

## News Determinants

**Directions:** Become familiar with the five news determinants and how each is applied. Save for future reference.

How does a reporter decide what to include in a story? How does an editor choose which stories to include in each day's edition of the newspaper? Reporters and editors make their decisions by weighing the *news value* of all the facts or stories available each day. Stories with greater news value for readers get written and those stories with greater news value than others are published in the paper. Several factors help to determine the news value of information. These are called *news determinants*. Although different journalists have slightly different lists, the items listed below are generally agreed upon.

1. **Timeliness**—News is perishable. It loses value as it ages. Readers want to know now. What happened yesterday, last night, or this morning is more newsworthy than what happened last week. A new twist, angle, discovery, or disclosure, however, will make an old story timely again. The same holds true for news of future events. The closer an event is to the publication date, the more news value it has.
2. **Prominence**—Important people are more newsworthy than others. Politicians, actors, singers—anyone in the public arena or public eye—are newsworthy. The same holds true within your school system. The president of the senior class is more prominent than Joe Freshman. Prominence can also be determined by the facts rather than the people involved. For example, a national award is more prominent than a local award.
3. **Proximity**—News closer to home has more news value than that from far away. A fire in Chile is less newsworthy than a fire in your hometown. However, if something happens far away but involves local people, then the news value increases because of proximity. For example, if the fire in Chile involves a local student away on a foreign exchange program, then the news value of that fire increases for your readers.
4. **Consequence**—That which directly affects readers has more news value. How many readers will this affect? How will this information affect the readers? Will it cost them money? Will it influence their career choices? Will it affect their health or well being? The greater the impact of the information upon the readers, or the more readers affected by the information, the greater the news value of that information.
5. **Human Interest**
  - a. **Oddity**—Readers are intrigued by the unusual or out-of-the-ordinary.
  - b. **Conflict**—Readers want to know who will win in elections, wars, sports, etc.
  - c. **Emotion**—Readers become emotionally involved in stories about children, animals, etc. Other stories can evoke humor, sympathy, anger, etc.

The degree of and/or combination of these factors will help determine the news value of information. Exaggerating or distorting information based upon these factors is sensationalism.