

# BROADCAST NEWS HANDBOOK

WRITING, REPORTING, AND PRODUCING  
IN A CONVERGING MEDIA WORLD

S e c o n d   E d i t i o n

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at Chapel Hill*

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BROADCAST NEWS HANDBOOK: WRITING, REPORTING, AND PRODUCING IN A CONVERGING MEDIA WORLD

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## DEDICATIONS

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From C. A. Tuggle

To my wife Tracey and children Brynne, Bethany, and Jenny, and to the memory of my father, T. B. Tuggle, my inspiration to always do my best.

From Forrest Carr

To the memory of Bruce Breslow, a good friend and the finest photo-journalist I have ever known.

From Suzanne Huffman

To my husband August F. Schilling III and to my parents, Carrol Statton Huffman and Margaret Anne Byrd Huffman.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

---

**Dr. C. A. Tuggle** began teaching at the university level in 1994 after a 16-year broadcasting career in local television news and media relations. He spent the majority of his career at WFLA-TV, the NBC affiliate in Tampa. He has held numerous newsroom positions, but spent the bulk of his career reporting and producing. He covered both news and sports, including six Super Bowls. Tuggle earned undergraduate and master's degrees from the University of Florida in Gainesville, and his Ph.D. from the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. He is currently teaching electronic communication at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His research has appeared in nearly a dozen scholarly journals and trade publications, and centers on television news practices and procedures. He regularly conducts writing workshops for local stations, professional and academic groups, and high school journalists. He has overseen student newscasts at three universities and his students have won numerous regional and national awards. In addition, he helped to develop more than 50 interns during his professional career.

**Forrest Carr** began his broadcast news career in 1980 as a radio reporter but quickly switched to television, starting as a copywriter and fill-in reporter before working his way into newscast producing and eventually into management. After working in the Memphis, San Antonio, and Tampa markets, in 1997 his travels took him to KGUN9-TV in Tucson, Arizona, for his first news director's job. During his tenure there, KGUN9 made waves locally and nationally with innovations in viewer service and community-responsive journalism, including a statement of news coverage principles known as the "Viewers' Bill of Rights." Carr returned to Media General's widely known converged Tampa news operation in 2001 as news director for WFLA-TV. In 2002, the News Center partners launched what is believed to be journalism's first converged statement of news coverage principles, "The News Center Pledge." Carr has contributed to numerous scholarly and trade publications, and has won or shared credit in four dozen professional awards, including a regional Emmy for investigative reporting. He is a 1980 graduate of the University of Memphis.

**Dr. Suzanne Huffman** is an associate professor of journalism and broadcast journalism sequence head at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas. She earned her B.A. at TCU, her M.A. from the University of Iowa, and her Ph.D. from the University of Missouri at Columbia. She has reported, anchored, and produced news at commercial television stations in Tampa, Florida; Santa Maria, California; and Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Dr. Huffman taught at three other universities before joining the TCU faculty, and her former students occupy

newsroom positions throughout the South and Southwest. Her academic research centers on the practice of broadcast journalism and her research articles have been published in *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* and other academic journals. Dr. Huffman is co-author with Dr. Judith Sylvester at Louisiana State University of *Women Journalists at Ground Zero: Covering Crisis*, published by Rowman & Littlefield in 2002, about the experiences of women journalists who covered the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States. She is a contributing author to *Indelible Images: Women of Local Television*, published by Iowa State University Press in 2001.

## FOREWORD

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### **Bob Dotson**

*Senior Correspondent  
"NBC Nightly News" with Tom Brokaw*

My grandmother always worried about my life's work. The first time she got a chance to see one of my stories on "NBC Nightly News," I called to see what she thought.

"Did you like my story on Tom's show tonight?" I asked.

There was a long pause on the other end of the line. Then she said, "Bobby, I think you should learn a trade."

"A trade?"

"Yes, they're not going to keep paying you for two minutes of work a day."

Well, they have. For 37 years I've been traveling the world on someone else's nickel. I've been in more motel rooms than the Gideon Bible.

And it's been a wonderful life.

The ticket to that life begins on the pages that follow. They contain the nuts and bolts of our business—the basics that hold us all together. This book will help you master our complex and challenging profession. It will also refresh your memory in the years ahead, so keep it handy.

I went to college back when the earth was cooling. Every technical thing I learned about is now in a museum. But the things you'll find on these pages are timeless. They're lessons that will last a lifetime.

So, read on. Have a good life. Call your grandmother.

## PREFACE

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**Dana Rosengard**

*University of Memphis*

Broadcast news was born in the 20th century as radio and television developed in the United States. Radio was something of a “gadget” at first. Radio, or wireless telegraphy, was a technological improvement compared to the wired telegraph that was widespread in the mid-1800s. Telegraph lines were vulnerable because they could be cut, but that wasn’t a problem with “wireless.” Guglielmo Marconi’s experiments with a wireless telegraph in 1890s Europe led to the invention of radio. Early wireless equipment was installed on ships at sea so that they could stay in touch with each other and with the shore—a better system than flashing lights and flags. The sinking of the White Star Line luxury liner *Titanic* in 1912 drew attention to the new invention and led to more widespread use of it.

By the 1920s, individuals were “tinkering” with radio at home and experimenting with what we know today as broadcast programming. In those days, the programs were broadcast live and might consist of sermons, musical performances, news headlines, election returns, or play-by-play of sporting events. Filling hours of time every day with live programming was problematic and station owners began to work out ways to share programs with each other. Early “networks” of radio stations began to form. Station owners were often individuals who were exposed to radio at schools or newspapers or department stores who decided to start tinkering with radio in their spare time. Visionaries such as David Sarnoff at RCA/NBC predicted that radio would become a “household utility” and he was right. Radio quickly became a popular mass medium, and millions of individuals bought sets for their homes. Radio was both an entertainment and a comfort to Americans in the years of the Great Depression and the First and Second World Wars. Listeners grew to recognize and trust the voices of reporters such as Edward R. Murrow at CBS.

Television was already in development in the 1920s when radio became popular in the U.S., but the economic depression and the wars overseas delayed its introduction. By the late 1940s and early 1950s, television stations were going on the air, Americans were beginning to buy television sets for their homes, and programs that had been popular on the radio moved to television. So did the network programming system. Early television programs were broadcast live and might consist of cooking shows, comedy acts, news headlines, election campaigns, and sporting events.

**viii** Preface

Talk about television was everywhere in the early 1950s, and the emergence of the medium was one of the defining elements of the decade. The actual invention and mechanical processes that would become the television known to the post–World War II generation go back to 1884 and German inventor Paul Nipkow, but it was not until 1923 that a man named Vladimir Zworykin, who started at Westinghouse and then switched over to RCA, developed the iconoscope (from the Greek words *eikon* [image] and *skopein* [to view]). This device aimed a beam of electrons across a target that had been charged by light imprinting on it. What he had developed was, in effect, a camera tube. He also developed the kinescope—the TV picture tube. It gave off a phosphorous glow with the electron stream. Together, his inventions became the television we watch today.

But because of the initial production costs and the interruption of World War II, it took a few decades (until the 1950s) for television to truly arrive and begin sweeping the nation. Television set ownership grew nearly 700 percent between 1950 and 1955, from 4.6 million to 32 million receivers.

Television news programming in the early 1950s came in the form of sponsored 15-minute evening broadcasts. NBC's John Cameron Swayze's "Camel News Caravan" and CBS's "Television News with Douglas Edwards" fought the technological demands of the new and growing medium and fought one another. Edwards led in the ratings until NBC introduced "The Huntley-Brinkley Report" in 1956. In 1963, CBS punched back, expanding its nightly network newscast to 30 minutes, incorporating longer reports and more film, and featuring an interview with President John F. Kennedy on the premiere expanded version of the broadcast.

Less than three months later, November 22, 1963, is the day most believe television news came of age, and the new CBS news star, Walter Cronkite, bore the burden of being under the bright lights on that dark day. People sat glued to their television sets through days of national mourning as Cronkite reported the assassination of President Kennedy. As news came in from Dallas by telegraph and telephone, Cronkite brought the scenes from Texas as well as the procession in Washington to the American public hour after hour after hour, almost four nonstop days of coverage. Cronkite's broadcast of the Kennedy funeral and events surrounding it signified the growing power of television news and helped propel Cronkite to his "most trusted man in America" title.

A big part of the power of the new medium was its ability to bring word of events from across the world and country as well as from across the town and region right into the American living room. In many ways, local television news is the most visible element of the local station in U.S. broadcasting. The news at the local level devel-



oped partly in response to the dictum of the Communications Act of 1934 to operate in the “public interest, convenience, and necessity.” And so, the local newscast was born as a way for stations to demonstrate responsiveness to the local community and to ensure their license renewal: 30 minutes of sights and sounds to keep cities and towns and neighborhoods abreast of events in their areas, regions, and nation.

But news was almost always one of the programs; and the voices, faces, and images in the news became part of the public consciousness. Americans alive in the 1930s remembered the voice of President Franklin Roosevelt in his first inaugural address saying, “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself,” in response to the economic depression then sweeping across America. That generation remembered radio reports about the explosion of the dirigible *Hindenburg* as it approached its mooring base in Lakehurst, New Jersey, in 1937. Americans in the 1940s remembered newsreel footage and still photographs of the Japanese aerial attack on the U.S. naval fleet at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. In the 1960s, Americans remembered the televised images of the assassination and state funeral of President John Kennedy. Later in the decade, they remembered grainy video images of U.S. astronaut Neil Armstrong stepping out onto the surface of the moon. And in the 1980s, they remembered the explosion at launch of the Space Shuttle *Challenger* in Florida with Teacher-in-Space Christa McAuliffe on board. Those twentieth-century sounds and images have been joined in the twenty-first with the terrorist attacks against the World Trade Center in New York City. News coverage of the two hijacked passenger planes crashing into the two buildings, the explosions and fires that followed, and the debris cloud that formed as the Twin Towers collapsed have become part of the public memory of the generation that heard it on radio and saw it on television.

It’s the job of reporters to observe and record such events. And it’s the job of reporters and news writers to put them into words. Reporters and writers and producers need to be concise, correct, and clear in their observations and explanations—so that the listening or viewing audience can understand and comprehend those events.

## PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

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A university professor once noted that a student told him she decided to study broadcast journalism rather than print journalism because she didn't like to write that much. It is, of course, a misconception that there isn't much writing in broadcast journalism. Anchors and reporters don't just stand (or sit) in front of a camera or microphone and pour forth interesting information. To understand the real world of broadcast journalism is to learn the step-by-step process involved. Good writing is the heart of that process.

Pioneer stations put news on the air to inform their viewers, to build their audiences, and to sell radio and television sets. Decades later, changes in corporate ownership, the unrelenting need for corporations to generate profits for their shareholders, and a series of corporate mergers have led some news managers to talk about "convergence" in their newsrooms. What this means can vary, but it broadly suggests that reporters in the 21st century would be wise to prepare themselves to write not only for broadcast, but for the Web and newspapers as well.

### Our Approach

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With *Broadcast News Handbook*, our goal is to teach aspiring broadcast or cross-platform journalists how to write, how to craft the language, and how to be effective storytellers using all the technology available to them without letting technology drive the process. Together, we have more than 50 years of broadcast journalism experience. In the final two decades of the 20th century, we saw many technological advancements that affected how news is covered: videotape, microwave and satellite technology, digital editing, and the list could go on. Technology has changed and will continue to change. But the need to be an effective storyteller hasn't changed, and won't. Regardless of what the tools are, those who can use those tools well to impart interesting information will always have a place in journalism. Foremost among those tools is the language itself. We don't buy into Marshall McLuhan's contention that "the medium is the message." We think the message is the message and the medium is simply a means to get that message to an audience. Technology and journalism are intimately connected in radio, television, and online applications, but content must always drive which stories are selected for coverage and how they're covered.

### Who Will Benefit from the Book

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We've tried to construct a text that will be useful to beginning broadcast journalism students as well as to those who have advanced in their college training and education and even to those who have entered

the workforce. We believe the practical “how-to” sections of this text and the real-world advice will serve students and early career professionals well. We hope the book becomes a resource for students as they progress through their studies and for working journalists as they further their careers in the information business. We believe this book could also be a valuable resource for news workers and managers in traditional print and broadcast newsrooms as they face convergence and the need to cross-train.

### Special Features of the Book

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The book is written by three people with decades of broadcast news experience. Between us, we’ve held every newsroom position there is. We approach this book from the perspective of what worked for us, as reporters, producers, and managers, and what we know will work for others. We believe the practical tips and guidelines we’ve included will not only help you break into the highly competitive world of broadcast news, but will also help you advance while remaining true to the ideals that led you to pursue a journalism career.

Although the book is written using three different “voices,” and although each author approaches the material from his or her unique perspective, we are frankly somewhat surprised at the cohesion that has emerged during the process of writing this book. There might be minor differences in our approaches, but there is unanimity about how the product of broadcast journalists should look and the steps necessary to get to that point.

- To help readers understand and remember those steps, we’ve included a DOs and DON’Ts box at the end of each chapter as a quick study guide and desk reference.
- Words in **bold** are defined in the glossary.
- Producing and writing are so closely tied together in broadcast news that a writing book would be incomplete without a thorough look at producing. The chapter about producing was written by the member of the team who is a working news director. As with other chapters in the book, the producing chapter is filled with practical tips—both about how to become an effective producer and how to make yourself stand out in the producer ranks.
- Broadcast writers write stories that are intended to be heard, not read. Therefore, we place emphasis on the performance aspect of radio and TV reporting.
- Although the book contains a wealth of information about how we do certain things, we have also included a chapter titled “Why We Fight”—a close look at the ethical component of the

**xii** Preface to the First Edition

broadcast news business. We believe strongly in the power of the media, but with power comes responsibility. We work in and teach about one of the most important aspects of a democracy—media that are free from government control. Protecting rights as we deal with the public’s right to know is a vital part of journalism.

- The book ends with a very important appendix. The appendix is a look at some problem words that good writers must master. Language is our foremost tool, and we need to know how to use that tool extremely well. Material used in the grammar and word precision quizzes that accompany this text comes from the appendix.

In general, the book advances from the characteristics of broadcast writing to the story selection process and writing tips that apply to all broadcast story forms. Interviewing and writing for radio chapters introduce us to the vital role of sound bites and natural sound. The book then presents three distinct television story forms: VOs, VO/SOTs, and packages. Chapter 13 is new to this edition and addresses media convergence and how writers on various platforms should approach it. We use what is arguably the world’s most widely known converged operation—Tampa’s News Center—as our model. The chapter is written by the news director of WFLA-TV, one of the three media companies that are part of the News Center.

### Supplements for the Second Edition

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A brand-new CD-Rom is now included in the Second Edition. On it are included numerous semi-raw video clips—both b-roll and sound bites. We also provide story notes that, along with the video, give students the material they need to write VOs, VO/SOTs, and packages. On the Instructor’s Resource CD (also new to this edition), we provide finished scripts that were generated by professionals. That way, students can compare what they did to what working broadcast journalists did with the same material. The same is true of a producing exercise, which appears on the Student CD. Students can put together a show rundown, then compare how they structured the show to how the show actually aired on a network affiliate in a Top-20 market (with the professional producer’s rundown available on the Instructor’s CD). Both CDs also contain links to numerous examples of award-winning broadcast journalism from student news competitions. The Instructor CD features a brand-new Test Bank, with a mix of essay, multiple choice, and true/false questions for each chapter, as well as grammar and broadcast style/word precision quizzes, complete with answer keys. Please contact your McGraw-Hill sales representative for further information to obtain a copy of the Instructor’s Resource CD.

Both CDs and the book's expanded website, [www.mhhe.com/tuggle2](http://www.mhhe.com/tuggle2), also contain

- A brand-new chapter, "What Television Producers Want: A Quick-Reference Convergence Guide for Print or Web Journalists 'Just Visiting' a Broadcast News Platform."
- Two updated chapters included in the first edition:
  - "Writing Sports Copy"—about reporting sports for the electronic media.
  - "The 21st Century"—what broadcast journalists can expect in the years ahead.
- Tips about how to prepare your résumé and résumé tape from someone who has reviewed hundreds of each.
- The News Center Pledge, referenced in Chapter 13 about convergence issues.
- Suggested test questions and the answers to those questions.

Again, please contact your McGraw-Hill sales representative for the access password for the Instructor's materials available online.

### Final Thoughts

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Throughout, we acknowledge that radio and TV news is a business, but also stress that it's more than that. It's a calling, both work and passion, and a means to document and be a part of history as it's made. We hope that we've imparted some of our passion for the craft of broadcast writing through this text.

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