

DIPLOMA IN MEDIA & COMMUNICATION



MCJ 301

PRINT JOURNALISM

Week 9

Key Topics

- Crime and Punishment
- Attribution
- Newspaper or TV Archives
- Guidelines for Reporting Crime Stories
- Stories about Specific Types of Crimes
- Court Stories

Attribution

- In crime stories, make sure you attribute all accusatory information and much of the information you received secondhand (not by direct observation)
- Factual information does not need attribution (E.g.: the location of a crime is factual)
- To reduce the use of attribution after every sentence, you can use an overview attribution for part of your story, especially if you are recounting what happened

Newspaper or TV Archives

- The first thing you should do before you write your story is to check newspaper clips in your library, TV file tape, or online archives
- Clips and tapes in your news organization database may not be up-to-date
- They may contain stories of someone's arrest but not the disposition of the case
- Always check to see if charges were dropped; or if the person is still awaiting trial or was convicted

Guidelines for Reporting Crime Stories

- Victims
 - Get full names, ages, addresses, occupations (use it if relevant)



Guidelines for Reporting Crime Stories

- Suspects
 - Get full names, ages, addresses
 - Description
 - Guidelines whether to include race or ethnic background
 - Check your organization's house style
 - A general rule is to avoid using race and ethnicity unless it is crucial to the story or to the description of a suspect

Guidelines for Reporting Crime Stories

- Cause of Fatalities or Injuries
 - Describe the injuries
 - Where were the injured taken to (hospitals, etc)
 - In stories involving property, specify the cause and extent of damages

Guidelines for Reporting Crime Stories

- Location of Incident
 - Get specific information for a graphic
 - E.g.: Info Graphics



Guidelines for Reporting Crime Stories

- What Happened
 - Make sure that you understand the sequence of the event
 - Always ask about any unusual circumstances



Guidelines for Reporting Crime Stories

- Arrest and Charges Filed
 - If people have been arrested, find out where they are being held, when they will be arraigned (a hearing for formal charges) or when the next court procedure will be
 - If they have already been arraigned, find out the amount of bail

Guidelines for Reporting Crime Stories

- Eyewitness Accounts
 - Comments by neighbours may also be relevant
 - Be careful about using accusations against named individuals
 - When in doubt, leave them out



Guidelines for Reporting Crime Stories

- Role-Play

- Imagine that you are in a car in the accident, your home was burglarized or burnt in a fire, your friend or relative was injured in a crime
- What information would you want to know if you are personally affected by the story?

Guidelines for Reporting Crime Stories

- Play Detective
 - What information would you want to gather to solve the crime?



Guidelines for Reporting Crime Stories

- Gather Graphics
 - What information would you need to draw a diagram of the car accident, draw the crime scene or a locator map, write a highlights box or a chronology of events, or design a chart or graphic depicting how and where the crime occurred
 - Ask questions to gain the information you will have to convey to the artist who will draw the graphic for your story

Guidelines for Reporting Crime Stories

- Use the Telephone

- Often you will gather information for crime stories over the telephone
- Usually you will get information from the dispatcher or public information officer who was not at the scene and is just reading a report to you
- Make sure you ask police officials to repeat any information that you did not hear clearly
- Also ask the police officer releasing the information to give you his full name and rank
- Police often identify themselves only by title and last name
- Ask the officer to spell the names of all the people involved; you can spell them back to double-check the accuracy

Stories About Specific Types of Crimes

- Motor Vehicle Accidents
 - Vehicle accident stories are usually hard news stories, unless there is an unusual angle



Stories About Specific Types of Crimes

- Motor Vehicle Accidents (cont.)
 - Make sure you have the following information:
 - Speed, destination, and directions of vehicles and exact locations at the time of the accident;
 - Cause of accident, arrest, citations and damages;
 - Victims' use of required equipment (seat belts, helmets, etc)
 - Weather-related information (if relevant)
 - Rescue attempts or acts of heroism

Stories About Specific Types of Crimes

- Burglaries and Robberies
 - A burglary involves entry into a building with intent to commit any type of crime
 - Robbery involves stealing with violence or a threat against people
 - If you are away and a person enters your home and steals your compact disc player, that's a burglary
 - If you are asleep upstairs and the person is downstairs stealing the player, that's still a burglary

Stories About Specific Types of Crimes

- Burglaries and Robberies (cont.)
 - But if the person threatens you with force, that's a robbery
 - A burglary always involves a place and can involve violence against a person
 - A robbery **must** involve violence or threats against a person

Stories About Specific Types of Crimes

- Burglaries and Robberies (cont.)
 - For both Burglaries and Robberies, include the following information:
 - What, why, who, where, when and how
 - What was taken and the value of the goods
 - Types of weapons used (in robberies)
 - How entry was made
 - Similar circumstances (frequency of crime or any odd conditions)

Stories About Specific Types of Crimes

- Burglaries and Robberies (cont.)
 - Mention in the lead any injuries or deaths
 - Keep the tone serious when the story involves death or serious injuries
 - In other cases, use your judgment and lead with any unusual angles
 - If there is none, stress what was taken or how the burglars entered the building, if that is the most interesting factor

Stories About Specific Types of Crimes

- Burglaries and Robberies (cont.)
 - Whether you write a soft or hard lead depends on how serious the crime was, whether it is the first story on the crime and whether you have enough interesting information to warrant a soft approach

Stories About Specific Types of Crimes

- Homicides
 - **Homicide** is the legal term for *killing*
 - **Murder** is the term for *premeditated homicide*
 - **Manslaughter** is homicide *without premeditation*
 - A person can be arrested on charges of murder, but he / she is not a guilty until convicted of the crime

Stories About Specific Types of Crimes

- Homicides (cont.)
 - Do not call someone a murderer until then
 - Also, do not say someone was murdered until authorities have established that the victim was murdered – in a premeditated act of killing – or until a court determines that

Stories About Specific Types of Crimes

- Homicides (cont.)
 - Some additional information to gather:
 - Weapon (specific description)
 - Clues and motives (from the police)
 - Specific wounds
 - Official cause of death
 - Circumstances of suspect's arrest
 - Lots of details from relatives, neighbours, friends, officials, eyewitnesses, and your own observations at the crime scene

Stories About Specific Types of Crimes

- Fires
 - Although fire stories may not be crime stories (unless arson or other criminal behaviour was involved), police reporters are often responsible for fire stories

Stories About Specific Types of Crimes

- Fires

- Important information to include in fire stories:

- The time the fire started, time fire companies responded, time fire was brought under control
 - Number of fire companies responding, number of trucks at scene
 - Evacuation (if any) and where people were taken
 - Injuries and fatalities (make sure you ask if there were any firefighters injured)
 - Cause (ask if arson is suspected – intentionally setting fire) how and where the fire started

Stories About Specific Types of Crimes

- Fires

- Important information to include in fire stories:

- Who discovered the fire, extent of damage, insurance coverage
 - Description of building
 - Estimated cost of damages
 - Presence and condition of smoke detectors or sprinkler system (especially in a public building or apartment building)
 - Fire inspection record, fire code violations (usually for follow-up stories, especially in public buildings)



Court Stories

- To cover courts, you need a basic understanding of the process and the terminology that is used
- Court procedures vary from state to state and even in counties within states
- A complete understanding of the courts would require a three-year course in the law field
- But in news reporting, whenever you hear a term you do not understand, always seek a definition

Court Stories

- If you do not understand something, chances are the readers will not either
- If you choose to report a court case with a hard news approach, you can use story-telling techniques to dialogue, description and narrative writing for portions of the story so that readers can experience the human drama that filled the courtroom

Court Stories

- Some basic guidelines for writing court stories:
 - Get reactions, facial expressions, and gestures of the defendant and the accusers, attorneys, relatives and other people affected by the case, especially in trial stories and verdict stories
 - Used descriptive detail and colour – lively quotes, dramatic testimonies, and dialogues
 - Translate all jargons and avoid legal terminology
 - State exact charges in the story

Court Stories

- Some basic guidelines for writing court stories:
 - Give the background of the crime, no matter how many stories have been published about this case
 - Include the name of the court where the trial or hearing is being held
 - Get comments from defendants, prosecutors, defense attorneys, plaintiffs (the people who brought suit or filed charges), relatives, and jurors in all verdict stories

Court Stories

- Some basic guidelines for writing court stories:
 - In verdict stories, include how long the jury deliberated. Also include how many jurors were on the case
 - Write the next step – the court appearance or in verdict stories, plans for an appeal if the defendant is found guilty



Court Stories

- Terms Used in Court Reporting
 - **Acquittal:** Finding by a court or jury that a person accused of a crime is not guilty
 - **Adjudicate:** To make a final determination or judgment by the court
 - **Affidavit:** Sworn statement of facts
 - **Appeal:** Plea to ask a higher court to review a judgment, verdict or order of a lower court
 - **Appellant:** Person who files an appeal

Court Stories

- Terms Used in Court Reporting (cont.)
 - **Arraignment:** Court hearing in which a defendant in a criminal case is formally charged with a crime and given a chance to enter a plea of guilty, not guilty or no contest. At this time, bail is usually set
 - **Bail:** Amount of money set by the court that the defendant must guarantee to pay if he does not show up for a court trial. If the defendant cannot raise the money through a bail bond company or personal sources, he stays in jail

Court Stories

- Terms Used in Court Reporting (cont.)
 - **Bond:** Written promise to pay bail money on the conditions stated. The bond for bail is usually 10% of the total amount of bail set. The term is used often interchangeably with bail. Very often, a person will borrow money from a bond company. Then if the person flees, the bond company loses the money
 - **Brief:** Legal document filed with the court by a lawyer, stating the facts of the case and arguments citing how laws apply to this case

Court Stories

- **Terms Used in Court Reporting (cont.)**
 - **Change of Venue:** Procedure to seek a change of location of the trial, usually when defense attorneys contend that the defendant cannot get a fair trial in the current location because of too much pre-trial publicity
 - **Charge:** Official allegation of criminal wrongdoing
 - **Civil Suit:** Lawsuit to determine rights, duties, claims for damages, ownerships or other settlements in non-criminal matters

Court Stories

- **Terms Used in Court Reporting (cont.)**
 - **Complaint:** Formal affidavit in which one person accuses another of violating the law
 - **Condemnation:** Civil action to acquire ownership of property for public use. When a municipality wants to build a road or sidewalk, the government will condemn the property to gain right of way
 - **Contempt:** Action that disregards the order or authority of the court. A lawyer who screams obscenities at the judge will probably be found in contempt of court

Court Stories

- Terms Used in Court Reporting (cont.)
 - **Defendant:** In a civil case, the person being sued. In a criminal case, the person charged with breaking the law
 - **Deposition:** Written statement of testimony from a witness under oath
 - **Discovery:** Pre-trial examination of a person (including depositions), documents or other items to find evidence that may be used in trial

Court Stories

- Terms Used in Court Reporting (cont.)
 - **Dismissal:** Order to drop the case
 - **Docket:** List of cases pending before the court. A trial docket is a list of cases pending trial
 - **Extradition:** Procedure to move a person accused of a crime from the state where he is residing to the state where the crime occurred and where the trial will be conducted

Court Stories

- **Terms Used in Court Reporting (cont.)**
 - **Felony:** Major crime punishable by a sentence of a year or more. Crimes such as robbery, homicide, and kidnapping are felonies; lesser crimes such as shoplifting are misdemeanors. Legally, a felony is defined as a crime punishable by death or imprisonment in a state prison
 - **Grand Jury:** Groups of citizen selected by the court to investigate whether there is enough evidence or probable cause that a crime occurred and that the person should be charged, or vindicated

Court Stories

- Terms Used in Court Reporting (cont.)
 - **Hung Jury:** Jury that cannot reach a unanimous verdict, a requirement in most criminal trials
 - **Indictment:** Recommendation by the grand jury that there is enough probable cause to charge a person or group of people with the crime under investigation. The grand jury hands up an indictment to the judge (because the judge sits on a platform higher than the jury); the judge hands down rulings. It's preferable to use the term *issued*

Court Stories

- Terms Used in Court Reporting (cont.)
 - **Injunction:** Order by the court instructing a person, group or company to stop the action that was occurring, such as picketing.
 - **Innocent:** The term “not guilty” is preferable in court cases. The *Associated Press Stylebook* previously recommended using the term “innocent” in case the word “not” in “not guilty” was dropped from typesetting

Court Stories

- Terms Used in Court Reporting (cont.)
 - **Misdemeanor:** Crime less serious than felony; crime punishable by less than one year in jail and / or fines
 - **Mistrial:** Trial that is set aside or declared invalid because of some mistakes in proceedings or, in a criminal trial, because the jury cannot reach a unanimous verdict
 - **Motion:** Request for the court to make a ruling or finding

Court Stories

- Terms Used in Court Reporting (cont.)
 - **Nolo Contendere:** Latin for “I will not contest it” (no contest). This plea has the same effect as a guilty plea, but it is not an admission of guilt. It means the person will not fight the charge. If you agree to pay a fine for a traffic ticket but do not agree that you were speeding, you are pleading no contest. This type of plea is used as a form of bargaining to get the defendant a reduced charge in exchange for his agreement not to protest and to eliminate the need for a trial. Use the English term *no contest* in a story, and explain briefly that it is not an admission of guilt

Court Stories

- Terms Used in Court Reporting (cont.)
 - **Plaintiff:** Person who sues in a civil case. The defendant is the one being sued
 - **Plea:** Defendant's response to a charge, stating that he / she is guilty, not guilty, or not willing to contest the charge

Court Stories

- Terms Used in Court Reporting (cont.)
 - **Plea Bargain:** Agreement between the prosecutor and the defendant (or defense attorney) to accept a lesser charge and a lesser sentence in return for a guilty or a no contest plea. Plea bargaining is used extensively as a way to eliminate court trials. Once the defendant pleads guilty or no contest, there is no need for a trial. However, a plea bargain must be approved by the court

Court Stories

- **Terms Used in Court Reporting (cont.)**
 - **Probable Cause:** Determination that there is enough evidence to prosecute a criminal case. Police officials also need probable cause – enough reasons to believe a crime being committed – when they seek a search warrant or any other warrant for a person’s arrest
 - **Probation:** Condition in which the person is released from serving a jail sentence if he meets certain terms, such as serving in the community, entering a centre for drug treatment or accepting whatever restrictions the judge decides

Court Stories

- Terms Used in Court Reporting (cont.)
 - **Recognizance:** Literally “recognition”. A person may be released from jail based on their own recognizance – meaning the recognition of a previously good reputation. This ruling is essentially the judge’s way of saying that, because of the person’s reputation, he is not considered a high risk for skipping the next court hearing or trial

Court Stories

- Terms Used in Court Reporting (cont.)
 - **Subpoena:** Court order commanding a person to appear in court or to release documents to the court
 - **Summary Judgment:** Procedure in a civil suit asking the court to give final judgment on the grounds that there are no further questions and no need for a trial
 - **Summons:** Document notifying a defendant that a lawsuit or complaint has been filed against him

Court Stories

- Terms Used in Court Reporting (cont.)
 - **Suspended Sentences:** Court order stating that the punishment of the defendant will be suspended if certain conditions are met. A person who receives probation gets a suspended sentence
 - **Temporary Injunction:** Court order to stop an action, such as a protest, for a specific amount of time until a court hearing and ruling whether the action should be enjoined, or stopped permanently

Court Stories

- Terms Used in Court Reporting (cont.)
 - **Tort:** Civil case involving damages, pain, suffering or other allegations of wrongdoing
 - **True Bill:** Indictment issued by a grand jury
 - **Verdict:** Decision by a jury about guilt or innocence
 - **Warrant:** Court order directing law enforcement officials to arrest a person. A search warrant gives officials authority to search premises

THE END

