

CHAPTER ONE

Part 1
The Fourth Estate

TODAY'S MEDIA

Sept. 11, 2001. No one will forget the day terrorists attacked America.

At 8:50 a.m., Eastern time, *The New York Times* sent its first news alert and story over computer screens worldwide:

A plane crashed into Manhattan's World Trade Center this morning, causing heavy damage and fires to several floors.

The initial report came five minutes after a hijacked airliner loaded with passengers and jet



The Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on America will be a story that anyone living at the time will remember for his or her entire lifetime.



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fuel crashed into the building. It was the beginning of much more from *The Times* throughout the morning.

9:04 a.m. Eastern time:

A second plane crashed into the World Trade Center towers, according to The Associated Press.

9:45 a.m. Eastern time:

An airplane has reportedly crashed near the Pentagon just outside Washington, D.C. Fire can be seen coming from the building.

There are reports of a large fire in the mall, and the west wing of the White House is being evacuated.

The Federal Aviation Administration has shut down all airports in the country.

One of the worst days in American history had started. Soon, another jetliner would crash near Pittsburgh. Both 110-story towers of the World Trade Center would collapse, raining dust and debris over lower Manhattan and killing thousands.

President Bush, who was in Florida at the time of the attacks, later called them “a national tragedy” and said the United States “will hunt down and punish those responsible.”

Within days, America would be at war against worldwide terrorism.

The enormity of the story was incomprehensible, but journalists throughout the United States and the world went to work immediately. One reporter on the job in New York was Jerry Schwartz of The Associated Press.

Schwartz had arrived at AP headquarters in Rockefeller Center at 8:30—as usual, the first national writer to arrive for the day. He looked up from his desk to a nearby television in time to see images of the burning trade center. Moments later, executive editor Jonathan Wolman charged through the office, grabbed Schwartz by the arm and ran with him into the New York City bureau. Schwartz found himself at a computer terminal, writing the biggest story of his life.

“I’ve been in this business for more than a quarter century,” Schwartz said, “and these were the most chaotic moments I have ever experienced.” Phones rang incessantly, reporters and editors shouted out developments and questions—“The tower collapsed? The whole tower?”—and Schwartz struggled to keep up with it all and to write a coherent story.

He wrote the breaking story for a couple of hours before he was detached to do a minute-by-minute chronology of an unbelievable day. Then, along with colleague David Crary, he wrote the story that would top many of the daily newspapers in the United States and abroad the day after the attack. It began:

NEW YORK—In the most devastating terrorist onslaught ever waged against the United States, knife-wielding hijackers crashed two airliners into the World Trade Center Tuesday, toppling its 110-story towers. The deadly calamity was witnessed on televisions across the world as another plane

slammed into the Pentagon, and a fourth crashed outside Pittsburgh.

“Today, our nation saw evil,” President Bush said in an address to the nation Tuesday night. He said thousands of lives were “suddenly ended by evil, despicable acts of terror.”

Said Adm. Robert J. Natter, commander of the U.S. Atlantic Fleet: “We have been attacked like we haven’t since Pearl Harbor.”

Establishing the U.S. death toll could take weeks. The four airliners alone had 266 people aboard and there were no known survivors. At the Pentagon, about 100 people were believed dead.

In addition, a firefighters union official said he feared at least 200 firefighters had died in rescue efforts at the trade center—where 50,000 people worked—and dozens of police officers were believed missing.

“The number of casualties will be more than most of us can bear,” a visibly distraught Mayor Rudolph Giuliani said.



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“Generally, there is a buzz, an excitement, even a giddiness when we’re working on a major story,” Schwartz said. “But this story was different. Everybody knew how important it was, how big it was, but nobody took any pleasure in it.

“When Rockefeller Center officials announced that the building was being evacuated as a precaution against attack, nobody moved a muscle. Nobody even looked up. There was a grim determination. We knew we were writing history, but it wasn’t the kind of history anybody wanted to write.

“We were all so close to the story, just a couple of miles away. There was no escaping the sorrow and the tragedy. We are journalists, we’re supposed to keep a distance from what we report. But we could not be immune to the horror of it, the heartbreak of it.”

The story developed quickly over minutes, days, weeks, months. Each day, newspapers reported the last 24 hours of developments. Each moment, online editions and broadcast outlets were able to report even more. Less than a month later, news organizations worldwide began reporting that the United States and Britain launched waves of heavy air and missile attacks against southern Afghanistan in the hunt for the al Qaeda terrorist network controlled by Osama bin Laden and the Taliban government that protected it.

In the years since Sept. 11, so much more has happened. The United States went to war in Iraq. President Bush won a second term. There were victories and tragedies in every nation and community of the world.

In December 2004, an earthquake in the Indian Ocean caused a devastating tsunami that ravaged the coasts of about a dozen Asian nations and killed hundreds of thousands of people. After the disaster, nations from across the globe joined the effort to flood the countries hit hard by the natural disaster with billions of dollars in aid.

William Recktenwald, a retired *Chicago Tribune* reporter who now teaches journalism at Southern Illinois University, was vacationing in Sri Lanka when the tsunami hit. He ultimately returned home safely and uninjured, and then in an article he soon wrote for the *Tribune* about his experience, he reported:

At 9 a.m. I settled in for breakfast at the Hotel Club Lanka on the beach at Ahangama, located on the popular south coast of Sri Lanka, where every room was booked with foreign tourists and Sri Lankan guests.

The grounds are like a picture postcard, the perfect place to end my two weeks on this

lovely island nation. The temperature was about 80; the skies, crystal clear and blue.

A big wave splashed, and people on the beach jumped back and yelled. In the next minute four or five larger waves rolled across the manicured lawn and pushed dirty water into the pool.

In the rest of his article, Recktenwald detailed how he came face to face with the tsunami and survived. He also reprinted the article and gave more information on



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Blog

Short for “Web log.” A blog is an Internet site, generally run by an individual. It is a new type of citizen journalism.

his experience in his own **blog**, a quickly developing online source of information that allows anyone (a blogger) to publish something instantly on a Web site.

Wow, what an age we live in. There is so much information to report and to process. And it’s available instantaneously, anyplace in the world. And as you read this sentence, thousands of people are working worldwide to gather information and disseminate it, in print, on the air and online.

Not too long ago, in the past century, a majority of students coming out of journalism schools used their talents primarily at newspapers. Now, many graduates still look for newspaper internships and jobs, but others seek and find work at a variety of media outlets such as magazines, television, online services, radio, public relations and advertising.

This book is aimed primarily at students who want to be news reporters and writers in the print media, but the skills they learn and use are required in any media-related job. Writing needs to be clear, concise and accurate. Reporting needs to be aggressive and precise, and it must be based on careful research and interviewing. It makes no difference if it is a memo to an advertising client or an understandable story for tens of thousands of people.

Regardless of the medium for which he or she works, a journalist must be able to gather information, find the most important elements, put the story together and communicate it effectively within the parameters of the medium.

It’s no secret that newspapers are hemorrhaging readers and people are turning to broadcast and Web sources for their daily diet of news. In a column titled “The New Old Journalism” in *Wired News* (www.wired.com), Adam L. Penenberg, a journalism professor at New York University and assistant director of the journalism department’s business and economic program, wrote, “Yes, it’s true that newspapers are steadily losing readers and that younger people will undoubtedly choose the Web.”

Later in his column, he added: “What is not true, however, is the notion that newspapers are dying. They aren’t. In fact, more people read traditional news outlets today than ever before. But they are doing it on a screen.

“Nowadays, news consumers have an almost unlimited choice. They don’t sit down with a newspaper for an hour to read it cover to cover. Instead, they bounce from site to site, story to story, link to link, customizing their newsgathering experience, clicking on whatever publications appeal to them.”

Penenberg concluded that the basics—writing strong leads; nut grafs; the inverted pyramid; who, what, where, when, why and even how—must continue to be taught, but there should also be experimenting with novel ways to approach reporting and writing.

“There will always be a market for young reporters who know how to gather facts and write them up in a clear, convincing manner,” he wrote.

In an e-mail after his column was published, Penenberg added:

“The basics are important in any field, whether it be journalism, jazz or designing Web sites. Only once you have mastered them can you break the rules. Otherwise it’s just plain schlock, and there’s much too much of that in the world (so why add to it?). Should students blog and experiment with new forms? Absolutely. But they should also learn how to write hard news pieces and the types of anecdotal leads that can draw readers in. That’s the key to success, no matter what media they choose.”



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Stacks of papers and scores of reference books are part of the environment of any newsroom, including *USA Today's* in McLean, Va.

The newspaper business in the United States began modestly nearly three centuries ago as an offshoot of the community print shop. Today, it is one of the nation's giant industries that depends heavily on technology.

And wherever the newspaper industry is headed, it still will need reporters working with telephones, notepads and computers. They can gather incredible amounts of information from credible and not-so-credible sources on the Internet. They can interview via e-mail. Online databases offer them government, corporate and organizational data.

The **Internet** is a sprawling, ill-defined, unimaginably large network-of-networks of computers that can communicate. It is not a place, nor is it a database. It is where organizations or people can communicate worldwide. On it can be found blogs, conspiracy theories, Supreme Court decisions, daily White House briefings and even pornography. It is an invaluable tool for a journalist because it means instant information about anything.

Internet

Worldwide networks that connect thousands of supercomputers, mainframes, workstations and personal computers so that they can exchange information.

How Reporters Cover the News

When aspiring journalists talk about where they would like to work, they usually mention huge metropolitan newspapers that would make them a foreign or Washington correspondent. Or they talk about magazines, television networks or large radio stations with news departments. They want to work for the places that pay the best wages and have scores of "specialists" traveling around the world. They want to have fun, interview the president, cover a Super Bowl, golf full time and write about it, or spend time with Academy Award winners.



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The truth is that most reporters never will work in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles or Washington, D.C. The majority will work for the hundreds of other metro dailies or their Web sites, community newspapers and small broadcast outlets throughout the United States, covering everything from a pie-eating contest, to a traffic accident, to a new business opening, to a double homicide.

Some reporters like community journalism and will spend their careers at small dailies or weeklies. Others will use their first job to gain experience and clippings so that they then can move first to a medium-sized newspaper or station and then to a major American city.

Reporting takes three forms:

- General assignment
- Beats
- Specialties

Each of these areas has distinct characteristics, but their borders are fuzzy. Daily news and feature stories do not fall neatly into a single category. They tend to spill over into all three. That means good reporters must be prepared to operate in any of these areas.

General Assignment Reporting

General assignment reporters cover breaking news or feature stories as they come up. Assignments for general assignment reporters usually come directly from an editor or from assistants who have read something in the mail, on the wires or in another publication or who have heard about a story from a public relations person, someone who telephones the newsroom or another editor or reporter.

General assignment reporters—they are called GAs for short—mainly cover **spot news**, which is news occurring now. They are important to any newsroom operation because they are there when a story breaks. For example, there may be a report on the radio that protesters are marching on a suburban town hall to demonstrate against an increase in water rates. A GA is sent to the scene immediately. Later in the day, the same GA may cover a parade downtown, then a community meeting in which political candidates are questioned.

The most successful GAs are excellent and quick writers who know their communities well. The stories they write range from crime to crops, from weather to widgets. They must know what is going on and who the main players are around town.

Working a Beat

Beat reporters cover breaking news and features in specific geographic and subject areas every day, such as police and fire departments; county and federal courts; and city, county and state governments. They generally come up with their own story ideas, based on knowledge of their beats and constant contact with sources. They may also be given assignments by their editors. Beat reporters usually write at least one story a day.

Spot news

News event covered by reporters as it is occurring.

Specialty Reporting

Specialty reporters cover breaking news and features in even more specialized areas than beat reporters, such as transportation, energy, medicine, the environment, technology, education, culture, law and aviation. Like beat reporters, they are responsible for finding and writing the stories that originate in their areas.

Their story ideas come from contacting sources and from public relations people, the wires and other editors, reporters and publications. While general assignment and beat reporters are concerned with spot news, specialty reporters are often interested in long-range stories, the roots of problems and the reasons behind the news. This means that they often operate under the most flexible deadlines, spend a lot of time researching and must learn computer-assisted reporting methods.

For instance, if there is serious contamination in the largest lake in town, the environmental reporter will first write a spot news story reporting it. Then the reporter may go on to study the problem in depth over a period of time to find out what caused the contamination, how it will affect the community in years to come, what can be done about it and what lessons it has taught city officials.

Specialty reporters have to talk to experts in a specialized field and then write stories in language readers will understand. Thus they must be experts as well as skilled news writers.

They must also be excellent reporters who can cross over into many areas. In the story on the contamination of the lake, the environmental reporter would have to talk to people at City Hall to find out why it happened, sources in the medical field to check on its health effects, police and fire officials who are keeping people away from the lake and researchers who are studying long-term effects of water pollution.

The Newspaper Newsroom

People in the Newsroom

Most newspaper newsrooms are structured the same way. At the top is the **editor**, whose role changes depending on the size of the paper. At a community newspaper the editor also may be a publisher, a business manager, a reporter, a photographer and an advertising salesperson. At a metro the editor may have nothing to do with the day-to-day editorial process; the *managing editor* is in charge. There may also be an **executive editor** above the managing editor, but his or her responsibilities extend beyond the newsroom.

At the other end of the ladder are the beginning reporters, who are trying to make their mark on the profession and hoping to get their names on front-page stories—that is, to get a **byline**. The number of newsroom personnel between the beginning reporter and the top editor is determined by the circulation of the newspaper and its budget.

Managing Editor

At most newspapers the **managing editor** runs the newsroom. It is his or her job to make sure that the newspaper is out on time each day and that costs are kept



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Byline

Line, usually at the top of a story, that names the author.

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Editors throughout the world meet each day to discuss the news and story play within their newspapers. This editorial meeting is being held in the newsroom of *USA Today* in McLean, Va.



within a budget. The managing editor is usually responsible for hiring and firing newsroom personnel and serves as a spokesperson for the paper. At smaller newspapers the managing editor is also involved in selecting stories, photos and graphics; making assignments; laying out pages; and editing copy and writing headlines.

In a typical newsroom the managing editor has a number of subeditors, each responsible for one facet of putting out the paper.

News Editor and Copy Desk

The **news editor** is in charge of the **copy desk**, where **copy editors** work. Their job is to edit copy and write headlines for the wire and locally written stories that go on the news pages each day. At larger papers there is a national copy desk that handles stories from other cities, a foreign copy desk that edits copy from other countries and a local copy desk that handles stories by “cityside” reporters. Larger newspapers also employ **designers** who are responsible for **pagination**, the electronic layout process. Individual departments, such as sports and lifestyle, may also have their own copy desks. Some newspapers have a “universal copy desk,” which edits stories from every department.

Most daily newspapers are members of The Associated Press (AP) and supplemental news services, which give them a steady flow of stories from cities and battlefields throughout the United States and world. Once the news editor decides which “wire stories” and cityside stories go into the paper, they are sent to an editor or designer, who positions them on a page and assigns the size and style

Copy desk

Desk inside a newsroom where copy editors process copy written by journalists and then write headlines.

Pagination

Layout process in which stories, photographs, graphics, cutlines and headlines are assembled electronically on a computer screen.

of the headline. Then each story is sent to the **slot editor** on the copy desk. The slot editor distributes the story to a copy editor who edits it and writes the headline. The copy desk is the last desk to handle the story before it appears in print.

City or Metropolitan Editor

The **city editor** runs the city (or metropolitan) desk and is in charge of the city-side general assignment, beat and specialty reporters. Assistant city editors may help hand out assignments and review stories. Reporters come to the city desk for ideas, with ideas, for counseling and with stories ready for editing.

It is the city editor's job to make sure that the news in the city (or metropolitan area) is covered and as many local stories as possible get into each edition. There is only so much space between the first and last pages of a newspaper, and ads fill up much of that space. What is left is called the **editorial news hole**. The city editor and the other subeditors at the paper are hoping to fill as much of the editorial news hole as possible with stories or photographs from their staffs; thus much of their time is spent trying to sell their material to the managing and news editors.

The number of reporters reporting to the city editor is determined by the size of the newspaper. Major metropolitan newspapers have scores of reporters; community newspapers may have only a few.

State Editor

The **state editor**—alternatively called the **area** or **suburban editor**—supervises reporters who cover communities and areas outside the city in which the newspaper is published. At a big newspaper, reporters may staff bureaus in communities throughout the state. They write news and feature stories about events and people in those communities, then call them in or send them by computer to the state editor, who edits the stories and finds space for them in the newspaper. Even small newspapers have state or area desks, but instead of covering the entire state, they often cover only other communities in the county or in the circulation area of the paper. Coverage of neighboring communities or other cities in the state is important to newspapers because they always are trying to increase their circulation and advertising base.

National and Foreign Editors

Metropolitan newspapers usually have **national** and **foreign editors** who work much like the state editor, but they supervise reporters in bureaus throughout the country or the world. Some newspapers may have reporters in Washington and New York. Others may have fully staffed bureaus in Washington, New York, and other major American cities. They may also have reporters in London, Rome, Moscow, Beijing and other major foreign cities. Community newspapers generally do not have national and foreign correspondents; they depend on the news services to supply them with national and foreign news and features.

Photo Editor

The **photo editor** supervises a newspaper's photographers. At many papers the photo editor sits at or near the city desk, assigning photographers to accompany reporters on news and feature assignments. Some papers have one photographer



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Editorial news hole

Space on a newspaper page that does not contain an advertisement and is reserved for stories or art.

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who handles everything, including pictures for advertisements. Others have several who divide assignments; a few have dozens who are specialized in the types of events they cover.

Graphics Editor

The **graphics editor** serves as the liaison between reporters, editors, photographers, artists and designers to coordinate the production of maps, charts, diagrams, illustrations and other informational graphics that accompany stories. At papers where there is no graphics editor, the photo editor or news editor is usually responsible for the graphics. An artist or staff of artists works for the graphics editor.

Sports Editor

The **sports editor** is in charge of sportswriters and the desk people who process their copy. The writers cover sports events and features in a community's high schools and colleges. They also cover professional sports in their area. The desk people on the sports staff edit stories and lay out the daily sports pages. The sports editor often writes a column.

Lifestyle Editor

The **lifestyle editor**, who might also be called a **features editor**, heads what is usually a paper's main feature section. The section may include articles by lifestyle writers, a food editor, an entertainment writer, a drama critic, a television writer and other reviewers and critics. It may include engagement and wedding announcements. The lifestyle editor, like the sports editor, is also responsible for editing and laying out pages each day.

Financial Editor

The **financial editor** is in charge of the business news that goes into the newspaper. Most papers have a business page or business section each day, and many have a staff of financial reporters who cover area businesses. Financial news has grown in popularity in recent years, and many papers are expanding their staffs to cover it. Newspapers have always printed closing stock averages and press releases on business openings, expansions and closings, but now they are assigning their own reporters to cover financial news as aggressively as any other news.

The News Meeting

At least once each day, the foreign, national, state, city, news, photo and graphics editors meet with the managing editor in what may be called a **news meeting, doping session, news conference, editors' meeting** or **editorial conference**. In this meeting they discuss the top foreign, national, state and local stories and photographs. They decide which stories will make it into the paper and which of those stories will be on the front page. A breaking news story could change their plans, but after about 20 minutes of give and take, these editors have determined what their readers will get that day. The sports, lifestyle and financial editors also meet with the managing editor each day, and they will be called into the meeting if they have stories that are being considered for the news section.

News meeting

Daily meeting in which a newspaper's editors discuss and then decide which of the top foreign, national, state and local stories, and photographs and graphics will make it into the paper.