

Module 1

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF A NEWSPAPER

Journalism is one of the most important professions in the world. It informs citizens about various events that take place in our community, state, country and beyond. The reports and analyses of journalists help people know the current affairs and to form opinions. Journalists inform the public through newspapers, magazines, radio, television, internet etc. These means of communication are often referred to as the news media.

Newspapers are daily engaged in the gathering, packaging and distribution of news, opinions and pictures from across the globe. Mass media shape and mould public opinion and represent social reality. They are complex and multi-faceted organisations involving huge business and commercial interests. Efficient and harmonious coordination of various departments of a newspaper are essential if it is to effectively function as a professional and business entity.

The mere collection of news and its distribution alone will not ensure the successful functioning of a newspaper. Advertisements in a newspaper are the basis of its stability and profitability. Similarly, a paper must have good circulation. The greater the circulation the greater will be the volume of advertisements. The mechanical production (print quality) and the distribution of newspapers also play a key role.

The organizational setup varies from newspaper to newspaper depending on the size and turnover of a newspaper. Generally most of the newspapers have three major departments - editorial, business and mechanical. Large newspapers may have more departments such as Human Resource Development, Public Relations, Personnel and Administration. However, editorial, business and mechanical are the core departments of a newspaper. Let us discuss the most important characteristics of these departments.

1. Editorial Department

The editorial department is the key section of a newspaper. The news, features, comments, columns, editorials, cartoons, letters to the editor are handled by this section under the leadership of the editor or editor-in-chief. A host of assistant editors, news editors, sub-editors, special correspondents and reporters work under the editor. The chief reporter along with a team of reporters collects news from various places. These reports are edited by a team of sub editors under the supervision of a news editor. Most newspapers have separate desks for local, regional, national and foreign news. Presently, most of the newspapers have online editions. A team of journalists will edit, design and present the content for the internet editions.

2. Business Department

The business department of a newspaper is of prime importance. To function properly and effectively, a newspaper has to be run as a business enterprise.

Usually, the business department consists of two sections, namely, advertising and circulation.

3. Mechanical Department

The mechanical section of a newspaper is in charge of the actual production of the paper. This section deals with the composing, plate making, printing, packing and dispatching. Once the stories are edited and arranged, the pages are handed over to the mechanical department. Here, these pages are converted into metal plates through a chemical process for offset printing. Once the papers are printed, they are folded, counted, and packed for delivery to various destinations.

Big newspapers may have more specialised departments than the above mentioned. Newspaper business is like any other corporate business venture. All the modern management principles are applied in order to maximize profit and to render the best product to the readers. Internet editions, mobile applications and other technologies are essential in reaching out the newspaper to the generation next.

Structure of Editorial Department

The editorial department is described as the soul of a newspaper. The department has two important sections namely reporting and editing.

Reporters gather news from different parts of the country and also from abroad. Photographers provide photos and cartoonists supply sketches of personalities and events. Editorial writers and special writers contribute editorials, features, articles, middles, columns etc. All the news collected including the photographs, cartoons, special stories, columns, middles etc. are edited and arranged by the editorial department. The organisational structure of the reporting and editing section is given below.

Editor

Reporting Section

1. Bureau Chief
2. Chief Reporter
3. Senior Reporters
4. Special Correspondents
5. Reporters
6. Trainee Reporters

Editing Section

1. News Editor
2. Chief Sub-editor
3. Senior Sub-editors
4. Special/Magazine Editor
5. Sub-editors
6. Trainee Sub- editors

1. Editor

The editor takes all important decisions connected with the publication of news and expression of opinion on vital national and international issues and events. He/she coordinates the editorial department (editing & reporting). Every newspaper in India is required under the law to print the name of the editor on every issue. This pins responsibility on the editor for what goes to print. If a newspaper violates the laws of the land the person responsible can easily be identified, located and booked.

The editor is appointed by the proprietor. The relationship between an editor and a proprietor need not be a smooth one always. We have numerous cases in India where the editor had to step down on account of disagreements with the proprietors. In some cases the proprietors have unceremoniously kicked out the editors. Legendary Malayalam editor Swadeshbhimani Ramakrishna Pilla had left the editorship of many newspapers on account of disagreements with the proprietors.

Some people hold the view that an editor is responsible solely to his/her conscience and to the readers. Interference on the editorial policy or on the discharge of the duties of an editor is considered an assault on the freedom of the press and it should be resisted at any cost. But there are few takers for this view.

Some newspapers such as *The Times of India* have done away with the post of chief editor. Some others such as *The Hindu*, and *Malayala Manorama* choose the editor from the family members of the proprietors so that they can avoid possible differences of opinion in the editorial matters.

2. News Editor

News editor is in charge of the newsroom and his major responsibility is in the selection of news stories. He/she allocates tasks to news team and instructs reporters on the news angles which are to be highlighted in reports. News editor is directly answerable to the chief editor.

The news editor in consultation with the chief reporter will decide what news stories should be covered and in what detail. As the final authority on the news, he has the power to stop the printing of a newspaper in order to accommodate an important fast-breaking news story. He/she must scan all incoming news and issue directions for appropriate editing. Dummy for the first page is finalised by the news editor. He/she should know the pressure, stress, ordeals and joys of working in the late night as well as the strain of competitive journalism and news operations.

3. Chief sub-editor

The senior sub-editor or the chief sub-editor is the captain of the editorial section of the news desk. It is his/her responsibility to see that copies are distributed among the sub-editors and to ensure that copies are edited properly, attractive and meaningful headlines are given and copies are free from libels. The edited copies are handed over to the printing section before the cut-off time.

4. Sub-editor/copy editor

The sub-editor also known as copy editor has been described as the midwife to the story and *the unsung hero of a newspaper*. He/she should have a lawyer's analytical approach and quick-mindedness which enables him/her to understand a story quickly and come to the core of the matter.

A sub-editor has to give appropriate headlines and, where necessary, revise and condense the material to suit the available space. These tasks call for a flair for writing and mastery over the language. He/she has to check and recheck facts, style, grammar etc. while editing a story in a newspaper.

A sub-editor's working hours are more regular than that of a reporter. Unlike a reporter who can be called to duty at any time, a sub-editor's duty is fixed like any other office worker's. The only difference is that a sub-editor has to work in shifts and his/her work begins in the late afternoon and goes up to 2 to 3 in the wee hours of the morning.

5. Chief photographer

Photojournalism is a form of journalism that creates images in order to describe a news story. A photojournalist is a visual reporter who must often make decisions instantly and carry photographic equipment, often while exposed to significant obstacles such as physical danger, weather, crowds etc.

A good photojournalist is both a skilled photographer who uses the camera and other equipment to his best advantage. He must also be a creative person who mixes technique and judgement to capture images as they happen because news events do not wait for the photographer.

A photojournalist must be prepared to act fast and have his camera always at hand. Interesting pictures are most often a result of the alertness of the photojournalist who is at the right place at the right time. The chief photographer coordinates the gathering of photos.

6. Reporter/correspondents

A reporter collects news on behalf of the readers of a newspaper. To a great extent, a newspaper's reputation and credibility depends on the reporters. They can make or destroy a newspaper. A reporter performs the noble task of educating and informing the reader about what is happening around them.

As in every other profession, specialisation is there in reporting too. Big newspapers have specialists to report political, legal, business, education, crime, sports, films and special events. These reporters write authoritative articles in their specialised areas.

An experienced reporter on being given an assignment asks:

1. What has happened? That is, what has really happened ---the complete story.
2. Why (or how) did it happen? That is, what are the explanations.
3. What does it mean? That is, how to interpret it.
4. What next? That is, in the light of the present news what is expected to happen next.
5. What is beneath the surface? That is, to interpret an event.

Principles of reporting

Every news story should contain four essential elements-- accuracy, attribution of source, fairness and objectivity. These factors give credibility to a publication and at the same time demonstrate a reporter's sense of responsibility.

1. Accuracy

The facts in a story should be correct, down to the minutest detail. A reporter must be precise with every bit of the details of a story. Readers tend to judge a

newspaper's credibility by their own experiences with its record of accuracy. News stories with inaccuracies are a sign of a lazy reporter.

2. Attribution

Source identification should be as specific as possible. Use the person's name if possible, not merely a 'spokesperson'. A reporter should not invent news source or attribute information to such vague quarters like 'an informed source', 'a confidential observer' etc. The source from which a story's information is obtained must be clearly identified. Failure to do so makes a reporter's story suspect.

3. Fairness

News stories should be scrupulously fair in their presentation of information. They should never serve the vested interests of groups or individuals. When a person criticises the behavior or opinion of another in a story, basic fairness requires that a person criticised is given an opportunity to respond.

4. Objectivity

Writers should strive to keep their personal opinions out of a news story. In general readers are unable to detect the reporter's political beliefs, religious affiliations or social attitudes. Every reporter will have his/her personal beliefs, interests, and involvements but these should not be allowed to creep into the story. At times a reporter will cover events that run contrary to those personal concerns. In such cases, the reporter should work harder to achieve evenhandedness.

Before a reporter submits a story, read through it one more time and ask: " Is it accurate?, Does it have a proper attribution?, Is it fair? And is it objective?"