



COURSE CODE: MAC 211

COURSE TITLE: News Writing and Reporting

LEVEL: 200

COURSE LECTURER: Rev. Fr. Dr. Peter Egielewa

GENERAL CONTENT AND OUTLINE

1. Definition of News, Types of News & Elements of News
2. Structure and Components of News Story
3. Leads & Types of Leads in News Story
4. Sources of News/Differences between News & Features
5. News Judgement & Layers of Reporting
6. News Writing for Newspapers
7. News Writing for a Broadcast Media
8. Conducting a News Interview
9. Elements of Good Quality Journalism
10. Tools of a News Writer/Reporter
11. Revision
12. Revision

Assessment	Marks
Class Presentation/Written test	15+15=30 marks
End of semester examination	70 marks
Total	100%
Attendance compulsory	75% to enable candidate seat for exams

1st Semester	Date	Topic	Lesson Content	Resources	Assessment
Week 1		Definition of News, Types of News & Elements of News	Define News, Students to give examples List the types of news and the elements		Questions & Answers with all Students
Week 2		Structure and Components of News Story			Questions & Answers with all Students
Week 3		Leads & Types of Leads in News Story			Questions & Answers with all Students
Week 4		Sources of News/Differences between News & Features			Questions & Answers with all Students
Week 5		News Judgement & Layers of Reporting			Questions & Answers with all Students
Week 6		News Writing for Newspapers			Questions & Answers with all Students
Week 7		News Writing for a Broadcast Media			Questions & Answers with all Students
Week 8		Conducting a News Interview			Questions & Answers with all Students
Week 9		Elements of Good Quality Journalism			Questions & Answers with all Students
Week 10		Tools of a News Writer/Reporter			Questions & Answers with all Students
Week 11		Key Concepts & Terms in News Reporting			Questions & Answers with all Students
Week 12		Revision	General Revision	Lecture Note	Questions & Answers with all Students

References

1. DUYILE, Dayo (2015), Writing for the Mass Media: A Manual for African Journalists, Lagos, Gong Communications Ltd.
2. Alfred Lawrence Lorenz & John Vivian (1996), News Reporting and Writing, India, Dorling Kindersley.
3. K.M. Shrivastava, (2007), News Reporting and Editing, New Delhi, Sterling Publishers Private Ltd.

1. Definition of News, Types of News & Elements of News

1.0 What Is News?

Many lay persons have simply defined news from the acronym of news to mean: North, East, West and South. The simple understanding of this definition is that news can come from anywhere. However, no one can define the term “news” that can satisfy everyone. Media Expert and Journalists are divided as to what constitutes news. However, news is not a phenomenon that is new to humanity. News is about people and anything that is associated with the human being, for instance, accident, Olympics, presidential election, oil spill, bomb blast by Boko Haram armed group. From the very beginning of humanity, the concept of news has always existed but in its simplest forms, for example by simple interactions at public space such as friends exchanging pleasantries on the way to the farm, discussing about products in the market squares, village head palace meeting or even by the town crier activity in the village. Indeed, the death of a village head, who had four wives was a big ‘thing’ in the village. Why? Is it because no chief has died before? Is it because he is a man? Is it because he had four wives? In the death of the village head, prominence is what makes it particularly important to indigenes and possibly neighbouring villages. That is one factor that comes to play when the concept of news is defined. Thus, not all events make news, only those that are considered important and interesting events do. Importantly too, some events may be important and interesting, they do not, however become news unless they are reported, making an event that has taken place known to its audience.

News is therefore a kind of history. The difference is that while history is an account of a past event, news is an account of a current event. News of today eventually become valuable documents for historians of tomorrow, just as historians of today consult newspapers of the past.

From the foregoing an attempt can be made to define news.

1. “News is an account of a recent event or opinion which is important and interesting (Shrivastata, 2007).

For an event to be news, it must fulfil at least three of the 6 “5Ws and H” pillar of a news story.

Who: Who are the person(s) involved or will be involved

What: What has happened or will happen?

When: When did the event take place or will take place?

Where: Where exactly did the event occur will take place?

Why: Are there reasons for the event that has taken place or what are the reasons for the event that will happen?

How: How did the event happen or how will it happen?

Human interest is the dimension that arouses that greatest interest in news gathering, namely that any news that affects people directly are always considered as news worthy.

But again news worthiness is determined not just by the value and importance of the news item but also by editorial policy of the media organisation e.g. the editorial style, policies and preferences.

Recently, however, news has increasingly become not just an account of what has happened but also of an event that has not happened, this is strictly determined by the news value of the future event. It must be very important and interesting to the audience to become news. For example, the planned visit of US president to Nigeria is news even if it will happen in a month's time.

1.1 Types of News (Generic)

There are two types of news: hard news and soft news

1.1.1 Hard News

Hard news are news constitute the critical function of journalism. They are accounts of events that have just happened or about to happen e.g. crime coverage, meetings, law and order issues, speeches, demonstrations, acts of war, traffic accident, elections, etc.). Hard news are very informative and emphasise facts and not opinions or analysis. They deal with current and time-sensitive events, e.g. Political, economic, or social issues which in turn have political, economic and social implications.

1.1.2 Soft News

Soft news are human interest stories which centre on lifestyles, entertainment, sports, celebrity gossip and society pages. They place less emphasis on facts although it must be founded on facts as well, only that the aim is to entertain. They are less time-sensitive, less serious and with less societal impact. Most soft news are derived from hard news but are not "breaking". They, however, contain more information than the original hard news they were taken from or generally written about an aspect of a hard news story. E.g. when you read that an accident has occurred and there are many casualties, that is hard news but when you read about the personal stories of first responders and rescuers rescuing people with their bare hands, that is soft news.

1.3 Elements of News

Some Authors refer to elements of news as news values and there are several of them.

1. Proximity: people are generally interested in news. But more important, people are interested in news about their environment, their local community, their neighbourhood, their Local council, their state, their country than elsewhere in that order. A market woman is more interested to hear that the government is giving loans to small business owners like herself than an EU aid coming to Nigeria for research purposes. Proximity refers to "where" or the place and this is

one of the key components of news. The audience needs to know where the news is coming from.

2. **Timeliness:** Old news is not news. People want to get information as it is happening. This is the reason why the concept of “breaking news” remains always attractive because there is a sense of “happening right now” in it. News is a highly perishable item and therefore the quicker it gets to its destination and is consumed, the higher the value. (Shrivastava, 2007).
3. **Prominence:** The personalities involved in a story determine what value is attached to that story. Journalists look for such personalities, such personalities will include, for example the president of the United States of America, (Global), President of AU (Regional, Nigeria’s president) and Nigeria’s president (local, national). Herein lies the “who” component of news.
4. **Drama:** issues that arouse suspense will naturally have a high news value such as a murder trial
5. **Conflicts:** Conflicts and wars always bring about change and therefore arouse suspense and increase its news value. Bad news is good news.
6. **Human Interest:** Almost all news relates to the human being but when it evokes emotions, it has a higher news value. Such events touch the feelings of people and therefore become important stories that’s move up the ladder in terms of selection.
7. **Consequence:** Most events have consequences. The higher and immediacy of an event the higher the news value. A possible nuclear war because of the potential consequences makes news. An oil spill in the Niger Delta of Nigeria has consequences because land and means of livelihood of indigenes will be affected. The sack of 21,000 teachers by Kaduna state Government is news because of its consequences.
8. **Currency:** Some events are more on people’s mind than others. In 2019, for instance, the presidential elections become the most dominant item of news. The outbreak of Ebola was news, now its monkey pox.
9. **Progress:** Technological breakthroughs are items that have high news value because they show progress in human existence. Iphone 10 will be news, Samsung galaxy S11 will be news. People are interested in the knowing how the world is advancing.
10. **Novelty:** New things and strange things will fall under the category of novelty. If a 6 year old boy is doing a PhD, its new and novel and will form an important value for gate keepers. (Ekharefo, 2016)

2.0. Structure and Components of News Story

News is generally made up of two parts: The lead (introduction) and the body. The lead is the first part or paragraph of a story. Lead will be discussed in detail shortly. The body of the story is the part of the story that follows the lead. It explains the lead and gives details to the content in the lead. Each paragraph contains a new idea that is clear and concise.

The structure of news is different from other formats of writing like drama, essay, poetry, novel, etc. which usually begin with minor details until it climaxes. In news

writing, the climax comes first before the minor details. The story structure begins from the most important elements contained in the lead until the least important which is found in the last paragraphs. In the last paragraphs, there may be element of background information as well. This style of writing is called the inverted pyramid.

2.1 The Inverted Pyramid

This is a news writing format used in news writing since early beginnings of news writing. It enables the writer to present in the order of importance and clearly and quickly as possible.

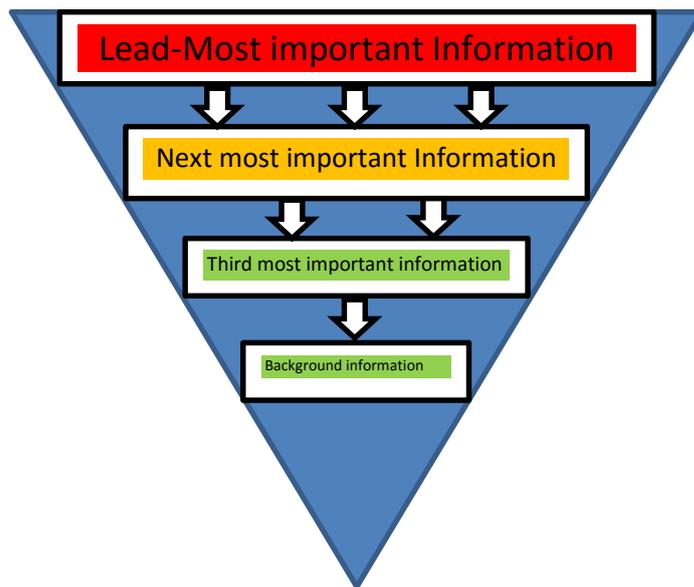


Figure 1: The Inverted pyramid format of news writing

2.2 Advantages of the Inverted pyramid format

1. Readers are able to get the main content of the story.
2. it simplifies headline writing
3. It helps the editors to plan a page taking note of each pyramid lead.
4. It assists the editors to design the page.
5. It makes editing easier.

2.3 5Ws and H

The 5Ws and H was established by Rudyard Kipling. The Journalist basic assignment is trying to find answers to these six letters.

- a. What Happened: this relates to finding out what happened. An example would be “a **sum of N8 trillion has been budgeted for the 2017 budget of Nigeria.**”

- b. Who was involved: this relates to the personality in the news which shows the prominence angle among the elements of news writing. An example: “**president Muhamadu Buhari** has presented a budget of N8 trillion for the 2018 fiscal year”.
- c. Where did it happen: This deals with trying to anchor a story from the point of view of location of an event. An example: “The National Assembly played host to the president of the federation in **Abuja**. The reason was the presentation of the 2018 budget.”
- d. When did it happen: This relates to time and generally finds a place in the lead. An Example: “President Buhari, **on Monday**, presented the 2018 budget to the National Assembly”.
- e. Why did it happen: This relates to the circumstances that has made an event take place. An example: “The Court cannot try the IG simply on the grounds that **the National Assembly is investigating him for alleged corruption**”.
- f. How did it happen. This is closely related to the why and it relates to explaining the **process that makes an event a news** story. An Example: “A priest was recently released by his captors after **spending two days with the captors without a ransom paid.**”

2.4 Components of News

There are basically three components of a news, namely: The event, the report, the audience.

1. Event: All news begins from an event that has happened and that will happen. There are many events happening at the same time. All cannot be come news. Through the process of gate keeping, some find their way to become news eventually. An event that is important to become news, it must be important to some persons or groups of persons.
2. The report: The editor is to determine which story gets published and what time and space is available. Since there are many stories before him, he has to make a decision. He has to prioritise. This is a difficult process. He needs to adhere to certain criteria in choosing what stories get published. Some of these criteria he must put into consideration include.
 - a. Objective: The writer should not inject his personal opinion in the story.
 - b. Accuracy: All information for the story and facts are verified.
 - c. Attribution: the sources that have provided the information used for the story must be clearly identified.
 - d. Complete: the story must have all atleast most of the 5Ws and H to be complete.
 - e. Balanced: All sides to the story must be represented.
 - f. Brief and clear: the story should be written in such a way as to be clear, easy and interesting to read. It should be short where possible.
3. Audience: Audience is the target of every news story. Without an audience a new story lacks purpose. Just as audience interest changes so must journalists adapt to their stories to the needs of their audience. News is written or broadcast in order to have an effect on the audience. People’s reactions to a news items

determines whether their story has achieved its aims. A journalist can know the changing needs of the audience, according to (Lorenz, 1996)

- i. Paying attention to ongoing social and language change among segments of the audience
- ii. Studying surveys of the audience to determine its demographic characteristics
- iii. Devising a composite picture of the audience
- iv. Knowing about audience preferences
- v. Participating in focus groups, in which experts tap selected individuals for their values, opinions and reactions.

3.0. Leads, Functions & Types of Leads in News Story

A lead is simply a statement that begins a story and that usually contains the 5W and H. It should contain the most important facts of the story. At the minimum the lead should answer the question of “who”, “where” and “what”. It is a summary of the story and should be written to attract the attention of the reader. A lead is normally found in the first paragraph and occasionally also in the second. Some scholars believe a lead should be about 35 words or less.

3.1 Functions of the Lead

1. **Answers the 5w and H:** A lead should be so written as to try to answer the 5W and H, and at the minimum most including the “who”, “where” and “what” (persons, places and events). The order in which the questions are to be answered will depend on which of those elements contain the most important value at that point of writing the story.

2. **Summarises the news:** A lead summarises a story such that after the reading a lead, a readers knows at a glance what the story is all about. It leads the reader to follow the story which ought to be supported by the facts.

3. **Suggest the Headline:** The Lead should be clear enough as to suggest what the headline should be.

4. **Must be authoritative:** A lead must indicate where the story is coming from. This could be a source or the institution concerned.

5. **Must be Attractive and Interesting to read:** A lead should spur on a read to continue to read the remaining part of the story.

- The lead is the first paragraph of any news story.
- Also called intro.
- gives readers the main points of the story and gets them interested in reading.
- Should be between 35-40 words or less.

- The shorter the lead, the better
- To hold readers' attention, make your lead powerful and impactful.
- Should contain the 5 Ws and H, but better when they are less in order not to make the lead too overstuffed.
- choose strong and vivid nouns and verbs
- Avoid verbosity and redundancy, and make every word count.
- omit adjectives, adverbs, and wordy constructions, focus on key words
- avoid writing what readers already know and telling readers what you're going to tell them.
- Keep to one point
- Avoid attribution and specific numbers."
- Avoid beginning a sentence with specific numbers

3.2 Steps to Note on Writing a Lead

Since writing of a lead is crucial to the overall appraisal of the story, special care and attention must be paid to the writing. The following are useful tip in this regards:

1. The SVO (Subject-Verb-Object) sentence structure should always be used.
2. Use the most important element of the news in your lead
3. Decide which of the 5W and H should be dominant in your lead
4. Lead should be clear and focussed
5. Use active verb always.
6. Lead should not be more than 35 words.

3.3 Types of Leads

1. Summary lead: Summary lead summarises the entire story in the lead. Such leads provide answers to the 5W and H.
2. Effect's Lead: this type of lead focusses more on the consequences or effect that is contained in the news.
3. Question Lead: This type of lead asks a question. The intro lead or the next paragraph provides the answer to the question raised by the lead.
4. Quotation Lead: This leads begins with a quote, especially of a key personality in the news.
5. Direct-Address lead: When a lead directs attention to the reader, then such a lead is direct address lead.
6. Double-Feature lead: This is a lead is one that has two separate but related ideas or major story content.
7. Contrast Lead: is a lead that demonstrates a contrast between different news items.
8. Staccato Lead: Lead is has a poetic style and includes short sentences coming after each other to create greater impact and attention.

9. Immediate identification Lead: is a lead that anchored on an eminent personality or celebrity.
10. Delayed-Identification Lead: Is a contrast to the Immediate-identification lead. In this case, such a lead delays mentioning the personality involved because the personality involved is of little significance.
11. Multiple-Element Leads: This kind of lead has multiple elements included in the same lead, mostly related but at other times the elements could be unrelated.
12. Flair Lead: This is a kind of lead that touches on some kind of drama and novelty.

4.0 Sources of News/Differences between News & Features

4.1 Sources of news

There are three main sources of news; the predictable sources, the unpredictable sources and the anticipated sources

- a. **Predictable Sources:** These are sources that provide regular information to the general public. Such sources can include published reports, journals, handouts, TV/Radio broadcasts, press releases, newspapers, Yellow Pages, directories, Social services agencies, Government reports, Advertisements. It can also include information from institutions such as police, schools, and religious organisations, labour unions, political parties.
- b. **Unpredictable:** here, there are no definitive sources for news. A journalist only needs to have the nose for news. Such sources are usually the least expected. A journalist should always be on the lookout for such tips and use them to get news.
- c. **Anticipated Sources:** These are events that are definite in character on which a reporter can rely and get news from e.g. Independence Day (October 1st), Children's day (May 27th), Christmas Day (25th December), New Year Day (1st January), Valentine's Day (14th February), Workers' Day (1st May).

4.1 Managing sources of News

Information provided by sources must be crosschecked and verified, because some of them may contain errors that the sources did not see or notice. There are certain steps that should be taken to verify sources.

1. Do not use sources' information alone: Journalists should look for alternative sources of confirmation information supplied by sources.
2. Be sceptical: never trust your sources absolutely. Journalist should have some doubts when retrieving information from sources. Some sources may deliberately provide false information to embarrass a news organisation or the journalist himself. Verify all information.

3. Obey the off-the-record Rule: Do not disclose sources that want to remain anonymous. This will build confidence and a cordial relationship.

4.2 Differences between News & Features

There are differences between news and features we shall tabulate this for clarity. We have defined news elsewhere. We will try to define feature below.

A Feature is a soft news and is an “inventive and creative form of journalism” (Duyile, 2015). Feature writing involves mastery of words, creativity, initiative and style. Feature writing covers a wide range of topics and subject matter including politics, religion, social problems, etc. Creativity is the one unique feature of feature writing that makes a whole lot of difference between news and feature. Below is the summary of the difference between the both. Basically, the feature writer is “a journalist, an educator, and a researcher/analyst.”

A feature writer researches his stories to get facts that are variable but in general features are written around people, personalities and events. In writing features, objectivity and subjectivity and weaved together. They are narrative, descriptive writings which are based on arguments meant to enlighten the audience about a subject of interest to the writer and the supposed audience.

A feature can thus be defined as a “written account of events, or a write up about a personality approached from personal and conjectural posture decorated with the writer’s opinions and some elements of the writer’s personality”. (Duyile, 2015).

Features add colours to newspapers and magazine publication, without which newspaper hard news would become boring to the audience.

S/no	Element	News	feature
1	Breaking (new)	Immediately	later
2.	News	Factual/straight	Developed, enlarged with more detail
3.	Writing style	Stereotyped (Inverted Pyramid)	Relaxed, more in-depth
4	Length	Short	Long
5	Entertainment	Less	More
6	Life Span	Short	Longer
7	Creativity	No colouration	Embellished with colouration

5.0 Layers of Reporting

5.1 The reporter as Facts Hunter

The reporter, like a hunter, goes out hunting for news. Three tools will be useful to him to accomplish this task

1. Observation: he should be able to observe his environment keenly.
2. Reasoning: he should ask himself what news he wants from the observation he has done. Thereafter he will begin by gathering facts.
3. Verification: he should verify the facts he has gathered.

5.2. Layers of reporting

There are three layers in reporting news.

Layer 1: Information is gotten from handout, press releases, decrees, bills. This information must be verified. Care must be taken not to become a PR agent of an organisation.

Layer 2: Information received are to be verified and background information obtained to back up stories. Here interview may be employed to get more information.

Layer 3: this is the interpretation and analysis stage. The journalist tries to help the people to understand the context and implications, if any, in the news and story behind the story.

6.0 News Writing for Newspapers

Writing for the newspaper is very interesting and different from other medium such as broadcast. In writing for a newspaper, simplicity of language is essential. The following tips would guide a journalist who is writing for a newspaper.

- a. Use short sentences with SVO (Subject-Verb-Object) format
- b. Better to use one or two syllable words
- c. Avoid unfamiliar or specialise words
- d. Be simple as possible
- e. Observe all the qualities of news writing.
- f. Follow the inverted pyramid format.

7.0 News Writing for broadcast

Print media is controlled by space while broadcast is controlled by time. This is the major difference between the two media and therefore writing for both is essential different although they follow the same basic principles like in print. In print, there is permanence in the sense that reader can read the news over and over again, but in broadcast the news is broadcast thereafter is gone, unless it is relayed again at a later hour that is not determined by the readers but by the media organisation. The news in print media is transient but it can transport readers to the scene of an event within a

short time. The news is usually between 1 and 2 minutes. The following tips would guide a journalist who is writing for a broadcast medium.

- a. Sentences must be brief. The audience are able to follow the news quickly if the sentences are shorter.
- b. Facts should be accurate.
- c. News must be simple because the audience is varied (literate, illiterate, young old, men, women, workers, students).
- d. Use block pattern. Block pattern reverses the inverted pyramid format. It is written in an informal way. In block format, unlike the inverted pyramid, all parts of the news are equally important.
- e. News is presented in a conversational style.
- f. Entertainment Angle: Use elements of entertainment. It should not be so serious as to avoid entertainment dimension.
- g. Grammatical option: Use the present tense, present continuous tense, use the active instead of passive voice.

8.0 Conducting a News Interview

An Interview is the process whereby certain person are met and asked questions with the intent of eliciting certain response that are of interest to the interviewer and b extension to the general public. It is a journalist tool for getting answers to certain issues of interest to the generality of people, who form he target audience.

8.1 Types of Interview

- a. Exclusive interview: An interview conducted by a reporter without another journalist being part of it.
- b. panel Interview: This is an interview when more than one journalist takes part in the interview.
- c. telephone Interview: This is an interview that is conducted through the phone.

Personality Interview: This is an interview done to extract information about the life of a personality.

- d. On-the-spot-Interviews: this is the kind of interview where journalist asks certain personalities on the spot or spontaneous questions to elicit response on burning issues.
- e. Group Interview: here, many reporters from different media organisations ask a personality or different personalities question. Press conferences and press briefings are the common forms of group interviews.

8.2 Conducting an Interview

The following are important steps in conducting an interview

- a. Identify the subject of the interview

- b. Book an appointment
- c. Prepare your questions. Do not give out all your questions to an interviewee except in extreme situations without an alternative.
- d. Do a background research on the subject matter.
- e. Arrive interview venue 15 or 30 minutes before interview to acclimatise with the environment.
- f. Listen well.
- g. Watch the emotional tone level (ETL) and tone down the questions if the ETL is too high or increase the questions if the ETL is too low.
- h. Always hold the microphone yourself to have control.
- i. Make your interviewee answer the central questions.
- j. Never feel intimidated by the personality of the interviewee.
- k. Start with a simple questions
- l. Do not ask dead-end questions (Yes or No).
- m. Interview is not a court. Do not prosecutorial in your approach.
- n. Do not lecture the interviewee
- o. Check that your microphone and midget are functioning properly.
- p. Thank the interviewee at the end of the interview
- q. Do not forget the “off-the-record” rule. Some information may be given to you and are not to be given out.

8.3 Phrasing the Questions

How questions are phrased by a journalist will determine to a large extent the quality of responses one gets. There are two way of doing this.: Open-ended Questions and close-ended questions.

.3.1 Open-Ended Questions

In open ended question there is a lot of room for flexibility. This style allows the interviewer to get more information than he anticipates e.g. “tell me about yourself”.

8.3.2 Close ended questions

In this type of question one elicits a yes or no answer, e.g, does your boss come early to office? The more direct and clear the questions are, the better the responses one gets.

8.4 Techniques to ensuring Accuracy in Interview

The techniques for ensuring accuracy are as follows

- a. Observing your interviewee keenly
- b. Never assume. Be clear.
- c. Ask follow-up questions.
- d. Ask if he wants to contribute any other thing to the interview.
- e. Tell the source when the story might appear

9. Elements of Good Quality Journalism/Journalist

A reporter must possess certain qualities to be effective in the business of journalism. These include:

- a. **Good education and training:** A journalist worth its salt must have basic knowledge in the proactive of journalism. He must know the principle and the tools he needs to work as a journalist.
- b. **Inquisitiveness:** A journalist must be inquisitive, he must be curious. He must want to know new things, go to new places, and find out about events.
- c. **Nose for news:** A journalist must possess the ability to recognise news worthy events. He should be able to smell news. He should ask: Will this be interesting to my audience? Is this event related to a previous event or upcoming event? Are the personalities of interest there? Are there consequences involved?
- d. **Pleasing personality:** A journalist must work to have a personality that easily attracts people and must be courteous to people in generally. Only so can he be in a position to get information from people.
- e. **Integrity and Sense of responsibility:** These two attributes are essential in terms of the journalist work place but also in his dealings with people. He should be trusted and should have a sense of responsibility that endears people to him.

10. Tools of a News Writer/Reporter

The tools of a reporter include the following:

Pen: A reporter needs a good pen to write. A journalist will always write and therefore needs pens.

Jotter: A jotter is important. In taking notes, a jotter is portable and can be carried from place to place.

Mini-tape: A mini-tape recorder helps the journalist to record event that have taken place and transcribe them later without the possibility of making mistakes.

Language of communication: A journalist must master the language of communication. In Nigeria, this is English language.

Cuttings (Clippings): cutting of newspaper and magazines, which are kept for referencing purposes.

Others: other items a journalist needs include: Dictionaries, reference books, literary references, directories, computer, and telephone.

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