publication.

The exercise of editing, especially in print media, can broadly be divided into four stages:

- Conceptualisation and planning
- Visualisation
- Dummy Preparation
- Handling of copy

Of the four stages, the most exhaustive stage is the fourth stage, i.e., handling of copy. It involves the following:

1. Selection of news items
2. Cutting and pruning
3. Removal of mistakes
4. Rewriting when necessary
5. Headlining

Newspaper offices receive news from various sources. Reporters and correspondents are positioned at various important places by the organizations for the purpose of collecting news. The newspaper offices also receive a bulk of news from different news agencies whose task is to supply up-to-date information round the clock. Then, there are other sources

as well, from where the newspaper offices get the information. The volume of incoming news items far exceeds what can be actually accommodated in the newspaper and not all of these are truly newsworthy. Therefore, the first activity, i.e., selection, is basically a gatekeeping process. (Gatekeeping function of mass media has been discussed in Course 1 of your BMC programme.) It involves sifting through the entire incoming news items, i.e., the copy and sorting out the newsworthy stories in accordance with the newspaper's editorial policy.

The second, third, fourth and fifth stages together form what is popularly known as copy editing. It includes cutting the news, tailoring and shaping them for publication. It also includes checking for inadequacies in grammar, syntax, facts and figures and, of course, news sense. It is also the job of the copy editor to cross-check facts. If required, corrections are made and at times the story is even rewritten. Finally, the news report is topped with a suitable headline. (Headlining has been discussed in detail in the next unit).

In a publication house, copies are filed by different reporters with ununiform writing skills. Therefore, an important function of copy editing is to bring uniformity of language and style in conformity with the stylebook, so that readers get a uniform reading experience.

The people on the desk are highly skilled in carrying out this specific job of editing. They sit at the desk or in the office and work in shifts. Their role is very specialized and demands immense creativity and concentration. It is because of their contribution that news becomes worthy of publication. They scan through all the news items, select the ones that are newsworthy and relevant for their readers, look for factual and qualitative errors, correct them, cut them to fit into the limited space without tampering the actual meaning of the news and finally give the news the shape and style that is followed by their newspaper. Therefore, the newsroom is the hub of the entire activities, and the Editorial Desk (also known as the Editorial Department or Copy Desk or News Desk) is the nerve centre of a newsroom.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS – A

1. Define the term editing.

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2. What are the four stages of news editing?

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ACTIVITY – A

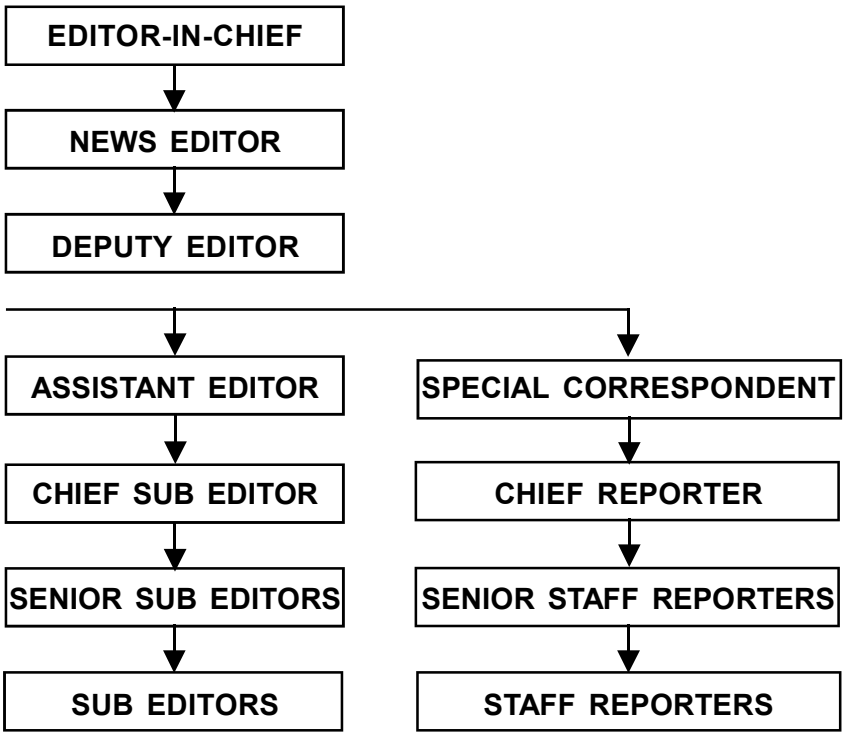
1. Visit a local newspaper office and collect unedited news copies filed by reporters. Identify the flaws in the copies and make a note of them. Now, edit and if necessary edit the copies according to your own understanding.

8.4 NEWSROOM SET UP

The news room is headed by an editor or editor-in-chief or chief editor. The editor-in-chief is the leader of the editorial as well as the reporting team. In addition to the Editor, many news organizations also appoint a Chief Editor, Managing Editor or an Executive Editor to look after important policy decisions of the organization and carry out other important activities that come under the purview of the editor. The person next in line after the editor is the News editor. The News editor is assisted in turn by a number of sub-editors or copy editors. Sometimes there might be senior sub editors also. There are usually different copy editors for different pages like page 1, sports page, international page, national page, city page, business page, entertainment page etc. There are also different sub editors responsible for different editions

of the newspaper and for different supplements. The reporters responsible for different beats report back to the concerned copy editor for their beats.

A flow chart representing the new room set up of 'The Assam Tribune', a leading daily newspaper of Assam, has been provided below for your better understanding.



8.5 ROLE OF EDITORS

The Editor:

It is the editor who is responsible for the entire content of a newspaper. He also takes the responsibilities of planning and directing various operations that are carried out in a day. Being the leader of the entire team of news men, the editor has to shoulder huge responsibilities. He not only has to plan, direct, supervise and take important decisions, but also has to ensure smooth functioning of different activities in a news organization. He also should be aware of the taste of the readers and shape the content of the paper according to the reader's taste and needs. The image creation of the

newspaper is in the hands of the Editor. He should be able to enhance the acceptability, credibility and popularity of the paper and contribute towards increasing the readership base of the newspaper. The editor also writes the editorial for the newspaper through which he needs to reflect the editorial policies and ensure respectability of the paper among the masses. The editor has to strive to create and enhance the newspaper's brand loyalty among its readers and often decide the paper's editorial policy keeping this factor in mind. (Editorial writing has been explained in details in Course 5 of your BMC programme.)

The News Editor:

The News Editor plays the most important role in the shaping of a newspaper after the editor. A News Editor's responsibilities are quite important as he or she is supposed to be in the overall charge of making sure that no important item is missing from the newspaper or the bulletin at any cost. He or she is also responsible for maintaining a steady and continuous flow of up-to-the-minute news items. He must get the best out of the news agencies and his own correspondents and see that they do not miss an important news. He has to coordinate the activities of the newspaper in its various sections like reporters, the different news desks and the picture and feature departments. Usually, this position is reserved for someone with long years of experience and a lot of 'connections and sources' in the field of news gathering. This is because he or she bears the ultimate responsibility for adequate coverage of all important news items.

The News editor must be able to spot an interesting news item when others may have failed. Then again, even if the reporters or other journalists of that organization miss anything of importance, it is the responsibility of this person to spot it and instruct his or her colleagues for getting the news out from the potential sources. A person in this position has to be literally 'on his toes' round the clock as anything may break out at any moment of the day. He must also keep a watch on what appears in the rival newspapers and evaluate the performance of his newspaper in relation to those newspapers. The news editor has to play the role of the eyes and ears of the Editor and act as a liaison between him and the newsroom.

Sub-Editor / Copy-Editor:

The sub-editor or the copy editor is by far the most hard- working person in a newspaper. It is the sub-editor through whom all news, articles and features meant for the newspaper passes and it is the job of the sub-editor to sift through all the material, discard unnecessary copy, select important and relevant matter and finally edit the copy to create the readable and publishable news content. The sub-editor has to rewrite defective passages, reduce lengthy reports to precise matter, and write proper headlines and leads. The sub-editor has to be well versed with the newspaper's style book and ensure that every news report fits this prescribed style. The sub-editor must have the stamina and the speed to be able to meet **deadlines**. The job of the sub-editor can be summarized in the following points:



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

1. He reads the story for clarity of language and meaning and rewrites whenever necessary.
2. He shortens the story while retaining the essentials and maintaining consistency.
3. He combines several reports from different sources to produce a single intelligible report.
4. He corrects grammatical mistakes and implements the house style.
5. He checks for errors of facts and figures.
6. He checks for legal errors like **libel**, contempt of court etc which could land the newspaper in trouble.
7. He adds important background information to place the story in a context.
8. He writes headlines and sub-headlines, when necessary,



Libel:
The act of publishing material with the intent of damaging a person's reputation. Libel is legally punishable.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS – B

1. Who heads the editorial department in a newspaper organization?

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2. Explain the role of the following persons:
   a. Editor

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   b. News Editor

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   c. Sub-Editor

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ACTIVITY – B

1. Take an appointment with the editor of a local daily. Find out from him what duties he has to perform. Also find out from him the newsroom structure of the newspaper and the functioning of the editorial department.

8.6 PRINCIPLES OF COPY EDITING

In the previous sections, you have received some basic idea about what editing is, who constitutes the editorial team and what is the role of each person. Let us now study the basic principles of editing. We shall begin with the principles of writing headlines.

Headline:

Headline writing is perhaps the most difficult part of news editing. Most stories come without a proper headline, and providing the appropriate headline which not just truly represents the story, but also catches the eye of the reader is indeed a challenge. While explaining the story accurately, the headline must

also fit into a limited space. Some copy editors approach headline writing by looking for a key word or two that expresses the high point of the story. Then they add other words until they have a headline. Other copy editors begin by forming a sentence that contains the essential elements of the story. Then they edit out excess words (adverbs, adjectives, articles, and so forth) and minor details until all that is left is a well-tailored headline that tells the story's essentials.



Letterpress printing:
A method of printing which uses metal type that contacts or presses the paper directly. In this method, printing area is above the non-printing area. Presently it has been replaced by modern printing technology and is almost obsolete.

A headline has to be appropriate not just in terms of sentence construction or being suitable for the news story, but even from the point of view of typography and layout considerations. And it is the copy-editor's responsibility to ensure this. Earlier, during the period of **letterpress printing**, headlines had specific word counts and had to be written and sized keeping in mind the availability of space. However, with the changed scenario of computerized newsroom, the editor is no more faced with such constraints.

We have already discussed the basic rules for writing headlines in the previous unit 'News Writing'. Here are a few more simple points for editors to keep in mind for writing satisfactory headlines:

- It must be appropriate
- It must tell a story
- It must conform to the paper's standard
- It must not just be a label
- It must not commit the paper to an opinion

Lead:

As discussed in the earlier units, the 'lead' is written in an inverted pyramid style, accommodating the most important points in it followed by the lesser important details. No matter how the reporter has written the copy, the sub-editor handling the copy has to arrange the lead in that manner after extracting the main points of the news. The lead should contain all the 5 W's and 1 H that we have discussed in the previous unit. But in case of a major story when it becomes difficult to club all the W's and H, then at least the lead should answer what, when and where. The rest of the elements should be dealt with in the subsequent paragraphs.

In writing the lead, the copy editor has to keep in mind the economy of words. Ideally a lead should not contain more than 30 to 35 words and each sentence should not exceed more than 15 words.

The lead should be short, crisp and precise. It, however, does not mean that the lead should be devoid of facts. The lead should contain limited words within which the most important facts should be carried. Ideally the lead should give the summary of what has happened in a nutshell. The reader should get the entire information in the lead itself, at least the crux of the story. It enables the hurried readers to get the main essence of the story in the first paragraph, without needing to go further. This kind of lead which summarises the story is called the **summary lead** or **news lead** or **multiple element lead**.

A short lead, telling all the vital points, using simplest possible words and maintaining the order of importance, is the key to the success of a story.

Apart from the normal summary lead, the copy editor can also, make use of different other kinds of lead for special impact in case of certain stories. For instance, the **narrative lead** (also known as descriptive lead or picture lead) can be used in order to attract the reader's attention by drawing a vivid picture of a particular situation, place, person, object or unusual phase of action that the story may deal with. Again, if in a news story, the time element consists of fast action or the intervals are separated by a series of related events, which needs to be emphasized, then the **staccato lead** can be used. It consists of several small broken sentences punctuated either by periods or dashes.

Again if the news story deals with a situation that presents some kind of contrast, say a contrast between the present and former situations, two people or say, between two events happening in two different places, then the **contrast lead** can be used. Sometimes, the lead can start with a question **(question lead)** and sometimes the reader can be directly addressed in the lead **(directly addressed lead)**. While reporting important speeches or public statements by important people, the lead may begin with a quote. This is called **quotation lead**. So, in this way, different types of leads can be used to enhance the impact of the story.

Body:

The body elaborates what has been established in the lead. Points which have not been accommodated in the lead are elaborated in the body. Mostly the body deals with the element of 'how'. But while constructing the body the sub editor should remember that he maintains the logical order of facts in the body. Or in other words he has to follow the inverted pyramid style of news writing. In case of features, on the other hand, the pyramid style is used. (You will learn more about feature writing in Course 5 of your BMC programme.)

Conclusion:

As mentioned earlier, a hard news story does not have a conclusion. Mostly, in case of soft news stories the conclusion is an essential element. Nevertheless, in the conclusion part the sub editor should weave out the vital points of the entire story and give a suitable conclusion.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS – C

1. What are the four composing elements of a news report?

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2. What are the qualities of a good headline?

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3. What are the points to be kept in mind while editing the lead?

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ACTIVITY – C



1. Take 10 headlines from a newspaper. Analyses whether the headline actually fits the news item? Do you think the headlines could have been improved? Write your own headlines to suit the news stories.

8.7 PHOTO EDITING

Apart from text news content, newspapers also carry news in the form of photographs. Apart from adding validity and emphasis to news stories, a photograph can also stand alone as a news item in itself. Besides, photographs lend variety to a page, attract attention, enhance the look of the page and break the monotony created by the text. **Photo features** are quite popular amongst readers.



Photo features:
A photo feature is a pictorial feature. A series of photos arranged according to a particular pattern to tell a story in an effective manner. There is very little or no write up in such features.

Just as a copy-editor edits the copy by cutting irrelevant portions and highlighting important ones, the photo editor also edits the photos in order to fit them into the layout of the page. Each photograph that reaches the newspaper office needs some amount of editing. Photographs are edited to fit into the specified space, enhance the quality of the photograph and do away with the unnecessary detail. By editing a photograph it is made worthy of publication. For this purpose every media organization keeps a photo editor whose task is to edit the photographs that reach the newspaper office every day.

The Photo Editor:

Like the News editor and other departmental editors, the Photo Editor is responsible for collection of quality photographs of any event happening anywhere and also editing it in order to make it worthy for publication in the newspaper. The photo editor in consultation with the editor or the departmental editors would select appropriate photographs, adequately edit them and decide their position within the layout of the paper. It is the photo

editor's responsibility to select the best picture which tells the story on its own. He has to edit it to properly fit it into the space available in the page without destroying or distorting the essence of the picture. To enhance the look of the paper, the photo editor may opt for horizontal or vertical pictures depending on the page layout and make-up. Here are a few basic requisites of a good photograph:

1. The photo should have the elements essential for news, i.e., it should have the news values.
2. The photo should be an 'action photo or dynamic photo', i.e., it should show some action taking place or show an indication of action. Diagonal elements add the feel of dynamism even to a picture in which no action is shown taking place. For instance, a photograph which shows inanimate objects can also be an action photograph, if the main elements can be traced along imaginary diagonal lines.



This photograph shows action taking place.



No action is seen in this photograph. Yet the diagonal elements across the photograph have added dynamism to the photograph.

3. Clarity is an important consideration while selecting photographs. The main elements in the photo must be clearly visible and never blurred or merged with the background.

The photo editor must also be a person with a comprehensive grasp of current affairs and a nose for news in addition to having adequate aesthetic and technical knowledge about photography.

There are different techniques of photo editing. In most of the cases photo editing involves cropping, scaling and caption writing. To edit a photograph it demands high amount of creativity on the part of the photo editor. In order to render his job in the true spirit of the term, the photo editor should be a photographer himself or at least should know the basics and nuances of photography.

Cropping:

A competent photo editor's job is to see to it that he does not waste space, and trims the picture keeping the main essence of the subject intact. This process of reduction done keeping the essential parts of the picture intact is known as cropping. Simply speaking, cropping is creative cutting of a photograph or a picture. While cropping a photo, the photo editor ensures that the photograph is cut to proper size, giving the right amount of **headroom, nose room/ looking space, walking space** etc. as per necessity. There are different techniques of cropping. When a photograph reaches the hands of the photo editor he first does a mental cropping. It means the photo editor should be able to visualize how the photograph will finally look like and would be able to decipher the meaning best. Then he proceeds with actual cropping of the picture. This, however, does not happen in most cases today, as nearly all newspapers use digital cameras these days. So, photos can be directly cropped on the computer and therefore sized and resized, cropped and uncropped according to convenience. But, in any case, a good photo editor will always be able to visualize the perfect shape and size for the picture almost as soon as he sees it.



Headroom:
A term used with photographs of people. It is the distance between the top of the subject's head and top of the frame. Too less or too much headroom makes a photograph look awkward.

Nose Room/ Looking space:
It is the distance between the eye which is furthest away from the camera and the edge of the frame to which the person is looking.

Walking Space:
Distance between a person (who is shown walking/ running) and the edge of the frame towards which the person is walking/ running.

Scaling:

Editing often also involves enlarging (blowing up) or reducing (blowing down) the size of the main image so that it gives a better visual impact or it fits into the available space. This is called scaling. Scaling has to be done proportionately so that the image is not distorted.

Caption writing:

A caption is the description of the content of a photograph. It tells what the photograph is all about. Usually caption is very short. Using minimum words the caption writer attempts how best to describe a photograph. Therefore, it is not an easy task and it demands high amount of creativity. Even though a good picture can express thousands words, yet photographs are always accompanied by a caption. A caption should always carry the elements of 'what', 'where' and 'when'.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS – D

1. What do you mean by the term photo-editing?

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2. What is the role of the photo editor?

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3. Explain the following terms:

   a. Cropping

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   b. Caption

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ACTIVITY – D

1. Consider the photographs on the first page of a newspaper. Now, in an attempt to increase their visual impact, if you feel necessary, crop the photos according to your own understanding.
2. Now give each of the photographs a new caption.

8.8 LET US SUM UP

Let us now have a quick recap of what we have learnt in this unit:

1. Editing involves cutting, cropping, shaping, checking for grammatical errors, sizing etc. Every media organization keeps an army of people to render this specialized job of editing. They are called as the desk people or subbing people etc. The desk is also referred to as the news-room.
2. In the editing process the news are first scanned for news worthiness by the desk. The selected news items are then checked for factual and grammatical errors.
3. The hurried reporters in the pursuit of meeting deadlines are bound to make mistakes which needs proper corrections in terms of facts, figures, grammatical mistakes such as sentence construction, usage of words, punctuations etc.
4. Most of the times the desk looks for redundancies and clutter in the news copy. Moreover stories are trimmed in order to fit into the space available.
5. The editorial department consists of both reporting desk and editing desk and is headed by the editor. The editor is the ultimate decision - maker, guide, coordinator, and motivator and he is responsible for all the content of a newspaper.
6. Editorial team is headed by the editor followed by the executive editor, assistant editor(s), deputy editor, news editor, senior sub-editors, and sub-editors. They all have specialized role to play and help the news-paper achieves its aims and objectives in the finest possible way.

7. Like news, photographs are edited in the news room. This piece of work is carried out by the Photo editor, who is skilled to render this service. There are different techniques that he employs while editing a photo, the most common being cropping and caption writing.



8.9 FURTHER READINGS

- **Essentials of Practical Journalism**, *Vir Bala Agarwal, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi*
- **News Writing,** *George A. Hough, Kanishka Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi*
- **Basic Journalism,** *Rangaswamy Parthasarathy, Macmillan India Ltd., New Delhi*



8.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS - A

1) Editing is the process of cutting the news, tailoring and shaping them in order to make them worthy of publishing in the newspapers.

2) The four stages of news editing are:

   a. Selection of news

   b. Evaluation of quality of content

   c. Correction and rewriting

   d. Final checking to remove redundancies and bringing uniformity of language and style.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS - B

1) The Editor

2) a) The Editor: The editor is responsible for the entire content of a newspaper. He also takes the responsibilities of planning and directing various operations that are carried out in a day. He not only has to plan, direct, supervise and take important decisions, but also has to ensure smooth functioning of different activities in a

news organization.

b) The News Editor: The news editor is responsible for maintaining a steady and continuous flow of up-to-the-minute news items. The News editor must be able to spot an interesting news item when the others may have failed. Then again even if the reporters of other journalists of that organization miss anything of importance it is the responsibility of this person to spot it and instruct his or her colleagues to get the news out from the potential sources.

c) The Sub - editor: All news, articles and features meant for the newspaper pass through the sub-editor and it is the job of the sub-editor to sift through all the material, discard unnecessary copy, select the important and relevant matter and finally edit the copy to create readable, publishable news content. The sub-editor has to rewrite defective passages, reduce lengthy reports to precise matter, and write proper headlines and leads.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS - C

1) The four composing elements of news are – headline, lead, body and conclusion.

2) The qualities of a good headline are:
   a. It must be appropriate
   b. It must tell a story
   c. It must conform to the paper's standard
   d. It must not just be a label
   e. It must not commit the paper to an opinion.

3) The points to be remembered while editing the lead are:
   a. It should be written in inverted pyramid style
   b. It should contain the most important of the 5Ws and H
   c. It should not be more than 30 – 35 words
   d. It should be kept short, crisp and informative.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS - D

1) Photo editing is the process of editing a photograph by cropping it, trimming it, resizing it and improving its quality, thereby making it fit for publication. It also involves giving a proper caption to the photograph.

2) The role of the photo editor is to select and edit photographs that land in the media office everyday. He not only has to make the photographs fit for publication by cropping them, trimming them, resizing them and improving their quality but also provides an appropriate caption to the photograph so as to place the photograph in a context.

3) a. Cropping is creative cutting and resizing of a photograph or a picture to improve its visual impact and quality.

   b. A caption is a short description of the contents of a photograph. It tells what the photograph is all about.



8.11 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

1) Briefly describe the different stages of editing.
2) Describe the newsroom set up in a news organization
3) What are the stages of photo editing?
4) Explain the roles of the different editorial staff in a news organization?

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