

Understanding Newsworthiness and the News Media

Unit Overview

This unit of work explores how the news media create newsworthy stories out of events and happenings in the world. The focus throughout the unit is on developing an understanding of the discursive construction of news values, with a particular emphasis on language and news photography and how they contribute to the construction of newsworthiness in hard news stories in the news media.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- ✓ To understand how language and photographs are used to discursively construct an event as newsworthy.
- ✓ To be aware of how news media texts serve different purposes and how structures of types of texts vary according to the text purpose and audience.

ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:

- ✓ That the news media employ both verbal and visual strategies to engage audiences in newsworthy events.
- ✓ That the news media manipulate both verbal and visual resources in order to emphasize the newsworthiness of an event.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

- ✓ What kinds of events and people are more likely to feature in news reporting?
- ✓ How can events be manipulated by the news media to appear more or less newsworthy than they actually are?

ESSENTIAL READING:

Bednarek, M. & Caple, H. 2017. *The Discourse of News Values: How News Organisations Create Newsworthiness*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Resources: website: <https://www.newsvaluesanalysis.com/>

Lesson 1: Newsworthiness and language

In this lesson, you will begin thinking about what the news media is, the kinds of events and people that regularly appear in news stories, and the kinds of audiences that different news outlets appeal to. You will also learn about the verbal resources that can be used to express newsworthiness.

ENGAGE:

Brainstorm the concept of 'news'.

- ✓ Where do we encounter 'news stories'?
- ✓ What qualifies as 'news'?
- ✓ What types of **events** do you notice appearing in news stories or broadcasts?

EXPLORE AND EXPLAIN:

Using the online websites of major **Australian** newspapers/news organisations (for example, *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Age*, *The West Australian*, *NT News*, *Daily Telegraph*, *The Australian*, *ABC*, *Nine News*), explore the news stories presented on the home page. Focus on 'news' (usually indicated by the section header 'News'), not 'analysis' or 'opinion'. Read the headline and first paragraph of each story (this is the 'nucleus' of the news story, presenting the essence and angle of the story).

In your group, choose one story each and make notes on the following aspects of the story:

- the types of people mentioned (for example, politicians, celebrities, ordinary people)
- location and time
- any positivity or negativity
- impact/effect/consequences
- scale/scope (how big, how much, how many...)
- stereotypes drawn on

Share and discuss what you have found for your story. What similarities do you find among the stories presented on the same home page or front page?

For your chosen news organisation, research their target audience. This can usually be found in their advertising section, where the news organisation addresses their potential advertisers. E.g. **At the Guardian UK**: <https://www.theguardian.com/advertising/guardian-circulation-readership-statistics>

Use your notes above on the news story you analysed and your reading about target audience to discuss how the news story has been made **relevant** for the target audience.

ELABORATE:

As a group, watch the following videos that explain news values:

1. *News Values*:

<https://www.abc.net.au/education/media-literacy/news-values/10078666>

2. *What are news values*:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W8ljz3osEQQ&feature=emb_logo.

Read the handout (listing the news values and their definitions). Discuss and check your understanding of the news values presented.

CONSOLIDATE:

In your group, revisit the stories you have already discussed. Annotate the texts for words that indicate the presence of news values, e.g. explicit references to **Australian** locations are likely to construct Proximity (refer to handout). Note: Not all news values might be present in the story.

Report your findings back to your group/class (e.g. in a short presentation), using examples to illustrate. Discuss differences between your groups' findings. Why do these differences occur? Think about the type of story or the target audience of the publication.

Categorize and collate your findings into a table. For example:

Table 1 Example collation of linguistic resources constructing news values

News value	Example linguistic resources from analysed story/stories
Proximity	NSW, Sydney, in Newtown, Victorian, Melbourne ...
Timeliness	<i>on Saturday, late last night</i> ...
Superlativeness	<i>hundreds of [reports], millions [in damages]</i>
...	

How are news values established through language in news stories?

EVALUATE:

Write a short reflective piece on what you have learned so far, and addressing the following questions:

- ✓ What are news values?
- ✓ How are news values constructed in texts?
- ✓ What influences the construction of newsworthiness?

Lesson 2: Newsworthiness and photographs

In this lesson, you will continue thinking about the sorts of events and people that regularly appear in news stories, focusing here on how these may be visually constructed as newsworthy.

ENGAGE:

Brainstorm the concept of 'news photography'.

- ✓ What are differences between the photos you take yourselves and the photos that accompany news stories?
- ✓ What types of photographs do you remember appearing in news stories?
- ✓ What do these photographs usually depict?

EXPLORE AND EXPLAIN:

Using the online websites of major **Australian** newspapers and news organisations, explore the news photographs presented on the home page. Focus on 'news', not 'analysis' or 'opinion'.

Working in small groups (e.g. on different websites), examine the subject matter of the photographs by analysing:

- ✓ Who or what is represented? (people, things, etc)
- ✓ Clothes and other features of the depicted people (uniform, equipment, regalia, etc)
- ✓ The activities the represented participants are shown engaging in
- ✓ The setting (location), where the activities are taking place
- ✓ Any other interesting elements to do with composition (angle, framing, etc)

Share and discuss your findings. What similarities do you find among the photos presented on the same home page or front page? How many of the photographs show individuals? Relate your findings to the target audience analysis that has already been done on this news organisation (or do the research, if looking at a different site). How has the photography been made **relevant** to the target audience?

ELABORATE:

Read and revisit the handout on news values. Discuss and check your understanding of the news values presented and how news values are constructed in photographs.

CONSOLIDATE:

In your group, revisit the stories and their photographs that you have already discussed. Use your analysis of the photographs (from above exercise) to show how visual features indicate the presence of news values, e.g. depicting iconic **Australian buildings/locations (Sydney Opera House)** is likely to construct Proximity for an **Australian audience**. Note: Not all news values might be present in the photos.

Report your findings back to your group/class (e.g. in a short presentation), using examples to illustrate. Discuss differences between your groups' findings. Why do these differences occur? Think about the type of story or the target audience of the publication.

Categorize and collate all of your findings into a table. For example:

Table 2 Example collation of visual resources constructing news values

News value	Example visual resources from analysed story/stories
Proximity	Depiction of iconic buildings: Sydney Opera House Depiction of iconic landscapes: Uluru ...
Eliteness	Depiction of famous film star: Cate Blanchett Depiction of political leader: The Prime Minister ...
Superlativeness	Depiction of high scale of damage (e.g. many damaged boats – after a cyclone)
...	

How are news values established through photographs in news stories?

ACTIVITY:

Examine the photograph and its caption. How do they work together to establish news values 'multimodally'? Do they do different work in establishing newsworthiness?

EVALUATE:

Write a short reflective piece on what you have learned so far, and addressing the following questions:

- ✓ How are news values constructed in photographs?
- ✓ What influences the construction of newsworthiness across words and images?

REFERENCES:

- Bednarek, M. & Caple, H. 2012. *News Discourse*. Bloomsbury. [Download chapter on news values here.](#)
- Bednarek, M. & Caple, H. 2017. *The Discourse of News Values: How News Organisations Create Newsworthiness*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Caple, H. & Bednarek, M. 2016. Rethinking news values: what a discursive approach can tell us about the construction of news discourse and news photography. *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism*, 17(4): 435-455. [Download here.](#)
- Caple, H., Huan, C. & Bednarek, M. 2020. *Multimodal News Analysis Across Cultures*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Feez, S., Iedema, R. & White, P.R.R. 2008. *Media Literacy*. NSW Adult Migrant Education Service.

Other resources:

Website: <https://www.newsvaluesanalysis.com/>