

History of Journalism

Journalism, the act of gathering and presenting news and information, has roots no older than the origin of written language.¹ In ancient civilizations, archaeologists have found earth slabs with early languages inscribed in what were once very public places in society. The Ancient Romans in particular were known for their means of transporting information and news throughout their empire with their roads and intellectual prowess.

During the 13th century, scholars used a method known as block printing to print information. The process involved using carved wooden blocks and ink to produce informational works. However, this process proved to be time-consuming and expensive since each word, phrase or picture required its own separate block. By the middle of the 15th century Johannes Gutenberg introduced the Gutenberg printing press that would revolutionize the spread of information. Although Gutenberg intended for the printing press to remain a secret, his printing press design spread quickly. Until 1814, printers used the printing press mainly for the mass publication of books and pamphlets. In 1814, London's *The Times* became the first newspaper to be printed using a printing press.²

Fueled by the rapid spread of information following the invention of the printing press, journalism has had a profound effect on history. Commercial journalism, introduced for the first time in China by Ernest Major, had a major impact on Chinese public opinion in the 19th century. The newspaper published by Major, known as *Shen Bao*, emphasized Western traditions in journalism like the avoidance of state propaganda. Journalism also had a profound impact during the late 19th century in American society. A new style known as yellow journalism emerged that emphasized sensationalism over fact. The peak of yellow journalism came in 1898 when the Maine sunk in Havana harbor. Advocates of yellow journalism latched upon the event and called for war in

the papers.³ Today, yellow journalism is recognized as one of the main factors that pushed the United States and Spain into war.

However, with the strength of journalism in influencing the public, many powerful leaders restricted the spread of news. Journalism while Mao Zedong had power was restricted heavily and controlled by the government. Leaders of the USSR also took great measures to ensure that journalism and the spread of information within their nation would not get out of hand. Even today, China heavily censors events that would make the government look unfavorable, such as the Tiananmen Square massacre.⁴

Today, the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) speaks out against censorship of journalism and seeks to make sure that all journalists uphold a certain benchmark of news. SPJ does this by promoting the free access of news and by creating an atmosphere in which journalistic excellence can grow. The SPJ was first established in 1909 and grew to establish itself as a leader in promoting ethical journalism by adopting its first Code of Ethics in 1926. In 1982, the SPJ began an ambitious project known as Project Watchdog to educate the public about the right of free press through public ad campaigns. In 1996, the SPJ adopted its modern code of ethics.⁵ This code defines a series of standards that journalists should strive to satisfy. The code is as follows:

1. "Seek Truth and Report It" Journalists must make sure that the information provided to the public is accurate. Sources must be known as openly as possible. Do not mislead readers with false or otherwise misleading information and absolutely do not tamper with photographs or videos.
2. "Minimize Harm" Be sensitive to those affected by events that have taken place and treat all those that you may encounter in your search for a story with utmost respect.
3. "Act Independently" Avoid personal conflicts in a story and remove them where necessary. Do not compromise journalistic integrity for special favors or treatment.

4. "Be Accountable" Be ready to take responsibility for any faults that may be made and encourage those with grievances against the media to make their issues known.⁶

Modern Journalism

With the invention of digital technology and the Internet, the spread of news through journalism took another shift as important as the invention of the printing press. Today, people increasingly turn to reading news on smartphones and other electronic devices, challenging news agencies to adapt to the digitalization of information.⁷ With easy accessibility to publishing software, amateur online journalists appear at astonishing rates on weblogs and alternative media. Mainstream news agencies respond accordingly to this trend, by hiring journalists from weblogs and creating blogs of their own. Journalists now commonly blog live from places such as courtrooms and unstable regions of the world where writing full-length reports would be too time-consuming.⁸

This shift to more accessible information gives ordinary people the capability to observe and report more immediately than many larger news agencies. Important news stories have been known to break on social media like Facebook or Twitter. During influential events like the Arab Spring, social media played a central role in the shaping political scene. Conversations about revolution often preceded major events on Twitter and videos on YouTube showed inspiring stories of protest across international borders. American U.N. ambassador Susan Rice recognized the role of social media in presenting news and its "power...to channel and champion public sentiment."⁹ As the public and mainstream news agencies turn more toward open forms of online journalism, the media setting is shifting slowly away from a model in which the few communicate to the many toward a model where the public has a strong voice.

Bias in Journalism

Today, the public looks upon the term "bias" in journalism in a negative light. One of the most well-known and common forms of bias in journalism is market-oriented bias, or checkbook

journalism. Market-oriented bias is slanted in that journalists write to appease advertisers and corporate owners of media rather than inform the general population. The practice of checkbook journalism also encompasses the licensing of exclusive information by news agencies.¹⁰ An example of this was ABC News, who paid \$15,000 for an exclusive snake photo during the Casey Anthony trial. This behavior runs rampant in the journalism industry and only hinders the spread of information.

Another form of bias, known as sensationalism, favors the exceptional over the facts. Yellow journalism was an excellent example of this type of bias. Although not as common today as it was in the late 19th century, sensationalism still sees use today in order to gain revenue. With these forms of bias comes a public distrust in the media.¹¹ Because of this, the SPJ Ethics Committee has spoken out against these practices. They remind journalists that accepting payment for releasing information calls into question the reliability of the information.

Although bias negatively affects the journalism industry, there is no denying its existence in modern journalism. As journalists at GSMUN, it is your responsibility to maintain your ethicality while also appeasing to those who support your organization in order to show your recognition of bias in journalism. It cannot be stressed enough that while writing, you must have a clear and thorough understanding of the influences on your news outlet to better help you understand the direction that you should be taking with your articles. Stay true to your institution, but also make sure to stay true to the information. You have a duty to the people to keep them informed. Do so in the truest and most ethical way that your organization allows, and therein will lie your success.

Committee Background

Hello and welcome to GSMUN XVIII Press Corps! Unlike other committees at GSMUN, Press Corps does not revolve around debating and writing resolutions, but rather reporting on the developments in each committee. Because this is not a traditional committee, you are not required to

write a conventional position paper prior to the beginning of the conference. Alternatively, you are required to write a critical analysis of an article from your assigned news agency. You are expected to select an article no more than two weeks old and no less than 750 total words and analyze it for style, content and tone. It is essential that you identify biases present in the author's writing and prepare to follow such biases when writing articles during the conference. Make sure to include the author's name and the article title in your analyses. Additionally, feel free to e-mail me your analyses before the conference for constructive criticisms to improve your final submissions.

When you arrive on the evening of March 20th, you will be assigned to three committees to report on during the conference. You will then write one article for each of your assigned committees as a journalist from your news agency. In order to gather information necessary for your article, you will observe committee sessions and take notes on issues and developments happening within the committee. You will also be encouraged to interview delegates for quotes or unique perspectives at appropriate times. Time management is key in Press Corps. Remember, you have a limited amount of time to research and write your article, so you cannot spend too much of your time at your assigned committees.

Your first article must be finished by the end of the first committee session on Friday night. In comparison to the articles you will write in the second and third committee sessions, your first article will be mostly an overview of your committee. Although you will have less time to write your article during the first committee session, it is important that you invest just as much effort into your first article as you will in your future, more comprehensive articles. The first edition of the *GSMUN Gazette* will be published and distributed during breakfast on the morning following the first committee session. The *GSMUN Gazette* will be the primary outlet in which information spreads among delegates of GSMUN, so it is crucial that you put substantial effort into your first article and

your articles to come. Also keep in mind that many delegates save their copies of the *GSMUN Gazette* to commemorate their time at GSMUN.

Your second article will be published during lunch on Saturday and will be your “featured” article. Unlike the first article, your second article will focus more on the specifics and expand upon crisis situations and developments of topics from the previous session. Additionally, your second article is generally longer than your first article since more time is allotted for writing. You will have the choice of writing a satirical article for your third article. This type of journalism is demonstrated well in articles published by *The Onion*, a well-known news satire organization. As such, it is encouraged that you study the writing style of *The Onion* writers if you plan to write a satirical article.

With the research you have gathered of your news agency, you should be prepared to represent your agency as effectively as possible through the tone and bias you convey in your articles. You must remember to retain the professionalism conveyed in the articles published by your news agency. Do not force an opinion onto the readers. Rather, present a bias by emphasizing topics more relevant to the opinions of your agency or going into more depth about a topic relevant to your agency’s normal audience. The journalist who most accurately and consistently represents their agency’s style while remaining informative and engaging through strong writing will be awarded the Pulitzer Prize at the end of the conference.

Tips for Journalists

- Place the most important facts near the beginning of the article to grab the attention of the reader. This is called an inverted pyramid style of writing.
- To help plan, make sure to answer six basic questions: Who? What? When? Where? Why? and How?
- Consider the assigned news agency’s biases and influences. Would the news agency look favorably upon the observed events?

- How would the events in your article affect the people in the news agency's country? Use this to influence the tone of the article.
- Remember to take detailed notes. Any quotes, short sentences or bits and pieces from a long debate and help add credibility and content to an article.
- Know what to include and what to leave out. While thoroughness is necessary, it is important to know what will keep the reader engaged.
- Be informative, but be concise. Avoid using unnecessarily complicated language for the sake of padding an article.
- Do not write your personal opinions directly into the article. Instead, use word choice, style and tone to properly demonstrate the appropriate beliefs.
- News articles are generally written in past tense in the active voice.
- Keep your news agency's biases in mind when writing. Any political, social or financial factors could influence the tone and direction of an article.

Useful References for Research

www.transparency.org - Website for Transparency International, which does regular surveys of the state of media in countries around the world.

www.spj.org - Website for the Society of Professional Journalism, to find resources and guidelines for writers.

www.theonion.com - The Onion, whose style of satire you could be emulating in the third newspaper.

www.onlinenewspapers.com - Online newspapers from nations around the world, but not limited to English only.

www.hsj.org/index.cfm - The High School Journalism Initiative's website. Great source of help and tools for new journalists.

Notes

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