UNIT 10: REPORTING FOR TV NEWS

UNIT STRUCTURE

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10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- understand the techniques of reporting
- gauge the duties and responsibilities of a reporter
- get familiar to various news sources
- get an idea of the emerging trends in news reporting

10.2 INTRODUCTION

Because of the additional visual content, compilation and production of news bulletin for television is much more difficult in comparison to radio and newspaper. This is because it involves a much bigger production team and requires more coordinated effort.

The job of a television news reporter demands much more than that of a print or radio news reporter. In this unit we will discuss about the qualities and responsibilities of a TV news reporter apart from introducing to you the basics of TV news reporting. We will also discuss about various news sources and about some emerging trends in news reporting which a broadcast professional should be acquainted with.

So, let us begin the unit with a basic introduction to TV reporting.

10.3 INTRODUCTION TO TV REPORTING

If there's a war, a disaster, or a major civil disturbance somewhere in the world, television news will be there. Electronic newsgathering or ENG technology makes us an eyewitness to happenings.

Although the printed word can be powerful, as we've so often seen in the last 50 years, seeing images, especially on TV, makes happenings much more real.

During the recent events surrounding the November 26, 2008 terrorists' attacks on Mumbai in which more than 200 people died, TV news brought the nation and much of the world together in feelings of outrage and sorrow. The same happened in September 2001, when America faced its worst terror attacks. Television brought to us live coverage of the terror attacks in Mumbai making us sit up in collective horror.

Gone are the days when we used to watch studio-based recorded news bulletins at fixed hours of the day on Doordarshan. Times have changed and so has technology. Along with these new technological advancements has changed the style and format of news on television. Today we not only have live coverage of important happenings from round the world, we are also served by hundreds of 'news channels' from across the globe which bring us information about almost anything happening under the sun every day.



EPF:

Television production which takes place outside the studio, in a practical location or special venue. Say for instance, awards functions, shows, concerts, political conventions, sporting events etc.

EFP emphasises on high-quality, multi-camera photography, advanced graphics and sound.

Electronic newsgathering (ENG) and **Electronic Field Production** (EFP) are technologies which have completely revolutionized the quantum of information exchange between the different parts of the world.

However, with the rise in the number of 24 hour television news channels, many channels tend to go overboard in their quest for 'exclusive' and 'breaking news stories'. Needless to say, television journalism sometimes also comes under the fire of its viewers. But we also need to remember that television journalism has done for humanity what very few technological advancements can claim to have done. Can you imagine the not switching on to your TV news channels, the moment you hear of a misfortune? Without television news, would we ever had seen the devastation caused by the

Earthquake in Gujarat or the havoc of the tsunami? Would you have seen the last few moments of Saddam Hussein's life or for that matter, Aishwarya Rai being crowned Miss World?

Television news has become an indispensable part of our lives. We cant imagine leaving our homes without a quick glance at the headlines read out by our ever so presentable news anchor. True that we have other means of gathering news but surely no media is as influential and overpowering as television. We all know ' a picture can speak a thousand words'. If such is the power of a picture, imagine the impact it can create if the picture is added some movement!

10.4 DUTIES, QUALITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF A TV REPORTER

A television station's reputation and credibility depends largely on its reporters. They are the lifeblood of a TV station which educates and informs its viewers on what is happening in the country around them, in the state in which they live, in the country of the birth and in the world at large. They are the tellers of news and views objectively without inhibition and without bias. They go after the facts of any event, pronouncements and happenings of social, political or economic significance and come out with a connected and fully documented narrative which gives all the particulars in their many-sided aspects. What they present helps the viewers to form their own informed judgment and thereby facilitate in the formation of public opinion on any particular issue.

To be a good TV reporter one has to possess certain qualities and attributes. In order to perform well on the job, a television news reporter has to possess some basic and essential qualifications. Some of these are given below:

Knowledge, Skills & Abilities:

1. **Accuracy:** The reporter must obtain unassailable information. Guesses, surmises and carelessly checked materials can only lead to disaster. The reporter must go by the slogan, 'get it first, but first get it right.'
2. **Good writing skills:** Writing for television requires immense skill because reporters often get little time to file their reports. They

should be able to write their news stories in a lucid, precise and effective manner in the time available to them.

3. **Integrity:** Objectivity often becomes the first casualty in television news reporting at the hands of different pressure groups. Reporters often face the wrath of politicians and other prominent figures when they report against the their interests. In such a situation, it is pertinent that reporters maintain their integrity and withstand the different kinds of pressure exerted on them from various quarters.

4. **Analytical:** Simply stating what has happened is not sufficient. A reporter must recognize a story, and must be able to put an 'angle' to the story. In addition to telling the viewers the 5 Ws and 1 H, a reporter must be able to correlate different events and analyse their implications.

5. **Clarity of expression**: The reporter must have the ability to express himself well both in writing and speech. The need for effective oral expression exists because the reporter very often has to interview so many people in the course of his work and very often he has to give details of the story himself to the viewers where it is necessary that every word is clear and unambiguous.

6. **Pleasant personality:** The reporter must have a pleasing personality. After achieving professional competency and while maintaining the integrity expected of news personnel, TV reporters must project an attractive and friendly personality to the audience. Attractive in this sense does not refer to physical appearance but a disposition that helps build audience rapport- a relationship of mutual trust or emotional affinity.

7. **Tactfulness:** A TV reporter must develop versatility in handling people because very often TV reporters find themselves in difficult and challenging situations or hostile crowd behavior. In such situations it is important for the reporter to tactfully negotiate the crowd while also getting his work done.

8. **Speed:** This is one of the most essential prerequisites of a TV journalist. A reporter must be able to handle accidents, disasters, and other spot stories in the minimum time or the story may miss the deadline and lose its importance.

9. **Ingenuity:** A TV reporter must strive constantly for originality in news gathering procedures, especially in investigative reporting. He should use good judgment in gathering information and learn to sort the important from the unimportant effectively. He should also be able to weed out information, determining what readers need to know and what will make a complete and accurate article.

10. **Good networking:** A TV reporter must know his sources well enough to ensure their credibility as suppliers of news. A TV reporter must have the ability to build contacts. He must maintain a long list of friends and acquaintances who may be of help when stories break and he should also intimately know people who can give authoritative information on any kind of story. A TV reporter must also establish and maintain a good working relationship with the police.

11. **Diligence:** Collecting information is not enough. A TV reporter, like any other journalist, must be diligent enough to always verify and double-check the names, addresses and designations of people before making a report.

12. **Versatility:** A TV reporter must have a thorough knowledge of diverse areas like crime, business, politics, sports etc. Live reporting often requires ad libbing on the part of the reporters. This calls for knowledge on diverse issues.

13. **Knowledge:** A good reporter should have broad general knowledge and experience in order to understand a number of different areas so as to have the ability to go from one area to another easily. He should also have a solid news judgment along with knowledge of current local news and newsmakers. In handling a story, the reporter must understand the facts to know their order of importance. He or she should be able to prioritize events and then go and report them.

14. **Curiosity:** A good reporter should always be driven by the need to be curious enough to go beyond the surface. He should look at things in a questioning manner so as to seek information about people, events, activities etc. He must also be skeptical at times in order to understand them.

15. **Techno savvy:** Nowadays, one the most essential quality of a reporter is his ability to use standard office equipment such as computers, fax machines, copiers, etc. He must be able to use and have knowledge of common television newsroom computer systems and software along with an ability to learn new software systems. He should be compatible with the operational and office policies and procedures. He must also have some prior experience or functional knowledge of news video editing systems with the basic knowledge of non-linear and or desktop-based editing systems. He should have some basic knowledge of camera handling techniques also.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q. 1. What do you mean by EFP?

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Q. 2. Why should a television news reporter be techno savvy ?

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10.5 SOURCES OF TV NEWS

You know that television news channels and their reporters build their reputation by providing up-to-the minute coverage of news and events that affect viewers' lives. Their reputations depend also on accurate and objective coverage of news and events. A rumour, grievance or tip from a contact may be a story idea, but it is not a story until the information is confirmed by reliable and reputable sources.

Television newsrooms generally use the same sources of news that are used by the other media. However, of late satellite/microwave video feed services, and syndicated video coverage are being increasing used by television news channels in addition to traditional news sources.

News Agencies

The primary sources of news on television are the news wire services or news agencies such as Press Trust of India (PTI) and United News of India (UNI) among other agencies.

Still photographs transmitted by wire services are also used on television, especially those of late-breaking stories for which moving pictures are not available.

Cable News Network (CNN), which revolutionized news reporting during the Gulf War, Conus, Associate Press (AP), United Press International (UPI) and such other agencies cater to international needs of the task of news gathering and news distribution. TV/radio newscast corporations and organizations owned by member stations and news newspapers also form arteries of news inflow. For instance, Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL), equipped with computerized news systems, has been feeding centres all over the country and also those located outside. The Government of India in September 1997, opened up internet service providers in order to strengthen the national information backbone with improved data transmission services. Just as the cellular telephone has made reporting for radio a lot easier, the Satellite News Gathering (SNG) devices have come as a boon to TV reporting. Due to this, agencies such as Reuters, ANI and UPI are often referred to as 'town criers' for the role they play.

In-House Sources

Don't overlook your own news room as a place to find information about stories. In addition to professional news agencies, various news production bodies employ their own correspondents, staff reporters, camera crews and stringers. A reporter could play the role of the proverbial watchdog for a society, keeping an eye on issues where authorities have shown signs of negligence, arbitrariness or injustice. A reporter's goal and role invests him with undeclared rights and power. Most stations employ correspondents/ reporters who gather news by going out with a camera crew to report an incident event such as a fire, an accident, a conference, etc. At times, owing to the absence of a visual, the reporter may file a dry story or instead speak to the camera and narrate the story.



Paparazzi:
Photographers who take photos of celebrities at moments when the subjects do not expect to be photographed, often taking them unawares, unlike press photography which is undertaken at press conferences, red carpet affairs and other events where there is an expectation and desire that the subjects will be photographed.

Besides, there are also freelancers and the **paparazzi.** Coverage of many spot events such as accidents, fires, floods, earthquake and the like is often difficult to procure if staff correspondents are not available at the time of the event. These events are sometimes covered by a freelance camera person scouting around the area. This visual coverage is purchased from the freelance camera persons who are known as stringers. The stations have to rely on stringers for unexpected news stories, particularly if the staff cameraperson is unable to reach the scene fast enough to record it.

Other Media

Different studios and stations work in unison borrowing and lending wire and stills. Most television stations monitor radio news bulletins and vice versa for important news stories. If the story is very significant and there is no time to obtain visuals, such stories are telecast dry.

Public Sources

A variety of public records are available to reporters. Government reports, court documents, police reports and city council proceedings, all may be considered public information, depending on local, state and national laws. If a public relations firm sends you a news release claiming its client has built the tallest building in Guwahati, you can verify the firm's claim by consulting officials of the Guwahati Development Authority or municipal authorities. Resource material such as encyclopedias and almanacs also may be considered public sources.



LET US KNOW

A Reporter's Checklist

Broadcast news is a highly competitive business and in the rush to get a story on the air it's sometimes tempting to guess at facts or use information from a questionable source.

However, errors in stories not only damage a station's credibility but they can derail a reporter's professional future. Here are five points to keep in mind when writing news stories.

1. Question those who claim to be a witness to an event and confirm that they really were in a position to see what happened.

2. Use a second source to double-check information that seems surprising or may be in doubt.
3. Double-check all names, titles, and places, and, when necessary, write out the pronunciation of names phonetically.
4. When writing the story, carefully check spelling and grammar; do the math on numbers.
5. Make sure that sound bites selected during editing accurately reflect what the person meant.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.3. Discuss the role of news agencies as an important news source.

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Q.4. What is the role of a freelancer in television news reporting?

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ACTIVITY 10.1

1. Visit a television news channel in your city/town. Talk to the reporters working there and find out what their news sources are.
2. Suppose you are asked to cover a bus accident in Guwahati in which 20 people have died. Who will be your news sources and how will you go about covering the incident for the channel you work for?

10.6 NEW TRENDS IN TV REPORTING

Sting operation: As we have already discussed in your course on Mass Communication and Journalism, in law enforcement, a sting operation is a deceptive operation designed to catch a person committing a crime.

As discussed earlier, a typical sting usually has a law-enforcement officer or cooperative member of the public posing as criminal partner or potential victim and go along with a suspect's actions to gather evidence of the suspect's wrongdoing. Let us discuss a little more about it in this unit in the context of TV news reporting. First let us consider some common situations of sting operations.

- Purchasing illegal drugs to catch a supplier
- Deploying a bait car (also called a honey trap) to catch an auto thief
- Posing as someone who is seeking child pornography to catch a supplier

Sting operations are being increasingly used today by various news channels as part of investigative journalism in order to uncover different scams, scandals and corruption cases. In such an operation, a journalist usually pretends to be someone he is not and then tries to get into the thick of things. Usually by keeping a Dictaphone or camera hidden within a bag or his clothing, he makes effort to capture 'scandalous activities or words' of the suspect.

A journalist has to be extremely careful when doing a sting operation. He should understand the potential dangers associated with such an operation before he actually jumps into it. Indian television has been since long witness to sting operations. The most famous of them being the one involving the Tehelka Chief, Tarun Tejpal and the then minister Bangaru Laxman. Ever since there have been scores of sting operations mainly used in investigative journalism.

There have also been instances of 'fake sting operations' conducted by various news channels only to raise their TRPs. The most recent example being the one which put the flashbulbs on school teacher Uma Khurana.

This is highly unethical and such incidents have come under the scanner of law and if the Broadcast Bill is passed, there may be strict regulations on the conduct of such operations.

Breaking News: Breaking news is a current event that broadcasters feel is important enough to permit the interruption of an ongoing programme in order to report about this breaking event. In common TV terminology, the term is often loosely used to denote the most significant story of the moment or a story that is being covered live. It could also be a story that is simply of wide interest to viewers.

Depending upon the kind of event, the report may last only a few minutes, or continue for several hours or even several days at a time. If coverage continues for an extended amount of time, the network may integrate analysis about the story through analysts in-studio, via. phone, satellite, or through other means of communication. The round the clock live coverage of the Mumbai terror attacks in November 2008 is a case in point. The attack lasted for more than 60 hours and given the magnitude of the event, most of the national news channels suspended almost all other coverage and dedicatedly covered only this event.

In the past programming interruptions were restricted to extremely urgent news only. But now such breaks have become quite common for 24-hour news channels.

Flash news

One of the emerging trends in news coverage is the Flash news. This genre of news is being extensively applied by the commercial news channels. A Flash news is that type of news which is usually very short and read by only one voice over. Moreover in Flash news there is an absence of commentary. We encounter flash news during any breaking event. During this time the newsroom does not have any visuals or deep coverage of the event and therefore it has to solely depend on the Flash news for a period. During this period when the news channel gives only flash news it basically tries to keep the viewers updated and engaged watching their news channel. And in the mean time the news room tries to get hold of footages and further coverage. This type of flash news is usually seen at the time of Bomb Blasts or any such unforeseen incidents.

Backpack Journalists and Herding Among TV Reporters

A reporter cannot be at all places all the time. In large cities, it is impossible for a channel to employ a reporter for every part of the city. With technological advances, several new trends have started. One of them is backpack journalist and second is herding.

A backpack journalist may be a salaried / contractual employee of a channel or a freelance journalist. This new breed of journalist is techno-savvy, has good oratory and photograpy skills and is ready to travel fast and take a few risks. Typically, a backpack journalist has a video camera of a good quality, a still camera, a good laptop and either a satellite phone or USB Modem or data card, along with a microphone and a tripod. This type of journalist can travel long distance on foot or any available vehicle and is not hindered by bulky OB Vans or staff. The backpack journalist is capable of shooting the footage, do the PTC, interview people, etc. and then quickly dumping the raw footage into the laptop, The journalist then writes a good copy for the narrative, records it and adds the sound track to the video wherever necessary. Then a piece of music is added for effect. Where video footage is not possible, the stills are used to build up the story. After editing the story, it is encoded on the format desired by the channel and beamed across by the satellite phone or the USB modem. And we have breaking news right from the ground situation. Sometimes the footage is grainy either because of video footage or because of encoding the video in a compressed format for making the file to be sent of a smaller size. However, the audio quality is maintained. Remember, the today's audience might pardon a bad video quality since it is exclusive coverage, but not bad sound quality.

A backpack journalist saves a lot of money for the channel. Moreoever, this kind of journalist can produce stories not just for the TV, but also for the print edition, the radio and the internet version. Todays media students should not limit themselves to developing writing skills but also learn to multi-task, as this can help them gain more stability in the profession.

As said earlier, a journalist cannot be in all places, especially in large metro cities. The reporters in such cities have a found a unique solution. All the reporters, especially on the night shift know each other and are in constant

touch during the night. Once the night shift is about to get over, they converge at a pre-decided place like a herd and share news stories and video footages using a simple camera-to-camera transfer using firewire or USB cables. Thus, all of them have the same footage, and in the morning, the audience wonders how all channels have the same stories with the same footage!



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.5. Briefly define the following terms:

a. Sting operation

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b. Flash news

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c. Breaking news

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d. Herding mentality of reporters.

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e. Backpack journalism.

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ACTIVITY 10.2

1. Prepare a report on the famous sting operations that have taken place in India in the recent times.

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10.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have been introduced to the basic concepts of television news reporting. Let us quickly recapitulate these concepts once again.

- Because of the additional visual content, compilation and production of news bulletin is much more difficult in television. Compared to radio it involves a much bigger production team and requires more coordinated effort
- Electronic newsgathering (ENG) is one such technology that has completely revolutionized the quantum of information exchange between the different parts of the world. ENG is a part of electronic field production (EFP).
- Electronic Field Production (EFP) includes many other types of field productions, including commercials, music videos, on-location dramatic productions, and various types of sports coverage.
- The primary sources of news on television are the news wire services such as Press Trust of India (PTI) and United News of India (UNI) among other agencies.
- In addition to professional news agencies, various news production bodies employ their own correspondents, staff reporters, camera crews and stringers.
- Different studios and stations work in unison borrowing and lending wire and stills. Most television stations monitor radio news bulletins and vice versa for important news stories.
- A variety of public records are available to reporters. Government reports, court documents, police reports and city council minutes, all may be considered public information, depending on local, state and national laws.
- Sting operations are being increasingly used today by various news channels in order to uncover different scams, scandals and corruption charges. In such an operation, a journalist usually pretends to be someone; he is not and then tries to get into the thick of things.

- Breaking news is a current event that broadcasters feel warrants the interruption of scheduled programming in order to report its details.
- One of the emerging trends in news coverage is the Flash news. This genre of news is being extensively applied by the commercial news channels. A Flash news is that type of news which is usually very short and read by only one voice over.
- Another emerging trend is backpack journalism and herding. This phenomenon is clearly the result of advanced technology in TV Reporting.



10.8 FURTHER READING

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2. Donald, Ralph, Maynard, Riley, Spann, Thomas (2008) Fundamental of Television Production. Pearson/Allyn and Bacon.
3. Hyde, Stuart W. (1998) Television and Radio Announcing. New Delhi : Kanishka Publishers
4. Kaushik, Sharda (2003) Script to Screen : An Introduction to TV Journalism. New Delhi : Macmillan India Limited.
5. Zettl, Herbert (2015) Television Production Handbook. USA : Cengage Learning



10.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q. No. 1 :

EFP or electronic field production refers to television production which takes place outside the studio, in a practical location or special venue. EFP includes many other types of field productions, say for instance, awards functions, shows, concerts, political conventions, sporting events etc. EFP work generally provides the opportunity to insure maximum audio and video quality.

Ans. to Q. No. 2) Now-a-days, every reporter has to handle standard office equipment such as computers, fax machines, copiers, etc. Unless he is techno-savvy, he will not be able to discharge his duties with ease and efficiency and will become dependent on other staff for everything. Therefore he should be able to use and have knowledge of common television newsroom computer systems and software along with an ability to learn new software systems. He must also have some prior experience or functional knowledge of news video editing systems with the basic knowledge of non-linear and or desktop-based editing systems. He should have some basic knowledge of camera handling techniques also.

Ans. to Q. No.3 : The primary sources of news on television are the news wire services such as Press Trust of India (PTI) and United News of India (UNI) among other agencies. Still photographs transmitted by facsimile wire services are also used on television, especially those of late-breaking stories for which moving pictures are not available. Cable News Network (CNN), which revolutionized news reporting during the Gulf War, Conus, Associate Press (AP), United Press International (UPI) and such other agencies cater to international needs of the task of news gathering and news distribution. TV/radio newscast corporations and organizations owned by member stations and news newspapers also form arteries of news inflow. Due to this, agencies such as Reuters, ANI and UPI are often referred to as 'town criers' for the role they play.

Ans to Q. No. 4 : Coverage of many spot events such as accidents, fires, floods, earthquake and the like is often difficult to procure if staff correspondents are not available at the time of the event. These events are sometimes covered by a freelance camera person scouting around the area. This visual coverage is purchased from the freelance camera persons who are known as stringers. The stations have to rely on stringers for unexpected news stories, particularly if the staff cameraperson is unable to reach the scene fast enough to record it.

Ans to Q. No. 5 :

a) Sting operation: In law enforcement, a sting operation is a deceptive operation designed to catch a person committing a crime. A typical sting will have a law-enforcement officer or cooperative member of the public play a role as criminal partner or potential victim and go along with a suspect's actions to gather evidence of the suspect's wrongdoing. Examples:

- Purchasing illegal drugs to catch a supplier
- Deploying a bait car (also called a honey trap) to catch an auto thief
- Posing as someone who is seeking child pornography to catch a supplier

b) **News Flash:** Flash news is one of the emerging trends in news coverage. This genre of news is being extensively applied by the commercial news channels. Flash news is that type of news which is usually very short and read by only one voice over. Moreover in Flash news there is an absence of commentary. We encounter flash news during any breaking event. During this time the newsroom does not have any visuals or deep coverage of the event and therefore it has to solely depend on the flash news for a period. During this period when the news channel gives only flash news it basically tries to keep the viewers updated and engaged watching their news channel. And in the mean time the news room tries to get hold of footages and further coverage. This type of news is usually seen at the time of Bomb Blasts or any such unforeseen incidents

c) **Breaking News:** Breaking news is a current event that broadcasters feel warrants the interruption of scheduled programming in order to report its details. Its use is often loosely assigned to the most significant story of the moment or a story that is being covered live. It could be a story that is simply of wide interest to viewers and has little impact otherwise.

The format of a special report or breaking news event on television commonly consists of an opening graphic, featuring music which

adds an emphasis on the importance of the event. This is usually followed with the introduction of a news anchor, which welcomes the viewer to the broadcast and introduces the story at hand.



10.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q. 1. Discuss the present scenario of the television news industry.

Q. 2. Write short notes on the following:

a. Breaking news

b. Sting operation

c. Investigative journalism

Q. 3. Do you think objectivity in television news reporting is possible in a competitive media market?

Q. 4. What are the main sources of news for television?

Q. 5. How and why do you think there has been a steady decline in the quality of television news content?