

Unit 2: Working in TV Journalism

These learning materials comprise several short tasks with key questions and resources focusing on the issues surrounding ethical and institutional practice within TV journalism.

The materials are available in downloadable PDF or in Word files that you can tailor to your own requirements. The tasks are suitable for a range of attainment levels, and teachers are advised to select the material most appropriate for their students.

Introduction

ACTIVITIES

1. The aims of TV journalism
2. The internal contexts of TV journalism
3. The external contexts of TV journalism

General information about these lesson ideas:

Aims and Learning Outcomes

What students can expect to learn and achieve.

Assessment

Ways in which tasks might be assessed, either formally or informally.

Curriculum Context

How the materials relate to the requirements of GCSE, AS/A2 Level and BTEC qualifications in Media Studies as well as the Programme of Study for Citizenship and English Language at Key Stage 4.

Introduction

These activities are designed to help students build on their knowledge of how news stories are structured and selected. Throughout unit 1, students will have analysed news values with a view to writing a script for a TV news story. In this unit, students will be encouraged to examine the social, political and ethical contexts in which news stories are conceived and produced.

Students who produce news need to be able to make judgements about compliance, accuracy and objectivity in a fast-paced environment. This unit will lay the foundations for these decisions. In order to bring the subject of professional ethics into a practical focus, examples and hypothetical situations have been included in the activities. Teachers should feel free to adapt these examples as appropriate or to substitute stories and situations which have developed out of class work on unit 1 of the course.

ACTIVITY 1: The aims of TV journalism

Objectivity and language

1.1 In pairs or small groups, consider the language used by TV journalists, paying particular attention to the use of passive and active constructions and the past tense.

1.2 Discuss the language used in the following sentences, encouraging students to circle or underline key words and phrases and to annotate them with suggestions as to why they were chosen:

1. A new Government report suggests that passive smoking may have a more dangerous effect on the health of children and young people than was previously imagined.
2. Critics of Gordon Brown's plans to increase aid given to developing countries to fight childhood diseases have claimed that the plans are short-sighted.
3. According to the Campaign to Protect Rural England, England faces losing most of its real countryside if current trends continue.

1.3 Discuss the differences between subjective and objective viewpoints and how this relates to the use of emotive and neutral language. Ask students to complete the table in **Worksheet 2.1** with emotive and neutral phrases as appropriate.

Consider the different connotations of these words and speculate as to the importance of language selection to issues of accuracy, fairness and balance in TV news journalism.

Ethics in action

1.4 The Communications Act 2003 demands "due accuracy" and "due impartiality" in TV news production. As a class, discuss what is meant by "due". For example the OFCOM Broadcasting Code says the following:

"Due" is an important qualification to the concept of impartiality. Impartiality itself means not favouring one side over another. "Due" means adequate or appropriate to the subject and nature of the programme. So "due impartiality" does not mean an equal division of time has to be given to every view, or that every argument and every facet of every argument has to be represented. The approach to due impartiality may vary according to the nature of the subject, the type of programme and channel, the likely expectation of the audience as to content, and the extent to which the content and approach is signalled to the audience.

Worksheet 2.2 gives a list of concepts used in discussions of journalistic ethics:

- accuracy
- impartiality
- balance
- neutrality
- objectivity
- fairness
- social responsibility
- bias
- advocacy.

The worksheet asks students to consider:

- the meaning of each concept
- which concepts are similar
- examples news stories where these concepts come into play.

In order to place these concepts in context, watch the online interview with the deputy editor. Discuss the practical application of these editorial values and explore the site to find out how ethical decisions could affect the business of news production.

1.5 Watch a pre-recorded excerpt from a TV news programme with the class (or a clip from the Channel 4 News site www.channel4.com/news), inviting pupils to identify examples of these concepts in action. Pay particular attention to the amount of time

allotted to each of the guests in a live interview, especially if the editors have tried to ensure that each side of the debate is represented.

Worksheet 2.3 asks students to consider what steps they might take to ensure stories meet ethical journalistic standards.

1.6 Discuss these findings with a view to considering whether complete objectivity is possible or even desirable in TV journalism. Note that each news broadcast represents only a selection of stories designed to appeal to a target audience in possession of a remote control. How do constraints of time and money affect impartiality? To what extent is news a 'construction'?

Allow the debate to widen, providing an opportunity to consider why journalistic ethics matter. To what extent are programme makers obliged to ensure that the news is entertaining and engaging as well as informative?

Ethics in conflict

1.7 Present the group with three hypothetical situations in which the ethical underpinnings of TV news journalism come into conflict with the practical demands of the bulletin. Encourage students to debate possible solutions to these dilemmas in small groups or in a formal class debate or role play. Ensure that reference is made to the concepts listed above and the NUJ Code of Conduct.

1. A news journalist is covering a factory picket line during a heated demonstration against proposed changes to working conditions. Just before a live report is due to be transmitted, the journalist is attacked by a policeman who may or may not have mistaken him for a protester. The journalist attempts to fight back and is pushed to the floor. He then takes refuge in a side street, where he intends to broadcast his live report. Should he be allowed to do so? What sort of ethical issues does this incident raise?
2. In the middle of a secret vote deciding on the leader of the Conservative Party, a TV journalist has been given a piece of important information by one of the MPs involved in counting the votes. The journalist knows that no other TV news programme has been given this piece of information and that if she were to report on it, she would have an exclusive. Unfortunately she has no time to verify this piece of information before her live bulletin goes on air. Should the journalist go ahead with this scoop? What sort of ethical issues does this incident raise?
3. During the floods in the American South, a news man is reporting on individuals who refuse to move out of their homes from a boat which sails across the flood water. He meets a man who has decided to stay put and wait until the waters die down. The journalist wants to persuade the man to leave his home and sail to safety on the small news boat. He also intends to film this 'rescue'. Should the journalist go ahead with his plan? What sort of ethical issues does this incident raise?

Ask students to share their opinions with other members of the group and discuss any areas of consensus or disagreement.

Ethical safeguards

1.8 Ask students to read and annotate the NUJ Code of Conduct (available from <http://media.gn.apc.org/nujcode>). Encourage pairs or small groups of students to summarise each of the 13 guidelines in a single word or phrase. Use students' responses to begin a discussion of the safeguards in place to ensure that journalism is objective and accountable. They should also watch the interviews on this site to understand the particular issues at Channel 4 News.

Ensure that students understand the following:

- Permission is sought from interviewees before interviews are aired.
- Sources are expected to be checked and verified before they are presented to the TV audience.
- Each major TV channel has its own editorial guidelines to ensure that a consistent standard of programming is maintained (for example, the BBC guidelines can be accessed at www.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/edguide/editorialvalues).
- If an individual or group feels that an issue has been represented unfairly in a TV news bulletin, there are several ways in which they might register their complaint.

The interviews on this site include reference to the guidelines under which ITN, the producers of Channel 4 News, operate. Determine the extent to which partiality, accuracy and objectivity have been seen to have been undermined in TV news journalism by presenting an edited account of recent complaints made to the BBC (see www.bbc.co.uk/complaints). Ask students to identify and annotate complaints which call into question the journalistic integrity of the corporation. A similar exercise can be constructed around Ofcom, which grants licenses to broadcast, (www.ofcom.co.uk) or by running a Google search of recent complaints against TV broadcasters.

1.9 (Extension Activity) Refer to Chapter 4 of the Communications Act 2003 which stipulates that broadcasters should produce “high quality” national and international news with “due accuracy” and “due impartiality”.

Ethics and society

1.10 To place the changing face of TV news journalism in its historical and social context, encourage students to visit the BBC’s current online exhibition marking the 50th anniversary of *From Our Own Correspondent* (available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/from_our_own_correspondent). Ask students to compare a current news story with one first broadcast in the 1950s; are the ethical underpinnings of TV news the same? Has the language used changed over time?

ACTIVITY 2: The internal contexts of TV journalism

2.1 Before starting work on this activity, ask students to consider the different pressures placed on TV news by the ‘internal institution’ (i.e. the channel or broadcaster) as part of whose schedule the programme is produced. (Note that ITN is employed by Channel 4 to make the Channel 4 News programmes.) These might include:

- the need to grow and retain an audience
- the house style of the channel
- the editorial / political line
- the available technology
- the length and frequency of each bulletin
- the journalists who work for the channel
- the views of the individuals and corporations who own the channel.

Branding the news

2.2 Lead a brand-based discussion of Channel 4, encouraging students to brainstorm key ideas and connotations (e.g. young, funny, slick, etc.). Do students regularly watch Channel 4, Film4, E4 or More4? If so, when do they tend to watch them and what sort of programmes do they watch? Having compiled an anatomy of the Channel 4 brand, watch a clip of Channel 4 News (either pre-recorded or hosted on the www.channel4.com/news website) with the class.

Ask students to repeat the previous exercise focusing entirely on the Channel 4 News bulletin. Compare the words chosen to represent Channel 4 News with those suggested in the discussion about the whole Channel 4 brand. Do the words overlap? Are there any major areas of disagreement?

Use this comparison to form the basis of a discussion about the news programme as a 'flagship' for the channel's brand and public image.

Note that Channel 4 is required by the Communications Act 2003 to appeal to a culturally diverse society, to educate and to be distinctive. Are these core values reflected in the clips that the class has seen?

Competition

2.3 Study the early evening news schedules (including Newsround and BBC News 24), identifying news programmes and commenting on how audiences are segmented. Discuss whether competition makes for more accurate, intelligent journalism or whether the interests of the public are undermined as each programme chases audience share.

Show the class a range of clips from other news programmes (available at edition.cnn.com, news.bbc.co.uk, www.itv.com and www.sky.com/skynews). Ask students to take notes under specific subheadings whilst they are watching:

- look
- mode of address (how does the programme 'speak' to its audience? e.g. formal/informal, tone, language, direct/indirect address)
- target audience
- content.

Discuss the relative approaches of each of these broadcasters before conducting research into the ways in which competition might affect the editorial content of the news.

2.4 Divide the class into study groups to work on the following areas:

1. Study the TV schedules, paying particular attention to the timeslots each bulletin occupies, the length of each bulletin, and what programmes are these bulletins competing with.
2. Consider the type of adverts featured in the commercial breaks, who these adverts might appeal to and their length.
3. Study the BARB website (www.barb.co.uk): find out about average audience figures for the evening news bulletins of each of the main channels, how popular is the news in comparison to the channel's other programmes?
4. Study the interviews on this site to see how the Channel 4 News team consider their audience. The advertiser's pack in the resources section will be helpful.

Discuss the findings of each of the research groups before conducting a debate on whether TV news programmes are really in competition with one another.

Changing technology

2.5 Compare the technology available in 2005 news production to that available 50 years ago (again, the BBC's From Our Own Correspondent exhibition may prove a useful starting point – http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/from_our_own_correspondent).

Consider in particular the following innovations:

- the use of satellite technology to obtain instant reports worldwide
- ENG (Electronic News Gathering) using lightweight digital video cameras
- virtual studios (students might like to visit the website of Vizrt, the company responsible for the ITV News virtual studio, www.vizrt.com)
- the changing technologies of reception e.g. multichannel television, webcasting
- the use of ENPS in the newsroom (see www.enps.com)

Challenge students to suggest some ethical problems and pressures caused by such advances in technology.

Ownership and control

2.6 Discuss the ownership of the British media. How does the difference in ownership (e.g. the BBC charter vs. the ITV shareholders – ITV, Reuters and United Business Media, a profit-making organisation) affect the difference in news values between the channels?

Make a distinction between different types of control:

- allocative control (management who control budgets)
- productive control (producers who ensure deadlines are met, editors, reporters and presenters).

Ask students to use **Worksheet 2.4** to fill in the table, speculating on the competing demands and needs of each of the groups involved in controlling the news broadcast.

Competing pressures

2.7 TV news journalism is shaped by a range of factors and people that determine the ways in which news bulletins are produced. Use **Worksheet 2.5** to help students to construct a table that links together the competing pressures of TV news journalists.

Factors that students may consider include:

- house style
- editorial line
- budget
- deadline
- scheduling
- technology
- flagship role of TV news
- channel owners
- audience
- society
- victims
- advertisers.

ACTIVITY 3: The external contexts of TV journalism

Sources

3.1 Ask students to list the sources of news used by TV journalists using the information on this site and their own knowledge. Sources may include:

- leaks / tip-offs
- press releases
- spin doctors
- politicians
- other media

- news agencies (e.g. Reuters, Associated Press).

Ensure that the class has a good understanding of how each of these sources operates before asking pairs or small groups of students to consider the sources under the following headings:

- reliability
- priorities
- ease of verifying information.

Ask students to complete **Worksheet 2.6**, which challenges students to come up with ways of checking the veracity of information provided from various sources.

Compliance

3.2 Students must ensure that news items produced comply with the appropriate legal and regulatory guidelines. Talk about some of the following laws and restrictions and the ways in which they impact upon TV news production:

- libel
- Official Secrets Act
- Contempt of court
- reporting restrictions.

Refer to the video interviews on this site in order to expand the students' understanding of compliance.

3.3 Help the group to make a distinction between legal and regulatory compliance before dividing the class into two. One group should sift and summarise relevant areas of the Communications Act 2003 (legal) (www.communicationsbill.gov.uk), the other should focus on the Ofcom Broadcasting Code 2005 (regulatory) (www.ofcom.org.uk/tv/ifi/codes/bcode/ofcom-broadcasting-code.pdf).

The aim should be a one-page dossier which should be given to the individual who will ultimately take responsibility for ensuring that the output of the group complies with the appropriate laws and guidelines. Alternatively, the groups might prefer to make an oral presentation of their findings.

Other media

3.4 Discuss the advantages and disadvantages that TV news has over newspapers and websites. The discussion might centre on issues such as:

- visuals / images / importance of pictures
- immediacy / live reports
- storytelling
- editing.

3.5 Ask small groups of students to consider the ways in which a TV news programme might exploit the advantages it has over print media in order to secure a larger audience share. The results could be presented verbally or as part of a strategy document which might be shown to board members as part of a planning meeting.

Ratings

3.6 Students have already considered the importance of ratings in shaping the news output of a TV channel in Activity 2, section 2.1.

As a means of investigating the relative importance of 'news as entertainment' and 'news as information', engage the class in a role play or drama exercise based around the following scenario.

A news programme has suffered a small but significant decline in viewing figures. A committee meet to discuss ways of increasing the audience share. This committee is made up of the following:

- advertising manager
- TV news editor
- investor
- budget controller
- lawyer
- journalist.

In role, students should assume the priorities, concerns and prejudices of each of these characters and begin a discussion of how the TV news programme might turn its fortunes around. Students might find reference to the video interviews with key members of the news planning team useful in preparing character responses and researching their roles.

Complying with the codes

3.7 Working with information sourced from the Ofcom website (www.ofcom.org.uk), discuss the repercussions of transgressing either the Ofcom Broadcasting Code or the Communications Act 2003.

Ask students to spend some time researching answers to the following questions:

1. How does an interest group or a member of the public make a complaint about the TV news?
2. What structures or organisations are in place to deal with complaints?
3. Who is ultimately responsible for the content of TV news?
4. What happens if a news bulletin is found to have acted in conflict with the Ofcom Broadcasting Code?
5. What happens if a news bulletin has breached part of the Communications Act 2003?

Use the answers to these questions to underline the importance of upholding journalistic standards in producing TV news.

At this point, students might like to add to the list of factors affecting TV journalists which they recorded in **Worksheet 2.5**, for example:

- legal compliance
- regulatory compliance
- public opinion
- political factors
- spin doctors and press releases
- other media
- ratings.

Aims and learning outcomes

At the end of this unit students will:

- understand the aims of TV journalism, including the social responsibility of the news journalist and the importance placed on objectivity and fairness in news reporting.
- understand the internal institutional contexts of TV journalism, including concepts such as house style, brand image and editorial line.

- understand the external institutional contexts of TV journalism, including regulatory and legal compliance, the use of sources and the significance of ratings.

Range of activities

- independent research
- whole group debate
- structured small group discussion
- role play.

Assessment

To ensure that students have a full grasp of journalistic ethics and of the institutional contexts in which editors and journalists work, set the class a piece of written work structured around a real or fictitious news story. You might want to select a local story, for instance a piece about a local man who has refused to pay his council tax as a protest against rises in council tax rates. The man, in his 70s, now risks prosecution for non-payment of taxes, and is calling on others to boycott what he sees as an 'unfair tax'. Alternatively, teachers might like to use the story which students scripted for Unit 1 of the course in order to ensure continuity of thought.

Having presented students with a story framework, set a written exercise with clear subheadings, such as:

- (a) What ethical problems do you anticipate emerging from this story?
- (b) How might a reporter covering this story be forced into conflict with the NUJ Code of Conduct?
- (c) Which of the internal institutional contexts of TV journalism will the reporter need to consider in covering this story?
- (d) Which of the external institutional contexts of TV journalism will the reporter need to consider in covering this story?
- (e) List three ways in which the journalist might ensure that the report is fair, accurate and objective.

Curriculum Context

These materials can be used with students of Media Studies at GCSE and AS/A2 Level as well as for teaching the National Curriculum Programme of Study for Citizenship and English at Key Stage 4.

The activities require students to reflect on the contextual pressures faced by TV journalists, and provide opportunities for them to explore the conflicts faced by editors and reporters (Citizenship 1g). Structured small group discussion is used to afford students the opportunity to justify their opinions orally (Citizenship 2b). Discussion of the competing demands of the TV audience and journalistic good practice allows students to take part in exploratory discussion (Citizenship 2c). Throughout the unit students should be encouraged to empathise with the dilemmas faced by TV journalists and to imagine another person's point of view. They should be encouraged to articulate viewpoints other than their own (Citizenship 3a, English *EN1* 3a - e). In studying the different ways individuals and groups might be represented in news stories, students will be able to identify the perspectives offered on individuals, communities and society at large (English *EN2* 1d, 1e). Students will be taught to appreciate how meaning is conveyed in a short news bulletin (English *EN2* 5a) as well as the ways in which the audience of TV journalism responds to the media (English *EN2* 5d).

Work in this unit will enable students of Media Studies to become more familiar with issues of representation and news values. The activities suggested engage with debate about the wider social and moral context in which media texts are produced, supporting GCSE and AS/A2 Assessment Objectives in the following ways:

OCR GCSE Media Studies AO5: Media Messages and Values
AQA GCSE Media Studies AO1b, AO2b
WJEC GCSE Media Studies AO1
OCR AS Level Media Studies AO3: Representation
AQA AS/A2 Level Media Studies AO2, AO3i
WJEC AS/A2 Level Media Studies AO1i, AO2ii
BTEC Level 4 Certificate in Media: Professional Context for Digital Video Editing

The unit can also be used in Scottish Qualifications Authority Intermediate 2 and Higher Media Studies courses: Media Analysis (Non-Fiction).