

Researching A News Story

Introduction:

- ▣ One of the most important skills to develop as a journalist is to know the most efficient way to research a possible news story.
- ▣ This may be a short process involving a couple of phone calls to ascertain or clarify facts with which you've already been provided, or it could be a lengthy and difficult task:

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- ▣ Involving making a series of phone calls over a number of days,
- ▣ Conducting interviews in person,
- ▣ Attempting to persuade people to provide you with information,
- ▣ Even carrying out secret research to try to find out facts that other people or organizations may not want you to know.

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- ▣ To develop the news story, there are a number of ways in which you can make sure that the research process is carried out carefully and that the information you gather is accurate and relevant to the story you want to cover.
- ▣ In the coming lines I am sharing few tips with you, which will help you in research to easily find out the story from different sources.

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1. Try to identify the type of story you're researching.
 - ▣ Is it a diary or planned event,
 - ▣ A story you have found from a press release,
 - ▣ A story you've heard about from an official contact – for example, a local government spokesperson or a member of the police or a representative from a certain educational establishment –
 - ▣ Or is it a snippet of information that you've overheard in the pub?

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2. Decide what the story is about. This may not be easy to begin with, but you need to have some idea as to the 'type' of story so that you know who to contact first.
3. If your story originated in a press release, try to see behind the story presented to you by the organization. Remember that they are after publicity –you're after news.

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4. Just because you have been sent a press release, this doesn't mean that it is a news story. You have to make that decision through your research.

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5. When you're trying to find out about a story originating from a press release, you need to talk to the individuals involved, not just the press officer. The press officer is your first contact point, but unless you can then talk to specific individuals, it's very difficult to discover the news value of the story.

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6. If your story originates from a 'check call', you still need to find out the names of individuals who you will need to interview – don't just rely on making one call to a police or fire service voice bank. You need to follow this up by talking to those involved in the incident. If they can't be reached by phone, be prepared to go to the scene yourself and find them.

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7. Remember that researching by telephone is not the only or necessarily the best option. Try to meet people face to face.
8. Be aware of your audience. When researching your news story, ask yourself whether or not your audience would be interested in it.

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9. Don't be satisfied with the first interviewee you find. They may not be the best representative of your story and you may need to do further research to find exactly the right people.

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10. Don't ignore any information that you may pick up in the way of your research. Even if you think it is not directly relevant to the story, it may help you find out the information you need, or get to the people you want to interview

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11. At all times in the research process, listen carefully to what you're being told. You may be able to find out a better story by listening to what your contacts are telling you.

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12. Lastly don't forget that your audience is also a great source of stories. In these days of more advanced Internet and email communication between media and audience, the journalist can use listeners, readers or viewers as very important sources of information. Some of the best stories can come from people following the programme or accessing the news site on their home PC.

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▣ Conclusion:

Research isn't easy. It's a skill that comes with time. Don't be put off by your inability to get to the people you need when you first start out. It's just a matter of perseverance, improving your skills as a tireless questioner and a critical thinker.

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That's all
Thank you