

## News values

The following information has been extracted from *Doing News: Approaches for the 21st Century* (Jenny Grahame, 2006)

### What makes a story newsworthy?

How does a journalist or an editor decide what's newsworthy and what's not? According to media analysts, they refer to a set of so-called news values. These are the criteria which help them to decide whether to follow up a 'story' in the first place, whether to use it, and, if so, where in the news to place it in relation to all the other stories, features etc. competing for space.

Of course, journalists and editors don't actually refer to a list of news values pinned on the wall of the office. To measure a potential news item against these values they use a combination of: gut instinct; years of professional practice; their knowledge of their readers' expectations and their owners' political beliefs, and their understanding of the ways stories help to sell newspapers.

### So what exactly are these news values?

Over 40 years ago, Galtung and Ruge, two Norwegian media analysts, identified a list of 12 features of international news stories which have come to be seen as the definitive list of news values. Based on their work, here are twelve questions to ask of any major news story.

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| <b>1. Frequency</b>        | Has it just happened recently - and can it easily be slotted into the news production schedule ready for the next broadcast or edition? |
| <b>2. Threshold</b>        | Is it a big enough event? Does it involve or impact upon large numbers of people?   |
| <b>3. Unambiguity</b>      | Is it easy to understand without too much complicated explanation or back story?  |
| <b>4. Meaningfulness</b>   | Is it meaningful to our culture and relevant to us in Britain?  |
| <b>5. Consonance</b>       | Is it what we might expect to happen, given the way previous events have been reported?   |
| <b>6. Unexpectedness</b>   | Is it unexpected, rare or surprising - or can it be made to seem so?  |
| <b>7. Continuity</b>       | Is it already in the news, and part of an ongoing story and therefore easy to cover?  |
| <b>8. Composition</b>      | Does it provide a good balance or contrast with other news stories of the day?  |
| <b>9. Elite nations</b>    | Is it about elite or powerful nations which may later have an impact on us in Britain?  |
| <b>10. Elite people</b>    | Does it involve famous or powerful people?  |
| <b>11. Personalisation</b> | Does it include a personal or human interest story about an individual we can identify with and relate to our own personal experience?  |
| <b>12. Negativity</b>      | Is it bad news - and therefore likely to sell more newspapers   |

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