Understanding the Newspaper Business in Nigeria

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A Resource Book

Edited by

David Jowitt, Godfrey N. Danaan
and Taye C. Obateru

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To all who fought or are fighting for vibrant, respectable journalism in Nigeria.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND INTRODUCTION

This book is a revised collection of papers presented at the 2013 media workshop for Priests, Religious and Laity which was convened by the Archbishop of Jos and President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria, Most Rev. Ignatius Kaigama. Our first note of gratitude goes to him for initiating the training, and supporting the production of this book as a response to the poverty of literature for the teaching of journalism and mass communication in Nigeria. Our co-presenters at the workshop – Fr. Alex Dung, Mr. Eric Pam, Mr. Raymond Goshit and Mr. Clement Yelkopba have played a significant role in shaping our thoughts. We thank our colleagues at the University of Jos and University of Salford, Manchester, UK, for providing the motivation to come up with this project.

Dr. Benjamin Halligan, the Director of the Doctoral College, University of Wolverhampton, UK, deserves a special place in our hearts. He kindly assessed and endorsed this book for use by students and anyone desiring a career in newspaper journalism.

This ten-chapter resource book is designed as a guide to various segments of the newspaper business. It focusses on the editorial, management and income-generation aspects of the business. In Chapter One, Godfrey Danaan critically analyses the viability of the print newspaper amidst the current trends in the industry. Chapter Two by Taye Obateru, is a guide on communicating effectively with the newspaper audience. In Chapter Three, David Jowitt examines how English is used in Nigerian newspapers while Chapter Four, again by Danaan, illuminates the concept of news and their evaluation. Next in Chapter Five is a detailed treatment of editorial and feature writing by Obateru which is followed by Danaan's paper on the process of copy editing which was illustrated with various examples.

In Chapter Seven, Obateru discusses the law and ethics guiding the mass media while the next two chapters written by Dantala Garba analysed the business aspect of a newspaper. In Chapter Eight, Garba x-rays issues surrounding revenue and sustainability and the techniques of income generation through advertisement in Chapter Nine. The final chapter, written by John Galadima focusses on the principles guiding the management of newspapers.

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FOREWORD

PRINT JOURNALISM FOR THE GLOBAL VILLAGE

It seems terribly idiosyncratic to be considering journalism and print media at the moment. When the British broadsheet newspaper *The Independent on Sunday* published its final issue after a full quarter century on the newsstands, on 20 March 2016, responses included, arrestingly, praise for what was perceived to be a far-sighted strategic response to the wider crisis of print journalism: to stop the press. *The Independent on Sunday* was to be no more on paper but would live on via a website. The "brand" of the paper, and what it stood for, remained. And for readers who customarily access news media via a variety of digital devices, the ending of the print newspaper may have been imperceptible anyway. In this respect, *The Independent on Sunday* was seen as leading the way – and that invariably *all* newspapers will, at some point in the future, commentators noted, follow this lead.

Perhaps then the crisis in print journalism is not so much one of dwindling interest and shrinking readerships but, rather, the very reverse of this trend. We read news widely and promiscuously, perhaps even constantly, and accessing our news from around the world. Our "global village" then is one that is now served (for the Anglophone world) by news outlets across Northern and Southern hemispheres. The challenges, for newspapers in print, seem to be along the lines of production cost (with the perception among the younger readership that news ought to be free), of timeliness (to read a newspaper often means being reminded of the news you first heard about during the afternoon of the day before), and of accommodating, or re-accommodating informed opinion. This latter aspect has been in direct conflict with the matter of cost: as overheads have been slashed to maintain or lower the shelf price, the balance has tilted in favour of facts and figures, over thought and analysis. But facts and figures are often freely available, and no one outlet has a monopoly (or, at least, a monopoly that can last more than a couple of hours) over facts and figures. Thought and analysis, as associated with incisive and expert writers, often

not beholden to his or her proprietor's editorial line, remains something of a unique offer. In Western Europe, it has not been unusual for that difficult figure of the "intellectual" to turn up regularly in newspapers, reacting to or offering commentary on the events of the day. Indeed, those with a longer view may consider it something of a duty of social or civic care to maintain a space for otherwise challenging writing: to ensure a level of critical inquiry remains alive, in the manner of cultivating and educating a readership, along with offering a source of modest income for those writers who provide as much in terms of opinion. In this way, the newspaper becomes characterised by a richness of character. At the other end of the spectrum – for what is, in the UK, often referred to pejoratively as the "gutter press" – the careful tracking of stories and dangling of insights around celebrities achieves something of a comparable character. One knows that a certain tabloid will be the destination for scoops on certain media stars, and so this becomes a unique offer.

One conclusion that can be drawn at this juncture is that the profession of a newspaper writer is again coming to the fore. The authors in this book are therefore quite correct to address aspects of the process of writing for newspapers, of expectations of reportage, of the sway and meaning and power of reportage, and to have this considered in a context that is particular to the challenges and opportunities of the Nigerian political and cultural situation. For the Western reader, Nigerian journalism offers a chance to break free from the stranglehold of received opinion in their own mainstream "home" media. For the Nigerian reader, the lessons of the successes and failures of Western newspapers can and should be absorbed into the daily news discourse. The crisis in print journalism, from this perspective, is entirely generative.

Dr Benjamin Halligan
Director of the Doctoral College
University of Wolverhampton
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April 2016

CHAPTER ONE

IS THE PRINT NEWSPAPER STILL VIABLE?

GODFREY N. DANAAN

Background: Decline in reading culture

The declining culture of reading has long been debated across disciplines. What has received greater world attention in this era of online messaging is individuals' loss of interest in writing by hand – the art which dominated early education and made learners and composers of ideas stand out. In mass media research and practice, experts tend to focus on the viability of the once ground-breaking print technology that gave rise to book publishing and the newspaper as a medium of mass communication. The ongoing transformations in the media landscape, which provide alternative platforms for information-sharing including direct online newspapers, suggest that the print newspapers do not fit into the new media sphere and might be phased out eventually. The critical and frequently asked questions include: Are print newspapers the same commodities that have attracted unprecedented consumers to newsstands in recent decades? Do people still read them? Do advertisers – small and large-scale entrepreneurs - use them to promote their products and services? Are they profitable? These questions arise because people now read newspapers online and get the same information published in print.

One way in which scholars have attempted to respond to these questions is by conducting readership and circulation studies, in addition to analysing the revenue profiles of print newspapers. From these efforts, they have discovered that newspapers in most developed economies have witnessed a sharp decline in advertising and circulation revenues (Danaan, 2007; Nielsen, 2015), some of which is due to economic recession (Carson, 2014; Molina, 1997; Roark & Stone, 1994). For example, in 1994, Roark and Stone claimed that the United States of America had "a declining percentage of readers" and predicted that "the prognosis of reversing this

trend is bleak" (1994, p.29). In those circumstances they concluded that since newspapers in the US were grappling with economic recession, they were not likely to make a profit. Seventeen years later, the Project for Excellence in Journalism appraised the status of US newspapers and reported that "among the major sectors, only newspapers suffered continued revenue decline […] an unmistakable sign that the structural economic problems facing newspapers are more severe than those of other media" (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 1994, cited in Mersey, Malthouse, & Calder, 2012, p. 696). In the United Kingdom, one of Europe's three major markets for newspapers – others being Germany and France - which accounts for 60 percent of the continent's daily sales (Molina, 1997), there is a sharp decline in newspaper readership. As documented by Sutcliffe and Jackson (2015), a recent report on UK's newspapers by the National Readership Survey showed that "the number of people who report reading a newspaper in print is falling even faster" (Available at <themediabriefing.com>). Both scenarios – the US and UK newspaper profiles – are indicative of a declining industry, making us reflect on the questions posed at the outset about print newspaper readership and viability. The paradigm shift from print to online newspapers has brought about low patronage both in readership and advertising. The interactive new media have exerted a great deal of influence on our lifestyles, reasoning and culture to the extent that, for example, our unique hand writing, by which we expressed solidarity with loved ones, took lecture notes and composed essays in school, is gradually giving way to online messaging. At the launch of BIC's Just Write Day on 29 October, 2015, an event set aside by the world stationery giant to rekindle in British citizens the culture of handwriting, *Daily Mail* education correspondent Eleanor Harding reported that

> half (50%) of 13-19 year olds in the UK have never written a thank you letter, 83% have not written a love letter and a quarter (26%) have never even written a birthday or Christmas card. Yet despite penmanship increasingly falling out of favour with millennials, most of those polled appreciate the intangible benefits a written note or letter can bring, believing handwritten communications are more personal and heartfelt.

These alarming statistics suggest that information and communications technologies are replacing creativity and human ingenuity in the UK. If the teenage population is not enthusiastic about handwriting, how would it develop a culture of reading the reports and articles in print newspapers which it does not construct? It would obviously prefer instant messaging via electronic devices. This means that the new media have adversely

affected reading and writing traditions, an indication that 'who is reading the print newspaper' is uncertain across many societies.

While these problems also exist in developing economies, research reveals that some newspapers in these societies still enjoy high patronage by readers and advertisers, as their literacy level has significantly improved (Franklin, 2008). For the purpose of illustration, let us examine the newspapers in Nigeria – a developing country where the first indigenous newspaper, *Iwe Irohin*, is said to have emerged on the continent of Africa (Akinfeleye, 2003; Oso, 2011). However, recent research (Salawu, 2015, p. 158) has claimed that three South African language newspapers – "*Umshumayeli Wendaba* (the preacher of the news), *Ikwezi* (morning star) and *Isitunywa sennyanga* (monthly messenger) predated *Iwe Irohin Yoruba Fun Awon Ara Egba ati Yoruba* (newspaper for the Egba and the Yoruba)". In his effort to reconstruct African media history, Salawu argues that the first, second and third South African newspapers emerged in 1837, 1844 and 1850 in that order, whereas *Iwe Irohin* was launched in 1859 (2015, p. 157). Although the emerging historiography is likely to trigger fresh debates in the media research domain, we shall not dwell on it. Rather, in this article we shall build our logic on existing literature.

Nigeria's newspaper readership growth has been rapid and the emergence of new titles in the industry has brought healthy competition among newspaper audiences and advertisers. Between 2000 and 2005, the number of national dailies rose from sixteen to twenty; regional papers increased from nine to ten and local weekly newspapers rose from seven to seventeen (African Media Development Initiative, 2005, p. 26). The report named ten newspapers in the country that are widely read: *The Sun, The Punch, The Guardian, Vanguard, Complete Sports, Nigerian Tribune, Daily Times, Today's Sports, This Day and Daily Trust* (2005, p.25). For example, *The Punch* is circulated among 60,000 to 80,000 readers, with about 381,000 people visiting its website monthly. *This Day* and *The Guardian* have approximately 359,000 and 176,000 monthly visitors to their websites (Zeng & Akinro, 2013). In terms of advertising revenues, the African Media Development Initiative report revealed that the total money invested in advertising (including other media such as radio and television) increased from US$63.076 million in 2001 to US$117.537 million in 2004 – a fifty per cent rise over the period under review (2005, p. 27).

Despite the evidence emerging from this review on Nigeria's readership status, which is indicative of a viable newspaper enterprise, we are once

again confronted with a weak economy and collapsed infrastructure whereby the majority of the population is poor and can neither afford nor access newspapers. The poor think in terms of food, shelter and other basic facilities that improve their living conditions. In that sense, they would not contemplate buying or accessing a newspaper; hence readership is reduced to a segment of society – the rich and elites who control state power.

Also, as the information and communications platform expands and becomes more complex (Danaan, 2006), necessitating the current newspaper mix – the print and online versions running concurrently and providing alternatives to readers, many Nigerian audiences, like their counterparts in US and UK, may be visitors to newspaper websites to access information. Imagine the unprecedented 381,000; 359,000 and 176,000 online readers who visit *The Punch, This Day* and *The Guardian* respectively every month to get news as published in the print versions. Will the print newspapers retain their readership while the online versions are accessible? In the last decade, Molina reported that most of the newspapers had started "transferring the paper version to the screen and/or adapting it for the screen; a smaller number are mixing some paper version editorial with the editorial original to produce the electronic version" (1997, p.198). The author noted that this evolving strategy had not yielded much in the way of commercial benefits, but had been embraced to meet readers' demands for online news services.

Sustaining the print newspaper in a multimedia market

In the present dynamic media regime, people rarely realize that the print newspapers can retain and attract a readership. Our previous discussion highlights the sharp decline in readership of print newspapers in developed and developing societies as well as the "unprecedented readership numbers" (Franklin, 2008, p. 6) in others. How can we make a newspaper the reader's delight? A number of approaches may apply. First, we should examine critically the contents of newspapers to ensure that they satisfy our readers' needs. Raeymaeckers (2004) has observed that readers spend less time reading newspapers. However, it is also possible to engage the same readers when they get what they want, as their reference for news is built on their desire. McCluskey, Swinnen, and Vandemoortele (2015) have used the analogy of 'good'(positive) and 'bad' (negative) news to explain the relevance of news to the readers. They argue thus:

> After reading the negative story, a consumer can avoid the negative event or at least the impact on his income, which he otherwise would have

> incurred. Similarly, after reading about the positive event the consumer is able to reap the benefits of the positive event of which he knows the impact on his income (2015, p.2)

Their statement is implied. For the consumer (reader) to be attracted to the commodity (news), the product must have value and should stand out to the extent that he is overwhelmed and desirous of getting hold of it. He wants something most striking, spectacular and out-of-this-world that would bring about satisfaction. For example, when Raeymaeckers (2004) studied newspaper editors in search of young readers, drawing from literature which revealed that young readers had difficulty with understanding newspaper contents because they lacked the background and context of the news, his research confirmed this result and therefore recommended that editors should include local news with sufficient background and familiar stories in order to attract young readers. The proposal to reinvent the contents of newspapers to satisfy young readers may have been well thought out, given that young readers would find in the newspapers information that turns them on. Mersey et al. (2012) have further observed that content producers should not only ensure satisfaction of their readers but should also take into account their experiences of consuming news, because both satisfaction and experience determine content value for the readers. They argue that satisfaction, in the context of news, "relates to how consumers evaluate aspects of content that they consider important", whereas "experiences relate to how content fits into the life of the reader" (2012, p.698). This strategy is geared towards retaining readership and gaining the patronage of prospective readers.

As a craft, newspaper design and layout must be handled with the readers in mind. Despite the electronic component of the newspaper, readers can appreciate the elements they physically come in contact with – like the print newspapers – and may prefer them to the abstraction of the online platform. The aesthetic construction of the newspaper should therefore appeal to the sense of sight and be intriguingly engaging to achieve this. A content reform such as this proved effective in Australia when its print media, like most countries, experienced a fall in readership due to the global economic meltdown (Carson, 2014). The editors sought for innovative ways that would rekindle in their readers the culture of reading newspapers. They focused on strategies of investigative reporting that would reveal information that was not in the public domain, which became the selling point of the commodity –the news. Even before the advent of media technologies, readers relied on newspapers for accurate information and views on social issues that were not synonymous with other media

(Wilkinson, 1972). They served as readers' companions because people carried them along (at work, in the market, etc.,) as they filled the gap created by boredom. These have pointed to the fact that once the newspapers improve on their contents through systematic innovations, it would serve as an incentive to readers who would ask for more.

The political economy of newspapers

The media's social responsibility of providing quality information and institutional framework to "shield and protect the individual from the excesses of the state and to facilitate the rights and liberty of the citizenry" (Errington & Miragliotta, 2007, p. 1) has gained momentum in both Western and emerging democracies. However, the understanding of this role through the lens of political economy leaves us with the firm belief that what is regarded as 'quality information' or the truth is a social construction driven by commercial interests. Herman and Chomsky (1988) have provocatively remarked that the media have been hijacked by the rich and other profit-driven forces because they operate within a society of concentrated wealth. They function to serve the interest of these forces without recourse to their social responsibility. The news, as a commodity, is geared towards satisfying the consumer – the reader (Mersey et al., 2012) – or, as Conboy and Steel (2008, p. 651) have observed, it is "tailored for a particular readership to create profit and/or exert influence on that readership". Conboy and Steel recall that the British newspapers emerged from the production of the proceedings of Parliament in the seventeenth century. Although the newspapers published the latest news on political activities of Parliament, their target consumers were the middle-ranking British citizens who derived satisfaction from this brand of journalism and could pay for the 'commodity'. As such, the news favoured that segment of the society that had the purchasing power, which translated into huge profits for the newspapers. It describes the political economy of the mass media that they are "first and foremost industrial and commercial organisations which produce and distribute commodities" (Murdock & Golding, 1973, cited in Dwyer, 2015, pp. 988-989) – a factor which has necessitated newspapers' search for business audiences (Carson, 2014). In that sense, the claim that news selection is an objective process can simply be dismissed, because only the powerful who sustain the mass media make the headlines. The media mask the truth in favour of those from whom they generate substantial revenues. Once they act otherwise or boycott advertisers and wealthy individuals they stand the risk of losing their business.

In the newspaper business, advertising has remained the major source of revenue (Roark & Stone, 1994). But before it became an integral part of the newspaper business, the copy price had to cover its total costs of production (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). When advertising became popular, most newspapers relied on it, and where they lacked the patronage of advertisers their copy prices were higher. For this reason, newspaper proprietors and their chains of editorial staff went after wealthy individuals who in turn gained prominence in their coverage. In certain circumstances, the copy prices of newspapers could not sustain them; hence the ones that had low advertising profiles collapsed. For example, Herman and Chomsky (1988) attributed the 'death' of the *Herald, News Chronicle* and *Sunday Citizen* to lack of advertising patronage.

In 1859 when Nigeria's *Iwe Irohin* was born, it was a non-commercial newspaper that focused on mission. It upheld moral values and publicized the activities of Christianity, especially the successes of the mission – new converts, baptisms, confirmations etc. Its copy price was 120 cowries – the equivalent of a penny (Salawu, 2015). As Akinfeleye (1985) explains, its price was "low […] because *Iwe Irohin*'s philosophy was geared toward humanity, morality and not so much on profit-making ventures" (p.35). Although the collapse of the newspaper has been closely linked to its role in politics –how it got entangled in the controversy between the Yoruba and the Egbas (Aliagan, 2005), Salawu (2015) concludes that the newspaper could not be sustained on subventions from its mission headquarters in London.

The list of newspapers that have survived on advertising support and those that have folded up due to lack of it is endless. The political economy of newspapers is crucial to mass media discourse, and it provides the framework for understanding the functions of newspapers in the society.

Conclusion

We have posed a question that sought an answer about the status of print newspapers in the rapidly changing media landscape characterized by online resources. Our discussion suggests that there is a visible drop in readership of print newspapers globally, largely due to the interactive and direct access platform as well as the economic recession faced by many societies. Despite these factors, the print newspapers attract an unprecedented readership that can be sustained through editorial ingenuity that would satisfy the readers and would make them want some more.

Fundamentally, however, we recognize that wealthy individuals control the newspapers wherever they exist, resulting in the masking of facts.

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CHAPTER TWO

WRITING FOR A NEWSPAPER AUDIENCE

TAYE C. OBATERU

Introduction

The various media of traditional mass communication – radio, television, newspapers and magazines - have their peculiarities which also dictate the kind of audiences they have. Hence the differences in media writing styles are not by happenstance. Writing styles have evolved in newspapers, radio and television in line with the unique nature of each medium. With the coming of the digital media and the convergence of the various news media via the internet, an evolutionary process has begun, with every news medium adapting to the new trend (Rodman, 2008; Spark & Harris, 2011). Older media forms have now migrated to the latest media channels (Campbell, Martin, & Fabos, 2006). Some of the manifestations are the gradual shift of many newspapers to a more conversational writing style and the shortening of both television news stories and sound bites. As Rodman (2008, p. 10) notes, "the convergence of content is a natural extension of technological convergence. It involves bringing together mediated interpersonal messages, including telephone and e-mail, with the messages of traditional mass communication such as text and television." As technology continues to evolve and change rapidly, the evolutionary process is most likely to continue for some time to come. The implication of this for every media practitioner is that mastering the writing style for a particular medium of mass communication such as print or broadcast, may no longer be sufficient in this era of convergence (Lorenz & Vivian, 2005; Smith, 2007). This paper therefore seeks to promote an understanding of the newspaper writing style for the 'converged' media audience of the twenty-first century.

The importance of good and proper communication by newspapers with their audiences cannot be over-emphasized (Mayet, 1987; Olajide, 1999).

Newspapers have from time immemorial played key roles in informing and entertaining the people apart from their watchdog roles (Garrison, 1990; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001). According to Campbell et al. (2006, p. 271), in addition to chronicling daily life, they "give assurances that communities are safe and nations are secure." They also assist readers to make choices about practically everything, from the kind of leaders they elect to the kind of food they eat. With the digital technology resulting in an alarming migration of newspapers readers to other platforms and the resultant loss in revenue, it is critical for journalists writing for newspapers to make efforts to 'retain' the remaining audience by making efforts to communicate with them effectively (Clark & Fry, 1992; Rodman, 2008).

Rodman (2008, p. 27) notes:

> The tendency of the audience to determine the meaning of media content is important because of the audience's economic clout. All media products, from book titles to Web sites, survive by audience preference. The print media's advertising rates are determined by circulation figures [...]. Advertisers depend on the most basic audience vote of all: buying behaviour.

A journalist is expected to not just gather information, but should be able to arrange and present the information in a logical, coherent and interesting manner. A professional writer for the media needs to understand the peculiarity of the different types of writing and follow the rules guiding them. For example, the straight news report is different from writing a feature, an opinion piece or an in-depth analysis. It is one thing to have something to say and another to say it in an appropriate manner (Cappon, 2000; Keeble, 1994). It is the responsibility of the writer to ensure that whatever he/she is writing compensates the reader for the time spent on it either in terms of information, entertainment or other values. Any writing that falls short of these values is likely to be discarded midway.

The newspaper audience

The newspaper audience generally refers to the readers of newspapers. They could range from those who purchase copies of a newspaper to those who gain access to copies through borrowing or other means. Electronic versions of newspapers can also now be read online, making the audience wider and more diverse. Most newspapers also have a target audience which they strive to please with their content; hence it is important for a

media writer to understand the audience of the news medium for which he/she is writing (Newsom, 1998). An understanding of the audience could determine if the message and the manner in which it is presented are appropriate (Rodman, 2008). A newspaper may also have a target audience based on its focus or mandate.

Knowledge of the audience

Knowing the audience guides a writer in communicating effectively. For example, where the audience of a news medium is known to be sensitive or antagonistic to a particular issue, this knowledge will assist the writer to craft his/her piece in a manner that would not offend members of the audience. Similarly, knowledge of the things that interest the audience assists the media writer to determine the kinds of stories or issues to write on. People like to read about things that relate to them and their life; they are delighted to read about illustrious heroes who do positive things. Understanding the audience also guides a media writer to identify their interests and to get their views on issues when necessary (Okoye, 2006; Smith, 2007).

Basic rules for writing for a newspaper audience

Members of the audience of a news medium are diverse in terms of age, educational qualifications, culture, religion and so on. It is therefore imperative for a media writer to bear this in mind. A highly educated person, a high school student or the barely literate person should be able to make sense out of and enjoy the piece of writing and find it entertaining (Keeble, 1994; Olajide, 1999). Observing the following guidelines would help to achieve this:

- Write in simple, easy-to-understand language: This involves using simple rather than complex sentence constructions and selecting words that will not be difficult for the average reader to understand.
- Explain technical or unfamiliar expressions to guide your audience: A lot of difficult or unfamiliar jargon is often expressed by those interviewed or found in speeches made by people which the average reader might find difficult to understand. It is good practice to explain such difficult expressions for the average reader to comprehend. For example, many technical, legal or health terms are strange to people outside the professions and it is by explaining them that the audience would understand. A journalist should strive

to do this. Readers get discouraged when they cannot understand what they are reading, or if they have to constantly use a dictionary to check the meanings of words or phrases.

- Avoid slang: In addition to the above, it is important to avoid slang and colloquial language as it may not be understood by many members of the audience. Where it becomes unavoidable such as if used in a quotation, it should be explained. Write simply and always ask yourself, 'Is there a simpler way to present this?' Also, always remember that your goal is to communicate with and not to confuse or confound your audience.
- Make effective use of punctuation: Proper punctuation in writing enhances reading and understanding. On the other hand, improper punctuation can make reading difficult or even confuse the reader.
- Do not snub your audience: You snub the audience when you ignore things that are of interest to them. People have things that interest them such as politics, sports, music, entertainment and others. A good knowledge of the audience is identifying those interests and making an effort to give the people what you know they like. When this is not done or those things that interest members of the audience are ignored or played down for other things which are of less interest to the people, it amounts to snubbing the audience. It also amounts to snubbing the audience when a media writer uses words that are inappropriate or difficult. Things that offend the sensibilities of members of the audience should be avoided. When they complain about any publication or issue, action should be taken about the complaints in a manner that would make them see that they are being accorded attention. This builds confidence between the news medium and the audience.

Writing responsibly

Writing for the mass media carries a lot of responsibility. A media writer must, in addition to being honest, fair and accurate, also act responsibly. Facts must be handled responsibly in order not to create problems for the same people you are out to serve (Newsom, 1998). What is disseminated should be to inform, educate or entertain the audience, not to create problems for them (MacDougall, 1987). The keys to responsible writing include:

- Stick to the facts: Present the facts and let them speak for themselves. In journalism, facts are sacred and the credibility which

the news media enjoys with the audience is largely based on the trust that they write the truth. If this trust is eroded through falsification of facts or misrepresentations, the news media are likely to lose public trust and this will adversely affect the confidence of the people in what they get from the news media. One general rule to avoid misrepresentation of facts is to leave out any 'fact' that cannot be verified, no matter how attractive it might look. Misinforming or misleading your audience amounts to a betrayal of the confidence they repose in you as a source of credible information.

- Don't sensationalize: Similarly, you as a writer should weigh the possible consequences of what you are writing even if it is the truth. Factual information disseminated by a newspaper might have a backlash in terms of the reaction of the public to the publication if sensationalized. It could lead to reprisals, violent demonstrations and so on, depending on the issue; hence the sensitivity of the matter. One way to present facts responsibly is to avoid sensationalism, which refers to a disproportionate presentation of an issue in a manner that tends to over-blow it.
- Double check: Facts presented in a write-up should be cross-checked as necessary to ensure that there is no misrepresentation. A writer should go through his piece as many times as time or a deadline permits to check if there was any mistake or inaccuracy in the manner of presentation. Double-checking helps to discover and correct such errors.
- Attribution: Except when writing personal opinions, identifying the source of the information being presented adds credibility to a story. With proper attribution, the reader is able to see that what is being presented is not a fabrication of the writer
- Be fair/balanced: Being fair is giving the subject of a story an opportunity to state his/her side. It is unfair to publish a story in which someone or an organization is accused of wrongdoing without hearing their side. Also, there are usually two or more sides to an issue and good journalism requires that every party is given an opportunity to have a say on issues involving them. Where for instance two sides are involved in a crisis, it will be bad to present the position of just one of them. Also, as much as practicable, the presentation of their positions should be balanced in terms of the space or time given to them. Stating the position of one of the sides in ten paragraphs and that of the other in just two paragraphs is neither fair nor balanced.

- Use direct quotations – Just like attribution, direct quotations boost the credibility of the story. As experts argue, there is nothing like hearing it directly from the horse's mouth. In addition, direct quotes make the write-up interesting because the way individuals express themselves can add colour to the story.

The National Open University of Nigeria (2009, p. 8) suggests the following principles for good media writing:

Concise – This refers to getting the message across as briefly as possible. There should be no unnecessary words and every word used must count. Words, phrases and clauses should not be superfluous. Strive to say much with fewer words while not jeopardizing the simplicity rule.

Concreteness – Choose words that assist the reader to make sense of what is being communicated. Some words create a vivid picture of what is being communicated while some are vague or abstract. Expressions that create images or pictures in the reader's mind are more effective in communication.

Organization – Well organized writing ensures that sentences and paragraphs come in the right order. Good organization makes for a smooth flow and pleasurable reading while haphazard arrangement of sentences or paragraphs makes reading difficult and uninteresting. There must be proper "symmetry" and "transition" in journalistic writing (Awoyinfa & Igwe, 1991). Symmetry is the proper connection of the facts being presented in a harmonious manner that will not leave the reader confused. Transition, which is the smooth flow of ideas from sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph, helps to achieve symmetry. A badly organized piece is comparable to badly arranged music which will produce discordant tunes.

Be Natural – Being natural allows the writer to create his/her own style and is one of the ways of making one's writing interesting. Every writer has some innate qualities which flow into his or her writing. A writer might be witty, satirical or passionate by nature and this helps him or her to write in his/her unique style while respecting the other principles of journalistic writing.