

Learning Situation

SENSATIONAL NEWS



Competencies

- C1-Interacts orally in English
- C2-Reinvests understanding of texts
- C3-Writes and produces texts

Student's name : _____

Date : _____

*Eugene Abrams, English teacher
CÉA LeMoynes-D'Iberville, CSMV, August 2018*



SITUATION:

You are the producer of a newspaper or radio/television news program and you need to decide what type of news you will report on. The president of your news agency wants your production to be popular.

Write an editorial article (or prepare an audio/video commentary) explaining what type of subjects your news service will report on and why you have made this choice.

THIS LEARNING SITUATION HAS FOUR (4) TASKS FOR YOU TO COMPLETE:

TASK 1: Singing about sensationalism

In this task, you will watch a video of Joe Jackson's song, *The Sunday Papers* and respond to several questions.

TASK 2: How does watching the news make you feel?

In this task, you will watch documentaries based on terrorism, natural disasters, sex scandals, etc. . . and comment on the effect that they have on you. Then watch examples of human-interest documentaries (based on similar events) and comment on how you feel afterward.

TASK 3: Sensationalism versus human interest stories

In this task, you will read several blog entries about sensationalism and human-interest stories in the news and then answer questions in a graphic organizer.

TASK 4: What news stories would you publish?

In this task, you will write an editorial article (or prepare an audio/video commentary) explaining what type of subjects your news service will report on (sensational or human interest) and why you have made this choice.

TASK I: Singing about sensationalism

Would you want to read a (true) recent news story about a military general who killed himself by drinking poison in the courtroom to avoid going to prison? In the challenge to grab the reader's or viewer's attention, newspapers and news programs have used various strategies to make their material more dynamic. The two most common techniques have traditionally been sensationalism and human-interest stories.

Watch a video of Joe Jackson's song, *The Sunday Papers*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DZ3NDP-Qiak>



Joe Jackson gives examples of sensational news headlines, which can be contrasted with human interest stories, which describe people or situations in a personal way so that readers can better understand and relate to them.

What are the names of the newspapers mentioned in the song?	
How would you describe the kind of stories published in these newspapers?	
Give at least three examples of articles mentioned in the song.	
Would you read one of those newspapers? Why or why not?	
Do you think newspapers like these are popular? Why or why not?	

TASK 2: How does watching the news make you feel?

Watch the following examples of documentaries based on terrorism and natural disasters and comment on the effect that they have on you. Then read or watch examples of human-interest documentaries (some based on the same tragic stories) and comment on how you feel afterward.

Sensational	
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1IKZggSI9-s 	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q7X3fyld2U0 
Human Interest	
https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/remembering-911-three-docs-to-watch 	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wRYW1lc-jsU 
https://video.nationalgeographic.com/video/magazine/ngm-last-chase?cs=featured&gs=recent 	

You may search on the internet for other examples of both types of documentaries.

Take notes on two of the documentaries in the rubric below:

Name of documentary		
Subject /type of news (sensational or human interest)		
Summary of introduction		
Chronological development of 3-5 main events or ideas in the documentary		
Conclusion		

<p>How were sound effects, video content, oral expressions or other elements used to influence the viewer? Minimum five examples</p>		
<p>Your opinion of the documentary -was it interesting, exciting, informative etc...? -explain</p>		
<p>How did you feel after watching this documentary?</p>		

TASK 3: Sensationalism versus human interest stories

Read the following blog entries about sensationalism and human-interest stories in the news and then answer the questions in the graphic organizer.

BLOG ENTRY 1:

Is Sensationalism in the News Bad? Sensationalism Actually Serves a Purpose, Historian Finds

by [Tony Rogers](#)

Updated October 26, 2017

Professional critics and news consumers alike have long criticized the news media for running sensational content. But is sensationalism in the news media really such a bad thing?

Sensationalism's Long History

Sensationalism is nothing new. In his book "A History of News," NYU journalism professor Mitchell Stephens writes that sensationalism has been around ever since early humans began telling stories, ones that invariably focused on sex and conflict.

"I have never found a time when there wasn't a form for the exchange of news that included sensationalism — and this goes back to anthropological accounts of preliterate societies, when news raced up and down the beach that a man had fallen into a rain barrel while trying to visit his lover," Stephens said in an email.

Fast forward thousands of years and you have the 19th-century circulation wars between Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst. Both men, the media titans of their day, were accused of sensationalizing the news in order to sell more papers.

Whatever the time or setting, "sensationalism is unavoidable in news — because we humans are wired, probably for reasons of natural selection, to be alert to sensations, particularly those involving sex and violence," Stephens said.

Sensationalism also serves a function by promoting the spread of information to less-literate audiences and strengthening the social fabric, Stephens said.

Criticism of sensationalism also has a long history. The Roman philosopher Cicero griped that the Acta Diurna — handwritten sheets that were the equivalent of ancient Rome's daily paper — neglected real news in favor of the latest gossip about gladiators, Stephens found.

A Golden Age of Journalism?

Today, media critics seem to imagine that things were better before the rise of 24/7 cable news and the internet. They point to icons like TV news pioneer Edward R. Murrow as exemplars of this supposed golden age of journalism.

But such an age never existed, Stephens writes at the Center for Media Literacy: "The golden age of political coverage that journalism critics pine over — the era when reporters concentrated on the 'real' issues — turns out to have been as mythical as the golden age of politics."

Ironically even Murrow, venerated for challenging Sen. Joseph McCarthy's anti-Communist witch hunt, did his share of celebrity interviews in his long-running "Person to Person" series, which critics savaged as empty-headed chatter.

The Junk Food Factor

There's another point to be made about sensational news stories: We love them.

Sensational stories are the junk food of our news diet, the ice cream sundae that you eagerly gobble up. You know it's bad for you but it's delicious. And you can always have a salad tomorrow.

It's the same with news. Sometimes there's nothing better than poring over the sober pages of The New York Times, but other times it's a treat to peruse the Daily News or the New York Post.

And despite what high-minded critics might say, there's nothing wrong with that. Indeed, an interest in the sensational seems to be, if nothing else, an all-too-human quality.

Source : <https://www.thoughtco.com/is-sensationalism-in-the-news-media-bad-2074048>

BLOG ENTRY 2

Why Open School of Journalism believes that Human Interest Journalism is important

Human interest journalism takes a closer, more personal look at the news. While conventional journalism presents the big picture, sticking to hard facts and statistics, human interest journalism focuses on details or aspects that resonate emotionally with the public. It is sometimes described as "getting the story behind the story" or "putting a human face on the news."

The straight story might tell you that West Africa has seen 13,268 cases of Ebola and 4,960 deaths. The human interest piece may feature survivors who have united to care for orphans whose parents succumbed.

The goal of hard news is to remain objective, but human interest stories can be written and presented under less stringent rules and with greater flexibility. These two styles of journalism have completely different goals; the one attempts to inform, the other, to engage readers or viewers on a personal level.

Purposes of human interest journalism

Human interest stories often relate to or support other content. Coverage of a devastating tornado in Texas included a story about a man who'd erected a homemade sign in his yard:

"For Sale. Split-level. Mostly Level." The article was about maintaining a sense of humor in times of crisis. Some articles are written to tug at heart strings, but others provide levity on bleak news days.

Other pieces are meant to entertain. The ordinary lives of movie actors, athletes and politicians are interesting to the public, as proven by the enduring success of Reader's Digest and People magazine. People like knowing that their favorite daytime soap star eats junk food for breakfast—it makes them feel less guilty about their own diets. With the help of the media, former First Lady Jacquelyn Kennedy ushered an enthralled public into the White House. Americans, women especially, relished reports of her table settings, the clothes in her closet and her day-to-day life with the president. That is one example of how the side story becomes the story.

One of the most common forms of human-interest journalism is the article or series featuring people or animals bearing up in the face of adversity. People respond emotionally to accounts of rescue, citizens pulling together, individuals maintaining their faith in the midst of catastrophe. Human interest coverage of 9/11 may have forever altered public perception of what New Yorkers are really like. Film footage following the Japanese tsunami in 2011 inspired hearts worldwide; victims in the aftermath were shown not looting, but helping shop owners put their businesses back together. Just about everyone is moved by stories of human resilience. Profiles of cancer patients, amputees or victims of violence may hold the public's interest for years. Videos of rescued animals are often the Internet's most frequently viewed.

Detractors

Human interest journalism does have detractors. Many conventional journalists feel that this approach removes objectivity. They contend that stories are usually written with a slant toward furthering a certain agenda, or to manipulate an audience into thinking or responding in a certain way. Its harshest critics don't believe this format should be included in objective news reporting.

The integrity of the journalist

A feature story on AIDS patients could increase understanding and inspire compassion—or it could start a panic. It could solicit contributions for research and treatment—or it could promote hateful stereotypes.

In the hands of gifted journalists, this human approach inspires charity, encourages civic involvement and sparks public discourse on tough topics. At its noblest, it rouses people out of apathy and into action. Sometimes it is a catalyst for change, prompting readers to take a deeper look inside them. At the very least, it may elicit a much-needed laugh or touch of inspiration at the end of a rough day.

It is the talent and integrity of the individual writer that determines the value of human-interest journalism.

Source: <https://www.openschoolofjournalism.com/distance-education-program/courses/human-interest-journalism-jg180>

Now, answer the questions in the graphic organizer.

Type of news story	Sensationalism	Human Interest Stories
Brief definition		
Subjects appropriate for this type of news		
Characteristics of this type of journalism		
Advantages (Reasons these stories could appeal to the public)		
Disadvantages		
Do you prefer sensationalism or human-interest stories? Give reasons.		

If you wish to find more information on different issues regarding sensationalistic journalism, you may explore some of these blogs:

UWRT 1102 Portfolio : <https://1102portfolioregalado.weebly.com/research-blog/fifth-blog-sensationalism-in-the-news-media-benefits-of-sensationalism>



ScienceLine:

<http://scienceline.org/2008/09/the-science-of-journalism-why-sensational-sells/>



ONAethics:

<https://ethics.journalists.org/topics/sensational-and-gory-material/>



Sensationalism – Chicanery of Ideas

<https://sanchaarblog.wordpress.com/2016/02/28/why-sensationalism-sells/>



TASK 4: What news stories would you publish?

A)

You are the producer of a newspaper or radio/television news program and you need to decide what type of news you will report on. The president of your news agency wants your production to be popular.

He suggests you read the following blog entry about how the media reports on crime before you make your decision.

Understanding how the media reports crime

While it can perform an important public service, media outlets are, first and foremost, a business. In the current global financial crisis, news media is a struggling business.

Focus of media on crime

Crime stories constitute the fourth largest category of stories for newspapers and television after sports, general interest and business which is an over-representation of the actual amount of crime occurring. Research suggests that over 50% of crime stories in a sample of Canadian newspapers dealt with offences involving violence but offences involving violence represent less than 6% of reported offences.⁴ This is likely a significant factor in the public belief that crime is on the rise. For example, Canada fortunately has a relatively low homicide rate. Every year, approximately, 600 Canadians are murdered and because murder remains a relatively rare event in our society, most of these murders will garner some media attention. So while homicide makes up less than 1% of crimes committed in Canada, it garners a significant amount of media coverage of crime.

The media is most likely to focus on stories that highlight the unique, the sensational, the extreme, and those that have the potential to impact the greatest number of people. For crime-related stories, the media are most likely to focus on events that have occurred multiple times, for example a number of assaults or break-ins that are centred in a small geographic area, or those that are very unlikely to occur. Homicides committed by young offenders are often front-page news and may cause people to believe that youth violence is at significant levels, despite being incredibly rare. The reason they are so newsworthy is because they are so rare – they shock us, are unique and because of that, may dominate headlines for days and weeks, thereby giving the public a distorted view of how common these crimes are.

The media does not just decide what stories get that kind of attention, but what stories do not get that kind of attention. The murder of a homeless man is not likely to get as much media attention as the murder of a teenage girl from a middle class family. The media can focus on a story, thereby making it headline news, or ignore a different story, and the public will never know.

While focusing on the sensational and most violent crimes, it may seem the media ignores the more common types of crime that are more likely to affect individual readers or viewers, such as single instances of auto theft or break and enter. The media also rarely covers sexual assault and partner assault cases, which are largely crimes that impact women and children and are the focus of many victim service provision agencies in Canada. These serious crimes against women and children often remain hidden from law enforcement, which influences media coverage because they tend to cover crimes that come to the attention of the formal criminal justice system.

Source: <https://crcvc.ca/publications/media-guide/understanding/>

B)

Now, you are ready to present your decision. What type of news will you report on?

Write an editorial article (or prepare an audio/video commentary) explaining what type of subjects your news service will cover and why you have made this choice (support your arguments with quotes or ideas from the above articles or any additional sources you may find). Use the following graphic organizer to structure your ideas in note form before writing your article or script. Refer to information from the blog posts above or other sources to support your ideas.

Editorial article, audio commentary, or video commentary(select one)	
Title	
Opening Sentence	
Type (or types) of news you will report on	
Reasons for decision	
Supporting facts or quotes (indicate sources)	
Possible counter arguments (and refutation)	
Conclusions (including questions to be pursued in the future)	

Write an article (250-350 words) or a script for a recorded audio or video presentation (3-5 minutes).