

Writing For Media

Week 6 Attributions

Providing Attributions

- Attribution tells an audience who gave info to a reporter, or the source of the information.
- It adds authenticity and authority to a story.
- Four reasons to attribute information:
- Protect the writer. Clear and honest writing demands that potentially controversial statements are attributed. This protects the writer. If it is an official's theory, let that official take responsibility for it.
- Avoid opinion. Anything that smacks of opinion must be attributed.
- Protect newsmakers. Reports of potentially criminal behaviour must never be treated as established facts until the judicial system has had its say.
- Add authority. To show that reporters didn't come up with a theory but that trained officials feel this way.

When and How To Attribute

- Attribution tells reader the source of information.
- Not every piece of info, however, requires attribution.
- Attribution is needed when an opinion or some other info subject to change or controversy is cited.

Verb of attribution

- Because *said* is a neutral verb, it should nearly always be used in the attribution for news stories.
- *Added* can also be used because it, too, is an **objective verb of attribution**.
- **Objective verbs of attribution** are verbs that reporters can use when quoting sources, to avoid interjecting personal feelings and perceptions about the way the source sounded.

- Using *said* might seem repetitive and unimaginative, but reporters do not have to bombard readers with it after every sentence.
- Here are some verbs of attribution that generally should be avoided:

Asserted	Demanded	Opined
Bellowed	Emphasized	Stammered
Contended	Harangued	Stated
Cried	Hinted	Stressed
Declared	Maintained	

- Because verbs of attribution refer to speech and not to conduct or action, they should *not* be used in ways that suggest physical impossibilities.

Placement of Attributions:

Six guidelines

- *If a single sentence is quoted directly, attribution usually follows the quotation. Example:*
- *If multiple sentences are quoted directly, attribution normally follows the first sentence.*
- *When speakers change, new attribution should be placed before the first quoted sentence.*
- *Attribution can precede a multiple-sentence direct quotation.*
- *Attribution to the same speaker should not be used more than once in a quotation, even if the quotation continues for several paras.*
- *If a partial quotation is followed by a complete direct quotation, use attribution between them.*

Anonymous Sources

- Each time reporters conduct interviews, they face the risk that their sources will request anonymity.
- Reporters must learn how to deal with people who are willing to provide information only if their names are not used in the story.
- Establish rules for the interview *before* it begins. Never assume that sources understand the established conventions that deal with the use of material.

- These conventions are:
- *On the Record*. All materials can be used, complete with the name of the source and his or her identification.
- *Off the Record*. The material cannot be used. Period. Reporters must decide whether the info they could potentially gain under these circumstances is worth it. Often reporters refuse to accept information off the record, choosing instead to ferret it out from another source.
- *On Background*. The material can be used, but attribution by name cannot be provided. Example: “We expect a quick settlement of the strike,” a high-ranking Labour Department official said.
- *On Deep Background*. The material can be used, but not in direct quotations. Also the material cannot be attributed to the source.