

Basic News Writing/
Introduction to Journalism

Cross-pressures on journalism & journalists

Bias & trust

Bias – Commonly identified biases

Journalists at major outlets tend to be “**liberal**”, politically and culturally

Journalists are **human** – have a set of life experiences; worldview

Journalism as a **practice**

- Favors conflict – stirring the pot
- Favors novelty – the news; man bites dog
- Favors celebrity – prompts interest, good for engagement

Journalists also often see themselves as **watchdogs** for the less powerful against the powerful – “Comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable”

Bias – Less commonly named biases

Journalism outlets (employers) tend to be “conservative” – running for-profit **businesses**; oppose unions

Journalism tends not to question **fundamental patterns** in society

- Nationalism (Does Al Qaeda deserve a fair hearing?)
- Capitalism (Does communism deserve a fair hearing?)
- Two-party system (Should the political structure be questioned?)

Audiences tend to be heavily biased – favor media outlets that pander to their already-existing opinions (more below)

Bias – Less commonly named biases

Speed & deadlines

Journalism is about the now

Journalists compete to be the first with the story

Sometimes inaccuracies can occur – damages trust

Every day the “news hole” needs to be filled

Stories need to be completed by **deadline**

If the story is incomplete, it is still published – possibly damaging trust



Bias – Less commonly named biases

Commercial imperatives

Media companies need to make money to stay in business (whether for-profit or non-profit)

Media companies make money by attracting audiences, then selling ads, subscriptions, etc.

Today's media environment is hyper-competitive (How much time did you spend on IG or Snapchat today?)

So, media companies must publish stories/items that strongly appeal to their audiences; shy away from stories that don't



Bias – Less commonly named biases

Commercial imperatives

Commercial imperative/audience feedback loop – can become “audience capture”

The “attention economy”

Upscale consumers are often preferred by advertisers



Polarization and Politics

The U.S. is becoming more “**polarized**” – people are aligning more closely with their partisan or ideological affiliation (Republican vs. Democrat; Liberal vs. Conservative)

- People tend to favor media outlets that reflect their pre-existing worldview back to them
- Feeds into the imperatives to maximize audience and profits
- People tend to criticize media that doesn't agree with their worldview – mainstream media, “lamestream” media

Meanwhile, social media companies maximize “**engagement**” by feeding people's worldview back to them

Fabrication, Lying, & Fake News

Fabrication – occasionally a journalist gets caught just making up sources, quotes, stories – usually for praise or fame

Lying – sometimes news outlets lie to their audiences, often to retain audience and profits

Fake news – deliberately false information

- Ideologues & political operators
- For money
- “Some men just want to watch the world burn”

Sometimes “fake news” is simply overblown or overly hyped news



All of these cross-pressures make
living up to journalistic ideals difficult

And failures damage trust

The erosion of trust – or the polarization of trust?

Trust in the media is complex

- People tend to trust media that aligns with their views
- People tend to trust local media more than national media
- A video from [Pew Research](#) for more

Often hear criticism of “the media”

But **there is no “the media”** – there are many different media, serving different audiences, all chasing audience and \$\$\$, hopefully while pursuing the truth

Very few news consumers think about these issues. Should they? Is that our job?