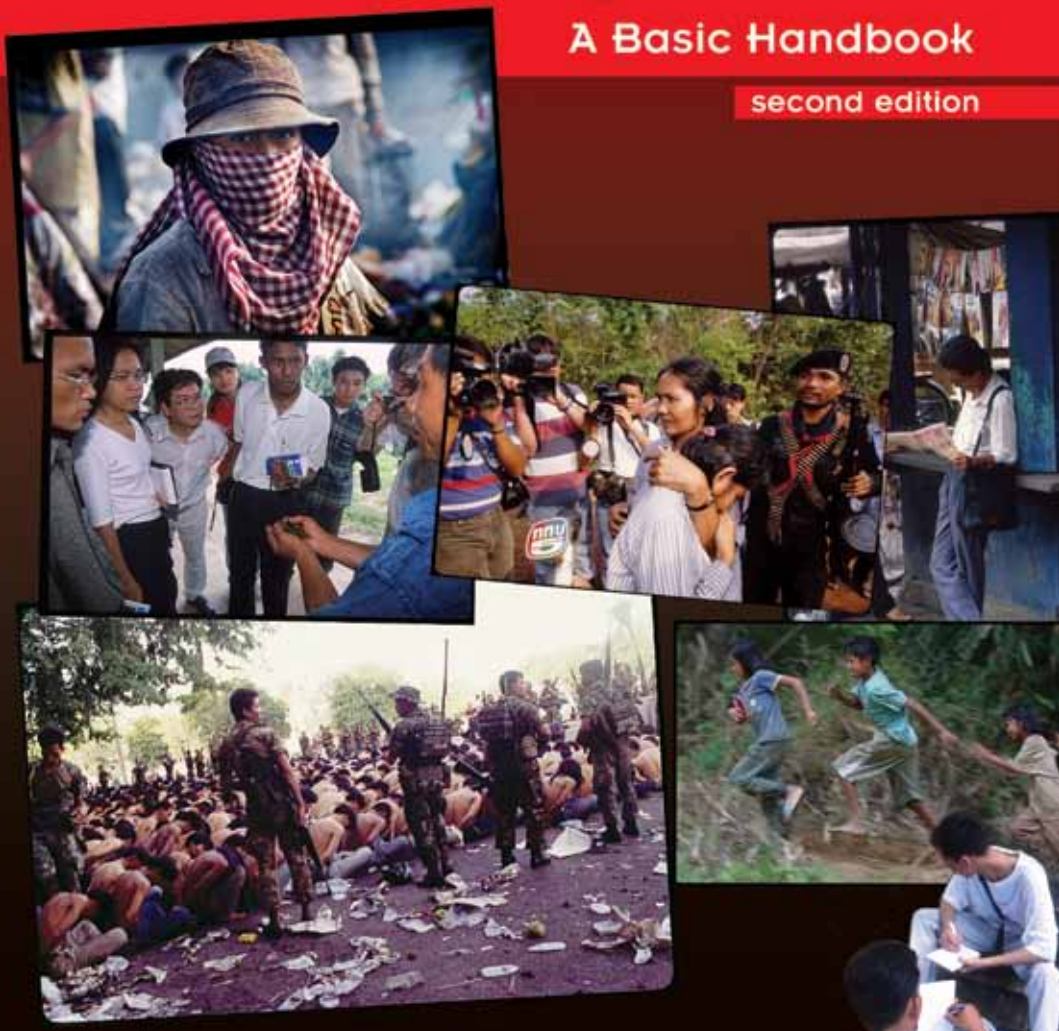
REPORTING and Writing News

A Basic Handbook

second edition



PETER ENG AND JEFF HODSON FOR
THE INDOCHINA MEDIA MEMORIAL FOUNDATION

PETER ENG AND JEFF HODSON

FOR

THE INDOCHINA MEDIA MEMORIAL FOUNDATION

SECOND EDITION

EDITED BY DOMINIC FAULDER

PRODUCED WITH THE SUPPORT OF

THE OPEN SOCIETY NETWORK MEDIA PROGRAMME

AND

THE MCGEE FOUNDATION

IMMF journalism training manuals have been produced in English, Burmese, Cambodian, Lao, Thai and Vietnamese, and may be viewed at:

http://www.immf.or.th/download/manual.aspx

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When [a good newspaperman] dies, a lot of people are sorry, and some of them remember him for several days," observed American editor Stanley Walker in 1924.

Hoping to do a little better, the Indochina Media Memorial Foundation was established in Thailand in 1992 to honor the memory of some 320 journalists killed on all sides in the conflicts that afflicted Indochina after 1945.

The IMMF has no political agenda, and harbours no religious, racial or social biases. It is funded by grants from governments, non-profit organizations and private individuals, and administered by a board in Bangkok dominated by working journalists who give their time voluntarily. The IMMF's aims are primarily professional. These include raising journalistic standards and building bridges among all the media of the five countries that belong to what is sometimes called the Lower Mekong Basin — Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam.

Although these countries are linked by one of the world's greatest rivers, their histories in the second half of the 20th century varied immensely. Indeed, their tumultuous experiences spanned everything from genocide to burst economic bubbles, from wrenching tragedy to euphoria. Could any sense of journalistic community be developed from such a backdrop? If the IMMF's experience is anything to go by, the answer is: Yes.

Since 1994, over 200 students from this disparate region have come to Thailand, a major domestic and foreign media hub in its own right. They have undergone intensive training lasting up to one month in Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Songkhla, and other parts of the Kingdom. Another 200 have attended shorter courses in their own countries. IMMF training has attracted editors, reporters, writers, radio broadcasters and photographers, and focused on environmental, business, social and other issues.

These courses were the first formal training for some, and many graduates described their time with the IMMF as a life-changing experience. The very same observation has been made by most of the IMMF's trainers. Though seasoned professionals from all over the world, they left Southeast Asia greatly enriched by insights they could never have imagined if it hadn't been for their students. The IMMF has always thrived on such sharing.

As Vietnamese photographer Tran Quang Tuan put it: "During out training course we were no longer five nationalities. We all belonged to one country — the land of IMMF."

This manual draws on the IMMF's unique experience in journalism training, laying out fundamental concepts in a clear, direct way. Unlike most training aids, this work was produced with the working journalists of Southeast Asia specifically in mind.

This manual was never intended to be in any sense definitive. We hope it will be an indispensable background briefing for future IMMF students — and indeed any aspiring journalist. Through Burmese, Cambodia, Laotian, Thai and Vietnamese translations, it may provide a useful shared point of reference — and perhaps in a small way foster some lasting professional bonds in a region today almost entirely at peace.

DENIS GRAY AND DOMINIC FAULDER
IMMF Co-Presidents

SARAH MCLEAN
IMMF Project Director

Bangkok, December 2001

INTRODUCTION

FIRST EDITION, 2001

This is an exciting time to be a journalist in Southeast Asia. Political circumstances, economies and societies are changing very quickly. Countries are developing and life is becoming more complicated. People need more accurate, timely and in-depth information so they can understand these changes and improve their lives. They depend on journalists to provide that information.

Unfortunately, journalism has not developed very far in this region because of civil conflicts, wars, poverty and isolation.

There is a great need for more journalism training and for training materials that are more relevant and useful for Southeast Asian journalists. Most of the existing materials come from the United States and other Western countries. They deal with the circumstances in those countries, not in Southeast Asia. And they are written in English that is difficult to understand.

That's why the Indochina Media Memorial Foundation produced this manual.

We wrote this manual specifically for journalists of the five IMMF countries. We used simple, clear English. We used real examples from the local media, both English-language and local-language. We focused on the mistakes that local journalists most often make. And we kept in mind the political, social and economic conditions in which local journalists work.

This manual covers the basic principles of reporting and writing. We wrote it mainly for print journalists who cover general news. But most of the principles also apply to broadcast journalism.

Some of these principles differ from what some Southeast Asian journalists are used to. But they are principles followed by good journalists worldwide. Perhaps you cannot use all of these principles in your own news organization right now. But if you use the principles that you can, you will become a better journalist no matter where you work.

In this book we've used excerpts from many different publications in this region. We've kept the writing styles and usages as they originally appeared. These styles and usages may not be consistent with the styles and usages that we adopted in writing this book.

We suggest that journalists study this manual to prepare for training courses by the IMMF and other groups. Many of these courses are about reporting on special subjects, like business or the environment. You will learn more from these courses if you learn the basic principles of journalism first.

Also, teachers can use this manual in schools and universities. Editors can use it in newsrooms.

However, this is not a complete textbook. We cover only the basics. There are many ways of writing stories. There are many exceptions to general rules. We suggest that you use this manual with the help of an editor or teacher, and with lots of discussion and practice.

We begin by describing what journalists do and what the qualities of good journalists are. Then we discuss how they find ideas for stories and gather the information for those stories. We then go to the writing process: how to find the lead and organize a story. Following that are chapters especially relevant for journalists in this region: using quotations, dealing with news releases, and covering news conferences, speeches and meetings. A chapter on good writing explains how to present information in the strongest way. We then explain the differences between

writing for print media and writing for radio and TV.

But being a journalist is about more than just reporting and writing. That's why we've included an important chapter on ethics. Finally, as we look toward the future, one of the main challenges for reporters in this region will be to catch up with other countries in using the amazing resources of the Internet.

We thank the **International Center for Journalists** and the **John S. and James L. Knight Foundation**, which supported Jeff Hodson's work on this manual, and the **Freedom Forum**, which supported Peter Eng's work. We thank the **Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung ('Friedrich Ebert Foundation')** of Germany and the **United States Information Service** in Thailand for funding publication costs.

Like you, both of us are journalists. That means we believe there always is room for improvement. We want this manual to be as useful as possible. If you have any comments or suggestions on how to improve the manual, please contact us at the IMMF.

PETER ENG
Independent Journalist

JEFF HODSON
Knight Fellow

Bangkok, December 2001

ADDENDUM

SECOND EDITION, 2009

The IMMF's *Reporting and Writing News: A Basic Handbook* quickly established itself as an indispensable teaching aid. It has been used by numerous organizations to improve journalism standards in Southeast Asia and sometimes farther afield. IMMF students attending regional training courses were routinely sent copies to prep them for discussions in the classroom. The manual was also translated into most of the national vernaculars of mainland Southeast Asia (Burmese, Cambodian, Lao, Thai and Vietnamese), all of which can be accessed free from the Internet: http://www.immf.or.th/download/manual.aspx

In late 2008, Jeff Hodson undertook a full review of the text and updated it where appropriate. The manual was then completely redesigned and a number of adjustments made to the photographic inclusions. This was funded by **The Open Society Network Media Programme** and **The McGee Foundation**, both of which are based in the US.

DOMINIC FAULDER
Editor, IMMF Journalism Training Manuals
Co-President, IMMF, 1994-2008

Bangkok, May 2009

GLOSSARY

Anecdote
A short factual story within a feature story, written with a beginning, middle and end. It is usually several paragraphs and illustrates an important point the writer is trying to make.

Angle
A particular approach or point of view in writing a story. Some events may have several equally interesting aspects, and the journalist can choose to focus on one of those aspects.

Anonymous source
A source who gives information only if the reporter does not name him or her in the story.

Attribution
The way in which the writer describes the source of a quote or information for the story.

Background
Information in a story that tells readers what happened in the past, related to the event being reported in the story. This helps readers better understand this event.

Balance and fairness
Important qualities of a good story — the reporter tells the reader both sides of an issue but does not favor one side or the other.

Body
The details, quotes and other elements that are the larger part of a news story.

Context
Information in a story that tells readers the current general situation related to the event being reported in the story. This helps readers better understand this event.

Editorial
An article in which the writer gives his own opinion, or the newspaper's opinion, on whether something is good or bad. In respected newspapers, editorials are separated from news stories and published on what is called the editorial page.

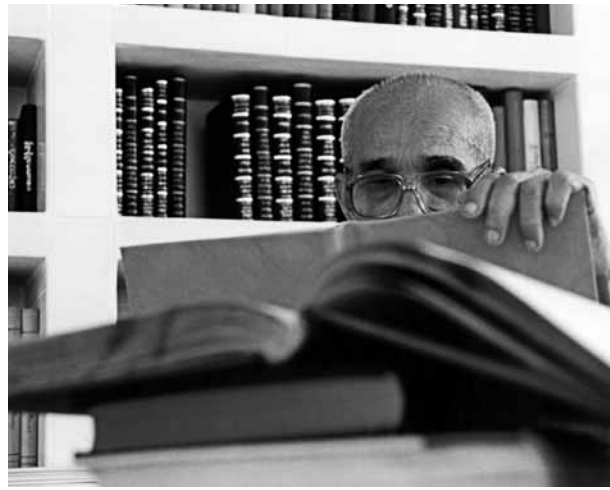
Embargo
To prevent publication of a press release or report until a specified date and time. Journalists are often given documents (including drafts of important speeches) before the official release on the condition they do not publish anything beforehand. This allows them to study the contents and be prepared for deadline. A warning usually appears at the top of such press release, for example: "EMBARGOED until 1.00 pm Wednesday."

Feature
An informative or entertaining story that is not necessarily tied to an event that just happened and usually involves significant research. It usually focuses on a human interest angle, and is sometimes called "soft news."

Human interest
An event or situation that appeals to the emotions of readers.

Inverted pyramid
Story organization in which the most important information is placed at the beginning, or in the lead, followed by information that supports the lead, and then less important information.

Jargon
The special words used by people with the same job, such as government officials, economists and journalists. These words are not usually understood by other people.


Think carefully about the words you use

Lead
The beginning of a news story. A direct lead gets to the main point or theme of the story right away. Most straight news stories have direct leads. A delayed lead gets to the main point or theme after the writer gives an example, anecdote, or sets the scene. Most features have delayed leads.

News
Stories about events that have just happened and should be told to readers right away. Sometimes called "hard news" or "breaking news."

News feature
A story based on a breaking news event reported with feature-writing techniques and/or a human interest angle.

Objectivity
Important quality of a good story — the reporter keeps his or her own opinions and feelings out of the story as far as possible, and tells the reader only the facts.

On the record
Describes information from a source that the source agrees can be used in a story and openly attributed to him or her.

Off the record
Describes information from a source that the source does not want published, or only agrees to publication with restrictions on attribution.

Quotation
The exact words a source says when making a speech or giving an interview, and surrounded by quotation marks when appearing in news and feature stories.

So What?
A phrase meant to remind reporters to include in their stories the significance of a news event or feature. It tells the readers why they should care about a particular event and how it could affect people.

Verification
The steps the reporter takes to make sure that the information a source gives to him is true. This may involve observation, talking to other sources or looking at documents.

CHAPTER 1: JOURNALISTS AND THE NEWS

THE ROLE OF THE JOURNALIST

Journalists have one of the most important jobs in any society.

Their circumstances differ from one country to another. In some countries, the government or political parties own the news media. In other countries, private individuals or companies own them. In many countries, there is a mixture of the two.

But whatever their situation, all good journalists share a basic mission. They give people the information they need to understand the world around them and to make decisions about their lives. People depend on journalists for information about their community, the government, business, sports, health and so on. With this information, they decide what to watch on TV, what to eat, what motorbike to buy, where to send their children to school, who to vote for in the next election, and so on.

Sometimes this information can be a matter of life and death. In late 2004, many tens of thousands of lives might have been saved in Thailand and elsewhere if the media had known early enough that a tsunami was racing across the Indian Ocean. Four years later, similar announcements could have saved victims of Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar's Irrawaddy Delta. Weather forecasters need the news media to put out their message quickly and efficiently to everyone.

Because many people read or listen to their stories, journalists must be responsible. *The first duty of a good journalist is to the people.*

Consider these definitions from journalists of Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Laos and Myanmar on the role of the journalist:

- To seek the truth
- To be a bridge between the government and the people
- To inform the people about new matters
- To educate, to entertain, to explain
- To protect the interests of the people
- To double-check information
- To write interesting stories
- To write for readers, not for sources

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE READER

Too many journalists forget their readers. Instead, they write to please their editors or their "sources," the people from whom they get information for their stories, including government officials. Many journalists do this because they see their editors and their sources every day. They want to please them. But if journalists write for their editors and sources, they tend to include the kinds of details that only their editors and sources would care about. The stories do not include the background and explanations that ordinary readers need.

Good journalists never forget who they are writing for. A daily newspaper with a large circulation — such as *Thai Rath* ('Thai State') in Thailand — has many kinds of readers: top government officials, rich businessmen, taxi drivers, poor vegetable sellers. *Thai Rath* covers many kinds of economic, political and social stories. Its journalists try to write in a clear and basic

way so that all the readers can understand.

On the other hand, journalists for a popular culture and entertainment magazine — such as *Pracheaprey* ('Popular') in Cambodia — know that many of their readers are young and interested in fashion, music and movie stars. So they focus on these subjects, and write about them in an entertaining style. They don't focus on politics and government.

Writers for the English-language *Vietnam Investment Review* focus on stories about business and finance for overseas investors. They have a very clear audience in mind.

Good journalists also know they must be good story-tellers. If they don't present information in an interesting way, people won't read their stories.

These two sure won't bite

THE QUALITIES OF GOOD JOURNALISTS

Professional journalists:

- Ask many questions
- Are balanced and fair
- Are credible and responsible to their readers
- Get information from many sources and double-check information
- Are honest and do not copy stories from other news media
- Come up with interesting and creative ideas for stories

Good journalists also are curious. They always want to know how things work, and are always reading news. They are observant. They notice unusual signs on the road that other people ignore. They listen well, but they also are skeptical. They do not accept something as true just because an official says it is true. They are independent. They do not let other people use them for their own benefit. They get both sides of a story and check the information to make sure it is accurate. They have discipline: they don't let things distract them, so they can finish stories by deadline. When obstacles are in their way, they do not give up. They find other ways to get the facts. And they write only the facts because that is what their readers want and need; they do not put their own opinions in their stories.

Many good journalists also have a strong sense of compassion. They dislike it when people abuse others. They can feel the sufferings of other people and identify with their problems. They want to report on these problems so that the

whole world will know, and do something to solve them.

WHAT IS NEWS?

The journalist's job is to "get the news." But many events happen every day. Not all are worth reporting. So what is news? What kind of information do readers want and need?

That is a decision journalists must make every day. Before starting to cover a story, they ask themselves: "Is this a story people will talk about?" and "Is this information they need to know?" *News is information that is important or interesting for a large number of people*. It is different from events that happen all the time, every day.

News is what is *unusual*. One famous definition of news is: "If a dog bites a man, it's not news. But if a man bites a dog, that's news." A story on the front page of the *Bangkok Post* was about a man who was arrested because he bit his dog on the neck. The man was trying to show that he was the dog's boss.

News is also something that *has an impact on many people*. It could be a big flood that destroys homes and crops. It could be a rise in oil prices, meaning it will cost more to drive a motorbike. Often the biggest stories are the ones that have an impact on the most people.

Sometimes, news is simply what *important or prominent or well-known* people do or say. Journalists follow top officials such as prime ministers, presidents and foreign ministers. These people are powerful and influential, so their opinions get more coverage than the opinions of ordinary people. Some journalists follow movie stars and singers because they know readers are interested in the lives of rich and famous people.

News has *timeliness*. Usually, news is what happens today. Not what happened last month. Readers want to know about the most recent events, and they want to know about them as quickly as possible. If there is a big fire or major accident in the city, many journalists will file stories immediately for radio, TV or websites. Others may write stories for the next morning's newspaper.

News often is about *conflict*. Conflict disrupts everyday life. People have disputes over land. Political parties compete for control of government. Countries fight wars.

News also has a *local* angle. People want to know about events that take place in or near where they live. A newspaper in Vientiane is interested in a flood near Vientiane. It is not so interested in a flood in Beijing. People also want to know about events that affect people who are similar to them. Laotians are interested in what happens to other Laotians. A plane crash in China might not get much coverage in a newspaper in Laos. But if three Laotians were on board, it would be a big story.

Sometimes news is information that is *useful*. It could be a story about how to get a new job. Or a story about how to exercise and stay healthy.

Then there is news that is just *entertaining* information. These include stories about animals, funny things that people do, the making of a new movie, and so on.

News is not always easy to define. A new young reporter may feel lost if the editor tells him or her to go out and "come back with a story." But with experience, the reporter will develop the ability to immediately spot what is news. ■

CHAPTER 2: FINDING SOURCES AND STORY IDEAS

Often the news is right outside our windows: a building is on fire, police capture a criminal, streets flood after heavy rains. But a lot of news is not so obvious. Journalists should not sit and wait for things to happen, or wait for their editors to give them assignments. They should come up with story ideas on their own. Reporters who come up with their own ideas are highly valued by editors. Besides, reporters generally have more interest when pursuing their own stories.

Reporters can look for story ideas by checking regularly with the government information offices or the ministries. Some offices list events scheduled for the day.

Some news releases can be the basis for good stories. Some are from non-government organizations (NGOs) or international agencies like the United Nations. Others come from businesses, schools or private individuals. Governments and other institutions also regularly issue documents and reports. A news release or document should be considered the starting point for a story. Let's say an environmental group issues a statement about the health of the Mekong River. An energetic reporter might spend a day on the Mekong to see how clean or polluted it really is, or how few fish there are compared to the past. The reporter might talk to fishermen, transportation companies and those living along the river's banks. [Chapter 12 explains in more detail how to write a story based on a news release.]

You should make sure you understand the topics or institutions that you cover. Make sure you know what the next development should be. Be prepared with all the background information you need when the parliament passes a new investment law, or when the central bank announces another interest rate cut.

Reporters can also get ideas by reading other newspapers, magazines and websites, and by tuning into radio and TV. They can go after questions that were not answered by other media, and find new angles to stories.

Good journalists plan ahead. They mark upcoming events in their calendars, and think of stories that can be written in advance. If a court is expected to issue a long-awaited decision on an important case, the reporter could preview the case in that day's paper. This is what Bangkok newspapers did before a former prime minister was found guilty of abusing power while in office. The advance stories helped prepare readers for the decision when it was announced.

Anniversaries of major events are also good ways to make issues timely. Many media groups wrote stories six months, one year and two years after the 2004 tsunami. Many agencies wrote stories based on the tenth anniversary of the 1997 Asian financial crisis. A Burmese journal followed up on the cyclone in 2008 with a story that began like this:

> *Six months after Cyclone Nargis struck the Irrawaddy Delta, the main concern for the United Nations is the massive shortfall in funding needed to help rebuild livelihoods for the hundreds of thousands of survivors.*

Annual holidays are another source for story ideas. Each country observes its own special days, but there are also many international days recognized by the United Nations. For instance, World Environment Day is June 5, International Women's Day is March 8 and World AIDS Day is December 1. These can be a hook for a story.

FINDING NEW ANGLES TO THE STORY

One of the biggest challenges is how to find a fresh approach to stories that seem routine, whether it's an election, a meeting or an annual holiday. On the eve of the king's birthday in Thailand, which is also celebrated as Father's Day, *Bangkok Post* reporters prepared a package of three stories. One was about fathers who were loved by their children. Another was about children whose fathers had left home, had died or were imprisoned. A third reporter wrote about a man whose job it was to string thousands of lights on Bangkok's Ratchadamnoen Avenue, making the street as bright as day at night.

In Burma, a journalist for the weekly *7-Day News* covered the death of a celebrity by focusing on how the funeral parlor was preparing for the funeral and the big crowds that were expected to attend. Readers liked his unusual approach.

In Phnom Penh, *The Cambodia Daily* sent reporters to interview homeless people who refused to move out of a downtown building. City officials had ordered all of the "squatters" to leave. The reporters told the story through the eyes of the families. Here is the beginning of the story:

Ask even more questions when the scene is confusing

Chan Thorn woke up last week with a rat chewing on her big toe.

But she did not panic. Instead, she did what she has done seven times before: She wiped the blood away, treated the wound and went back to sleep.

"There are too many rats to kill them all," Chan Thorn said Sunday, showing the scars on her fingers and toes from previous rat bites.

There are 88 families squatting either inside or atop the Hem Cheat theater on the corner of Streets 130 and 15 in the heart of Phnom Penh. They have become accustomed to the army of rats attacking them at night.

The story went on to give details about the conflict between the city and the "squatters" and the dirty conditions they chose to live with.

WHERE ELSE DO JOURNALISTS GET IDEAS?

They brainstorm with editors and colleagues. This means sitting around and sharing ideas — even ones that seem silly or very different at first — and discussing whether they could be turned into interesting stories. Where does all the garbage go after a festival? How much does it cost to clean it up? How much garbage does the city produce in a year? Is the landfill running out of space? Where will garbage go in the future? Could more of it be recycled or converted into alternative sources of energy?

Another approach is to think of who is affected by an issue or event, and write the story from the point of view of those people. For instance, after an increase in fuel prices, reporters could talk to motorists, taxi drivers and transportation companies. If the city announces a new megaproject, who will gain? Who will lose? During election campaigns, what do voters think about the candidates and the issues? How will they be affected by the proposed policies?

Some journalists read technical journals to learn about developments in the fields they cover. A journalist who writes about the environment might read bulletins or newsletters produced by environmental NGOs or the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization. They might also subscribe to online news alerts. They educate themselves as much as possible about the topics they cover. As they learn new things, they share them with readers.

In Cambodia, many journalists read the monthly weblog of the former king, Norodom Sihanouk. The "king father" gives his opinions on many subjects such as the Khmer Rouge tribunal or the problems of poor farmers. These opinions often provide good material for stories.

Good reporters also find stories by listening to other people — at home, in the market or at a party. What are people talking about? Are they worried about rising prices and falling incomes? The quality of schools? Whether they can afford to retire? Their ideas and concerns may be the basis of a story.

Journalists also get plenty of ideas by keeping their eyes open. They might take a different route to work one day, looking for new things. If they see an interesting-looking building under construction, they could call the city department in charge of building permits. They might find out that it is an unusual new movie theater or museum. That is a story many people in the city would be interested in reading.

HAVE MANY SOURCES, BUT GOOD SOURCES

Human sources also provide ideas for stories. They also supply the information needed to write those stories. It's essential to have sources. But it's important to have *good* sources. Journalists should make sure they have sources who can be counted on for accurate and objective or neutral information. Has the information they have given in the past been accurate? Are these sources respected by other people? Are they in a position to know about the things that they comment on? Do they have reasons to tell lies?

Journalists also need to make sure they have sources who are experts in certain subjects. These include economists. If they need to write a business story and don't understand a particular term, reporters can call a financial expert or an economist for help.

To develop good sources, reporters need to talk to people frequently, whether in person or on the phone. When the source knows the reporter, they will trust him or her. And the reporter will know if the source can be trusted.

Some journalists get to know the mid-level officials at the institutions they cover. These are the people who often know what's really going on. And secretaries and advisers may be good sources because they know what officials are doing. They also can help to arrange interviews.

Good journalists base their stories on information from many sources. When one source gives information, they check with other sources to make sure it is accurate. Or they get comments from other sources so they can write a more complete story. They don't just quote government officials. They talk to experts such as NGO workers and university professors. They talk to ordinary people who are affected by the events.

Good journalists check with sources regularly to find out what is going on.

Here are some news sources for journalists in Southeast Asia:

- Press releases
- Government offices
- Police departments and hospitals
- International agencies
- Diplomats
- NGOs
- Businesses and business associations
- Schools
- Newsletters, magazines, newspapers and websites
- Local and international TV and radio newscasts
- Youth groups
- Political groups
- Temples, churches and mosques

KEEP A SOURCE LIST

It's important to keep a well-organized list of sources. Reporters should always ask for the name cards of the people they interview. They should put them in a box or business card holder and enter the details in a computer file. They should also keep a telephone directory and government, business and NGO directories. Often, they will need to call someone quickly. They won't have a lot of time to go searching for a name. ■

CHAPTER 3: BASIC STORY STRUCTURE

HARD NEWS AND FEATURES

There are two basic types of stories: hard news, sometimes called breaking news or straight news, and features, sometimes called soft news.

Hard news is usually about events that have just happened and must be reported to readers immediately: a big fire, a government announcement, a court decision, the death of a well-known person.

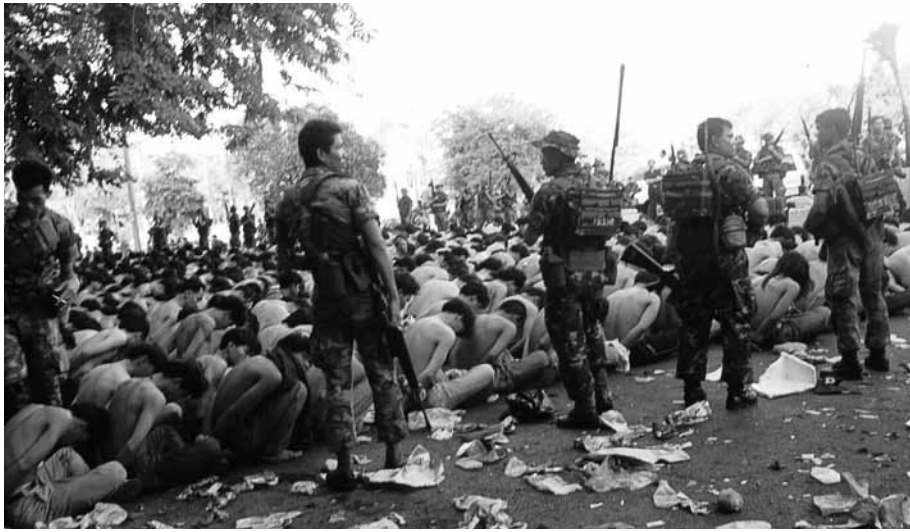
Features do not necessarily concern events that have just happened. They are designed not only to inform readers but also to make them think more deeply about a situation or an issue. Or they may be written just to entertain. Hard news reports events; features can help explain them.

Most features are about human interest topics. A feature could be about a social trend, such as the popularity of Korean movies, or about serious health issues, such as how a village copes with an outbreak of bird flu. Features also include profiles of people doing important or interesting things, such as how a CEO turned a small company into an international business. Profiles may describe a person's character, or the feel of a place.

Features generally go into more depth than hard news stories. To report a feature, a reporter may have to spend many days doing interviews and research.

LEAD AND BODY

Most stories have two main parts. The first is the introduction, sometimes called the



Soldiers and prisoners: an urgent hard news story

"lead." The rest of the story is called the "body." Most stories have one main theme. Both the lead and the body should relate to that theme.

In a straight news story, the lead is usually just one sentence. It tells us what the story is about, and includes the most important elements of that story. Good leads grab the attention of readers and encourage them to read the rest of the story.

The body contains information that explains and supports the lead. This includes details, quotations and the background of the event being reported. The more important information comes first, followed by less important information.

Here's an example of a good news story. Note the clear, simple language, and logical arrangement of information.

CAMBODIAN GARMENT WORKERS STRUGGLING

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia (AP) – The economic slowdown in the United States has forced the temporary closing of at least 12 garment factories in Cambodia so far this year, Commerce Minister Cham Prasidh said yesterday.

As many as 3,000 workers have been temporarily laid off and more jobs could be lost if the situation does not improve, he said.

Additionally, thousands more people were working fewer hours as many of the 200 garment factories had cut down on overtime and gone from two shifts to one, the minister said.

"The economic problems in the United States have us very concerned for the factory operators and the workers both," he said.

Cambodia's garment industry employs 200,000 people, who earn an average of $40 per month. More than 80 percent of its production is shipped to the United States for retail sale.

The minister said less than 40 percent of Cambodia's annual garment export quota to the United States had been filled even though the year was half over. By comparison, he said, nearly the entire quota for the United States had been filled by the end of June last year.

Features are more flexible. There are many ways to write them.

Features are usually less urgent, so readers do not need to know the most important information right away. The lead may be a description of a person or place, or other information designed to make readers curious. The main point of the feature appears soon after the lead.

Here's an example of a good feature. Note that the beginning, middle and end of the story were carefully thought out and tied together. Also note the use of good descriptions and quotations.

ON NEW YEAR'S, NO CHEER FOR SHOESHINE BOY IN VIETNAM

HANOI, Vietnam (AP) – Dinh Van Tuan, 16, had never even heard of New Year's Day before. The festive pop of firecrackers that echoed through Hanoi only startled him on yet another bleak day of trying to earn enough money for rice.

Early morning, he was in front of the Associated Press office, grasping the metal gate with two hands, his tiny head stuck between the bars in a painfully imploring look no child should ever have. Dressed in filthy clothes — which he bought used and are the only set he owns — the boy was begging for shoes to shine.

Short and thin, Tuan looks more like 9 or 10 except he's smoking a cigarette.

He responds to most questions by looking at the pavement with a frown and asking again if there are shoes to be shined. His legs often hurt from wandering the streets 11 hours a day in the Hanoi winter looking for customers.

On New Year's Day, he's only had a sweet rice cake a reporter bought for him and some water from street peddlers who pitied him.

"Today I have something to eat, tomorrow maybe nothing," he said.

Told of the custom of New Year's wishes, Tuan said: "I wish I will make more money someday. I will give it to my parents. I will buy a car and a house and enjoy life until the day I die."

Tuan is among the ragged band of teenage boys who lug crude wooden boxes containing shoeshine supplies along downtown Tran Hung Dao Street every day, looking for customers in the restaurants, bars, company offices and foreign embassies.

They seek the new merchant class created by Vietnam's free-market reforms who are throwing out traditional plastic sandals in favor of leather shoes. "Shoeshine, shoeshine," is about all they can say in English.

Many of the kids, like Tuan, left their poor rice-farming families in the countryside to come to Hanoi. They spend most of their daily lives on the streets, with no adults to guide them, comfort them, or give them New Year's presents.

Tuan arrived two years ago with a friend, now 15, with whom he wanders the streets. He first sold sugarcane, then bought a shoeshine box for about 30 U.S. cents.

Tuan says he is close to his parents, and they want him to return home. But he says he can't go back because the family is too poor. He can't shine shoes in Hai Hung province because there, "no one has shoes."

He has had only two years of schooling and can't read or write. He almost never plays, except for kicking around a crudely bound ball made of straw, rubber pads and rubber bands.

When he sees the many rich kids playing along Tran Hung Dao Street, he says, "I wish someday I could be like them."

Tuan pays about 5 U.S. cents a day to sleep in a two-room boarding house with 20 other people, most of them street peddlers. There's no toilet there. Tuan walks an hour every day to Tran Hung Dao Street and anther hour back in the evening. He's on the street by 6 a.m.

Each customer usually pays him about 11 U.S. cents: on lucky days he has two or three customers. As more shoeshine boys have hit the streets, it's been more and more difficult to make a living. By evening New Year's Day, the only customer Tuan had was a reporter who wanted to interview him.

It's difficult getting Tuan to talk: he feels there is little to talk about. He sits on the handle of his shoeshine box. Black dirt streaks his right cheek. He wears cheap plastic sandals and his feet are coated in the soot of the streets. Now and then, he turns his head sharply and in confusion as firecrackers rattle the streets.

There is a third kind of story that combines feature-writing techniques with news. These stories are sometimes called "news features" or "feature-style." The drama of the event is retold with description, powerful quotes and telling details. This kind of approach can be used to tell the story through the eyes of one of the participants: a firefighter who rescues

Disaster victims also have the right to dignity

a family from a burning building, a cyclone survivor who clings to a palm tree, the woman who sees a bank robbery.

Here is an example of a news feature from an Associated Press correspondent in northern Vietnam. Note how the story begins like a feature by focusing on a person who is affected by the flooding, then moves on to read much like a hard news story.

DEATH TOLL CONTINUES TO RISE FROM VIETNAM FLOODS

HANOI – Tran Xuan Mien spent an entire day clearing mud and debris out of his flooded house — only to watch the water rush back into his living room Tuesday.

"I'm exhausted," said Mien, 62, who lives in Vietnam's capital, Hanoi. "My house is full of water again."

After a break from the rain for much of Monday, showers resumed in northern and central Vietnam on Tuesday and the death toll from days of flooding continued to rise.

The authorities announced that they had recovered 19 more bodies, bringing the total to 85.

Meanwhile, residents of the capital, where forecasters said rains were the heaviest in 35 years, attempted to clean up.

Mien lifted his washing machine, refrigerator and two motorbikes onto piles of bricks to keep them out of the water.

"I've been living here since 1984, but I've never seen rain like this," he said.

Forecasters predicted several more days of rain but said it would be lighter than the downpours that soaked the region over the weekend.

With swollen rivers and lakes across the Red River Delta, the authorities remained

concerned that dikes could break. Some 9,000 soldiers were deployed to make emergency repairs.

Another 6,000 people were sent to help 35,000 households affected by the floods in Hanoi, where 23 neighborhoods remained under at least a foot of water Tuesday.

Water levels were lower in Hanoi on Tuesday, but schools remained closed and in some areas, garbage and debris floated into flooded homes.

"My house is still surrounded by water, and it smells horrible," said Nguyen Thi Lien, 67. "We have limited water, just for cooking, and we haven't had a bath in four days."

The Vietnamese authorities were concerned about possible outbreaks of waterborne diseases, said Nguyen Huy Nga of the Health Ministry.

"Diarrhea, cholera and typhoid could occur after a week of flooding, and dengue fever is also a concern," Nga said.

Flooding in central Vietnam has killed 41 people, while 44 have died in northern provinces, including 20 people in Hanoi.

Although the rains have eased in the central region, flooding continued to cut off some isolated areas.

"Roads to those villages are still under water," said Pham Viet Phu, a disaster official in the worst-hit province, Nghe An. "The death toll could rise."

[We'll examine the leads and structures of news and features more closely in Chapters 8 and 9.]

THE 5 WS AND H

All stories must cover certain key questions. They are often called the 5Ws and H:

WHO — who was involved in the news?
WHAT — what happened that was important or interesting?
WHERE — where did the news happen?
WHEN — when did it happen?
WHY — why did it happen?
and
HOW — how did it happen?

These are the questions all people ask when they want to learn more about something that has happened. No story is complete unless it at least covers the 5Ws and H. Even reporters with many years of experience use this checklist before turning in their work. In hard news stories, the answers to the 5Ws and H are often put in the lead.

Here is a story from a regional broadcasting company:

Southeast Asia's five Mekong River countries are studying a plan to set up an association of rice-exporting nations. Vietnam's prime minister made the announcement yesterday in Hanoi after a regional summit of the Mekong River nations with Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar.

He says these nations are the rice bowl of the Asian region and their exports account for about 50 percent of the world market so they have an important role to play in ensuring food security.

Thailand proposed a rice exporters' cartel last April, as world grain prices reached record levels. It backed away from the plan after the Asian Development Bank and rice importing nations criticized it, saying it would increase hunger and poverty.

The story includes Who (five Mekong countries, Vietnam's prime minister, the Asian Development Bank), What

So what? What makes a story?

(studying a plan to create a rice-exporting association), Where (Southeast Asia, Hanoi) and When (yesterday; last April). It partly explains the Why (the countries play an important role in providing food for the world), but doesn't give all the reasons. Cartels are usually formed so they can control the price of the goods they export. The How isn't clear yet.

Take a look at this story from *The Nation* newspaper in Thailand:

> *RUSSIAN TOURIST KILLED AFTER FALLING FROM 11TH FLOOR OF PATTAYA HOTEL*
>
> *PATTAYA, Chon Buri – A Russian tourist fell off the balcony in front of an elevator of a hotel in this seaside town early Tuesday morning and died.*
>
> *Police identified the tourist as a 28-year-old man.*
>
> *Police said the man fell from the balcony on the 11th floor of the Adriatic Palace Hotel Pattaya to the third floor at 12:20 am Tuesday. The man was staying on the 25th floor with his girlfriend.*
>
> *Witnesses told police the two were returning to their room but accidentally exited the elevator at the 11th floor. While waiting for the elevator, they played and took turns carrying each other before the man fell off the balcony.*

The story deals with Who (a 28-year-old Russian tourist, his girlfriend, police, witnesses), What (died after falling off a balcony), Where (a Pattaya hotel), When (Tuesday morning), and Why and How (because he and his girlfriend were carrying each other near the balcony).

Now look at the beginning of a story from a Cambodian-language Phnom Penh newspaper:

> *The Ministry of Public Works and Transportation, which is located along Norodom Boulevard, in Sangkat Srah Chak, Khan Daun Penh, near Wat Phnom, collapsed in big pieces and injured seven people, three of them seriously.*
>
> *According to Mr. Uk chan, Secretary of State for the Ministry of Public Works and Transportation, this building is Minister Khy Taing Lim's meeting hall and it collapsed at 8.30am on Friday, 23 March, 2001.*

The story goes on for a few hundred more words. But it never tells us who the injured people were. Workers? People passing by? Men? Women? Children? All we know about them is in the lead. The

writer spends much of the rest of the story describing what the building is used for, how old it is, and wondering what would have happened if a meeting had been in progress in the building when it collapsed. He completely forgot about the seven victims, and seemed more concerned about how lucky it was that no high-ranking officials were hurt.

And look at this story from the English-language version of a Vietnamese newspaper:

> *CYCLISTS WIN THAI TOUR YELLOW JERSEYS*
>
> *Two cyclists, Hoang Thi Thanh Tam and Nguyen Nam Cuc, won yellow jerseys at the Thailand cycling tour.*
>
> *Hoang Thi Thanh Tram won the first yellow jersey in the junior competition. Meanwhile Nguyen Nam Cuc won the jersey in the men's international competition.*
>
> *Competing in the Thailand tour are 145 cyclists from Thailand, Uzbekistan, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Vietnam and the Republic of Korea.*
>
> *They are competing in the men's and women's junior and men's international events.*

What was the name of the cycling tour? Was it a major competition? What are "yellow jerseys?" How many kilometers was the race? When was the competition held? Where in Thailand? Was there a prize?

And if you are writing for a Vietnamese newspaper, shouldn't you tell your readers something about the two Vietnamese cyclists? What are their backgrounds and ages? What areas of Vietnam are they from? Also notice the two different spellings of one name: "Tam" and "Tram."

SO WHAT?

Just as important as the 5Ws and H is "So What?" You've told your readers the news, but they also want to know: Why should I care? Why should I bother to read this story? Your job is not only to provide your readers with information, but also to explain the significance of that information.

Too often, journalists report the most recent development of a complicated political issue but do not explain the importance of that development. Or they write stories full of accusations from all sides but do not explain why the dispute is important.

On all stories, ask yourself:

- What's really important about this event or development?
- Why do my readers or listeners need to know this?
- How will it affect their lives?

If you can't think of why readers should care about a story, it may not be worth writing.

In the story we saw earlier in this chapter about the closing of garment factories in Cambodia, the second paragraph answered the "So What?":

> *As many as 3,000 workers have been temporarily laid off and more jobs could be lost if the situation does not improve, he said.*

In a story about a new flood map in Myanmar, the reporter makes clear in the first sentence (see the underlined words) why it's important:

> *A flood hazard map that will help protect new buildings from potential water damage*

Explain how economic policy affects people on the street

is nearing completion. Work began on the map last July, following the destruction wrought by Cyclone Nargis in May.

Finally, a story from the *Bangkok Post* illustrates why a new outbreak of bird flu is a cause for concern. See the underlined parts of the story.

NEW BIRD FLU OUTBREAK IN SUKHOTHAI

Bird flu has been found at a native-chicken farm in the northern province of Sukhothai, raising fears of a new outbreak of the H5N1 flu virus.

Livestock Development Department chief Sakchai Sribonnsue said a lab test on a chicken carcass from the Thung Saliam district showed the dead fowl was infected with the H5N1 strain.

All 17 native chickens at the farm had been culled to prevent the disease from spreading, Mr. Sakchai said.

The department declared the area near the infected farm a bird flu outbreak zone to facilitate the disease control operation last week, when five chickens at the farm died, he said.

It was the third outbreak of bird flu this year. The first two were in Nakhon Sawan's Chumsaeng district and Phichit's Sak Lek sub-district in January.

"The department will work closely with health officials to prevent the virus being transmitted from the fowl to

humans," the livestock chief said.

The department will also inform the World Organization for Animal Health today about the re-emergence of bird flu. Frozen poultry exports would be suspended.

Agriculture Minister Somsak Prissananantakul has instructed stepped-up surveillance for bird flu as the disease usually flares up in the cold season.

A total of 25 people have been infected by the virus since 2004, with 17 dying.

The story says the bird flu case is important for a couple of reasons. First, it could lead to a new outbreak of the H5N1 virus. The last sentence reminds readers the virus has killed 17 people, or 68 percent of those who were infected. It's deadly. That's why it's important. A secondary "So What?" is that bird flu means frozen chicken exports will stop for the moment. The story, however, could have told readers that Thailand is one of the world's leading exporters of frozen chicken. It's an important part of the economy.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Readers often need other information to be able to understand the new event you are reporting. You should include in your story a short summary of the context and background. The context means the current general situation related to that new event. The background means what has happened in the past related to that event. For example, if you're writing about the government's new economic policy, you could include a paragraph explaining that the government is trying to match the economic growth of other countries in Southeast Asia (that's the context) and a paragraph describing the government's former economic policy (the background).

A story in the *Vietnam Investment Review* discussed how the return home of Vietnamese now living in eastern Europe could raise housing prices in Hanoi. The writer included this background:

In the early 1990s, a wave of Vietnamese workers returning from the former East Germany made housing purchases in Hanoi that caused residential property prices to double.

But by the late 1990s, the rush to capitalize on the new Hanoi housing appetite through the construction of new houses for buyers such as returnees, foreign expats meant supply was exceeding demand.

Now take a look at the first two paragraphs of this story, from a wire service, about the celebration of Cambodia's independence day. The first paragraph is the news. The second paragraph contains context, background and the "So What?"

Phnom Penh – Prime Minister Hun Sen vowed to strengthen Cambodia's armed forces yesterday as he joined the country's king in celebrating the 55th anniversary of independence from France.

The prime minister's statement came amid a tense stand-off between Cambodian and Thai troops near the 11th-century Preah Vihear temple, which last month erupted into a clash that raised concerns of a border war.

The context is the tense stand-off between the two countries. The background is a clash between the two sides that took place last month. The "So What?" is the concern over a possible war. ■

CHAPTER 4: BASIC REQUIREMENTS OF GOOD STORIES

We have reviewed the basic structure of all stories. Now let us consider some of the requirements of good stories. They include getting information correct; identifying sources of information; being fair, balanced and neutral; and being complete.

ACCURACY

Above all else, journalists must get the information correct. Mistakes can harm sources and readers, damaging reputations and causing financial losses. Readers could also lose trust in the media organization and switch to another source of news instead. That's bad for business.

Never assume something is correct. Always ask. Always check.

Accuracy means paying attention to every detail. That begins with simple things like the spelling of names, titles and places. And it goes on to confirming information in news releases, and to making sure you have quoted someone accurately, or have accurately described his or her views.

You may think a spelling mistake is "not so important." But if you spell someone's name wrong, a reader who knows the correct spelling will say, "If she can't get the name right, I wonder what else is wrong in the story?" Sources may get angry if you misspell their names. They may not trust you any more. Ask the source. Get a business card. Look in the telephone directory. Is it Chuan Leepai or Chuan Leekpai? Jacky Chan or Jackie Chan?

A newspaper can cause all kinds of problems when it makes mistakes. A Cambodian newspaper made people worried when it reported that a popular brand of condom might be infected with the virus that causes AIDS. The government had to hold a news conference to deny the story. The newspaper printed an apology; "We made a mistake as professional journalists," it said.

Make sure you check all the details

It's bad enough making mistakes when we are on deadline and in a hurry. But there is no excuse for making them simply because we were careless or too lazy to check the information.

VERIFICATION

Above all, never print anything controversial without verifying it. When possible, verify it by going to see for yourself. If you can't do that, ask witnesses to confirm it. Also look for documents that prove the information is true.

During military fighting in Cambodia, an official of Siem Reap province told a reporter there were no problems in that part of the country. All the fighting was in Phnom Penh, the official said. But the reporter heard gunfire in the distance. He did not believe what the official said. He went to the hospital. There he saw doctors treating a boy injured by gunfire. The boy's relatives said two old farmers had been killed. But the journalist did not see any injured soldiers. So he went to the military hospital outside town. There he saw many injured soldiers, who said that others had been killed. And the reporter verified those deaths by going to a temple where the bodies were cremated.

The tsunami of 2004 claimed tens of thousands of lives across Asia, but in Myanmar officials announced less than 100 deaths. Journalists were skeptical. One reporter made the long and difficult journey from Yangon to the shores of the Irrawaddy Delta. She took a bus for three hours and then walked for several more hours. Through her own observations and by interviewing villagers, she was able to verify that there were, in fact, very few deaths in the places she was able to access. An official with an international relief agency later came to a very different conclusion from talking to fisherman, and estimated that the true figure may conservatively have been ten times greater than was originally estimated.

Verify documents, too. If you don't, you could become the victim of a trick. Late one night, a Cambodian newspaper received a fax from someone claiming to be the new president of the ruling party. The fax said party members voted for a new leader during a special meeting in a remote part of the country. The information could not be verified, but the paper published the story anyway. It was a mistake. The next day, party officials said no such meeting was held.

Handling rumors is one of the most difficult challenges for journalists on deadline. Politicians and other people who try to promote their own interests often try to use journalists to make their opponents look bad. Never print rumors. Go directly to the source. Demand proof. Ask the person who is the subject of the rumors. If you can't prove the information, don't publish it.

Mistakes are embarrassing for the newspaper and hurt its credibility. But that's not all. They also can be costly. A Hong Kong newspaper printed a story that implied that one of the sons of Cambodia's former king, Norodom Sihanouk, was illegitimate. Sihanouk said the story was false, and hurt his reputation. He threatened to sue for millions of dollars in damages. If a small newspaper had to pay such damages, it would go out of business. More recently, a Bangkok newspaper reported there were cracks in the runways of the new airport. But the paper did not name its sources and did not verify the claim with anyone who had seen the cracks. The agency

Sources may not always want to be identified

in charge of the airport filed a lawsuit against the newspaper. But it was later withdrawn, and the paper's reputation was partly restored when some cracks did eventually show up in some of the runways.

OBJECTIVITY

Journalists should try to report the facts in a neutral way, and keep their opinions and feelings out of stories. If they mix up facts with opinions, readers will never be able to rely on the stories as accurate information. Journalists should allow their readers to form their own opinions, based on the facts that they report.

This doesn't mean your newspaper cannot take positions on issues. It can, and it should. But the newspaper should clearly mark the opinions as editorials, commentary and reviews, and keep them separate from the news stories. This strengthens the paper's credibility.

In Southeast Asia, newspapers controlled by governments or political parties often insert opinions into their "news stories."

A story in a Cambodian-language newspaper called a top government official "money faced … a father of corruption like a crocodile covered with moss, an authoritarian with feudalistic ideas, and … a communist." The story said this was "according to officials at the Ministry of Rural Development." But it did not name those officials or give any evidence for the accusations.

But it is not just political stories. Unfortunately, many journalists put their opinions into all kinds of stories, including social affairs, sports, crimes, even disasters.

It's impossible to be completely objective. We all have feelings and opinions that affect the way we report and write stories. Good journalists make use of their passion. A journalist who is angry after seeing the problems of poor villagers may decide to write a story to tell people and force the government to take action. But even though the journalist feels strongly about the problem, he or she must report the story accurately and fairly.

A few years ago, many Cambodian newspapers published only opinions. But now they are publishing more real news. That includes not only the independent newspapers, but also the pro-government and the anti-government newspapers. This is because people now want to read "not only opinion, but what happened and where," says Pen Samitthy, the editor of the best-selling daily, *Rasmei Kampuchea* ('Light of Cambodia').

ATTRIBUTION

If you are at a news event, you can simply write what you saw or heard there. But in most cases, your information will come from someone or somewhere else. Readers have a right to know the source. Is it from a statement, an interview, a document? Who said it?

Telling readers where the information came from is called attribution. If readers know the source of the information, they can judge whether the information can be believed, or how important it is. You must attribute all direct quotations from sources, as well as descriptions or explanations of events you yourself did not witness. If you do not attribute the information, the reader assumes the reporter or the newspaper is the source.

Attribution usually is placed at the beginning or the end of the sentence. Its position depends on style and clarity. Here are some examples:

- Thailand's foreign minister said his country would continue to cooperate closely with ASEAN.
- The number of foreign tourists visiting Mandalay doubled last year, according to the government's tourism office.

Attribution doesn't prove that the statement is true. It simply tells the reader what somebody said. You shouldn't just publish any statement simply because you can cite the person who said it. You shouldn't just quote anyone saying anything he or she wants. First, the source must have authority on the matter he or she is talking about. Then you have the responsibility to check whether the statement is true. If it is not true but you still use the statement because a top official or another newsworthy person said it, you should include in your story a sentence telling the reader what the truth is. This can be a problem in a conflict situation where people contradict each other. You should present both sides and clearly tell readers who said what.

Reporters should cite their sources by name, occupation and other details if possible. The more readers know about the source, the easier it is for them to decide if the information is true, or how they should react to that information. Let's say someone says, "The economy is starting to improve." The reader would react differently to that statement if the head of the central bank says it, rather than a shopkeeper.

But you don't need to put the name or full title of the source in the lead. If the name is not well known, or the title is

Piles of rice speak for themselves

long, that may make the lead difficult to read. You can put that information in the second paragraph.

Avoid this kind of lead, from a Laotian news organization:

> *Borikhamsay Province agriculture and forestry planting head Bounkham Phommachuk reported that the province's farmers started to harvest wet season rice in October.*

This is the right way to use attribution, as shown by *Vientiane Times* reporter and IMMF alumnus Ekaphone Phouthonesy:

> *The government has agreed to provide disabled students with a monthly allowance as part of efforts to encourage them to attend school, according to a finance official.*
>
> *Ministry of Finance Office Deputy Head Sila Viengkeo confirmed on Wednesday the ministry would deliver the first allowances to disabled students nationwide this month.*

This lead from the *Bangkok Post*, by former IMMF student Parista Yuthamanop, also shows how to put the details in the second paragraph:

> *The World Bank has praised the Thai government for making progress in easing poverty and resolving problems in the banking sector.*
>
> *Jemal-ud-din Kassum, World Bank vice-president for East Asia and the Pacific region, said he was encouraged by the government's policy focus on the poor and the business-like management style.*

Not everything has to be attributed. Don't attribute statements that are obvious, easy to verify, and not controversial.

- Piles of garbage littered the main road in Pattaya. (Obviously observed by the reporter)
- More than 100 companies are listed on the stock market. (Easy to verify)
- Many companies are beginning to feel the effects of the global financial crisis. (Not controversial)

ON AND OFF THE RECORD

Sometimes a source will restrict how you can use the information he or she gives you.

A source may allow you to use all the information and name him or her in your story as the source. In that case, your interview is known as "on the record." In general, once you've clearly identified yourself as a reporter, you should assume

that every interview is on the record. Never offer to let a source speak "off the record."

Sometimes a source may say that you cannot use anything he or she says in your story. In that case, your interview is known as "off the record." The source may have information that will help you understand a situation. But the information may be too sensitive to make public. Or it will make the source look bad or cause him or her problems if you use it. If you agree to go off the record, you should keep your promise.

Always make sure you and your source clearly agree on the terms of the interview.

ANONYMOUS SOURCES

Sometimes a source is willing to give you information for publication, but only if you don't name him or her in your story as the source. You may have to write something like, "according to a government official who asked not to be named." Such a source is called an anonymous source.

You should always seek "on-the-record" information, but it may be necessary to use anonymous sources when the information is important to your story.

You and your source should agree on how he or she can be identified. Be as specific as possible without revealing the source's identity. For example, a "high-ranking official in the ministry of finance" is better than a "government official." The more specific the source, the more credible the information.

Don't use too many anonymous sources. When people are not named, they may not feel as responsible for what they say. They can make critical or dishonest comments about people or events when they know they won't be blamed for making those comments. They can say anything they wish to help whatever political or social cause they support. The more anonymous sources you use in your story, the less credible it is.

The Associated Press news agency says it uses anonymous quotes only when the source is talking about facts, and not giving an opinion. The AP says it uses an anonymous source even in these circumstances only if (1) the source is known to the AP; (2) the source is in a position to know the information that he or she is providing; (3) the information is essential to the story; and (4) it is not possible to get that information on the record.

BALANCE AND FAIRNESS

Reporters know there's more than one side to a story. That's why they interview many sources for their stories. It's especially important when they write about political or social issues, election campaigns, or other events involving people of different opinions.

Your story is balanced if it gives the views of both sides of an issue. Your story is fair if it does not favor one side or the other.

That doesn't mean you must give the same amount of space to each point of view. But you must include some reference to differing points of view. A story on an election campaign would not be balanced if it did not include the views of all the major political parties.

When serious accusations are made against someone, you must get a response from that person. You must give him or her the opportunity to defend himself or herself. That is fairness.

News organizations controlled by governments or political parties also should try to be balanced and fair. Otherwise,

readers will think the stories are just propaganda. The stories will have more credibility if they include some reference to different points of view, even if they appear at the end of the story.

CLARITY

Stories should be written clearly so readers can easily understand them. To write clearly, first you must think clearly. You must understand events before writing about them. To do that, ask good questions, and many good questions, to get the necessary information. Then *think* about that information before you start writing. Once you know the topic well, you can choose the main angle for the lead. Then you can organize the remaining information in a logical way.

Clarity means using simple language that ordinary people understand. Avoid the jargon used by experts and bureaucrats. Clarity also means being concise. Don't use more words than you need. Be specific, avoid general terms.

The lead of this story from an English-language news agency sounds as if trade office bureaucrats wrote it:

> *Malaysia and Myanmar will soon finalize an agreement to facilitate the conduct of barter trade between the two countries, Malaysian International Trade and Industry Minister Rafidah Aziz said Thursday.*

What do these (29) words really mean? Rewrite it this way (18 words):

> *Malaysia and Myanmar soon will complete an agreement to increase their barter trade, Malaysia's trade minister said Thursday.*

Clarity means explaining terms. If you use the word "deflation" in a business story, add an explanation for the reader: "Deflation, the reverse of inflation, is a decline in the prices of goods and services."

Clarity means using short words and writing short sentences. In most languages, the subject-verb-object structure is the clearest way to write a sentence.

Example: *Police arrested three men on Thursday*.
Subject: *Police*
Verb: *Arrested*
Object: *Three men*

Example: *The prime minister will visit China*.
Subject: *The prime minister*
Verb: *will visit*
Object: *China*

COMPLETENESS

Your story must not leave out any important elements. You must not only answer the 5Ws and H. You must also speak with the key sources, examine the key documents, visit the key places. What those key elements are depends on what your story is about. Let's say you're writing a feature about the spread of bird flu in a province. If there is a doctor who is the leading expert on that subject, you should speak to that doctor. If someone has written a major study on the subject, you should read the study. If there is a hospital where victims of bird flu have been taken, you should visit that hospital. ■

Journalists collect information in three basic ways:

- Direct observation. They see for themselves.
- Interviewing. They talk to people and ask them questions.
- Research. They use documents and the Internet.

Keep your mind open as you report. Don't start by deciding exactly what story you will write, and then going out to get the details that fit that story while ignoring everything else. At the start, let yourself go in all directions. During your reporting, you may find that the real story, the important and interesting story, is different from the one you imagined at first. Once you decide on a focus, then look for the details you need for the lead and body of your story.

CHAPTER 5: OBSERVATION

Often you cannot be at events so must interview people who participated in them or saw them. But direct observation is possible in many types of stories, for instance stories about news conferences and meetings as well as most features about people and places.

Direct observation is often the most reliable way to collect information. You don't have to depend on witnesses who may not remember the details accurately or fully. Observation is a good way to verify somebody's claims. You know whether the claim is true or not by seeing for yourself.

If you are at the scene of an event, you also can get convincing details. With these details, you can paint a picture of the scene for your readers. You can show them what it was like to be there.

Here's how one reporter described a village in Thailand after the tsunami:

> *Ban Nam Khem looked like a bomb had been dropped on it. Boats were tossed from the sea and wedged between homes, or what was left of them. Cars were crushed, and twisted metal, garbage and debris littered the landscape. The smell of death was everywhere.*

And this is how a reporter described the aftermath of the cyclone in Myanmar:

> *BOGA LE, Myanmar – The water has not receded fully, and few aid trucks have made it here. Only one helicopter, from the*

IMMF students in the field

Myanmar military, was spotted all Friday, dropping off instant noodle packages around a devastated delta that needs much more. Win Kyi, a mother looking for a lost son, was crying, her body shaking and arms outstretched for food, money, water — anything.

"I have nothing," she said, shuffling in a state of shock. "Everything is gone."

Six days after a cyclone churned through the coastal plain of Myanmar, it is clear the damage is great and that little aid has made it to the thousands of villagers along the sea south of the commercial capital, Yangon.

The smell of rot and death is in the air here, part of a single district where the military government says 10,000 people have died.

Yet it is difficult to assess the actual human toll, even in a landscape of toppled trees and houses and bloated farm animals that resemble the devastation of the 2004 tsunami.

Good journalists use all their senses: sight, smell, sound, touch and even taste and the general "feel." Ask yourself: What are the people doing? How are they doing it? What sounds do I hear? What does it smell like? What does the weather feel like? Write down the details in your notebook.

A journalist covering a plane crash can describe the black smoke rising to the sky, the smell of fuel, the heavy rains slowing rescue workers.

Direct observation also helps journalists better understand an event, issue or person. If you are writing about a new factory, you will have a better understanding after visiting it and seeing

Don't just say he is old

how its products are made. If you are writing about a soccer player, you will have a more convincing story after watching him or her in action.

When talking to people, observe their reactions. Do they look away when you ask sensitive questions? Observe their surroundings. Is the desk messy or neat? What kinds of pictures are on the wall?

All this helps you to be as specific as possible when you write your story. Good journalists don't tell us a man is old. They show us he is old; they describe his gray hair, wrinkled hands and slow walk.

But you have to be selective. Not all details are relevant. Just because you see what kind of food someone is eating for lunch does not mean you have to describe it in your story. You may notice that a businessman you are writing about is wearing a tie with a picture of an elephant on it. But that tie may not say anything important about the businessman. So don't mention it in your story. But if the businessman is known as a protector of wildlife, and is wearing a tie with a picture of an elephant on it, that would be a good detail to include.

IMMF alumnus Ung Chansophea used her powers of observation to illustrate the clash between old and new cultures in a Lisu hill-tribe village in northern Thailand:

> *Her hands busy sewing long strips of colorful cloth, 18-year-old Sabai Tip proudly wears a traditional Lisu costume made of pink, black and blue velour. She said she wears it every day, even at home. In contrast, the decorations on her body are modern: hair highlighted deep yellow, two modern bracelets, a bright earring and violet-colored nails.*

Details also help set the scene. Here is the lead of a feature about how industrial development is hurting one of Thailand's best-loved cities. Note how details come from using all of the senses:

> *Chiang Mai, Thailand – At the five main gates of Chiang Mai's old city, people gathered recently for an ancient ceremony called Intakhin. Buddhist monks in orange-yellow robes chanted as people offered flowers, incense and candles to ask for rain and plentiful crops.*
>
> *But the honks and roar of traffic jams around the gates blocked out the chants, and fumes from cars and motorbikes overpowered the sweet smell of incense.*

Here is the lead of another feature, published in several newspapers in Asia, about children abused in Cambodia:

> *PHNOM PENH, Cambodia – Her eyes are big, her cheeks are plump, and she's wearing a bright red T-shirt, a white dress and new sandals. On the wall of her room is a poster showing cheerful children, sunlight and a dove. Other children are singing outside. But she stares at the floor, refusing to look at a visitor. In an hour-long conversation, she cannot be persuaded to smile.*
>
> *The girl is 10 years old. Three weeks ago, she fled a brothel to which she had been sold by her father, a policeman.* ■

CHAPTER 6: INTERVIEWING TECHNIQUES

Reporters can't always be where the news happens. Often they must speak to witnesses, or to people who know about a subject. Sometimes they must speak to victims of crimes or disasters. Or to somebody who is accused of doing something wrong. To get a good story, reporters must know how to ask the right kinds of questions in the right manner.

GETTING THE INTERVIEW

In some countries, top government officials stay away from the press. They demand that questions be submitted in advance or handled by their spokesmen. And they may take days to respond — if they respond at all. In this situation, you should find out the official's daily schedule. When the official makes a public appearance, you may be able to stop him or her and ask some questions.

It helps to have good mid-level sources. If you are friendly with the adviser of an official, that may help you get an interview with the official. If you are polite to secretaries and assistants — those who take the messages — there is a better chance that your calls will be returned.

Many interviews are done by phone. It saves time. Whenever possible, though, you should do interviews in person, especially if you've never met the source before. When you are face to face, you can observe your sources and their environment, and put some of those observations in your

Not all officials welcome journalists

story. Body language is an important part of communication. You can show empathy and understanding when listening to someone. And you can tell by your source's reactions if he or she is uncomfortable or seems not to be telling the truth.

BE PREPARED

The more you know about the subject you're writing about, the easier it is to get sources to talk. This doesn't mean you have to be an expert. But if your sources see that you have taken the time to research the subject, they will feel they are not wasting their time speaking to you. Read previously published articles. Ask other reporters and editors. Call up experts. Do a search on the Internet. The more background you have, the more focused your interview will be.

Chanyaporn Chanjaroen, a Thai reporter who covers financial news, reads a lot and takes classes for financial reporters. She interviews stockbrokers and foreign exchange dealers every day. They are very busy people.

"My first question should get to the point and I should know what I want from them," says Chanyaporn. "Mostly I have one or two minutes. I don't want to annoy them with stupid little questions."

Chanyaporn writes down her key questions ahead of time, so she doesn't forget to ask them. She arranges them in a logical order, and ensures that the most important questions come first.

She may not ask all the questions she has prepared. There may not be time, or the interview subject may already have answered them when answering earlier questions.

As an interview proceeds, a question prepared earlier can cease to be relevant, or a better question begs to be asked.

Interviewers must always stay flexible and be able to think quickly about where a line of questioning is leading.

When you make your initial list of questions, think not only about the 5Ws and H and what you need to write your story, but also: What do my readers want to know? What would they ask if they were there?

The key to a successful interview is knowing what topics must be covered, and preparing the right questions to cover those topics and more.

BE ON TIME

This is a matter of courtesy and professionalism. Often your sources are busy people who were kind enough to make time to speak with you.

STARTING THE INTERVIEW: IDENTIFY YOURSELF

At the start of an interview, identify yourself and your news organization. It would be wrong to quote someone who didn't know he was talking to a reporter. Give the person your name card. Explain what kind of story you're writing. This will help focus the interview.

In some situations, like Chanyaporn's, you have to go directly to your questions because your source has little time. But if there is time, you can engage in some general conversation — about the weather, the national football team or something in the news — with your source first. Then go on to your questions when your source appears comfortable.

NOTE-TAKING AND RECORDERS

Using a recorder ensures accuracy. Nobody can claim they were misquoted. Using a recorder, you can also focus on what your source is saying.

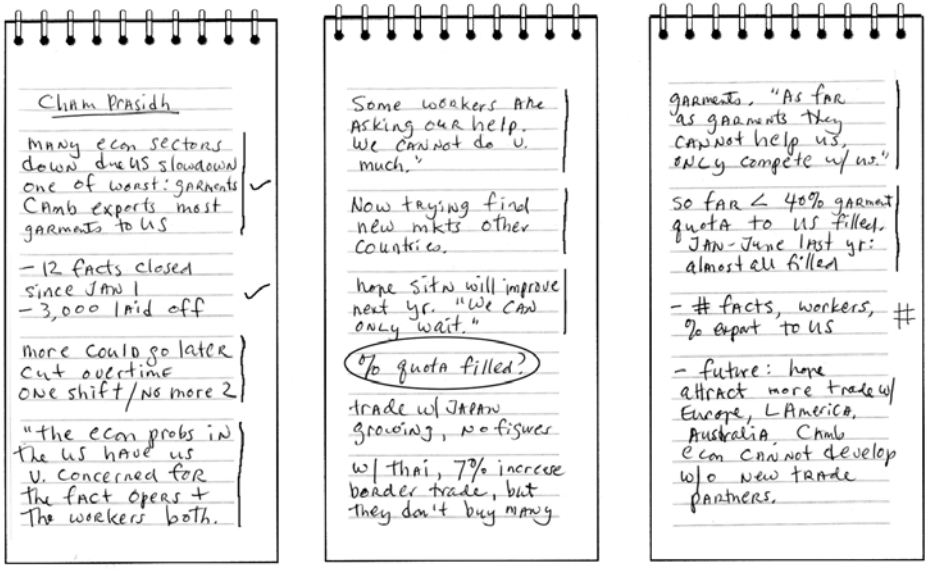
But some people get nervous around recorders. They don't want to talk much when they know that every word is being recorded. Using recorders also takes time. When you are on deadline, you often don't have time to find the right quotes. And recorders can fail. Carry extra batteries and make sure they are fully charged. Also take notes as a back-up, and always try to note 'landmarks' in the interview by using the counter or time elapse indicator. This will speed up accurate retrieval of full quotes later.

It's not easy to take notes while you are listening. If your source is speaking too fast, politely ask the source to slow down. If the source said something you were not able to write down, ask him or her to repeat it. Tell the source you want to make sure you write accurate notes of what he or she is saying. The source will appreciate your good intentions.

In any case, you should have some kind of shorthand. You can learn the standard shorthand. Most reporters create their own. For example, a "b/c" could stand for "because." "Gov" means "government." A "$" sign for "money."

You don't need to write down every word. Write down key phrases and figures, and make an outline of the person's comments. From experience, you will know what good quotes are, and write them down in full when you hear them.

Below are some pages of a reporter's notebook for the story we saw in Chapter



Sample notes

3, about how the slowing of the U.S. economy is hurting Cambodia's garment industry.

The reporter omits most articles (the, a) and prepositions (to, in, etc.), focusing on the key words. The exception is in the quotations, where the reporter wants to make sure he or she has all the words exactly as they were said. The reporter writes "econ" for economy, "Camb" for Cambodia, "facts" for factories, and so on. The reporter circles a question he or she wants to ask the minister later in the interview. The reporter writes a reminder to get background figures needed for the story, and puts a # next to it so he or she will immediately see what needs to be done upon arrival at the office.

The minister spoke about several topics. The reporter decides to write about the U.S. slowdown and the garment industry. So he or she puts a line next to all the paragraphs on that theme. That way, it's easy to see what material belongs in the story. The reporter puts a check mark next to what he or she thinks may be the lead.

ASK "WHY" AND "HOW" QUESTIONS

For the most part, ask questions that encourage your sources to explain or elaborate.

Avoid questions that can be answered with a short response, such as "yes" or "no" or other one-word replies. Examples:

- "You're running for office, aren't you?"
- "Are you going to achieve that goal?"

Instead, ask questions that start with a "why" or "how." Examples:

- "Why did you decide to run for office?"
- "How do you plan to achieve that goal?"

There are times when it's useful to ask "yes" or "no" questions, for instance when a source does not seem willing to give a clear answer. The reporter may need to phrase the question in such a way that the source has no option but to confirm or deny. An example: "Is it true or not?"

KEEP QUESTIONS SHORT

Some journalists like to hear themselves talk. They ask several long questions at one time. But sources might get impatient and confused. By the time they have answered the first question, they have forgotten the other questions. Keep your questions direct and simple.

LISTEN, BE ALERT AND LOOK CAREFULLY

Your job is to listen to your sources, not lecture them or argue with them. Keep your opinions to yourself. That doesn't mean you're simply a note-taker. You must listen carefully and critically. Think about what is being said. Do the answers and comments make sense? Did the source really answer your question? Think about what he or she is saying, not just about what question you will ask next.

Be alert for anything unusual. If the source says something interesting that you did not expect, be ready to switch direction and follow the new angle. Good journalists often go into an interview expecting a certain kind of story, and come out with a completely different one.

During the interview, note the way the source responds to questions. Does the

Is there more to your subjects than greets the eye?

source make a fist or point a finger when making a point? Does the source constantly move his or her legs as if he or she is nervous? Also note the surroundings of the source's home or office. Recording these details can bring the story to life.

DON'T BE AFRAID OF "STUPID" QUESTIONS

If your source gives a complex or vague answer, ask him or her to explain. You can say, "I want to make sure I clearly understand this so I can explain it in simple terms to my readers."

When sources start speaking in jargon, don't be afraid to ask them what they are talking about. For instance, a medical doctor might say that a patient is at "elevated risk for myocardial infarction." If you ask what that is, the doctor might say, in plain English, "at risk of a heart attack."

Often a source refers to groups or agencies by their acronyms, or abbreviations. An official might say, "We hope to bring this up at the ADMM+3." A general journalist has every right to ask, "What is that?" Answer: The Asian Defense Ministers' Meeting, plus China, India and Japan.

If a source explains a complicated process, whether it's about manufacturing or medicine, it's good to repeat back what you think you have learned. You can tell your source what your understanding is: "Let me make sure I understand correctly. You're saying that ...." That gives the source a chance to correct any misunderstandings. Most sources are willing to help you understand. They want to make sure your article is accurate.

There are, of course, stupid questions. Don't ask a top official how to spell his or her name. Don't ask a banker what an interest rate is. You should know the answers to these ahead of time.

HANDLING "NO COMMENT"

Don't give up if a source at first refuses to comment. Ask the question in a different way. If that doesn't work, tell the source it's in his or her best interest to give his or her side of the story. Explain that if he or she gives no comment, you will have to say this in your story. The source knows that looks bad — readers will think he or she is hiding something. You also can tell the source that your story will be less

accurate and not balanced without his or her comments.

But finally, you must respect the source's right not to comment. In general, don't write that the source "refused" to comment. Say he or she "declined" to comment. It's more neutral.

WHEN A SOURCE STILL DOESN'T ANSWER

Politicians like to talk on without really answering your question. If that happens, repeat the question. If that doesn't work, rephrase the question. As a final effort, ask the source about rumors or criticism you have heard. If the source knows you already have the other side of the story, he or she may provide a more direct answer.

TRY SILENCE

Sometimes a source answers briefly and incompletely, then becomes silent. Instead of going right on to your next question, wait a moment. Don't be embarrassed to allow a period of silence. Most people don't like silence, so it is likely that the source will continue talking. Your silence tells him or her that you are waiting for further explanation.

WHEN THEY TALK AND TALK ...

When the source starts talking about something unrelated to your interview, you have two options. One is to let the source go on and hope that he or she will say something interesting. But if time is short, you'll have to politely interrupt: "That's very interesting. Thank you for your insight. Getting back to (the main point)..."

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS: GETTING SPECIFICS

Sources often answer questions in a general way. But the reporter needs details to better understand the story, and to paint a better picture for the reader. To get more details, reporters must ask good follow-up questions.

If a police official tells you two cars collided at a major intersection, ask if there were any injuries. If he tells you three people were hurt, ask who they were, what kind of injuries they had and what hospitals they were taken to. Were there any criminal charges or fines? How long was traffic delayed?

If a politician says his life has been threatened, ask for examples.

If a CEO says his company plans to open 10 new branches, ask where, and when, and how many people will be employed. And so on. Only by getting many details can you build a story that will answer all of the reader's questions.

One of the biggest challenges for reporters is when something newsworthy but unexpected comes up during an interview or press conference. Sometimes you may not be ready to ask a good follow-up question. If you need more time to think, ask, "Why is that?" Or, "What do you mean?" Or, "Could you tell me more about that?" Such questions will keep the interview going.

DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

Sometimes you need to ask sensitive or tough questions that you would prefer not to ask. You just have to force yourself to do so. You may feel embarrassed, for instance, to ask celebrities about their families or personal lives. But your readers will want

Some say there is more to life than documents

to know the answers. The answers could make the difference between an ordinary story and a good story. You might begin such questions by saying something like, "I'm sorry. But I have to ask you this ..." Or, "Would you be comfortable talking about …"

Sometimes you need to get a response from a person who has been accused of wrongdoing. Explain that you want to be balanced and fair. Explain that this is a chance for him or her to clarify or correct information that might be wrong.

In these circumstances, ask the basic, easier questions first. Ask your most difficult questions last. If the person refuses to answer the difficult questions and ends the interview, at least you got some information from the meeting.

If the source hangs up the phone or closes the door in your face, don't worry about it. You are a reporter. It's your duty to try and get a response.

PROFILE INTERVIEWS

The goal of a profile is to shine light on a person's character. That means you must get a source to relax and to speak freely. It's important to conduct the interview at a place where the subject is comfortable, whether at home or at a favorite restaurant.

You must prepare carefully for such an interview. Your source will be pleased that you made the effort. Can you refer to an article that he or she once wrote? Do you know what schools he or she attended? Do you know anything about the subject's hobbies and interests? What do other people say about the person you are profiling?

It may take time for the source to open up and become friendly. Good reporters often go back to interview their profile subjects a second or third time. In profile interviews, you should observe how the subject behaves. If you have time, try to watch the subject at home or at work or doing a hobby. Good stories show people doing things.

ENDING THE INTERVIEW

Thank the source for his or her time. But don't forget to ask three final questions:

- Is there anything important that I've forgotten to ask?
- Do you recommend speaking to anyone else who knows about this subject?
- Can I call you back if I have further questions? (Get home phone numbers, mobile numbers and e-mail addresses if possible. Ask the source to contact you to clarify any statements.) ■

CHAPTER 7: USING DOCUMENTS AND THE INTERNET

Whenever possible, reporters look for documents that confirm or add to what people are saying. A document is anything with information that has been written down or keyed in. It can be a piece of paper or data stored in a computer. Documents include press releases, telephone directories, budgets, reports, government statistics, e-mails, text messages and so on. Photographs and audio recordings are also important research materials.

Your story is stronger and more believable if you cite a document to support your points. If somebody talks about a letter or report during an interview, ask for a copy, either in print or in digital form. When sources give you tips, ask them to support their claims with documents.

You probably often receive reports from the government, NGOs or international agencies such as the World Bank. See if the report contains a strong message. Focus on any recommendations it makes for improving things. Then look for examples, quotations or figures from the document that support these recommendations.

Many agencies release reports on a regular basis. Try to get copies of the important ones before they are officially released. That will give you more time to read and understand them. If the reports are technical or complicated, ask experts to explain them to you.

Sometimes books, reports and other documents are issued under embargo. An embargo means you are not allowed to publish the information until a clearly stated date and time. After that date, the contents can be made public. If you have advance access to an embargoed document, you are being taken on trust. You should always respect the conditions under which you have been granted early access to such material — especially if you want to enjoy similar access in the future.

Public access to documents varies from country to country. But you may be surprised at what exists. Consider:

- Property records
- Police reports
- Legislative proposals
- Court documents
- Budgets
- Company statements and annual reports
- Environmental reports
- Logging concessions
- Government economic reports
- Records of council meetings

It is not always easy to find out what documents exist, but one of the first things you should do is try to understand how different institutions work. What kinds of information do they have to report on a regular basis? In what form does the report come? Which unit and which official releases that report?

When reporters formally request documents from the government,

Everybody is potentially an interesting story

it often takes a long time to get them. Sometimes reporters need friendly sources to help them gather this information.

By searching through such documents, reporters may be able to expose wrongdoing and abuse of power. In some countries, reporters can check documents to see who is giving money to politicians. Then they look at reports to see how the government is spending its money. They try to find a connection: Did any of those people who gave money to politicians also receive government contracts worth a lot of money? Such reports show who has influence and who uses the government to get rich. This is an example of what is called investigative journalism.

ALWAYS VERIFY

Be careful: documents can be misleading or false. You should try to verify them. This is especially true with the Internet. It's easy for anybody to post anything on a website, or to create phony documents, photographs or reports. Just because something is online does not mean it is true. This applies also to stories that have appeared previously in your own newspaper. If you are not careful in using information from earlier stories, you may repeat those mistakes.

AND TALK TO PEOPLE

A story based on one document alone is boring to read. And it is unbalanced. Get comments from experts and from people affected by what is described in the document. Look for real-life examples to make the story interesting. If the report is about poverty reduction, visit a slum in your community and talk to people while making observations. If the report is about a new agricultural program to improve crop production, talk to the farmers involved to see how they benefit. ■

CHAPTER 8: THE LEAD

THE CHALLENGE

Many journalists say the hardest thing about writing is deciding how to start. The first words of the story are the most important. If the lead is interesting, readers will finish the story. If it's not interesting, they'll turn the page.

Once the lead is written, the next challenge is to organize the rest of the story.

How should information be ordered to make the most sense? Even the most experienced writers often have trouble with organization. They have collected a lot of information. It is hard to decide what information should be used, and what should be left out.

In features, the ending of the story also is important. Some writers end their stories with the least important information. Others like to leave the reader with a strong impression of the story's theme. Sometimes it's a strong quotation. Finding the right ending can be difficult.

THE WRITING PROCESS

Writing is a process that does not begin when the reporter sits down at the computer. Writing is thinking. It begins as soon as the reporter comes up with an idea for a story. And it continues through the reporting phase: finding a focus, asking questions and collecting details. Reporters think about the information as they gather it. Then they analyze the information to see if it makes sense. Finally, they put it in an order that readers can easily understand.

For good writing, journalists first need good reporting. If they are having problems writing a story, it is often because they did not talk to enough people, or did not gather enough information. If they have not done enough reporting, the story will not be clear in their minds.

There are two types of leads: direct leads and delayed leads.

The direct lead tells the reader the main theme or point of the story right away — in the first sentence.

A delayed lead usually starts with an anecdote (a very short story), or an example of a person in a particular situation or a description of a scene. These illustrate the main point of the story, or set the mood for the story. Later, the writer tells the reader directly what the main point is.

Take careful notes to help set the scene clearly

The type of lead you use depends mostly on whether you are writing hard news or features.

DIRECT LEADS

Direct leads are best for hard news. They often contain the most important information about what happened, such as the most important of the 5Ws and H. The best leads are written in the subject-verb-object structure that we mentioned earlier.

Look at this lead from the *Vientiane Times* in Laos:

> *The Japanese government has agreed to fund rural roadwork in Houaphan province, as part of the campaign to reduce opium poppy cultivation.*

The lead contains Who (the Japanese government), What (agreed to fund rural roadwork), Where (in Houaphan province) and Why (to reduce opium cultivation).

The following lead is from the *Bangkok Post*:

> *Nine people were killed and 11 injured when a drag racer lost control and slammed into a crowd of spectators at racetrack Bangkok Drag Avenue in Khlong Luang district on Saturday night.*

The lead contains the Who (nine spectators and 11 others), What (were killed and injured), Where (a racetrack in Khlong Luang district) and When (Saturday night).

DELAYED LEADS

Delayed leads are good for features. The writer usually begins with an interesting example or anecdote about a person or incident to illustrate the main point of the story. That gets the reader involved in the story.

But when using a delayed lead, it is important to get to the point of the story in the first few paragraphs. Otherwise, readers will soon wonder what you're trying to say, why they should be reading the story.

Of course you could begin a feature with the main point instead of an example, anecdote or scene. But it usually is not as effective because it is not as specific and not as easy for the reader to identify with.

For a story about a Thai woman who said she had found her lost child, *The Nation* newspaper chose a delayed lead:

> *Huad Susaeng, 31, did not recognize the skinny, dirty little girl she spotted begging on a Phuket street last week. But something made her stop and offer a 10-baht coin. The child looked at her intently, ignoring the money.*
>
> *"Mom?" the girl asked softly, as tears began pouring down her grimy face.*
>
> *That word — and the million-to-one chance meeting — ended three years of tragic separation that shattered two lives …*
>
> *"When we arrived at the scene, the mother and daughter were still hugging each other and crying," said a police officer, who had been alerted by Huad.*
>
> *Kesorn Manpook, seven, was kidnapped three years ago by a Cambodian gang from a relative's house in Khon Kaen. Heartbroken Huad mounted a desperate search but finally gave up hope of seeing her little girl again.*

The writer begins with the chance meeting on the street, then goes on to the main point — the mother's long search for her little girl, who had been kidnapped.

If you wrote the story with a direct lead, it might read something like this:

A woman who had spent three years searching for her missing daughter found her last week begging on a street in Phuket.

But the story has much less impact.

A common way to do a feature on a trend, disaster or something else that affects many people is to start with a short story about one of those people.

The *Phnom Penh Post* did a feature about poor families who journeyed to Cambodia's Ratanakiri province to do dangerous work in gem mines. The feature began by describing one man's search:

At 15 meters below surface level in his narrow slit tunnel, what Puy fears most is that the feeble flame of the candle he carries will go out, leaving him alone in the stifling darkness.

Another way to begin a feature is to set the scene.

Here is the beginning of a story about a "Burmese" town near Bangkok, written by a Thai journalist:

Mon monks pray at a wedding ceremony for a Burmese couple. The groom, in white, long-sleeved shirt and gold-colored longyi, a sarong-like garment, and the bride in a pink traditional blouse and longyi, pay homage to the elders. A traditional wedding song and chatting of the people fills the air.

Then the scene moves to the couple greeting the visitors.

Newlyweds Min Tun Thein, 22, and Mi Thuzar Tun, 20, are watching their wedding ceremony recorded on video in their small room at the Shrimp Market flat block. The live wedding was celebrated a few days ago in front of their room. A "Welcome" sign in the Burmese language still hangs there.

The couple is among an estimated 200,000 Burmese migrant workers living in Maha Chai, a port city of Samut Sakhon province.

There are also conversational leads that make readers think, and that grab their attention.

For example, the beginning of another story from *The Nation*:

These child workers might be a good lead

Imagine Bangkok without electricity poles, power and telephone lines.

Barring possible legal challenges, that vision could soon become a reality thanks to an ambitious Bangkok Administration (BMA) scheme.

The BMA may award a contract to US construction firm Pro-Dive Inc to build new tunnels to keep unsightly telephone and electricity wires underground. The project is part of the BMA's plan to keep the horizon clear, enhancing the city's landscape.

DO NOT "BURY" THE LEAD

In writing hard news stories, many reporters fail to put the main point or angle of the story up high. For example, they may start a story on a meeting with who attended the meeting, instead of what action was taken there. In other words, they "bury" the news deep in the story.

Take a look at this news report from Laos:

Borikhamsay Province Agriculture and forestry planning office Head Bounkham Phommachuk reported that the province's farmers started to harvest wet season rice in October.

To date, harvesting has been completed on 19,530 ha (80 percent) of the total 24,792 ha.

Rewrite it this way:

Farmers in Borikhamsay Province have harvested nearly 80 percent of their wet season rice crop, a government official said.

About 19,530 ha out of the total of 24,792 ha have been harvested, said Bounkham Phommachuk, the head of the province's Agriculture and Forestry Planning Office.

Battambang: everyone wants to work there

The new version makes the lead easier to read by removing the official's name and long title. It also focuses on the news — the harvest — instead of the official, who is only the source of the news. It focuses on the specifics (80 percent has been harvested) instead of the general (that harvesting has begun).

Take a look at how this story from a Cambodian-language newspaper begins. The "waist string" refers to a string many Cambodians wear, believing it protects them.

> *Oh! Battambang my sweetheart! This is a song which Mr. Sin Sisamuth sang famously in the '60s and '70s. From the Sangkum Reastr Niyum era until the present era, which man does not want to go to be the governor of Battambang? And which policeman, military police and customs official does not want to get hold of a post in Battambang? Because Battambang is a province with the biggest economic gateway after Phnom Penh city and Kampong Cham town, the same as Kampong Som, too. But those who want to go, the majority are unable to go, and those who can go must have a waist string, and generally speaking they must have dollars for the big brothers [gangs] so they can have a chance. But for this second term, Battambang especially is not easy to gobble up like the previous term because Battambang at this time is facing serious insecurity after Phnom Penh city, where almost every day there are thefts, robberies and shooting to kill people and in particular the occurrences that are difficult to crack down, which are groups of big brothers who are the children of provincial and ministerial officials.*
>
> *The information from [the newspaper's] correspondent based in Battambang has reported that on the night of 31 July at about 10 o'clock a grenade was thrown onto the roof of Bopha Tip dancing bar and that grenade rolled down and exploded, causing one policeman to die and injuring five other policemen along with people nearby, five of whom were also wounded.*

The news here is the explosion and the people hurt. But the story gets to that only after a very long paragraph in which the newspaper comments on the town.

Better to write it this way:

> *A policeman was killed and 10 other people injured in a grenade attack on a nightclub in Battambang on the night of July 31.*

Here's another buried lead, from a Burmese newspaper:

> *Yangon – The fourth donation ceremony for construction of Thabyinnyu Pagoda was held at Dhammaythaka Sarthintaik on Ward 5 in Mayangon Township this morning, attended by Secretary-1 of the State Peace and Development Council Lt-Gen Khin Nyunt.*
>
> *The ceremony was also attended by Dr Khin Win Shwe, wife of Secretary-1 Lt Gen Khin Nyunt, Minister for Industry-1 U Aung Thaung, Minister for Mines Brig-Gen Ohn Myint, Minister for Information Maj-Gen Kyi Aung, Minister for Progress of Border Areas and National Races and Development Affairs Col Thein Nyunt, Minister for Transport Maj-Gen Hla Myint Swe, Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement Brig-Gen Pyi Sone, Minister for Electric Power Maj-Gen Tin Htut, Minister for Sports Brig-Gen Seign Win, Minister for Health Maj-Gen Ket Sein, Minister for Religious Affairs Maj-Gen Sein Htwa, Chaiman of Yangon City Development*

Committee Mayor U Ko Lay, officials of the Office of State Peace and Development Council, District and Township Peace and Development Councils and well-wishers.

Secretary of Work Committee Deputy Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation Brig-Gen Khin Maung briefed Secretary-1 Lt-Gen Khin Nyunt on progress of work for construction of the pagoda and Chairman of Finance Subcommittee Deputy Minister for Rail Transportation Thura U Thaung Lwin on cash donations and expenditure for construction of pagoda.

After 207 words and a list of 17 names and long titles, we finally get to some news:

Secretary-1 Lt-Gen Khin Nyunt and ministers accepted donations amounting to K 17.5 million.

A better lead would be:

Top general Khin Nyunt and other officials collected 17.5 million kyat in donations yesterday for construction of a new pagoda in Mayangon Township.

Perhaps you think you should list all of the senior officials who attended. If so, do that after you've reported the news.

DO NOT OVERLOAD THE LEAD

It is important to know what belongs in the lead. It's also important to know what does not. Do not crowd the lead with too many ideas, or with details that are not so important and could be mentioned later in the story. You do not need to put all the 5Ws and H in the lead; some of it can go in the second and third paragraphs.

This lead from a newspaper in Myanmar gets it right:

PARLIAMENTARY democracy era newspapers sold like hot cakes at a rare book show — and more are still available at the publisher's office for interested customers.

Zaw publishing house held its rare book show from October 6 to 24, at Lawkanat Gallery on Pansodan Street, Yangon. This was the fourth such exhibition, and featured works by the Venerable Ledi Sayadaw. Would-be readers in search of more can contact the company at 82, 37th Street, Yangon.

The next example is from the *Viet Nam News*. The lead contains What, Who and When, while the Where and Why are in the second paragraph.

HANOI – Breast feeding infants is an effective way to prevent them from being exposed to unsafe foods, said Dr Jean-Marc Olivé, World Health Organization Representative to Viet Nam, yesterday.

At a press briefing held by the WHO and the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) in response to the contaminated milk scandal in China, Olivé said the scandal highlighted the need to breast-feed infants for at least six months to help enhance growth and brain development.

Now take a look at this lead from an English-language Thai newspaper about a currency swap, which is an agreement to borrow foreign currency in order to keep a country's own currency stable:

Thailand and Japan will sign a preliminary agreement on a US$3 billion (Bt135 billion) bilateral currency-swap arrangement when their finance ministers meet in Honolulu on the sidelines of the Asian Development Bank meeting next week.

Always ask yourself what the story is really about

Is it so important that the agreement will be signed by the ministers in Honolulu during the bank meeting? Is not the agreement itself the news? And what is the purpose of the agreement?

The AP lead on the same story reported the news clearly and concisely:

> *Thailand and Japan have reached general agreement for a US$3 billion currency swap to support the baht.*

WHAT'S DIFFERENT HERE?

All good leads should be not only informative, but also interesting. They should not just have the most important information, but also, where possible, tell the reader how this particular event differs from others. Are all car crashes alike? No. Think about how the crash that you are writing about is different from other crashes. Put that in the lead.

Instead of writing:

> *A passenger bus overturned just outside Yangon during a rainstorm yesterday, killing three people.*

Consider writing:

> *A passenger bus overturned just outside Yangon during a rainstorm yesterday, killing three elderly women who were returning home from a relative's funeral.*

Writing the lead is not as easy as following a formula. Who does not always go before What, followed by Where. The order depends on the news event.

If there was a car crash and four people died, the lead might be:

> *Four people were killed yesterday when a car skidded off a wet road in Ho Chi Minh City.*

If the crash was caused by flooding, the lead might focus on Why:

> *Heavy rains and flooding swept a car off the road in Ho Chi Minh City yesterday, killing four people.*

If a top official was in the car, the lead might focus on Who:

> *The finance minister, Mr. XXX, was killed in a car crash in Ho Chi Minh City yesterday.*

If the location is unusual, and no one died, then you might focus on Where:

> *A car smashed into a famous temple in Ho Chi Minh City yesterday after its driver lost control, injuring four people.*

You must think about what aspect of the event is the most important.

List the points you want to make in order of importance

CHOOSING THE "ANGLE"

Sometimes there is no one right way to begin a story. There may be several interesting points of view, or "angles" to the story.

Imagine you just covered a news conference with the finance minister. If he had made a major policy announcement, of course you would lead the story with that. But this time he did not say anything that was particularly important or new. So you could select from several possible aspects of what he said. You could lead with his optimism about next year's GDP growth. Or his comments about controlling inflation. Or about trade relations with China. Any one of those angles could make a good story.

Or, if you're writing about an outbreak of malaria on the Thai-Myanmar border, you can write it from the point of view of the people who are suffering from malaria, or of the doctors and aid workers trying to contain the outbreak, or of the scientists studying the outbreak to try to create more effective malaria medicines.

When you're trying to decide what angle to lead with, one of the questions you should ask yourself is: Who exactly are the people who read my particular newspaper? Are they general readers? Well-educated readers? Specialists? Foreigners? Choose the angle that is most interesting and worthwhile for your particular readers.

TIPS ON FINDING THE LEAD

To find the lead, ask yourself:

- Who did what to whom?
- What is the story really about?
- What's the point of writing about this event?
- What was the most interesting thing about the event?
- What does the reader want to know most about this event?
- What about this event will affect the reader the most?
- If you're covering a speech, ask yourself: Who said what to whom?
- If you're covering a meeting, ask yourself: What action was taken? ■

CHAPTER 9: ORGANIZING THE STORY

After you have chosen the lead, you can shape the rest of your story. You have told your readers the main point or angle. Now you need to explain it. The body of the story must support the lead. How? With details, quotations and background.

But what order do you put them in? Good stories present information in a logical way. What you write in one paragraph will raise questions in the minds of readers. You should answer those questions in the next paragraph. And those answers will in turn suggest what you should write next.

PUTTING YOUR NOTES AND THOUGHTS TOGETHER

Before you start writing, think of the main theme or angle of your story. Then think of the main points you want to make about this theme or angle. List them in order of importance. Try this first without looking at your notes. You will probably be able to remember many of the important points. Then go through your notes and documents (or recordings) to see if there is anything you forgot. Look for details and quotations you want to include to support the main points.

Answer questions raised in one paragraph in the one that follows

You need not include every detail. Good writers select the best details. Knowing what to leave out is just as important as knowing what to include.

HARD NEWS STORIES

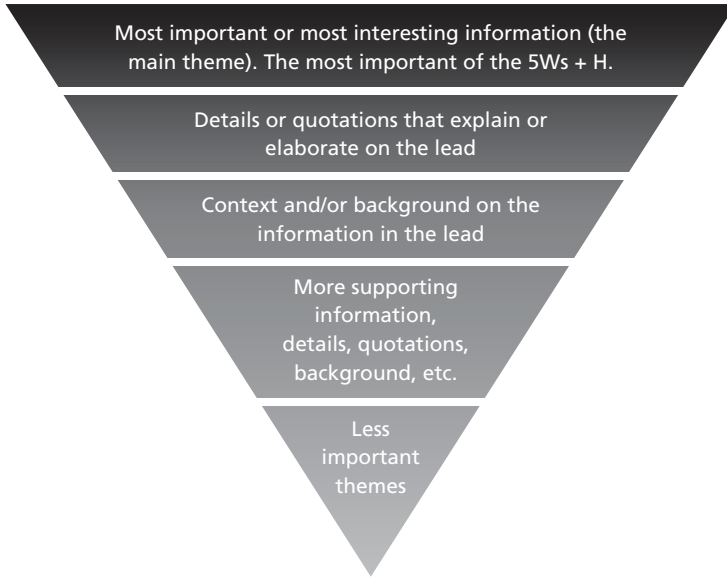
Every country has its traditional stories about how the country was founded, or about its heroes, or about how certain cultural practices started. When we tell these stories, we begin at the beginning, and we end with the result or the most important event. Many novels also are written this way.

But hard news stories are written in the opposite way. Newspaper readers want to know what happened right away. The story structure is called the "inverted pyramid," or an upside-down triangle.

The pyramid is wide on the top. As we go down, it becomes more and more narrow, then becomes a tip. This means the most important elements of your story come first. Then the less-important elements. The story ends with the least important elements.

Generally, the lead answers the most important of the basic questions about the event — the 5Ws and H. The second paragraph gives details or background about the lead. This is followed by more information that supports the lead: quotes, details and background. After you've written all the information about the main theme, you write about the less-important

Conservationists call Chiang Mai "another Bangkok"



themes. Good quotations are attractive to readers, so put those near the top of your story.

Why do journalists use the inverted pyramid?

Readers do not have the time to finish every story. Often, they only read the first few paragraphs. So you must give them the most important information right away. If they want more details, or have time, they can read on. Also, many newspapers don't have much space.

Let's look at a couple of good news stories. This story, which we first saw in Chapter 3, tells us the information concisely and keeps to the theme throughout, without any unnecessary words or details.

CAMBODIAN GARMENT WORKERS STRUGGLING

The lead is a clear account of what happened with the most important information.

Phnom Penh, Cambodia (AP) – The economic slowdown in the United States has forced the temporary closing of at least 12 garment factories in Cambodia so far this year, Commerce Minister Cham Prasidh said yesterday.

So What?: How does this event affect people, and why should they care?

As many as 3,000 workers have been temporarily laid off and more jobs could be lost if the situation does not improve, he said.

Additionally, thousands more people were working fewer hours as many of the 200 garment factories had cut down on overtime and gone from two shifts to one, the minister said.

A quote from the minister mentions both the factories and the U.S. economy.

"The economic problems in the United States have us very concerned for the factory operators and the workers both," he said.

The background and the context — how Cambodia's garment industry and the U.S. economy are linked.

Cambodia's garment industry employs 200,000 people, who earn an average of $40 per month. More than 80 percent of its production is shipped to the United States for retail sale.

The minister said less than 40 percent of Cambodia's annual garment export quota to the United States had been filled even though the year was half over. By comparison, he said, nearly the entire quota for the United States had been filled by the end of June last year.

Here is a story from *The Cambodia Daily*, by IMMF graduate Kay Kimsong. ("Disgruntled" means unhappy.)

DISGRUNTLED TAXI DRIVERS BLOCK ROUTE 6A

A clear description of what caused the traffic jam.

About 20 taxi drivers, angry about the city's new rule preventing them from entering Phnom Penh, blocked a portion of National Route 6A on Tuesday, jamming traffic for an hour.

Details on the lead. Again, simple and clear.

Six fire trucks were called to the scene to disperse the drivers, who were arguing with police and other authorities attempting to stop their vehicles from entering the city.

In the previous story, the background was placed at the end. Here, it must come higher because readers would not understand the story unless they are quickly told what the dispute is about.

Tuesday marked the beginning of the municipality's ban on taxis entering the city from the northern provinces. Officials say the ban is designed to ease traffic congestion and beautify the city.

Taxis are now required to stop at Prek Leap market, located about 5 km outside the city, and transfer their passengers to buses which will take them to Phnom Penh.

The taxi drivers' side of the story, with a quotation from one of them.

Taxi drivers said it was unfair that Ho Wah Genting Transport Co, a Malaysian company, has a license to provide bus transportation from Phnom Penh to Prek Leap and from Prek Leap to the provinces.

The bus company's side of the story, with a quotation from a representative.

"If Ho Wah is allowed to do this, we taxi drivers will make no money because people will get off the bus and get on another one," said Houn Hak, a taxi driver who takes people to and from Kampong Cham province.

The view of another party involved in the story, with a quotation. The use of these three quotations livens up the story and gives readers a sense of the attitudes and emotions involved in the dispute.

Sin Phearom, assistant manager for Ho Wah, said taxi drivers should not interfere with Ho Wah's business because the company received permission from the Ministry of Public Works and the municipality to operate the buses.

He said his company has already tried to help local taxi drivers by cutting down the number of trips from Prek Leap to the provinces from 12 per day to seven.

"If we cannot invest here, we will leave and tell our friends not to come," Sin Phearom said.

Nhem Saran, director of the municipality's Public Works Department, said the taxi drivers should concentrate on improving the quality of their service instead of blaming Ho Wah.

"I think people will choose Ho Wah buses because they are safe, air-conditioned and are comfortable," he said.

Asia is just as modern as it is old

HANDLING MORE THAN ONE MAIN THEME

Many stories have only one theme. But sometimes there are two or more equally important points about a news event.

Let's say the legislature approves two laws: one increases the income tax, the other makes it illegal for children to work. Both are important. If you put both elements in the lead, the first half of your story can focus on the tax. The second half can focus on the age restriction.

For example:

The National Assembly today approved laws that increase income taxes and ban child labor.

In the body of your story, however, you must keep related material together. Present all of the details about the tax first. Then present the details about the child labor law. If your story jumps around

Stand back from the press herd whenever you can

between the two elements, the reader will be confused.

FEATURES

Most news stories are written in the inverted pyramid style, but there are many ways to organize a feature. The graphic below shows one common way.

Features generally use delayed leads. The writer often begins by focusing on one person who faces a problem that other people also face. This is because readers can understand the situation and experience of a specific person better than a statement about the general situation. The person is used as an example or illustration of the general situation. Another common way to begin is to set the scene of the story, perhaps with a colorful description of the place.

After the delayed lead comes a theme paragraph that tells the reader what the story is about. This paragraph links the example or illustration to the body. It is usually placed after the first few paragraphs.

The rest of the story explains the lead and supports it with details, quotations and examples. Often, after the theme paragraph, the writer returns to more details about the person, illustration or scene in the beginning of the story. The feature usually contains a lot of good description and quotations, which give it "color." It often has an ending that leaves the reader with a strong impression of the main theme.

Thus, a feature has a carefully constructed beginning, middle and end, like a good short story or novel.

Here is a feature filled with color, good quotations, meaningful details and explanations of the significance of what is happening. The writer ties together extensive personal observations, document research and interviews. We saw the lead of this story in an earlier chapter as an example of the use of observation and of how to set the scene.

RAPID DEVELOPMENT THREATENS TO TURN ANCIENT TOWN INTO 'ANOTHER BANGKOK'

With descriptions using all the senses, the writer first takes the reader to the scene. He draws the reader into the story and illustrates the main theme.

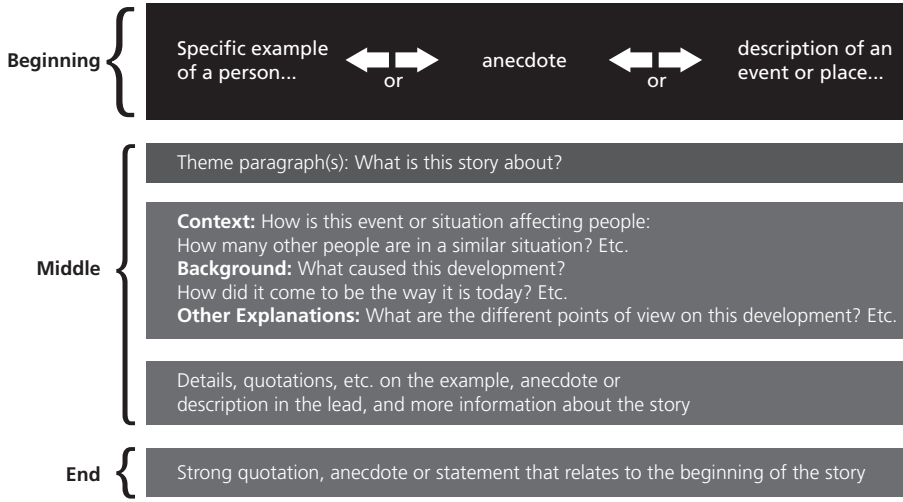
CHIANG MAI, Thailand – At the five main gates of Chiang Mai's old city, people gathered recently for an ancient ceremony called Inthakhin. Buddhist monks in orange-yellow robes chanted as people offered flowers, incense and candles to ask for rain and plentiful crops.

But the honks and roar of traffic jams around the gates blocked out the chants, and fumes from cars and motorbikes overpowered the sweet smell of incense.

These paragraphs continue the colorful descriptions in the introduction and explain the theme of the story. Notice how the specific contrasts between the past and the present are used to show the theme.

Chiang Mai, former capital of the Lanna Thai Kingdom, celebrated its 702nd birthday this year. After Bangkok, which is five centuries younger, it is Thailand's second-most popular city for foreign tourists. Chiang Mai still offers plenty of old-world charms: temples, handicrafts, and nearby ethnic minority hilltribe villages, jungles and waterfalls. Still preserved are the moat and parts of the fortified gates that marked the city's original limits. Wrapped by forested mountains and the Ping River, Chiang Mai has been called the Rose of the North.

But conservationists are calling it "another Bangkok" as rapid expansion has brought traffic jams, pollution, and high-rise condominiums and mega-malls, and has threatened the distinctive cultural traditions of the north. A painting at the newly opened Contemporary Art Museum, entitled "Chiang



Mai 1997," shows car fumes and high-rises beating down on an elephant with tears in its eyes.

These paragraphs give the context and the background. They explain how Chiang Mai got to be the way it is, and where it may be headed in the future.

Chiang Mai's growth has been fuelled in part by the Japanese agricultural businesses and other factories south of the city. But some of the expansion also comes, ironically, from an influx of wealthier people seeking to escape the misery of Bangkok. Just as in Bangkok, in Chiang Mai's suburbs the paddy fields have given way to vast new housing estates, many of them uninhabited because no one can afford them now.

Thailand's current economic downturn has provided some breathing room by halting some of the bigger projects, but there is no doubt what direction Chiang Mai will take once the money returns.

The writer gives more examples of the city's problems, similar to the examples given in the first two paragraphs. Note the use of comparisons (parking lots the size of football fields) and specific details (durians to Barbie dolls to washing machines) so the reader can clearly imagine the scene.

Chiang Mai's first "superstore" opened three years ago. Suddenly, last December three more opened. These huge warehouse-like structures, equipped with parking lots the size of football fields, sell everything from durians to Barbie dolls to washing machines. Offering one-stop convenience and cheaper prices, they are threatening the survival of the small family stores and community fresh markets where people have traditionally shopped.

The French-owned superstore chains Carrefour and Auchan opened the same week as they brought their global battle to Chiang Mai.

The writer places up high in the story a quotation that shows the new value of consumerism in Chiang Mai.

"Our aim is to put all the products in one place and let the customer choose. Every day more and more people come," said Philippe Richard, manager of Auchan, which has 50 cashiers and 10,000 square yards of floor space.

Auchan constructed an underpass on the nearby highway so customers can drive in from all directions. The superstores have worsened the city's traffic and made the roads more dangerous. They are also starting a new era of junk mail. Their advertisement brochures — shiny, full-color evidence of the new competition and consumerism in Chiang Mai — are scattered all over the city, piled on tables, stuffed into mailboxes, slipped under the doors of offices and through the gates of homes.

More examples of problems, backing up the lead and

Researchers now are testing blood lead levels of traffic policemen in Chiang Mai, the same types of tests that have

theme of the story. Note again the specific details.

produced alarming results in Bangkok. They are monitoring the Ping River, which has been polluted by pesticides used by farmers upstream. As the city grows, it is producing more garbage than its disposal and waste treatment facilities can handle.

The writer has described many of the city's problems. Now he provides balance and perspective to the story.

The problems should not be exaggerated, however. The authorities have banned the construction of high-rises near temples. The moat surrounding the old city has been cleared of garbage and equipped with a cleaning system. In terms of population, Chiang Mai is still only one-fortieth the size of Bangkok.

This very short paragraph provides a smooth transition to a sub-theme: not only are the physical structures in Chiang Mai changing, but also its social and cultural ways.

More worrisome to many people are the changes in the city's way of life.

The vices more often associated with Bangkok include a corrupt scheme last year in which army officers and city employees tried to squeeze money from vendors at the Night Bazaar, a popular tourist spot downtown. Also last year, a policeman angered after his girlfriend left him for a foreigner shot and wounded two Italian tourists at Chiang Mai airport.

The point about changing ways is made with both background and observation.

More people are proudly showing off the mobile phones that are favorite status symbols of Bangkok's spoiled rich youth. At a restaurant specializing in the "khantoke" dinner, a variety of spiced northern Thai dishes served with sticky rice, a guitarist sang not local tunes but American country songs by John Denver.

Three strong, concise quotations — not the kind of statements you usually hear from academics.

"The new greed is robbing us of our simplicity," said Udom Roongruangsri, director of the Center for Promotion of Arts and Culture at Chiang Mai University.

Udom is completing six years of work on an encyclopedia of northern Thai culture. He called the book "the last citadel, the last wall, before our civilization is finished."

Udom said the traditional culture is being threatened partly because under Thailand's highly centralized political system, Chiang Mai is governed largely by officials sent by Bangkok, and not by native people. Bangkok values, he said, are dominating.

"I try to teach my daughter the northern dialect, but she does not accept it because of her teachers, her friends, and the TV," he said.

Other conservationists complain about some of the "cultural" shows organized for tourists by government officials

who know little about the local culture. They say Chiang Mai's history and heritage are being distorted, used to entertain and bring in money rather than to educate or encourage cultural appreciation. At the Night Bazaar, entertainers regularly perform traditional dances on a stage in order to draw customers to the restaurants. Ethnic Thai women wearing costumes of the Lisu hilltribe have been seen performing dances of the Akha hilltribe.

Udom said Chiang Mai people no longer consider the temple as a real part of their community. Instead, he said, people now go to the temple only when they have a particular need they want fulfilled — "just as they go to noodle shops only when they are hungry."

During the recent Inthakhin ceremony, a couple drove up to the 13th-century city gate in their shiny new white Honda Accord and left 20 seconds later after leaving a contribution in an envelope. Above the loudspeakers broadcasting the chants of the monks was a large bright yellow banner inviting people to come and pray. Featured on the banner: the symbol of a major mobile phone company. A few feet away, paying no attention to the chants, three young women chatted happily as they looked at a superstore ad.

The writer wraps up the story by returning to the scene at the beginning, again with colorful and specific details. The observation on the young women makes the reader think a bit about the story as he or she finishes it. This feature has a carefully constructed beginning, middle and end. It is unified by a single main theme. The quotations and details keep the reader reading to the end. And all the quotations and details are relevant to the theme.

OTHER STRUCTURES

There are many kinds of stories and ways of organizing them. They are very difficult to teach in a textbook. If you are unsure about how to organize the feature you are working on, it's best to get a good editor or trainer to take a look at it with you. Some other types of features are:

- A news feature, or news analysis, takes a timely event that has been reported in a breaking story and explains how it happened, what it meant, and what may happen next. This could be about, for example, why children die during monsoon-season floods in Vietnam, or what the entry of new members may mean to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.
- Human interest stories — about anything from animals, children, a tragedy to a victory against great odds — can be funny or sad. These stories appeal to the emotions of readers.
- Profiles shed light on the character of a person.
- Travel stories describe the character of a place.
- Investigative stories are particularly complex. They are written after extensive planning, interviewing, visits to places, research of documents, analysis and so on. Such stories usually report what someone, perhaps in the government or at a big business, is trying to keep secret. ■

CHAPTER 10: USING QUOTATIONS

Quotations are important because they add credibility and authority to a story. They support the information in the lead. They also add emphasis to major points of the story. Through quotations, readers can "hear" the information directly from the source. And they can get a sense of the source's attitudes, emotions and character. Quotations add variety and pace to the story. The reader does not just get line after line of information.

A story without quotations can be very boring.

WHEN TO QUOTE, WHEN NOT TO QUOTE

Use only quotations that summarize a situation well, contain strong feelings or images, or show something about a person's character.

Here are some quotations from survivors of the cyclone in Myanmar. They were collected by a Burmese reporter for *Agence France-Presse* (AFP). The first is from a man who was the only survivor in his family.

> *"The storm came into our village, and a giant wave washed in, dragging everything to the sea," said one man in his 20s. "Houses collapsed, buildings collapsed, and people were swept away. I only survived by hanging on to a big tree."*

The next quotation leaves readers with a similar image, and has the feeling of authenticity:

> *"The waves were so strong they ripped off all my clothes. I was left naked hanging in a tree," said one teenage survivor.*

The next quotation is from a Thai resident commenting on the election of Barack Obama as the 44th president of the U.S.

> *"What an inspiration. He is the first truly global US president the world has ever had," said Pracha Kanjananont, a 29-year-old Thai sitting at a Starbuck's in Bangkok. "He had an Asian childhood, African parentage and has a Middle Eastern name. He is a truly global president."*

That is much more colorful and profound than reporting that "people in Bangkok were happy with the result of the election." The quotation has good rhythm as well.

A story without a quote is likely to be very boring

The following quotation, from the *Bangkok Post*, conveys the strong feelings of a major general who was re-assigned to oversee aerobic dances after he became involved in a political dispute.

> *"It is ridiculous to send me, a warrior, to dance at markets," said the major general of the Thai Army when he learned he was given a new assignment by the army chief.*
>
> *"The army chief wants me to be a presenter leading aerobic dancers. I have prepared one dance. It's called the throwing-a-hand-grenade dance," said Maj-Gen. Khattiya Sawasdipol.*

Always look for the best quotations. Good quotes at the beginning draw your reader in. Good quotes in the middle keep your reader going. And a good quote at the end leaves a lasting impression.

When you use a quotation to support the lead, make sure that it adds something new. Don't use a quotation that just repeats the same information already in the lead or body, as in this story:

> *PHNOM PENH, Cambodia – Cambodia announced yesterday that it has eradicated polio, becoming the last country in the Western Pacific region to get rid of the disease.*
>
> *Prime Minister Hun Sen said he was proud to "announce to the whole world for the first time in Cambodian history that polio was fully eradicated from the country."*

Never use quotations that are boring, difficult to understand or express what is obvious. In those cases, just write the

Not everyone wants to be quoted

information in your own words. Many reporters use quotations just because they have them in their notebooks. They want to show their readers that they interviewed sources for the story. Avoid this.

Look at these examples of the bad use of quotations in stories from various publications.

A quotation from a Vietnamese government minister:

> *"Processing rice, subsidiary food crops, coffee and tea as well as timber and other forest products will be counted as the most promising labor-intensive businesses."*

This is the confusing way bureaucrats like to speak. You should write it clearly and simply in your own words — but first you'll have to find out what the minister is trying to say.

A quotation from a United Nations official in Phnom Penh:

> *"I am looking forward to strengthening cooperation and assistance between the Royal Government of Cambodia and the Global Environment Fund."*

That is dry and boring. It is also very vague. And this is just background information, not the type of material you should quote:

> *"Fast food spending per transaction is 40-50 baht, compared with US$7 in Singapore and $12 in the United States."*

With experience, you will develop a sense of when to quote someone, and when not to quote.

AVOID OPENING WITH A QUOTATION

Generally, you should not start a story with a quote. If you do, your readers may be confused. They may not be sure who is speaking or what the story is about.

This was the lead of a Laotian newspaper story:

> *"What bothers me is the way some of the foreign press always tries to accuse Laos without consideration of the facts but following their own fantasies," said Champassak Province Governor Oneneua Phommachanh at the opening of a journalism course in Pakse, the very morning of the intrusion of bandits into Laos through the Lao-Thai Vang Tao-Chong Mek border pass.*

We are not informed until the end of this very long sentence that the governor's statement has something to do with bandits at the border. And even then, it is not clear what happened. What "facts"? What "fantasies"? Quotations are clearer if you first explain the context in which the quotations were said.

So rewrite it this way:

> *Champassak Governor Oneneua Phommachanh yesterday criticized the foreign media for their coverage of an attack on a border post in southern Laos.*
>
> *The governor said foreign reporters portrayed the incident as a rebel attack on the government, but he insisted it was simply a robbery.*
> *"What bothers me..."*

WHO IS TALKING?

If you have different quotations from different speakers, don't just put the quotations on top of each other. The reader will be confused about who is speaking. First introduce the new speaker so it is clear that a second person is speaking.

Wrong: *"I'm not happy with the new budget because it will hurt the poor," the governor said.*

"This budget will eventually force the government to raise taxes," the Senate president added.

Right: *"I'm not happy with the new budget because it will hurt the poor," the governor said.*

The Senate president added, "This budget will eventually force the government to raise taxes."

"SAID" IS ENOUGH

In most cases, use quotations with the word "said." This is a simple, clear and neutral word. Don't worry that you are repeating "said" too many times; readers will not notice it. Words like "claimed," "declared," "asserted" or "argued" all have different meanings. For example, when you say that someone "claimed," that means you are expressing doubt about the person's statement.

NEVER CHANGE QUOTATIONS!

Quotation marks mean that whatever appears between them is exactly what the source said. Never change quotations, even if you only want to make them clearer to your readers.

However, you can delete the "ums" and "ahs" and other meaningless fragments that people normally use when they are speaking. And some journalists believe it is OK to correct small grammatical errors.

If you use a quotation, use it exactly as it was spoken. Otherwise, use only part of the quotation. Or just say the same thing in your own words without the quotation marks. That is called paraphrasing.

Do not take quotations out of context. That means you tell the reader exactly what the source meant when he made the statement. In the interview with you, the source may have added important qualifications to the one quotation that you used. Or he she may have elaborated on it. Or he or she may have said it only as a joke. You have to tell the reader the context.

Imagine you are interviewing a football player. He is talking about football players more than 35 years old, and says, "I am the best." You can quote him. But you must make clear to your readers the full meaning of the quotation. He was talking about his ability to play football, not about something else. He was comparing himself specifically to other players more than 35 years old, not to all players in general.

WATCH OUT FOR STRINGS OF QUOTATIONS

If used well, quotations can make your story stronger. But too many journalists write stories by simply putting one quotation after another after another. They do this especially when covering statements, speeches or news conferences. That's lazy journalism, and it makes stories confusing and boring. You need to make clear to your readers which quotations are important, and what the context is. ■

CHAPTER 11: TIPS ON GOOD WRITING

THE FOUNDATION: REPORTING

Good writing includes attention to many things. But first, you must recognize that you cannot write a good story unless you did a good job gathering information. Only with solid reporting can you understand the subject well enough to write about it. Good reporting produces the details, quotations and focus that make the writing strong.

We have mentioned the importance of bringing your story to life with strong quotes and descriptions, and anecdotes and examples of real people. We have also discussed the importance of writing specific details that your readers can immediately see, hear and feel instead of vague, general concepts.

CLARIFY, SIMPLIFY

In Chapter 4, we mentioned clarity as one of the essentials of a good story. To achieve clarity, your writing should be direct, using the subject-verb-object construction. It should be concise, using no unnecessary words. You should use everyday language. Avoid jargon, which is the specialized language of professions and areas of work. Also avoid clichés, which are phrases that have been used so often they are almost meaningless. For example, some journalists like to write about "sprawling refugee camps," "posh resorts" and "political uncertainty fueled by speculation."

Do not write long, complicated sentences. Try not to put more than one idea into each sentence. Use simple words and phrases that are easy to understand. Do not try to impress your readers with your knowledge of big words. For example, instead of "demobilization," you could say "reducing the size of the military." It's a bit longer, but easier to understand. Of course, simplifying usually means using shorter words instead of longer ones: like "rooms" instead of "accommodation," and "start" instead of "initiate."

If you have a hard time writing a story, pretend you're telling it to a poor farmer from the countryside, or to an uncle who owns a shop in the market. How would you tell the story to them? Good writing has a natural, conversational quality. It should be the way we talk. Do not try to impress your readers with a flowery writing style. You are supposed to be a communicator and a story-teller. If people cannot understand you without having to consult a dictionary, you are wasting their time and patience.

USE STRONG VERBS AND NOUNS

Is the wedding music playing, or is it *blasting*?

Is the economy improving, or is it *rebounding*?

Use concrete, specific verbs. Active verbs are better than passive verbs. "The police *arrested* the suspects" is better than "the suspects *were arrested* by the police." Concrete, specific nouns are better than general, vague nouns. "A teenager" is better than "a young man." Avoid using too many adjectives and adverbs. Often they just add words but have little impact.

Strong verbs and nouns leave readers with a memorable impression, but don't

Reporters and lottery buyers study their numbers

exaggerate. Not every disagreement among politicians is a "heated battle." Sometimes it's only a quarrel or debate. Not every difficulty for the government is a "crisis." Sometimes it is just a problem.

SHOW, DON'T TELL

Use specific details and examples to illustrate general points, and specific words and phrases whenever you can:

- Don't just tell your readers the park is "beautiful." The word is so vague it is hard to imagine. In what way is the park beautiful? Describe the kinds of flowers, trees and ponds, the colors and the smells.
- Don't just tell them the house is "old." Show them by describing the peeling paint, rusty gate and broken windows.
- Don't just tell them the vegetable seller is "happy." Show them by describing how her toothy smile fills up her face from ear to ear.

Good reporting, based on good observations, makes readers feel as if they are there with you. Make your readers see, hear, feel, understand.

It is also important to show people doing things. Good stories, especially features, show people in action so that readers can picture the whole, moving scene.

Seng Sophoan, a Cambodian journalist, described a 17-year-old girl recalling how she was sold to a brothel. She could have written that the girl "was crying," but instead she wrote, much more effectively:

Sok Na grabbed the long sleeve of her brown blouse to wipe away a tear.

HANDLING NUMBERS

Numbers are important because they help convince readers of the main point. If you are writing a story about the spread of HIV, readers will want to know how many people have the virus. But most numbers mean very little unless they are compared to other numbers. If you mention the number of AIDS cases this year, compare it to the number last year. Compare both numbers to the overall population.

The same goes for budgets. Every story about an agency's new budget should compare it to the previous year's budget. Is it higher or lower? By how much? If you have numbers for the first quarter of the year, compare them to the numbers for a previous quarter.

This is also important when reporting market prices. Do not just tell readers the new price of a commodity. Compare it to the old price so they know the difference. Calculate the percentage change.

Reporting numbers alone is not enough. You need to explain the reasons behind the change in numbers. Why is HIV on the rise? Why is the budget higher this year? Without these answers, the numbers mean very little.

Choose carefully what numbers you use. If you have too many in your story, readers will go right to sleep.

See if you can stay awake reading this excerpt from a story about rainy season rice production in Laos:

Houaphan had transplanted 9,000 hectares of rice, equal to 80 percent of the total, Sayaboury 11,700 hectares, equal to 53.9 percent of the total, Phongsaly 2,300 hectares, equal to 40 percent of its total, Xieng Khuang 12,155 hectares, equal to 85 percent of its total, Khammuan 35,800 hectares, equal to 50 percent of its total, Savannakhet 85,000 hectares, equal to 79 percent of its total, Saravan 30,000 hectares, equal to 64 percent of its total, Champassack 46,000 hectares, equal to 56 percent of its total, Attapeu 8,000 hectares, equal to 60.6 percent of its total.

Only the most serious reader would continue. There is too much information. It would be better to put the numbers in a separate chart or graphic.

You may have collected a lot of data, but do not empty the entire contents

Show, don't tell

of your notebook into your story. Use only the most important figures. When possible, round off the numbers. Instead of saying 11,235,684 people, write "11.2 million." Instead of saying "48.75 percent" of tourists are Japanese, write "nearly half."

Sometimes figures are hard to understand unless compared with something else we can easily picture. For example, the human body has tens of thousands of kilometers of blood vessels. That is a lot but very hard to imagine. Try writing, "the human body has so many blood vessels they would wrap around the planet twice if laid out in a line." The number has become a picture that is much easier to understand.

A reporter was told that the steel rods inside a large building were pulled so tight they created a force of 8 million pounds. But what does 8 million pounds mean? He asked an engineer, who told him: "That would be like the weight of 220 cars stacked on top of each other." This kind of comparison helps your readers understand just how strong the force is.

RHYTHM AND VARIETY

Good writing has a rhythm to it.

> *First there was the Green Revolution. Now comes the Gene Revolution.*

Bou Saroeun, a former reporter for the *Phnom Penh Post*, wrote this lead for a story about agricultural changes in Thailand.

It is almost like a rhyme. Each sentence has a similar structure. That highlights the differences between the key words: green and gene. This lead sets up a story about foods grown from seeds that have been scientifically changed.

It is also important to vary the length of your sentences.

There is nothing wrong with writing a long sentence like this one if it flows well, and it gives the reader important and interesting information. But follow it with a short one.

TONE

The tone (meaning feel or style) of the piece should be appropriate to the story. If you are writing about an accident that killed several people, the tone should be serious. If you're writing a feature about a man who sells plastic monkeys for a living, the tone can be light and relaxed.

RE-WRITE

When you are finished with a draft of your story, do not be easily satisfied. Go over your story again. Edit yourself and be tough. Ask yourself: Can I make it clearer? Can I make it simpler?

STYLEBOOK

There are rights and wrongs in grammar and spelling. But some words and constructions may have alternatives; there also are different ways to punctuate. To be consistent, all news organizations should have a manual with rules on spellings, punctuation, figures and so forth. By following the stylebook, every reporter and editor will write in the same way. The newspaper will look much more consistent and professional. ■

CHAPTER 12: NEWS RELEASES

Many stories are written from news releases distributed by various sources including governments, businesses, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international agencies such as the United Nations.

But in most cases, you should not simply rewrite a news release. You should consider them just starting points for stories. Sources write releases to promote themselves, their work, cause or product. So the information is often incomplete or one-sided. Or they may simply be poorly written, without the details that news stories require.

Is this a story about small businesses or health hazards?

Good journalists use their creativity and reporting skills to produce good stories from ordinary news releases. They give their readers a complete picture instead of a one-sided rewrite.

If needed, you should call up the source of the release to ask for clarifications or further details. Using your own knowledge or research, add background and context to the topic raised in the release. Get comments from people who may disagree with the information in the release, or provide a different point of view. If there are people affected by the topic mentioned in the release, get comment from them also.

Many releases are written in bureaucratic and technical language. Don't forget to ask yourself, and tell your readers: what does all this mean for real people?

Here's a checklist to consider when an editor drops a news release on your desk:

- Ask yourself: what's the new or interesting information here?
- Double-check the information. Is it accurate?
- Apply the 5Ws and H test. What's missing?
- Find the human interest angle.
- Call the contact person listed on the release for more information.
- Interview other sources. Get "the other side" of the story.

Let's look at a couple of news releases and consider how we would handle them.

On the next page is a release from a United Nations agency. This release contains some good information, and with a little work you can turn it into a good story.

Food security will always be an important story

First you'll need to call the World Food Program office for clarifications before you can write a clear story. For example, have some of the 40,000 people already received the rice? If not, when will they get it? In what provinces are these people? Are they mostly rice farmers? The release says more than 300,000 people fled their homes and are short of food. So in what way are the 40,000 people "the most severely affected?" In the last paragraph, what is meant by "repairing flood damage at the household level" and "undertaking long-term rehabilitation of rural infrastructure?" You need to know so you can explain it to your readers.

NEWS RELEASE
7 SEPTEMBER

WFP SENDING FOOD TO 40,000 VICTIMS OF FLOODS IN CAMBODIA

PHNOM PENH – With a new flood season threatening Cambodia, the United Nations World Food Program is sending emergency food supplies to some 40,000 people whose homes and food stocks have been washed away.

In an initial rapid response to the crisis, WFP is sending a total of 500 metric tons of rice — enough to feed each recipient for a month — to Cambodians identified by

government disaster management officials as the most severely affected flood victims. At the same time, the agency is undertaking missions to assess food needs in the flooded areas so that a bigger operation can be launched if necessary.

"We have to be prepared for further flooding at this time of year," said Rebecca Hansen, WFP Country Director for Cambodia, noting that the 500 tons of rice are coming out of a fund for contingency planning which allows WFP to react within 24 hours in a humanitarian disaster.

"We are concerned because the people needing help have only just now finished rebuilding their communities after the major flood of the Mekong River Delta last year," added Hansen. "Their lives are too fragile to withstand all these new shocks."

More than 300,000 people in eastern and southern Cambodia have been evacuated from their homes and are suffering from food shortages. Government disaster management officials estimate that 1.2 million people have been affected in some way by the flooding.

Last year, an epic flood in the Mekong River Delta destroyed thousands of homes and more than 200,000 hectares of Cambodia's rice crop. In that natural disaster — the worst in the region in 70 years — 347 people died, 80 percent of them children.

This year, Cambodia has been plagued by both drought and floods in differing regions. The combination has seriously undermined food security in the country, one of the poorest in Asia.

WFP is concluding a year-long $9-million emergency operation in Cambodia that saw immediate food relief go to 500,000 people in the first phase of the operation, followed by a second phase in which 250,000 people received food aid for repairing flood damage at the household level. In the third phase, expected to end this month, 115,000 beneficiaries received food for undertaking longer-term rehabilitation of rural infrastructure.

Some further details would also make the story stronger. When may the new floods come? Has it started to rain already?

The release contains strong quotations from Hansen that you could use in your story. You could ask her to elaborate and get some more compelling details. For example, has she visited areas where people have just finished rebuilding their houses? What did she see? What will these people do after their one-month worth of rice aid is finished? Can anything be done to help these people guard against the effects of future flooding? Or is giving food aid the only thing the United Nations can do?

You could also call up NGOs or the government officials (mentioned in the news release) who have dealt with the most severely affected victims. Ask them what they saw when they visited the victims. What do they think about the World Food Program's response to the crisis? Is the aid adequate? Is it the right kind of aid? Should it have been given sooner? Remember, this is a statement from the World Food Program, which like every other organization has it own point of view and will only say good things about itself. As a journalist, your job is to provide your readers with different points of view.

And of course your story will be much more interesting if you go speak with some of those 40,000 people and describe

their feelings and living conditions. How are they surviving? How do they feel about the possibility of another flood? You could then begin your story by describing a real, suffering person whom your readers can empathize with. That's stronger than leading with an announcement about a rice distribution operation.

Perhaps you do not yet have time to visit the affected areas. Or you feel you should write something about the World Food Program operation quickly because other newspapers will be doing that. In that case, talk with sources on the phone and write what you have first. Then plan a trip to the affected areas to do a feature with strong descriptions and quotations from the scene.

Here's another news release, from the Tourism Authority of Thailand, the Thai government's tourism marketing body:

PRESS RELEASE

VISITOR ARRIVALS REACH FIVE-MILLION IN FIRST SIX MONTHS

Bangkok, Thailand, September 11 – International visitor arrivals to Thailand totaled 5,003,691 in January-June, an increase of 7.86% over the same period of 2000.

Arrivals from major markets included East Asia (2,986,703), Europe (1,175,436), the Americas (326,787), Oceania (200,407), South Asia (172,247), the Middle East (99,581) and Africa (42,530).

All of the regions reported strong growth. Arrivals from East Asia were up by 6.09%, from Europe 8.58%, the Americas 12.96%, Oceania 16.58%, South Asia 6.38%, the Middle East 22.52% and Africa 15.02%.

Tourism Authority of Thailand Governor Pradech Phayakvichien commented, "We are very happy to see this strong growth from our major markets, thanks to strong support from the government and co-operation from related public and private sectors."

Japanese visitors were the biggest source market with a 12.23% (or 611,902) share of overall visitors to Thailand during this period. This was followed by Malaysians (10.27% share or 514,122), Taiwanese (7.44% or 372,070), Chinese (6.77% or 338,578) and Singaporeans (6.53% or 326,757).

Also in the January-June period, female visitors grew by 8.6% (to 2,005,957), a higher growth than the 7.37% rise in male visitors (2,997,734).

Repeat visitors comprised a total of 52.94% (or 2,648,967) of the market share and showed a healthy 20.84% growth while first-time visitors declined slightly by 3.77% (2,354,724). Visitors travelling independently (FITs) had a bigger market share of 58.72% (or 2,937,971) of the total number of visitors and grew by 13.30% over the previous year, a much higher growth than the 0.96% rise in visitors travelling as part of a tour group (2,065,720).

Business travelers and convention delegates grew slightly by 3.69% to 441,339 and 0.99% to 45,328, respectively.

In term of age groups, most visitors to Thailand were aged between 25-34 (comprising 26.73% or 1,337,458 of total visitors) and 35-44 (24.06% or 1,203,957) years.

Children aged under 15 years and senior citizens aged 65 years and over also showed growths of 6.73% and 6.55%, respectively, indicating the strength of Thailand as a destination for families and retirees. A strong increase of 11.08% in student travelers also indicated that the

country's image is changing positively.

The average length of stay grew from 8 days in January-June of the previous year to 8.11 days in January-June of this year. This is very much in line with TAT's major effort to encourage visitors to stay longer.

On the outbound front, the number of Thais traveling overseas totaled 1,072,479 during January-June, an increase of 9.03% over the same period of last year.

TAT projects that visitor arrivals to Thailand will total about 10.3 million this year, up about 8.32% and bring about 320,124 billion baht in revenue to the country's economy.

Contact Foreign News Section
Tel: 662 694-1222 ext. 1540-3
Public Relations Division
Fax: 662 694-1325
E-mail: prdiv3@tat.or.th

This release is not much more than a list of statistics without any narrative, but with a careful study and some phone calls it could produce a good story.

First, the release fails to answer a basic question that it raises with the very first sentence: why did the number of foreign visitors increase, especially from the Middle East, "Oceania" and Africa? An official at the tourism agency should be able to answer those questions.

You also will want to ask how the figure for January to June of this year compares with the same period in other years, not just last year. Is it the highest-ever total? What percentage of these visitors were tourists as opposed to business people and others? "The Americas" and "Oceania" are not terms most people use. Where do they refer to?

The quotation from the head of the tourism agency is not very interesting. It is mostly the government congratulating itself. So you will need to look for a good quotation from one of the sources you call for the story.

In the bottom part of the release, something interesting appears. More children, older people and students are visiting Thailand. This indicates "the country's image is changing positively." You may know that Thailand has a reputation for attracting more male than female visitors. You'll want to ask officials of the tourism agency if this is what they are referring to, and if so, how and why this image is changing.

And you will want to ask analysts outside the government if it is actually true that the visitor profile is changing. Why are more children, older people and students visiting Thailand? You can ask people working at private tourism companies, tourism analysts at financial institutions, and others.

Perhaps they will say that the trends are not as positive as the release makes it sound. Or that the release omits significant facts. Or perhaps they will agree with the release and add some relevant comment. That also makes your story stronger and more complete.

And if you can find some of these children, older people and students and ask them about Thailand's attractions and why they are visiting, then you can include in your story real people instead of just statistics or analysis. ■

CHAPTER 13: COVERING MEETINGS, SPEECHES AND NEWS CONFERENCES

News organizations get many of their stories from meetings, speeches and news conferences. In all cases, the reporter must first prepare by finding out about the speakers and the issues. Only then can they ask good questions, and give their readers a clear and complete account.

MEETINGS

If a government or policy-making body is meeting, *focus on the action that was taken and its impact on the reader*. Was there a vote? Did the committee decide to recommend a pay raise for teachers? To increase the tax on shops? To approve a new budget? If no action was taken, focus on the reasons why, or on the debate that took place.

Meeting stories should include:

- Who met
- The purpose of the meeting
- What action was taken
- Why action was taken
- Comments from participants/ observers
- Who will be affected by the action, and their comments
- If no action was taken, was there a general agreement that action should be taken?
- If no action was taken, did somebody say something important or interesting?
- Background on the issue

This lead from a Lao-language paper tells us *who* was at the meeting and the general topic they discussed. But it doesn't tell us *what* they said about the topic. That is a very common mistake among journalists in Southeast Asia.

Colonel Bouasieng Champaphanh, Lao sub-committee chairman, and Thai sub-committee secretary Major General Serirath Thinrath jointly talked about the situation in Vang Tao, which happened July 3, to Lao and Thai media during the Lao-Thai Boundary Security Keeping Committee Conference.

Later on in the story, we learn more about the situation. "Armed bandits" had attacked a border post and taken customs officials hostage. The Laotian colonel said the Thai and Laotian armies are now cooperating to maintain peace along the border. That information should have been in the lead.

Here's the full text of another meeting story, from an English-language Laotian newspaper:

GIRLS SMOKING MORE

The number of teenagers, particularly girls, who smoke has increased, said Dr. Somchai Pholsena, head of the Information Education Center for Health (IECF), at a one-day meeting to formulate a National Policy on Tobacco

Control in Lao PDR on July 24 at the Lao Plaza Hotel.

It was supported by the Adventist Development Relief Agency (ADRA), and involved 40 participants from the Public Health Ministry and relevant departments. A number of representatives of international organizations were present, and the meeting was chaired by the Deputy Minister of Public Health.

The agenda included discussion and reports on the general world tobacco situation and its control, the Lao tobacco situation and control, the bad effect of tobacco on health, information of import and tax on tobacco, and future strategies and policy for tobacco control.

Of the total land area of Laos, 7,500 sq km are devoted to growing tobacco. In urban areas, 25 per cent of Lao men and 1.5 per cent of Lao women are smokers. In rural areas, 60 per cent of Lao men and 30 per cent of Lao women smoke. 70-90 per cent of Lao smokers are members of an ethnic minority group.

Laos has two tobacco factories producing the Adeng and Dokmaydeng brand names. Two agencies import 555 and Marlboro brand names.

The lead says the purpose of the meeting was to make a policy on control of smoking. But nowhere in the story is the reader told what the meeting accomplished. If a new policy was made, what is it? Any new policy would affect many people. If the meeting failed to make a policy, why did it fail?

The lead has a bit of the right idea. It mentions an interesting statement made at the meeting. But the information is never explained in the rest of the story. Why are more girls smoking? By how much is smoking among girls increasing? Were any ways to control this discussed at the meeting?

The story tells readers the agenda of the meeting, but it does not say what were the main opinions expressed. Did members of the meeting agree or disagree in their views of the problem and on ways to control it?

The story gives us a few facts about the percentage of smokers and the brand names. But the key background is missing: what is the current policy on tobacco control? And what is the context: why is the government tackling this problem now?

Now look at this story on a major diplomatic meeting, which is much more difficult to report and more complex to write.

Note how the writer uses his background knowledge, comments made at the meeting, and interviews with participants after the meeting to give a complete and meaningful picture of what happened.

The reporter quotes seven sources, both named and unnamed. In addition, he interviewed several other sources during the day to learn what happened and why it was significant.

The story flows smoothly and logically from one theme to another, from the most important theme to the least important theme. The reporter kept all the related information together. He answered in logical order all the questions the reader may ask. Of course, in order to organize a story well, the reporter must be well-read and have a full grasp of the issues.

A two-sentence lead is used to report two newsworthy developments: what the meeting accomplished and what it did not. Note, however, that the ideas are clearly and simply expressed.

These paragraphs include a key quotation backing up the first part of the lead. A careful reader will immediately ask: What is the ASEAN Regional Forum? The reader knows from the lead that it is a security meeting. The reporter immediately answers that question. This also helps back up the

U.S. ASSURES ALLIES IT IS COMMITTED TO ASIA'S SECURITY AND IMPROVED RELATIONS WITH CHINA

HANOI, Vietnam (AP) – The United States and China reassured Asian and European nations at security talks Wednesday that they will try to end their recent tensions. But the forum was unable to persuade North Korea to resume dialogue.

Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan said his country valued its relations with the United States and will work with Washington to ensure peace and stability in the region.

"Following a period of difficulties, the China-U.S. relations, which capture universal attention, have recently been on the way to improvement," Tang said in a speech to the ASEAN Regional Forum.

The forum, sponsored by the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations, includes the United States, China, Russia, South Korea, the European Union and other nations. North Korea attended as an observer.

U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell assured the group that the United States put a priority on relations with China and

Be ready to ask the speaker good questions

lead ("Asian and European nations"). The reporter has already backed up the lead with China's comments. Now he backs it up with comments from the other side, the United States. He was not able to interview Powell for the story, but asked another participant what Powell said.

with the Asia-Pacific in general, an ASEAN diplomat said.

In a meeting with Thai Foreign Minister Surakiart Sathirathai, Powell stressed that "the U.S. remained committed in the region, and that the administration was very focused on Asia," Thai spokesman Norachit Singhaseni said.

U.S.-China relations have been worsened in recent months by the convictions of U.S.-based scholars charged with spying, a U.S. spy plane dispute, the proposed U.S. missile defense system, and human rights issues.

"We would like to see the United States and China resume normal diplomatic discussions, and that seems to be the direction and we welcome that development very much," Norachit said when asked the position of the Southeast Asian nations.

This background is essential to understanding the story. It tells readers the importance of what's stated in the lead. The background is simple and short, just enough to understand the story.

Both China and the United States play key economic and security roles in Southeast Asia, which has more than half a billion people and some of the world's most critical sea lanes.

North Korea attended the ASEAN-sponsored security talks for the second time, but this time Foreign Minister Paek Nam Sun declined to come and instead sent a lower-level official, Hur Jong. As a result, there was no U.S.-North Korea meeting at this year's talks.

These two paragraphs explain the context and the So What — what improved ties between the United States and China mean for Southeast Asia.

Hur killed hopes for a quick resumption of North Korea's dialogues with the United States and South Korea.

"They just took the line that the U.S. is putting some conditions on the resumption of talks," ASEAN Secretary-General Rodolfo Severino said in recounting Hur's remarks at the security talks.

Now the writer introduces the second part of the lead. These two paragraphs directly back up the lead.

"The U.S. said no, they're not imposing any conditions at all. They're just waiting for a response from North Korea on the offer of dialogue," Severino said.

The North Koreans remained silent after other countries at the talks expressed hopes for a resumption of the North-South dialogue, Severino said.

The good reporter always seeks both sides of the story. He got this comment by asking: How did the United States respond to North

Indeed, "they have a negative view of the dialogue," said a South Korean official who declined to be named.

Even Chinese Foreign Minister Tang said he would be "happy to see further improvement" in North Korea's relations with other nations.

Ask quick and concise questions

Korea's allegation? More background that helps the reader understand the story. The talks failed this time on the Korea issue. The main story is now complete.

The writer moves on to less important developments. The phrase "also made little progress on another..." creates a smooth transition to another theme. The background and significance are stated clearly and simply.

The day's developments on the issue are reported: why

North Korea's attendance at the security talks a year ago led to breakthroughs in relations with the United States and South Korea and was a rare opening to the outside world for the Communist nation that fought a war with the South in the 1950s.

The security talks also made little progress on another Asian security issue — a dispute over islands in the South China Sea. Competing territorial claims by China and several ASEAN countries have caused some armed clashes over the years.

These countries are negotiating a "code of conduct" to avoid further clashes but still disagree on issues including the geographic area the code would cover, said Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Dy Nien, who chaired the security talks.

He said countries were now considering a proposal from the Philippines to break the deadlock.

During the talks, countries including the European Union raised objections to U.S. plans for a missile defense system,

progress is being blocked and a possible solution. The writer goes on to another secondary theme. This one is less important than the South China Sea dispute because objections to the US missile plan have been reported previously in the media.

said Belgian Foreign Minister Louis Michel, representing the EU.

"We have to discuss with the Americans about the missile defense system because it can have some bad consequences on the disarmament process," Michel told reporters.

In his speech, Tang repeated China's warning that the missile defense system would harm regional peace and stability. It will "do no good to trust and cooperation between countries," he said.

CONFERENCES

Conferences are more difficult to cover. Conferences are often organized by academics, NGOs, professional groups and governments. Often they are held to exchange ideas, and little or no action is taken. If the conference has a main speaker, his or her comments could be the focus of your story. If several participants offer solutions to a problem, they could be the focus of your story. Talk to participants during breaks in the conference. Get them to elaborate on their ideas. Ask them what should be done about a certain issue.

Conferences may not always produce good stories, but they are good places to meet experts and talk about story ideas.

As with covering meetings, you should avoid leads that only list who, where and when. As in this story from a Vietnamese-language newspaper:

> *The Conference to review the two-year campaign against drugs and social vices among members of the labor movement, organized by the Central Trades Union movement — VN (LDLDVN), concluded in Quang Tri, on the 20th of March.*

Later, the story quotes a top official as saying that drug abuse and "social vices" have not been decreasing because some branches of the movement felt no sense of urgency about them. He suggested ways to fix this problem. These ideas should have been in the lead.

SPEECHES AND NEWS CONFERENCES

SEEK BALANCE

Keep in mind that the speaker usually has a specific purpose for the speech or news conference. The speaker has a message that he or she wants the media to distribute to the public. He or she might be promoting a political party or a business product. It doesn't matter. Good journalists know they are getting only one side of the story. You should be ready to ask the speaker good questions to find out more information, and to challenge his or her statements. Often, the speaker's answers to your questions, and not what he or she said in a prepared statement, will be the focus of your story.

If the speaker comments on a controversy, you also must include in your story comments from his or her rivals, or from experts or members of the audience who do not agree with his or her point of view. This is a matter of writing a balanced story.

FOCUS ON WHO SAID WHAT

Stories about speeches and news conferences should include:

- Who spoke (name, title and organization)
- What the speaker said (the main point), including some good quotations
- Where and when the speech or news conference took place
- Who listened (the audience), and how they reacted
- Comments/reaction from others involved in the issue

The lead should focus on the first two items: *Who said What?*

Too often, the leads of stories about speeches and news conferences mention the speaker and when, where and to whom he or she was speaking. They fail to include the speaker's main point. Ask yourself: What was the most important or the most interesting or unusual thing the speaker said? For example: Did the speaker offer a new solution to a problem? Did he or she comment on a controversy? Put it in the lead.

Where he or she spoke and information on the audience can be put in the second or third paragraphs. That way, you can keep the lead simple and clear.

And make sure you focus only on the main points. Don't list everything that was said in a speech or at a news conference. Your job is to select the most important or interesting points for the reader.

The most interesting points may come at the end of a long speech, so you must stay alert. Let's say the prime minister

Focus on who said what of interest on the record

is attending a graduation ceremony for a medical school. He spends the first 45 minutes of his speech talking about the state of health care. In the last five minutes, he changes topics and announces a crackdown on illegal immigrants. All illegal immigrants will be sent back to their countries immediately, he says.

If he did not say anything dramatic about health care, the lead should *not* be:

> *The prime minister yesterday talked about health care as he handed out diplomas at the first graduation ceremony of the medical school.*

Instead write:

> *The prime minister yesterday announced a crackdown on illegal immigrants.*

Later in the story, you should mention that he made the comments during a graduation ceremony of the school. Also mention that he spent most of his time talking about health care. The graduates won't get angry at you. Remember that you are writing for the reader, not the students.

Often a speaker makes an important statement but does not elaborate on it in his speech. After the speech, ask him or her to explain and give examples. Be sure to say in your story that he or she made those comments in an interview with you after the speech. Otherwise, readers who were at the event may be confused and say you were inaccurate. As a rule, try to talk to the speaker after the speech anyway. You can get more details and often, more interesting quotes.

BE PREPARED

Always try to get a copy of the prepared text of important speeches before they are delivered. That gives you time to study it and get ready to ask good questions. But be sure to compare it with what the speaker actually says during the event. Speakers often say things that are not in the prepared text, or they leave out parts of it. Of course, even if you cannot get a copy of the text ahead of time, you should read about the issue that the speaker will discuss. That way, when the speech is given, you know what the news is.

Let's take a look at an example of a good speech story.

The reader knows immediately that this will not be just a record of what was said.

The reporter quickly summarizes the main features of the policy. A quote is used to summarize Thaksin's speech and backs up the lead. The lead did not single out specific policies because they were not new but campaign promises

BANGKOK, Thailand (AP) – Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra unveiled his new government's policy Monday, making a host of promises that critics say he will be hard-pressed to fulfill.

Addressing the first session of the new parliament, Thaksin said the policy would be aimed at creating jobs, increasing income and ridding the country's banks of their debts worth $28.5 billion.

"The government will do everything in its power to create an opportunity for new life," said Thaksin, a telecoms tycoon-turned-politician. "Thailand needs change in every dimension." Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai party-led coalition came to power

already reported many times. This background is essential for the reader to understand the story.

after winning the Jan. 6 general elections on the back of specific promises: a three-year debt moratorium for farmers, a $23,800 development fund for each of the 77,000 villages in Thailand, cheap medical care for the poor and setting up a national asset management company to take over banks' debts.

The writer returns to the second part of the lead — the criticism of Thaksin's policy. He includes three well-chosen, strong quotes.

But critics have warned that the populist policies would prove to be too expensive.

"New ideas, new actions do not mean (they are) right ideas and right action," Thaksin's predecessor and opposition leader Chuan Leekpai, told parliament during a debate on Thaksin's speech.

"Remember that this country is not as rich as you are," he said.

Chuan warned that setting up the asset management company to take over the debts of private banks would only help rich businessmen and increase the government's burden.

"You have no right to use taxpayers' money to help the rich," Chuan said.

This background on Thailand's recent economic history helps the readers understand the context of Chuan's

Thailand's once-booming economy collapsed in the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis when foreign investment, the lifeblood of production and exports, pulled out of the country. The crisis also exposed the widespread cronyism, nepotism and corruption in the financial system, which is still struggling to recover.

The purpose of a ceremony is as important as who attended

remarks, and the context in which Thaksin is making his new policies. The story is essentially complete here. Newspapers with space could publish the rest of the story, which provides less important details of Thaksin's policy announcement and adds criticism from another politician.

"The most urgent and important tasks for the government are speeding up the fixing of economic problems by changing the structure of the economy, administration, society and politics. All must be carried out simultaneously," Thaksin said.

Among the other pledges he made were to set up village banks that would give loans to small businessmen, develop state enterprises to be run by professionals free from political intervention, crack down on drug trafficking, and encourage public participation in the government's anti-corruption drive.

He also promised to raise fiscal discipline by using state-of-the-art technology to reduce government spending and to improve the taxation system.

On Sunday, the deputy leader of a coalition partner of Thaksin added his voice to the chorus of criticism against the populist policies.

Chalerm Yubamrung, the deputy leader of the New Aspiration Party, said Thaksin's promises were designed to draw votes and would ultimately increase the public debt burden. Policies to end rural debt were not new and badly conceived, he said.

The story would have been stronger, simpler and clearer with a little editing. For example, the lead could be:

> *Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra announced his new government's economic and social policies Monday, making many promises that critics say will be difficult to keep.*

Still, this is a very good model for how to think about writing a speech story.

AND CEREMONIES TOO …

Reporters often make the same mistakes in covering ceremonies as they do when covering speeches and news conferences. Their leads focus on the senior official who attended and how he led the ceremony. But is that the real story? What about the new school that was opened during the ceremony? Does that mean that the children in the village will be able to go to school for the first time?

Always think: *what was the important thing that happened here, and what is its impact on people?*

A group of journalism students from Myanmar recently were given a few notes to write a (hypothetical) story about the opening of a movie theater in Moulmein, a city in southeast Myanmar. Most of their leads focused on the military officer who led the ceremony. One lead said the officer "cut a ribbon in front of the theater and gave a gift to each person at the ceremony."

In fact, what was interesting and important was how the opening of the theater affected people:

> *More than 400 movie-lovers rushed today to the Superstar Cinema, the first movie theater to open in Moulmein since 1971.* ■

CHAPTER 14: WRITING FOR BROADCAST

Broadcast journalists can apply many of the principles we have been talking about. But there are important differences between print and broadcast writing.

Print journalists write to give their readers a mental picture of scenes. Broadcast journalists talk to their audiences.

Radio and TV journalists play audio recordings or show photographs and video recordings of news events so that their audiences can directly hear or see the events. Good broadcast journalists do not describe the audio and video recordings or photographs. Instead, they help their audiences understand them.

ONLY ONE CHANCE, SO BE CLEAR

Newspaper readers can spend as much time as they want reading a story. They can go back and read the story a second or third time. Radio and TV audiences cannot always do this. They usually only have one chance to hear the story. Also, most radio and TV newscasts are very short. Broadcast journalists have very little time to tell their stories.

This means broadcast journalists must be even more *clear*, *concise* and *selective*

Broadcast stories must be immediately understandable

than print journalists. They should use ordinary, everyday language and an informal, conversational style. Simple and direct sentences are best. One sentence should flow into the next sentence just as if they were talking to someone about the event. The listener must be able to understand the story fully the first time he or she hears it.

Select only the most important information from a document or a news conference, or the main theme from complicated events. Present this key information or main theme in the first two or three sentences of the story. That way, the audience will immediately understand the reason why the story is important or interesting, and they will keep listening.

Most of the background and details — such as people's ages, addresses, statistics and so on — that are found in newspaper stories do not need to be included. Such information would make a broadcast story too long and complicated.

FOCUS ON NOW

When people turn on the radio or TV or download a podcast, they expect to find out the latest news, what is happening that day, even that hour. So broadcast journalists focus on the most recent development and the present time as much as possible.

A FEW RULES

To write a good broadcast story:

- Keep sentences short, and use the simple subject-verb-object sentence construction.
- Keep to only one idea in a sentence.
- Use strong verbs, and use adjectives and adverbs only when necessary.
- When possible, use the present and (in English) present perfect tenses to give the story impact and immediacy.
- Avoid complicated words that ordinary people do not know. Avoid the official language that government officials and technical "experts" like to use. Say "carry out" instead of "implement." Say "buildings" instead of "facilities."
- Generally, start the sentence with the source of the information. That makes it easier for listeners to follow. That differs from print stories, where more often the source is placed at the end of the sentence.
- Put the important words at the front of the sentence. Don't say: "Changes in the soil are making it more difficult for the villagers to grow food." Say: "Growing food is now more difficult for the villagers because of changes in the soil."
- Shorten titles of people and names of agencies that are too long. Instead of "director of the export division of the Customs Department," simply say, "customs official." The listener or viewer does not need to know the full title.

Look at this lead of a story broadcast by a TV station in Myanmar:

Maj-Gen Sein Htwa, Minister for Social Welfare, Relief, and Resettlement, received a delegation of Southeast Asia

TV images often reduce the need for descriptive reporting

Region Human Trafficking Elimination ASEAN-Australia Project Identification Mission led by Dr Michael Dalton at the Mya Yeik Nyo Royal Hotel's Pyaysaung at 18.30 local time.

The lead is long and complicated, with three long names and terms that few listeners would understand. And what is the news? Just that the meeting took place? What did they talk about? Did they agree to do something? And what is this group, and why are they visiting Myanmar?

The second paragraph of the story lists the names and long titles of seven officials whom the major general hosted for dinner. The third paragraph lists two officials and several places the delegation visited.

How could a listener understand all this?

Now let's take a look at two news stories that we saw earlier in this book, and consider how we could make them into broadcast stories.

On the left is the first print version story. On the right we show one way it could be rewritten for broadcast.

PRINT VERSION

The economic slowdown in the United States has forced the temporary closing of at least 12 garment factories in Cambodia so far this year, Commerce Minister Cham Prasidh said yesterday.

As many as 3,000 workers have been temporarily laid off and more jobs could be lost if the situation does not improve, he said.

Additionally, thousands more people were working fewer hours as many of the 200 garment factories had cut down on overtime and gone from two shifts to one, the minister said.

"The economic problems in the United States have us very concerned for the factory operators and the workers both," he said.

Cambodia's garment industry employs 200,000 people, who earn an average of $40 per month. More than 80 percent of its production is shipped to the United States for retail sale.

The minister said less than 40 percent of Cambodia's annual garment export quota to the United States had been filled even though the year was half over. By comparison, he said, nearly the entire quota for the United States had been filled by the end of June last year.

BROADCAST VERSION

Cambodia's commerce minister says 12 garment factories have temporarily closed so far this year, putting 3,000 people out of work.

Cham Prasidh today blamed the shutdowns on the economic downturn in the United States.

And more jobs could be at risk if things don't improve, he says.

The minister says thousands more are working fewer hours as many of the country's 200 garment factories cut down on overtime and shifts.

The garment industry in Cambodia employs more than 200,000 people. About 80 percent of production goes to the United States. Cham Prasidh says he is concerned for the welfare of both factory operators and workers.

[This layout provides a clear illustration of how broadcast journalism is lighter and more concise than print journalism when presenting the same story. The broadcast version is over 40 per cent shorter.]

In the broadcast story, we get our listeners interested with a lead that is a clear, short statement of the main fact. Note the simple sentence construction.

We begin with the commerce minister so the listener immediately knows the source of the information. We use the present tense to give a sense of immediacy. The lead of the print version mentioned both the factories and the U.S. economy. Here the U.S. economy is left to the second paragraph so that the lead can be kept short, simple and easy to say. For the same reason, we leave the minister's name to the second paragraph.

In the second paragraph, we make clear the minister's name and when he spoke. We use "today" because the broadcast reporter would be reporting the event the same day that it happened.

In the third paragraph, the "and" is a bridge to the next piece of information. In broadcast journalism, starting the sentence with "and" is a good way to keep sentences short and to move the story along.

In the fourth paragraph, again we use the present tense, to tell the listener that these events are happening now.

In the last paragraph, we use less background than in the newspaper version because (1) we have less time in a broadcast news bulletin, and (2) listeners won't remember too much detail anyway.

Here's the second print version story again.

DISGRUNTLED TAXI DRIVERS BLOCK ROUTE 6A

About 20 taxi drivers, angry about the city's new rule preventing them from entering Phnom Penh, blocked a portion of National Route 6A on Tuesday, jamming traffic for an hour.

Six fire trucks were called to the scene to disperse the drivers, who were arguing with police and other authorities attempting to stop their vehicles from entering the city.

Tuesday marked the beginning of the municipality's ban on taxis entering the city from the northern provinces.

Officials say the ban is designed to ease traffic congestion and beautify the city.

Taxis are now required to stop at Prek Leap market, located about 5 km outside the city, and transfer their passengers to buses which will take them to Phnom Penh.

Taxi drivers said it was unfair that Ho Wah Genting Transport Co, a Malaysian company, has a license to provide bus transportation from Phnom Penh to Prek Leap and from Prek Leap to the provinces.

"If Ho Wah is allowed to do this, we taxi drivers will make no money because people will get off the bus and get on another one," said Houn Hak, a taxi driver who takes people to and from Kampong Cham province.

Sin Phearom, assistant manager for Ho Wah, said taxi drivers should not interfere with Ho Wah's business because the company received permission from the Ministry of Public Works and the municipality to operate the buses.

Everyone wants to beat traffic congestion

He said his company has already tried to help local taxi drivers by cutting down the number of trips from Prek Leap to the provinces from 12 per day to seven.

"If we cannot invest here, we will leave and tell our friends not to come," Sin Phearom said.

Nhem Saran, director of the municipality's Public Works Department, said the taxi drivers should concentrate on improving the quality of their service instead of blaming Ho Wah.

"I think people will choose Ho Wah buses because they are safe, air-conditioned and are comfortable," he said.

This can be turned into a broadcast package. A package is a pre-recorded mix which normally includes the reporter's voice, at least one quotation from someone involved in the story and sometimes some background sound or music. The garment factories story was basically just a summary of facts, so it was better suited to a single voice report read by the newscaster.

With a broadcast package, the writing does not need to be as tight as in a news bulletin; you have more time to add color. But the basic rules still apply. Tell the story as simply, directly and logically as you can.

In a package you have the advantage of being able to use people's own voices. As far as possible, you should let people tell their own story in their own words. Short voice quotations in packages are usually called "clips."

Let's look at how this is done. Remember that it is being broadcast the same day as the event.

The lead is often given to the newscaster. The reporter then takes up the story. This adds urgency and pace. Note that the name of the highway is left for later to make the start of the broadcast easier to understand. Simpler words are used: "break up" instead of "disperse;" "trying" instead of "attempting;" and "cars" instead of "vehicles." As in the print story, listeners need this background early to understand the story. Again for simplicity, "must stop" is better than "are required to stop."

Newscaster:

Traffic was blocked for more than an hour today on one of the main highways into Phnom Penh when 20 angry taxi drivers staged a protest. Our reporter at the scene was Kay Kimsong.

Reporter Kay Kimsong:

The blockage of Route 6A was only cleared when six fire trucks were called to break up the drivers, who were arguing with police trying to stop their cars from entering the city.

Today was the start of the city's ban on taxis entering Phnom Penh from the northern provinces. Officials say this will reduce traffic congestion and make the city more beautiful. Taxis must now stop at Prek Leap market, about 5 km outside the city. Passengers then travel by bus into Phnom Penh.

Feelings ran high, especially against Ho Wah Genting Transport Co., the Malaysian bus company licensed to carry people from Phnom Penh to Prek Leap and then on to the provinces.

Houn Hak, a taxi driver on the Kompong Cham route, explains why.

Clip, showing Houn Hak:

The clip of Houn Hak lets us hear the driver's anger, so the emotional effect of the broadcast story is much stronger.

"They're taking the food from our mouths. If Ho Wah is allowed to do this, we taxi drivers will make no money because people will get off the bus and get on another one."

Reporter Kay Kimsong again:

But speaking for the company, assistant manager Sin Phearon strongly disagrees.

Clip, showing Sin Phearon:

Two more clips add interest and balance to the story by giving different points of view. They are all the stronger because we are hearing people speaking for themselves.

"Look, these people have no right to interfere with our business. We've had permission to run the buses from the Ministry of Public Works and the municipality. We've tried to help them by cutting the number of journeys every day from 12 to 7. If we can't invest here, we'll leave and tell our friends not to come."

Reporter Kay Kimsong:

And Nhem Saran, director of the city's Public Works Department, seems to have even less sympathy for the taxi drivers' complaints.

Clip, showing Nhem Saran:

"They should work to improve their service instead of blaming Ho Wah. I think people will choose Ho Wah buses because they are safe, air-conditioned and comfortable. It's as simple as that."

Sign Off, Kay Kimsong:

It is not necessary to have a sign off. But it does give a neat, clean close to the story.

Kay Kimsong, reporting from the now clear Route 6A into Phnom Penh. ■

CHAPTER 15: ETHICS

THE RESPONSIBILITY TO BE ETHICAL

So far we have been talking about the skills of the journalist: observing, taking notes, writing stories. But good journalists have more than just technical skills. They also are ethical: they know the difference between right and wrong behavior, and they always try their best to do what is right.

We said at the beginning of this book that journalists have important jobs - their stories reach many people and influence their opinions and actions. So journalism can be a powerful tool for public service. With this power comes responsibility: the responsibility to be truthful, independent and fair.

Journalism can be a powerful tool for public service

When journalists are unethical, they may hurt many, many people. They may hurt their sources, their newspapers, their readers and society in general.

TELL THE TRUTH

Do not lie in order to get stories. When you introduce yourself to a source, say clearly your name, the name of your news organization, and that you are working on a story. Do not claim to be, for example, a doctor or a government official in order to get information or access to a place. Do not record conversations without permission. When your lie is discovered, it will hurt the reputation of your newspaper. Sources may not talk to your newspaper in future.

Always tell the truth in writing your stories. Do all you can to make sure the information is accurate. Make sure it is complete, fair and balanced. Make sure it does not distort reality. Make sure it is not just rumor. If you later find out that a story you published is false, inaccurate or misleading in some way, make sure a correction is printed in your newspaper so that your readers will know the truth.

Always remember that it does not matter what your personal point of view on an issue is. Include all points of view in your stories.

Some journalists write stories filled with opinions. They want to spread their own opinions, or the opinions of the group that funds their newspaper. They routinely criticize other people such as politicians, and they do not care if there is any truth or not in these criticisms. The

danger is that many readers will think that these opinions are the truth, because they were published in a newspaper.

Your editor, the owner of your newspaper, advertisers or the authorities may pressure you to put certain opinions in your news stories. They may even want you to write things that are not true. We know that most times, it will be very difficult not to obey. But these are the times when you have to think about your responsibility to your profession and to society.

Some journalists are columnists who write articles expressing their personal opinions. That is fine as long as those columns are kept separate from the news stories. But the columnist's opinions must be supported by facts and solid arguments; the columnist cannot just spread his or her own biases.

When you publish information that is false and hurts a person's reputation, that is called libel. In many countries, that person can go to a court and sue you and your news organization for libel. If the person wins the suit, the court may order your news organization to pay him or her a large amount of money in damages. That would seriously hurt your news organization's reputation and its finances. Your organization may even have to close. Libel laws differ from country to country. Make sure you read your country's law.

DO NOT EXAGGERATE OR CREATE ILL FEELING

We know conflict makes news, and stories about conflicts sell papers. Conflicts over race, religion, political and other issues can cause violence on the streets. Ethical journalists will not exaggerate the conflicts in their stories and photographs because that could make the situation worse. And they do not use their stories to create hatred against people of other racial, religious or other groups.

SERVE THE PUBLIC, NOT YOURSELF

Good journalists serve only the public interest. Do not use your profession for personal gain. Do not use information from your sources to make money. Do not get into business relationships with your sources. Do not allow yourself to be used for the gain of particular political or social groups.

Do not get into situations where you may have a conflict of interests. If you work for the government, you should not write about the government. If you do, you are unlikely to write in an objective, neutral way about the

Respecting privacy: showing AIDS victims from behind

government. For the same reason, if you campaign for a political party, you should not write about politics.

Do not take money, gifts or favors from people, including government officials, politicians and businessmen. Many of these people will say they are giving you these things just to be kind to you, or to help you with your transportation expenses. But actually, they are trying to influence what kinds of stories you write. They are giving you bribes. We all know that it is not easy for journalists in some Southeast Asian countries to refuse bribes. They make very low salaries. They have to pay the rent and they have to feed their families. In each situation, you will have to make your own judgment about what to do. But it is important to keep trying to reach for the ideal: independence. You must never think of bribes as a normal part of your income.

DO NOT STEAL OTHER PEOPLE'S WORK

Do not take other people's stories and photographs and put them in your own newspaper, radio or TV report — unless you ask their permission first and give them credit, telling your readers that they produced the work. This includes any material on the Internet. Otherwise, you are lying to your reader. And you are violating the rights of the journalist whose work you stole.

We all know that sometimes this is not easy. Some smaller newspapers say they must steal stories and photographs because they do not have enough money or staff members to get the material themselves. But stealing other people's work is one of the worst ethical mistakes in journalism. We call this plagiarism. In some countries you can be sued in court for plagiarism.

BE FAIR

In an earlier chapter, we talked about the importance of being balanced and fair. That includes getting a complete story that does not leave out any important facts. It includes making the best effort possible to get the response of a person who is accused of wrongdoing. When you publish stories on crimes, or photographs of them, do not treat people as if they are guilty just because the police have arrested them. People have the right to defend themselves in court. They are innocent unless and until a court examines the evidence and rules that they are guilty.

BE DECENT AND SYMPATHETIC

Exercise good taste in presenting your stories and photographs. Avoid bad language such as curses or crude descriptions of sex acts or the body. Avoid what is obscene or shocking, especially when covering accidents, crimes and disasters. Consider the feelings of the relatives of the victims. How would you feel if that was your sister whose death was described and whose body was shown in the newspaper? Do you need to use the name or photograph of a teenage rape victim if that would bring her shame in her community? In many countries, printing such information is also illegal.

We all know sex and blood helps sell newspapers. But your job is not to sell newspapers. It is to provide information to people in a responsible way.

RESPECT PEOPLE'S RIGHT TO PRIVACY

People have a right to be left alone to live their lives. Sensational stories about

someone's private life do not belong in a newspaper. How would you feel if a newspaper exposed your own love life or health problems for the world to see?

There are exceptions.

Government officials have less of a right to privacy because they are public servants whose salaries are paid by the people and whose actions have an impact on the people. Other public figures, such as film stars, can also expect their private lives to be of public interest. In recent years, Thai newspapers have exposed Buddhist monks who had sex with prostitutes. They are right to cover such stories. That is of public concern because in Thailand people donate lots of money or other offerings to monks to support them as community leaders and teachers of morality.

RESPECT YOUR SOURCES

You have a responsibility not only to the public, but also to your sources. For example, if a source gives you sensitive information only on condition you do not name him or her, you must keep your promise. You cannot reveal the source's name either in your story or otherwise. That could cause a lot of harm to the source's personal and professional life, and sometimes even put his or her own life at risk.

DISCUSS WITH COLLEAGUES

When an ethical problem comes up, do not try to resolve it yourself. Discuss it with your colleagues. Try to figure out how the choice you make will affect others. Who will gain? Who will lose? Who will be harmed? Consider how other journalists have resolved similar problems.

CODE OF ETHICS

All news organizations should write a code of ethics for their reporters and editors to follow. It should specify what kinds of behavior are expected of all journalists and what kinds of behavior are not acceptable. It should specify how those who violate the rules will be punished. Copies of the code should be kept in the newsroom so that everyone knows what the rules are. ■

Ask what your responsibilities are to your sources

CONCLUSION

We have learned the basics in this manual, but there is much more to being a professional journalist. Now it is up to you to improve your reporting and writing skills. But you have to be willing to work hard, and be humble and open to criticism.

Is your story understandable to ordinary readers?

It always helps to have other people read and comment on your stories. After all, you are a communicator, and only other people can tell you if you are communicating well. Ask other reporters and editors in your newsroom, and your friends outside the office, to read your stories. Ask them: As a fellow journalist, what do they think of this story? Ask them: As an ordinary reader, what do you think of this story? Listen to their comments. Make changes in your writing if they are needed.

After your story has been edited, study the differences between what you wrote and the changes your editor made. Consider why the editor made those changes, and notice how they improved your story.

If you do not have the benefit of good editors, seek out training opportunities outside the newsroom, such as at the universities or with media training organizations.

Even if you do not have the benefit of a good editor or trainer, there is a lot you can do yourself. Perhaps the most important is to read good stories in good newspapers. Read all the good stories you can get your hands on. Read them critically. Study the writing style, the organization, the background paragraph, the quotes, and other elements we have discussed in this manual. Reading good novels and short stories also will give you ideas on improving your story-telling skills, especially in writing features. Ask yourself: Why does the writer do it this way? Is this story effective? Why is it effective? Think about how you could use these same techniques in your own writing.

You can also read other journalism manuals and materials. We've listed some of these in the Further Reading section. In 2009, the IMMF produced an advanced reporting manual, including chapters on feature writing, in-depth reporting, opinion and editorial writing, news analysis, and how to cover specialized beats such as business and the environment.

When you finish a story, edit yourself and be tough on yourself. Do not hold on to words just because you have already written them down. We hope you will remember to ask yourself all the questions raised in this manual: Does this say what I want it to say? Is everything I have written accurate and fair? What do my readers want and need to know? What is the role of a journalist? ■

Except for *Getting the Story*, all of these resources are written in English that may be difficult for non-native speakers. They also deal mostly with situations in the US. Still, they all provide excellent information for advanced reporting and writing that we could not cover in this manual.

BOOKS

The AP Broadcast News Handbook, by Brad Kalbfeld. Published in 2000 by McGraw Hill Professional Publishing.

The Associated Press Guide to News Writing (3rd edition), by Rene J. Cappon. Published in 2005 by ARCO.

Getting the Story. This is a textbook and a video tape produced in 1990 by the International Center for Journalists, 1616 H Street, NW, 3rd Floor, Washington DC 20006-4999, USA.

A Handbook for Cambodian Journalists, by Huw Watkin. Published in Phnom Penh in 1998 by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

News Reporting and Writing (11th edition), by Melvin Mencher. Published in 2007 by McGraw Hill College Division.

The Newspapers Handbook (3rd edition), by Richard Keeble. Published in 2001 by Routledge, London and New York.

Writing and Reporting News, A Coaching Method (6th edition), by Carole Rich. Published in 2009 by Wadsworth Publishing Co., 10 Davis Drive, Belmont, CA 94002, USA.

BOOKLETS

The International Center for Journalists has produced the following:

Ten Practical Tips for Environmental Reporting, by Peter Nelson

Ten Practical Tips for Business and Economic Reporting in Developing Countries, by Paul Hemp

Ten Steps to Investigative Reporting, by Lucinda Fleeson

Free and Fair: A Journalist's Guide to Improved Election Reporting in Emerging Democracies, by Lisa Schnellinger

WEB SITES

The Columbia Journalism Review (http://www.cjr.org) provides guides for covering specific beats, including crime, climate change, health and other resources.

The American Journalism Review (http://www.ajr.org) provides guides for the Internet, research, statistics, press freedom, etc.

The Poynter Institute (http://www.poynter.org) provides discussion of a wide range of issues in journalism as well as instructional guides including very helpful "tip sheets."

The International Center for Journalists (http://www.icfj.org) has links to training tips and online training tools. It also runs www.ijnet.org , the International Journalists' Network.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A number of people generously shared their time and expertise to help make this project possible, including commenting on drafts of the manual, making reading suggestions and reviewing photographic selections:

JUDITH CLARKE, assistant professor of journalism at Hong Kong Baptist University. Meirion Edwards, consultant to The Thomson Foundation.

MIKEL FLAMM, IMMF photography trainer and board member.

DENIS D. GRAY, Bangkok bureau chief for The Associated Press and IMMF co-president, 1994-2009.

SARAH MCLEAN, IMMF project director, 1994-2009.

GRAHAM WATTS, IMMF trainer.

We are grateful to everybody who helped find the story examples included in the two editions of this manual, and to all the news organizations which gave permission for the use of excerpts from their stories, particularly The Associated Press.

Various publications were helpful in the writing of this manual, most of which are listed under Further Reading. They also include publications and instructional guides provided by the International Center for Journalists and the Knight International Press Fellowship Program.

PHOTO CREDITS

Cover: *Top left*, MIKEL FLAMM. *Middle from left*, VINAI DITHAJOHN, WIRUCH THONGCHAEW, DOMINIC FAULDER.

Bottom from left, DOMINIC FAULDER, SAROT MEKSOPHAWANNAKUL
Inset bottom right, VINAI DITHAJOHN.

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Have an eye out for the unusual

DOMINIC FAULDER is a British journalist who has been based in Bangkok since the early 1980s, contributing articles, photographs and commentaries to a wide range of news organizations. He was a special correspondent for the regional newsweekly *Asiaweek* until its closure in 2001, reporting mainly on Myanmar and Cambodia. He has held numerous board positions at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand, including president for two terms, and was co-president of the IMMF from 1994 to 2008. Faulder was educated at St Paul's in London and the University of Warwick.

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REPORTING and Writing News

A Basic Handbook

second edition

"When I wondered what it was that set the IMMF apart, I realised it was the fact that its ethos flourishes in the people that run it. I could not recommend a better forum for the training of journalists."

– Graham Watts, former Deputy World News Editor, *Financial Times*, London

"I was very impressed with what the foundation was achieving with limited resources."

– David Brown, Agriculture Editor, *The Daily Telegraph*, London

"I don't want to exaggerate the endeavours of the IMMF, but it has been just about the only organisation to keep up its work in the training of young journalists in emerging Indochina countries on a consistent basis. Our reporters who have participated in the IMMF programmes have not only been satisfied with what they had learned, but also enjoyed opportunities to be with fellow journalists from neighbouring countries."

– Pana Janviroj, President, *The Nation*, Bangkok

"IMMF, in my view, does an invaluable service in putting across these issues to journalists in the region and in training them to communicate more effectively. I have taught on two courses, and have frequently been struck by the way minds are changed and eyes opened."

– David Nicholson-Lord, London

THE INDOCHINA MEDIA MEMORIAL FOUNDATION