

UNDERSTANDING NEWS

Notes by

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News is an event, idea, or opinion that is timely, interests or affects a large number of people in a community, and can be understood by them.

Elements of News

1. **Proximity**: Location, location, location: If an event is happening nearby, it will impact the audience more than if it were happening somewhere else that doesn't affect them as much, such as in another state or country. For example, if Kolkata's Metro rail expands to a new route, or if a severe cyclone is brewing over the Bay of Bengal near the Sunderbans, residents will urgently want to know about it. Similarly, if your company opens a new branch in Salt Lake Sector V, your organization becomes instantly relevant to the professionals and job seekers living in the state.
2. **Prominence**: A well-known person, place, or event has a stronger news angle than something the audience isn't familiar with. A guest speaker visiting a local neighbourhood school during story time doesn't resonate with many people... unless that speaker is Sourav Ganguly, Prosenjit Chatterjee, or Amartya Sen.
3. **Timeliness**: Current news has more impact than something that happened yesterday or last week. The public and news media lose interest quickly, and past events become stale when there's always fresh news somewhere. No one cares that a mild seasonal shower passed last monsoon, but if a major storm or waterlogging is currently paralyzing transit at Esplanade during peak hours... that's a different story. In the same vein, journalists will likely gloss over your company's product launch from six months ago, but your upcoming announcement is much more likely to grab their attention.
4. **Oddity**: If something is unusual, shocking, or bizarre, the strangeness and novelty alone could make it newsworthy. A wild elephant casually wandering out of the forest and strolling through the streets of Siliguri, or a street vendor inventing an unusual culinary twist like "ice-cream fuchka"? You don't see that every day! Has your company developed a unique innovation that no one else in the region is doing? That's oddity!

5. **Consequence**: If the impact of an event may directly affect readers, they'll want to know about it. Routine administrative adjustments pass unnoticed until policy shifts directly alter the livelihoods of the population. A sudden revision in state recruitment exam rules, a hike in suburban train fares, or a major natural disaster in flood-prone districts like Ghatal carries serious consequences for millions of households.

6. **Conflict**: Audiences are always interested in disagreements, arguments, and rivalries. If an event creates conflict, many consumers will be interested based on that alone. Let's not forget that it's human nature to choose sides and stand up for their opinions, views, and preferences. In this region, conflict news stories frequently center on intense political debates during Assembly elections, heated debates between trade unions and management, or the classic, century-old football rivalry between East Bengal and Mohun Bagan.

7. **Human interest**: If a situation draws an emotional reaction, it might contain the news element of a human-interest story. These can be "soft" stories like children enjoying the traditional festivities during Durga Puja, an inspiring comeback story of a Kumartuli clay artisan overcoming immense poverty, or infuriating reports of administrative negligence during civic repair works. Your company's employees may fit the human interest angle of news if their personal journey makes them unique.

8. **Extremes/superlatives**: Reporters and audiences might be interested in the first, the best, the longest, the smallest, the highest – if you can legitimately claim one. Highlighting the engineering feat of building the country's first underwater metro line beneath the Hooghly River, or a local student securing the top rank in a tough national competitive exam instantly grabs headlines. Be careful, however—do not overly focus on this, create hyperbole, or exaggerate claims, as dishonesty will come back to bite you.

9. **Scandal**: Reporters want a scoop on the scandal – everyone wants to hear all the details whenever there is moral, financial, or legal misconduct. High-profile investigative reports on recruitment scams or financial irregularities involving prominent political figures or executives are sure to draw relentless media coverage. This is one area of news you definitely do not want your organization to end up in the spotlight for.

10. **Impact**: Whether it's a massive peaceful rally encompassing central Kolkata or a major transport strike halting daily state-wide bus services, the more people involved in the event, the more newsworthy it is. Similarly, the number of people affected by the event will affect its newsworthiness, whether it's an adjustment to state minimum wage

rates, an update on widespread public welfare schemes like Annapurna Bhandar, or a major regional infrastructure breakthrough.

Types of News

The chart (shown below) divides news into four main categories based on specific criteria:

1. Based on Treatment

Refers to how a story is presented, written, and structured based on its urgency and tone:

Hard News: Serious, urgent, and time-sensitive news covering major events such as politics, policy shifts, disasters, or crime. It is usually written using the inverted pyramid structure, putting the key facts right at the top.

Soft News: Feature-style stories focusing on human interest, lifestyle, entertainment, and personal profiles that are less time-sensitive. These stories focus more on emotional connection, creative storytelling, and detailed narrative descriptions.

General News: Standard day-to-day reporting covering routine public occurrences, announcements, and general events. It keeps the public informed about regular social activities without requiring intense investigative effort or high-level urgency.

2. Based on Timeliness

Refers to when and how an event occurs in relation to the news gathering process:

Diary News: Pre-scheduled or planned events that newsrooms keep track of in advance (e.g., press conferences, scheduled meetings, elections, planned rallies, or holiday events). Journalists can prepare background context, questions, and logistical coverage well before the event takes place.

Spot News: Unplanned, sudden, and unexpected events that require immediate coverage as they happen on the spot (e.g., accidents, fires, sudden protests, or natural disasters). Reporters must reach the venue quickly, gather real-time facts from the scene, and file reports rapidly under tight deadlines.

3. Based on Geographical Spread

Refers to the location and territorial scope of the news event:

Local / Regional: News focused on a specific city, town, district, or state affecting the immediate local population. It directly impacts the daily lives of residents by addressing community issues, local governance, and neighbourhood developments.

National: News that affects an entire country or addresses national governance, nationwide policies, and major country-wide events. These stories shape national public opinion and often involve central government actions, national economies, or country-wide security.

International: Global news covering foreign affairs, international conflicts, diplomacy, and events taking place in other countries. It helps audiences understand cross-border relations, global economic trends, and international cultural exchanges.

4. Based on Reporting Beats

Refers to specialized subject areas assigned to reporters based on specific fields or sectors:

Political: Coverage of political parties, elections, leaders, and party dynamics. Reporters track party strategies, campaign promises, and political debates.

Parliamentary: Reporting on legislative assemblies, parliamentary sessions, debates, and bills. It focuses on how laws are passed, policy debates unfold, and government representatives fulfil their duties.

Crime: Coverage of law enforcement, police investigations, criminal activities, and public safety. Journalists work closely with law enforcement and legal experts to report on public security and investigation updates.

Civic / Civil: Reporting on municipal issues, local civic amenities, infrastructure, public utilities, and community problems. It addresses local public grievances like road conditions, sanitation, water supply, and urban planning.

Court: Coverage of judicial proceedings, legal trials, court hearings, and verdicts. Reporters translate complex legal terms and judicial rulings into easy-to-understand language for the public.

Lifestyle: Reporting on fashion, food, wellness, personal living, travel, and social trends. It offers advice, highlights modern living preferences, and covers emerging consumer interests.

Education: Coverage of schools, universities, academic policies, exams, and educational institutions. It tracks policy changes, student concerns, academic achievements, and entrance test updates.

Sports: News on athletic events, matches, tournaments, player profiles, and sports governance. It includes live game commentary, post-match analysis, and behind-the-scenes profiles of athletes.

Health: Reporting on medical updates, public health policies, medical breakthroughs, diseases, and healthcare systems. It provides crucial information on wellness, disease prevention, and public health infrastructure.

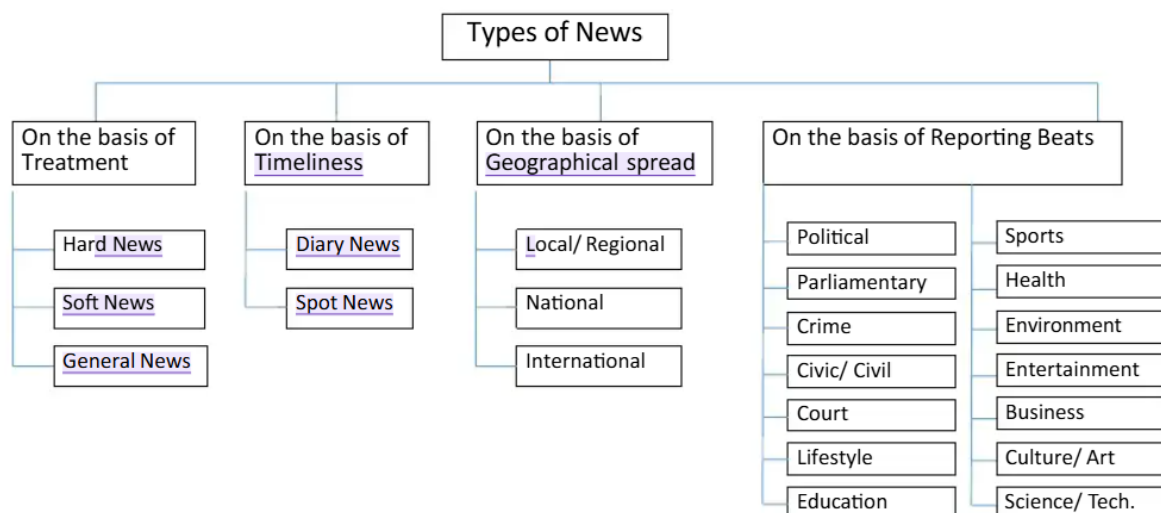
Environment: Coverage of climate change, wildlife conservation, environmental protection, and pollution. It raises awareness about ecological imbalances, sustainability efforts, and environmental policies.

Entertainment: News covering films, television, theater, music, celebrities, and pop culture. It includes movie reviews, celebrity interviews, industry awards, and arts coverage.

Business: Reporting on corporate updates, stock markets, financial policies, trade, and economic trends. It offers insights into market fluctuations, company earnings, consumer trends, and economic indicators.

Culture/Art: Coverage of cultural festivals, literary works, heritage, visual arts, and traditions. It celebrates local history, artistic achievements, folklore, and creative expressions.

Science/Tech: Reporting on technological advancements, scientific research, space exploration, and digital innovations. It explains complex scientific discoveries and digital developments to show their impact on everyday life.



Types of Sources

A reporter gets news mainly by building reliable contacts while covering a specific beat, like politics or crime. While public events and press conferences are open to all journalists, personal contacts give reporters exclusive stories. Some contacts share information for publicity, while others need to remain anonymous for critical stories. When sources stay hidden, reporters must verify the facts and keep evidence—like audio recordings or documents—to prove the truth. Most importantly, protecting the identity of these sources is a sacred duty for every journalist, even under pressure.

Classification of News Sources

News sources are divided into three main types:

1. Primary Sources

Primary sources provide direct, first-hand information. These are sources a reporter finds directly while working on the field, covering an event, or building contacts with officials and locals. Because these details come straight from eyewitnesses or key figures, they carry high credibility in news reports. They form the core of exclusive and original stories that set a newspaper apart from its competitors.

2. Secondary Sources

Secondary sources come from professional news agencies that gather raw news from across the country and the world, then sell it to newspaper organizations. They help newsrooms cover important national and international events when local reporters cannot be present on the ground. This allows newspapers to provide complete global coverage to their readers every single day.

- **India:** Press Trust of India (PTI) and United News of India (UNI).

- **International:** Reuters (UK), Associated Press (AP) and UPI (USA), and Agence France-Presse (AFP) (France).

3. Tertiary Sources

Tertiary sources are materials that come directly to the reporter without them asking for it, such as press releases, official statements, and public petitions. They help organizations quickly share formal announcements, upcoming event details, or policy updates with the media. Newsrooms often receive hundreds of these notices daily from government offices, companies, and political parties.

- **Handling Releases:** Because of space limits, newspapers rewrite or trim most press releases before publishing. They are mainly useful for finding contacts and context. Journalists verify the facts in these releases before using them to ensure the story remains unbiased.
- **News Embargo:** A "release date" or "embargo" line tells journalists when the information can be published. Breaking an embargo early is considered a serious ethical violation in journalism. Respecting these dates helps maintain trust between official media representatives and working journalists.

In primary and secondary sources, the reporter actively goes out to find news, while tertiary sources come directly to the reporter.

Hierarchy of News

In journalism and mass media, the hierarchy of news refers to how newsrooms evaluate, organize, and prioritize stories based on their importance, urgency, and audience impact. This hierarchy determines which stories make the front page of a newspaper, lead a broadcast bulletin, or sit at the top of a digital news app.

Here is the breakdown of the hierarchy of news, structured from top priority to lower priority:

1. Top Tier: Hard News & Breaking Events

These stories are placed at the very top of the hierarchy (e.g., front page lead, headline banner, or broadcast top story) due to their immediate impact and high urgency.

- *Breaking News:* Unfolding events that require immediate, real-time reporting (e.g., major political decisions, natural disasters, severe accidents, or sudden economic shifts).
- *High-Consequence & National/Global Impact:* Stories affecting millions of lives, such as elections, state/national policy changes, economic crises, wars, or public health emergencies.

- *Prominent Figures & Governance:* Major developments involving key political leaders (President, Prime Minister, Chief Minister) or major state institutions (Parliament, Courts).

2. Second Tier: Major Beat & Investigative Reporting

Once breaking news is addressed, newsrooms prioritize significant developments within established beats and investigative work.

- *Investigative & Exclusive Exposés:* In-depth, verified reports uncovering systemic failures, financial scams, corporate misconduct, or government irregularities.
- *Key Regional / City News:* Major local events that carry heavy consequences for the audience's immediate surroundings (e.g., city-wide transport strikes, civic infrastructure projects, major regional crime investigations).
- *Economic & Business Updates:* Key financial market changes, corporate developments, employment figures, and trade announcements that directly influence households and businesses.

3. Third Tier: Soft News, Features, & Specialized Beats

These stories are typically placed deeper inside the newspaper, further down a news feed, or in later segments of a news broadcast.

- *Human Interest Stories:* Inspiring personal journeys, community achievements, emotional narratives, or cultural profiles that trigger empathy.
- *Specialized Beats:* Dedicated reporting on sports, science and technology, lifestyle, health, and environmental conservation.
- *Entertainment & Culture:* Movie releases, celebrity news, art exhibitions, food, and pop culture trends.

4. Bottom Tier: Routine Announcements & Filler Material

At the bottom of the news hierarchy are low-urgency or routine items that are published if space and time allow.

- *Routine Notices & Briefs:* Press releases, public meeting notices, minor local events, and standard organizational updates.
- *Filler Stories:* Non-urgent background stories or soft items used to fill remaining space on a printed page or digital layout.

● Factors That Determine a Story's Place in the Hierarchy

Editors use standard news values to decide where a story fits within this hierarchy:

1. Impact / Consequence: How many people are affected by the event?
2. Proximity: How close is the event to the local audience?
3. Timeliness: How fresh or immediate is the news?
4. Prominence: Are famous people, major organizations, or iconic places involved?
5. Conflict & Scandal: Does the story involve high-stakes disputes, rivalries, or misconduct?

6. Oddity / Novelty: Is the event bizarre or unprecedented?

Principles And Techniques of News Writing

News has to be written in such a manner and drafted in a style that the principal/main information is conveyed to the audience in minimum possible words and in minimum possible time. Therefore, the first paragraph of the news story, which is called Lead or Intro (introduction), presents the gist of the event/happening in about 24 to 30 words, as far as possible. We will also briefly mention how to draft an intro/lead, and how many kinds of leads there are for writing the news.

5Ws and 1H

The news stories are written using 5Ws and 1H in the first paragraph itself. This is probably the first and the most important, and traditional principle of writing a news item. The first paragraph of news, called the Intro or Lead, should contain answers to 5Ws and 1H, namely, Who, What, When, Where, Why and How. This is the most cardinal principle of writing news and is followed all over the world.

The first paragraph of the news item must clearly state **who** is the main actor, character, object, subject or concern of the event, which needs to be told or written about. Is it the President, Prime Minister, any minister, governor, a well-known foreign dignitary, or any other prominent person? Is it a notorious criminal or any other individual of any status, whom people know in some context or the other?

The other four Ws and one H are:

- **What** happened?
- **When** did it happen?
- **Where** did happen?
- **Why** did it happen?
- **How** did it happen?

Depending upon the nature of the event, the reporter has to decide which of these Ws is more important and crucial to the story. Obviously, politically prominent persons such as the president, prime minister and other such people in government or in society will get more attention and also more space. The time when the event occurs is also extremely significant. Any event having an impact on a large majority of people will also be of great importance. For example, a rail accident taking place at midnight will be an important time to be taken note of -- both for the news reporter, for the editorial desk, and for the

general public also. The venue of the event also assumes great importance in a news story. For example, if the event occurs in the Prime Minister's office, Parliament House, or in a state assembly, a railway station, a mosque or temple, every place mentioned here has its own unique significance. But if it happens at a venue where a large number of people are present, the consequences can be well imagined. Therefore, each W has its own importance in the context of the event which is reported. Incidentally, the 5W-1H formula of writing the intro or lead is attributed to the late British author who lived and worked in India, Rudyard Kipling. He wrote for the daily English language newspaper, The Pioneer, then published from Lucknow in the 1930s. Kipling's favourite saying for writing news based on this formula was as follows:

*"I keep six honest serving-men
(They taught me all I knew);
Their names are What and Why and When
And How and Where and Who."*

Given below are some examples to tell you as to how intros and leads can be drafted, based on the formula 5Ws and 1H:

WHO (Focused on *Who* is speaking):

The Prime Minister will speak to the nation on Monday, August 15, at 8:00 AM from the Red Fort in Delhi.

WHAT (Focused on *What* is happening):

An Independence Day address to the nation will be given by the Prime Minister on August 15 at 8:00 AM from Delhi's Red Fort.

WHEN (Focused on *When* it takes place):

This coming Monday, August 15, at 8:00 AM, the Prime Minister will give the 70th Independence Day speech from Delhi's Red Fort.

WHERE (Focused on *Where* it happens):

At Delhi's historic Red Fort, the Prime Minister will deliver the 70th Independence Day speech on August 15 at 8:00 AM.

WHY (Focused on *Why* it is taking place):

To mark India's 70th Independence Day on August 15, the Prime Minister will speak to the nation from the Red Fort at 8:00 AM.

HOW (Focused on *How* it is being delivered):

By speaking from the ramparts of Delhi's Red Fort, the Prime Minister will address the country for its 70th Independence Day on August 15 at 8:00 AM.

The reporter must decide which of the 5Ws is essential to the story and its overall development. This choice also depends on where the story is written and where it will

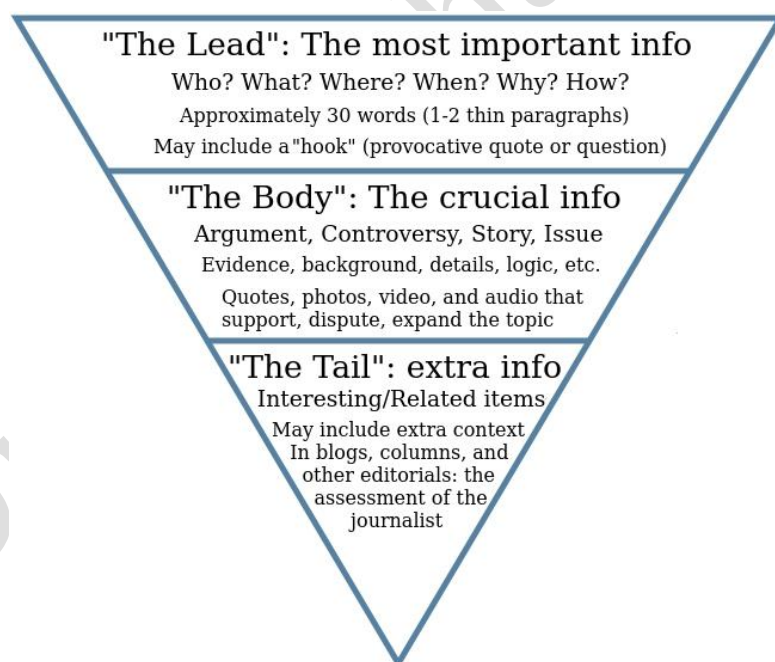
be published. For example, if the reporter is in Kolkata and the newspaper is published in Delhi, Jaipur, Bangalore or Guwahati, the story must be angled to suit that local audience.

The Inverted Pyramid

Another traditional way of writing the news is called the **Inverted Pyramid**. The first paragraph, known as the **Intro** or **Lead**, contains the most important point and main idea of the news story. The main body of the news item then expands, details, and explains the rest of the story. Because of this, the facts in the following paragraphs must support the main points mentioned in the Lead.

If you picture a news story as a diagram, it looks like an upside-down pyramid. The most important fact comes at the top. Next come the less important details. The least important facts go at the very bottom, arranged one by one based on their relevance to the overall length and structure of the story. Writing a story this way is known as the **Inverted Pyramid technique**.

The lead or intro of a news story based on the inverted pyramid technique is shown below:



Actually, the inverted pyramid technique is a very basic method of news writing. A question may now arise in your mind: why should one write like this?

The main argument behind it is that the story's main theme should be wrapped up in a one-sentence or two-paragraph nutshell, with a clear summary placed high up in the story. This important information near the top—usually contained in a single paragraph—is also known as the **lead** or '**nutgraph**'.

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