# UNIT 7: TV NEWS

**UNIT STRUCTURE**

7.1 Learning Objectives
7.2 Introduction
7.3 Basic features of TV news
7.4 Structure of TV news bulletin
7.5 Let us Sum up
7.6 Answers to check your progress
7.7 Further reading
7.8 Possible Questions

## 7.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- explain the basic features of TV News
- describe the structure of a television news bulletin

## 7.2 INTRODUCTION

Television journalism is not only about glamour. It is a very challenging career for those who are willing to put in hours of hard labour day in and day out. It is an extremely satisfying opportunity for those who have the zeal and the perseverance to 'bring' news before the public.

This unit will give you an idea about the steps involved in making a news package, the structure of a news bulletin. Read this unit carefully. This will help you carve an interesting and challenging career in television journalism for yourself.

## 7.3 BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF TV NEWS

This section considers patterns in structure, duration, and sequencing of items of television news bulletin, as well as uncovering the principles of the selection of events creating the content of the news bulletin.

There are channels which air variety of programmes along with news, like say Doordarshan national channel. Then there are exclusive 24-hour news channels, which only air news and current affair programme, like NDTV 24x7. Duration of a news bulletin is also different across channels. While channels with variety programmes have three or four news bulletins in a day, some news channels have hourly news bulletins.

Except for those in small markets, most news departments are large in relation to a station's total employment. Employee strength of the editorial departments range from about a dozen to nearly one hundred depending on the importance the concerned channel give to the news. Television news programmes are put together by reporters, anchors, copy writers, video tape crews, mobile outdoor broadcast (OB) van operators, operators of special-effects generators and computer graphics systems, tape editors, and a production crew working in a studio, the control room, and the video tape room.

There is a discernable pattern to a daily television news operation. Putting together a television news broadcast involves research, writing, interviewing, recording the visuals and editing, before the actual show. In the news room, hours of anticipation are followed by a sudden quiet as the action moves to the news set and the control room. The show goes on the air in an atmosphere of concentrated effort and often of some anxiety. As closing credits roll, there is satisfaction, relaxation and even excitement. If significant problems arise during the news cast (a rare occurrence), the news producer, assignment editor, anchors, and other key personnel meet with the program producer for a brief post mortem (a discussion of what had worked, what did not work and why).



**Live telecast**: the programme being shot and transmitted during the actual performance to the viewer's TV set in real time. Major sports events, news bulletins etc. are usually telecast live.

A TV newscast cannot match the wide and instant coverage of radio or the in-depth report of print news. The time taken up by visual material does not allow for a probe, or even adequate background information. Indeed, a TV newscast cannot present the most interesting and significant news since the cameras just cannot be always present where such events take place (e.g. a coup, an invasion, a war, or a cabinet meeting).

A TV newscast is, however, the ideal medium for presenting ceremonial events like coronations, swearing-in-ceremonies, arrivals and departures

of VIPs, parades, inaugurations, and sports. Unfortunately, the hard core news does not lie in these events-even if they are telecast **'live'**-and constitute only a small percentage of the daily fare of news. However, things are changing. With the audience becoming more demanding and competition heating up, television news is covering hard news.

The standard newscast in India used to employ the radio technique of reading out the news in a formal manner from a script (or cards or on an electronic "**teleprompter**"), interrupted with an occasional still, a map, or a moving picture. Frequently, the news was tailored to the visuals available. However, with the acquisition of **ENG** (Electronic News Gathering) and the latest computerized equipment, the number of visuals has increased. Indeed, the news bulletins of Doordarshan's channels, as also those of the many satellite channels, have in recent years taken on the format of 'magazine' programmes, with the newscaster playing a proactive role in 'presenting' the news.



**ENG:** News gathering which relies on videotape or digital equipment, as against the earlier method of NG or newsgathering where reporters collected TV news with traditional film cameras

Some of the popular programmes of Doordarshan are News bulletins, general news magazines, and panel discussions of public affairs. The visuals which are included in these programmes are basically slides, film clips, maps, diagrams, charts, animations and graphics.

Some **characteristics** of TV news reports:

- A TV news story is short; normally with a duration ranging between 90 seconds to 120 seconds. However, in some rare cases, the duration might extend further depending on the importance of the event or incident covered.
- Since TV news is visual, a lot of meaning is made by the images themselves. Therefore, it is imperative to capture action shots to make it more gripping.
- News bulletins usually have a dramatic opening with music and montage (compilation of assorted shots). Every channel has its unique signature music and style which helps the viewers identify the news bulletin.

- Most news bulletins have attractive headlines to capture the attention of the viewers. The most important happenings find place in the main headlines.
- Editing is of prime importance in television news since the way a story is edited can change the angle and context of the news. There is a lot of scope for manipulation in editing. The editor should, therefore, maintain professional integrity and must not engage in unethical practices. The editing of television news should be ethical in the sense that the shots should be edited and assembled in a manner that they do not appear out of context and do not portray something that never actually happened.
- Television news editing is normally kept simple - only cut to cut editing is used - and use of visual tricks, usually used in films like slow motion, blurring, repetition, etc is avoided.
- There is always some kind of slant rather than straight factual reporting in television news. Every television story in its narrative comes with a point of view. Though objectivity is an important yardstick of good reporting, television news very often has the tendency to over simplify by creating heroes and/or villains.
- Television being an audio-visual medium puts importance on look. A visually appealing look and pleasing personality is required to be a good anchor/newscaster. Good grooming and positive body language could be an asset for an anchor.
- Another characteristic feature of television news is the inclusion of **sound bites.** Interesting and engaging sound bites add life and credibility to the news and the background sound of the sound bite helps portray situations. Sound bites in TV news are normally around 10-15 seconds each.
- The language used in television news is conversational. The viewer must be able to understand it immediately.
- Television news often has the reporter appearing and talking to the camera on the location in order to explain, simplify or narrate something that cannot be visually shown. It is called 'Piece-to-Camera' (PTC). It also lends credibility to the news item.



**Sound bite:** Sound bite is a brief video tape recorded comment or short interview.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q.1. What should be the ideal length of a TV news story?

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Q.2. What is signature tune and how does it help the viewer?

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Q.3. Why should the editor maintain professional integrity?

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Q.4. What is a PTC?

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Q.5. What do you mean by ENG?

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## 7.4 STRUCTURE OF TV NEWS BULLETIN

A television news programme is both horizontally structured (a bulletin is organised into several sequences), and at the same time, it is vertically enriched by, for instance, narrower interactions (for example dialogue between a newsreader and correspondent, a third party interviewed by a correspondent), different narrative structures, and various modes of expression and representation and numerous other elements.

All television news bulletins are made up of stories based on real happenings in the world, real events, meetings, arguments, conflicts, compromises, agreements, etc. These stories need to be packaged and shown to the audience in a way that they can easily understand. Packaging involves

putting the relevant visuals in logical order and creation of interesting and logical narratives by the programme makers. Most stories on a news bulletin should have a simple structure.

- These reports should have an **Introduction**. The introduction will usually answer some of the five Ws: Who, What, Where, When and Why? It might even raise the question of how it happened. But one important element should be kept in mind — it is not to give away all the important detail as answers to these questions. If this factor is not taken into account then there would be little point continuing with the story. So the introduction may leave some of these questions unanswered and also may well pose several **Questions** or describe significant **Problems** that need exploring. At times an introduction needs to be a bit more sophisticated, it should provide the answers to WHAT, WHO and WHERE, but tactfully leave the WHY and HOW- to be answered in the main report. However, it is not a fixed formula. Introduction will depend on the nature of the story.
- The introduction of the report is followed by the **main body** of the report in which the answers to some or all of these questions are elaborated. Part of this elaboration will be contained in the visual images that provide the evidence that the story is genuine.
- The final part of the report is the **conclusion**. Here the loose ends of the story are tied up bringing the story to a close. But it should be kept in mind that all conclusions may not be neat and sometimes they may end with more questions.

One can observe a certain **consistency, predictability** and **universality** in the structure of a television news bulletin across the channels in different states or even countries. Its structural and temporal frames are predetermined not only by the regularity of its appearance (daily programmes, fixed timing, relatively stable time duration), but also by its focus on certain **categories of events** - human interest, politics, economy, social issues, sports, etc.

The process of communication begins with **opening** and **headline sequences**; then it is further developed in a news items complex, that is, it

is either divided into sections or it forms one whole, and the communication finishes with the summary of the main issues and a **closing sequence**.

There are several news items in a bulletin. Prioritisation of news item in terms of placement and time duration follow the **principle of relevance.** It means that more important news items are placed first and are longer. Many of them also appear in headlines or in news reader's abstracts. In addition, the **ordering of items** may be affected by the working of other rules, for instance, criteria of foreign and home, content preference and others. In particular, attention is paid to the first and last items of a bulletin. The importance of the first item may be highlighted by including it in all headline sequences and at the same time its content/character/angle can also reveal the values of the producer/news channel. As uncovered by a number of British researchers and analysts, the final item is seldom negative or disturbing. Although diversity in content and form is typical for the central part of a **news items block**, some pieces of information are held back to the final part that covers sports, light/off beat events and rather positive human interest stories.

You may have noticed that headlines of a news bulletin are often repeated at the end. It is intended to help the viewer who may tune in while the broadcast is already on the air and may thus miss the headlines at the start. It also helps the newscaster to recapitulate (recap) and sum up important stories and indicate to the listener that the newscast is now nearing the end.

The arrangement of items in a bulletin requires considerable skills and editorial ability. We have to keep in mind that a bulletin is more than the compilation of the news items. A news bulletin has a character of its own. In practical terms, different stories on abroad subject domain have to be integrated as much as possible. For example, all stories about a major national development or an important international event have to be taken together, as far as possible. They have to be brought together and made into a compact form. This is to be done in such a way that after the main news in the story, the reactions, repercussions, comments, along with any offshoots or sequels, are arranged in a logical and interesting manner.



**Lead story**: The most important story of the bulletin.

Let us suppose that there is a story about India winning the last of the three test matches against Australia and thereby winning the home series 2-1. This series win has come after 24 years. Obviously there is a lot of excitement among the Indian fans about this win. Now, the news of this win will naturally be the **lead story** of the bulletin wherein the statistics will be provided and the scores would be mentioned. Information like who was adjudged the man of the match and man of the series will be given. The story will also say that this series win has come after 24 long years. After this story, several related stories will also follow wherein comments of the cricket experts, reactions of the fans, family members of the cricketers reacting to the win in their respective hometowns etc. will be accommodated. Immediately after this, an analysis of the match might also follow wherein the anchor will discuss the significance of the win with a cricket expert and dissect the match to discuss the turning points of the game. Finally, the anchor will sum up the situation both on and off the field as a result of this historic series win by India.

In newspapers, all these stories would be different items, with separate headings and placed alongside the main story or even separately on different pages. But it is not so in television (or even in radio). In television, one has to bring all the related stories together in the form of a roundup, avoiding unnecessary repetitions and reducing the less important stories to the barest minimum so that the overall story is not too long. Yet it should be as comprehensive as possible.

This arrangement is called for when there is a major story to be handled. Even otherwise, related items should be grouped together. But one has to be careful while doing so and understand the individual significance of each story and examine if stories that are loosely connected can be grouped together or not. For example, suppose there is a major story about India approaching the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna, Austria to convince the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) of countries about its civil nuclear programme and you have another story of an Austrian cultural delegation arriving in New Delhi to perform at the India Habitat Centre as part of a cultural exchange programme. In such cases, it is not necessary to place the second story alongside the major item. If there is time you can put it separately later in the bulletin.

In newspapers reporters have assigned beats (subjects/areas they cover). In most of the large news channels reporters have been assigned beats. Like some newspapers have editors looking after particular subject (Business Editor, Current Affairs Editor, Features Editor, Sports Editor, etc.), news channels have different producers looking after different content area.

Some may deal with **accidents and conflicts** involving stories of accidents, disasters, strikes, demonstrations, terrorism, and various problems. The second group may deal with **politics** (issues of politics and diplomacy). Some producers may deal with **economic matters**, some with **social matters, culture, sports, etc.** Channel management decides on the specific content area and the number of producers handling an area, depending on the editorial policy of the channel.

Television news is very often labelled as very personalized and individual centered. It means larger problems and issues are depicted through the portrayal of an individual's personal story. At times, it fails to portray the larger dimension and complexities of the problem/issue. Then there is the growing tendency to **sensationalise** and **dramatise** events to attract the attention of the audience. Often it crosses the border of reality and enters into the arena of fiction. The growing tendency to put more importance on entertainment is another area of concern in television news. Not only more items on entertainment-world are finding space in mainstream news, the form of news is also changing to put in more entertainment quotient. These, of course are not exclusively Indian phenomenon. It is happening all over the world. Market is taking its toll on the way news has been perceived and presented.

The content of television news displays a certain pattern in news selection. The process of picking a particular event as a newsworthy element is directed by a set of criteria defined by **Galtung & Ruge** as **news values**, and described by **Fowler.** The news values reflect organisational, genre-related and socio-cultural factors participating in news selection. Also, he offers twelve titles and more specific names for them:

- frequency
- threshold
- absolute intensity

- intensity increase
- unambiguity
- meaningfulness
- cultural proximity
- relevance
- consonance
- predictability
- demand
- unexpectedness
- unpredictability
- scarcity
- continuity
- composition
- reference to elite nations
- reference to elite people
- reference to persons
- reference to something negative

(Fowler 1991: 15-16).

The **frequency** factor suggests that events happening within 24-hours production time are likely to be reported. The **threshold** takes the size of the event (large-scale, major events) into consideration, and the **unambiguity** of an event guarantees its selection. **Meaningfulness** is influenced by geographical, historical, cultural closeness, whereas **consonance** reflects what people expect to happen, or want to happen. If the **unexpectedness** of the event gets it selected as newsworthy one, then **continuity** is a factor backed by the event already found in a previous bulletin. The **composition** of the whole bulletin decides on the newsworthiness of one item, being part of the whole. **Reference** to elite nations and to **elite people** depicts media interest in powerful and popular elements. **Reference to persons** provides a space for identification with the individual person's experience and fate. **Negative** events generally attract more attention than positive ones.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q.6. What are the three main parts of a television news story?

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Q.7. What are the five Ws that the introduction usually answers?

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Q.8. What part do visual image play in the news story?

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**ACTIVITY 7.1**

1. Watch the television news bulletin at nine on NDTV 24X7. What are the different parts of the bulletin? Find out which issues are being covered in that bulletin and in what chronology.

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## 7.5 LET US SUM UP

- Television news bulletins are made up of many stories.
- A TV news story has three parts – introduction, main body and conclusion.
- A television news bulletin or newscast is a regularly scheduled television program that reports current events and affairs.

## 7.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans. to Q No.1 :** 90 sec to 120 secs

**Ans. to Q No.2 :** News bulletins usually have a dramatic opening with music and assorted shots, called montage. Every channel has its unique opening music and montage. This is called signature tune or signature music. It helps the viewers identify the news bulletin.

**Ans. to Q No.3 :** Editing is of prime importance in television news since the way a story is edited can change the context of the news. There is a lot of scope for manipulation in editing. The editor should, therefore, maintain professional integrity and must not engage in unethical practices.

**Ans. to Q No.4 :** PTC or Piece-to-camera is a unique element of TV news where the reporter talks to the camera on location in order to explain, simplify or narrate something that cannot be visually shown.

**Ans. to Q No.5 :** ENG or Electronic News Gathering is news gathering which relies on videotape or digital equipment, as against the earlier method of NG or newsgathering where reporters collected TV news with traditional film cameras.

**Ans. to Q No.6 :** Most stories on a news bulletin have a simple structure -

- They have an Introduction. This will usually answer some of the five Ws: Who, what, where, when and why. It might even raise the question of how it happened. Of course, if the introduction answers these questions in too much detail, there would be little point continuing with the story, so the introduction may leave some of these questions unanswered and also may pose several Questions or describe significant Problems that need exploring. Sometimes an introduction will be a bit more sophisticated, telling us the answers to the WHO and WHERE questions, but leaving it up to the main report to answer the rest –WHY? HOW? WHAT?
- Then there is the main body of the report in which the answers to some or all of these questions are provided and elaborated. Part of

this elaboration will be contained in the visual images that provide the evidence that the story is genuine.

- Then there is the conclusion. Here the story is brought to a close and loose ends are tied up. Of course, not all conclusions can be conclusive. It may raise more questions or open avenue for further probing into a problem.

**Ans. to Q No.7 :** The five Ws are: Who, what, when, where, why.

**Ans. to Q No.8 :** Visual images are the main components of a TV news story. It adds meaning and authenticates whatever is being said, apart from keeping the viewers hooked



## 7.7 FURTHER READING


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4. Luthra, H.R. (1986) Indian Broadcasting. New Delhi : Publications Division.

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## 7.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q.1. What factors came together to promote the development of news channels in India?

Q.2. What is the scope of television news in India?

Q.3. What is the importance of editing in TV news?

Q.4. How has the advent of ENG changed the entire face of TV reporting?