



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
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## **The Modern Newspaper**

Curriculum Unit 89.05.04  
by Eugene Gandelman

How did the small, one page tabloid of the last century evolve into today's voluminous publication, often more than two hundred pages on Sunday? Early newspapers carried news from outside the local area. That was what the readers of Colonial times yearned for, especially news from overseas. There was little need for advertising in early newspapers. There was practically no need for sports news, the arts, business, entertainment or comics. Since the newspaper serves the needs and interests of its community, there was no need for specialized sections in a community's early stages. As a community grew from farms, to village, to town and into a city, the need for more varied information grew as a diverse population emerged. Eventually the content and frequency of these "non essential" news items increased to the point where they required a regular segment of the daily or weekly edition. This gave birth to permanent specialized sections of the modern newspaper.

The following unit will discuss these sections and how they cooperate to intricately weave together the "strands of information" which provide the strength and coverage of today's newspaper.

Later units will take a much closer look into each major section of the modern newspaper and how it evolved, how its staff operates, the gathering or creation of information, its audience, its substance and many more aspects of each individual vital section of today's newspaper that has "something for everyone."

## **Newspapers come in all sizes, shapes, format and style**

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It is important to remember when discussing the modern American newspaper that publications throughout the country differ widely in format, features and style. No two are exactly the same. Some papers will have items that others omit. They vary in section and feature sequence and type. One may have a Business Section while another calls it the Financial Section. Some papers may put city news first, others on the last page. Newspapers also differ greatly depending on the city or metropolitan population involved. Large cities like New York, Los Angeles, Chicago and others will have newspapers that may differ greatly from those published in New Haven, Little Rock and Santa Fe. Papers may have a Farming Section, University Section or Shipping Section (i.e. Newport News).

Publications like the New York Times, Chicago Tribune and Washington Post have a large readership outside

their regions and would include more national and international news as a result of it. The Wall Street Journal concentrates exclusively on financial news as well as political and international news and how they affect the financial community.

The journalism curriculum discussed in the following units will use all types of newspapers as examples. The newspaper used in Unit 2, The New Haven Register, is an example of a modern urban publication serving a city of over 100,000 people in a metropolitan area consisting of approximately 500,000 readers.

## News Smart

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Most students in Middle and High School realize that there are two kinds of “smarts” which are necessary to “make it” in life. There is school smart, also called book smart, and there is street smart.

School smarts are taught by a number of teachers over the years. Initially, it is the knowledge pumped into our heads of the basic skills necessary to handle life’s requirements. Reading, writing and mathematics are taught in ascending levels over the years. Then comes the variety of life’s subjects taught to us through books and lectures. Most of us resign from the classroom when we feel we have endured a sufficient amount.

Street smarts are learned even before we begin our formal education at age five or six, and they continue to be learned long after we’ve seen our last classroom. The courses, though not as formalized as those learned in school, have names like common sense, social interaction, peer pressure, and even survival. In fact, a street smart education goes handinhand with a classroom education since the school hierarchy is similar to neighborhood society with its masses, authority figures and rules of social conflict.

At first glance it might appear that these two kinds of education are all a person needs for success in life. Closer scrutiny, however, reveals that a third kind is more important in a modern world than before. Today it is vital that students also learn how to be news smart. How to read and listen to the news, how to interpret it, use it, and benefit from its information, are all necessary skills that must be learned at an early age, and maintained throughout life. Students need to be shown how events on the local, national and international level affect their lives. A high school student in the market for a new Toyota, for example, would benefit if he could interpret the news of a pending Yen revaluation. The result might mean the saving of hundreds of dollars if the car were purchased prior to a particular date.

Learning effective newsabsorbing habits and skills are as important as obtaining good health and nutrition habits. A daily intake of the news is as necessary as food, water and rest in order to succeed in this constantly changing world of ours.

## The Front Page

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A newspaper’s front page serves as a window through which the reader can peek into the edition and get a glimpse of the features and items contained in its pages. The front page is like the cover of a magazine and often helps sell the paper at the newsstand.

The front page of the paper has its name in large bold print at the top. Beneath the name is the number of years in print or volume number along with the edition number for the current year. The price and weather forecast are also near the top of page one. Many newspapers print announcements of highlighted features for the edition and their page numbers at the very top of the page. The city or town of publication is also printed.

The main feature story receives the boldest headline of the front page as well as the entire newspaper. Other featured stories begin on page one and are often continued elsewhere in the first section (approximately the first twenty pages). However, these articles can be continued in sections other than the first.

Perhaps the most useful tool on page one is the Index. Usually situated in the lower left or right hand corner of the paper, the Index lists the features and sections contained in the paper along with their corresponding page numbers. The Index contains both regular daily items and special features of the edition. Learning to use the Index properly makes finding information fast and accurate.

Many newspapers across the country recently have made their front pages more inviting adding color photos and highlights as well as maps, charts, and graphs and diagrams.

*(figure available in print form)*

## Front Page Features

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Answer the questions listed below.

1. Write the headline of the major news story in a different way.
2. Write the weather expected for the day.
3. On what page is the detailed weather forecast?
4. What is the name of the newspaper?
5. What newspaper did it take over?
6. How many years has this newspaper been printed?
7. How many days this year has the paper been issued?
8. How much does the paper cost?
9. On what page is the featured story continued to?
10. What is the full date of this issue?
11. What two important questions are answered by using the chronological map accompanying the chase story?
12. How many towns are shown on the map?
13. Write five different cities that produced front page stories in this issue.
14. Rewrite the major headline three different ways.
15. How do the photos of the auto crash and church members add to the printed stories?

## HEADLINE VOCABULARY

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Use your Dictionaries and Thesauruses to answer the following:

1. In the chase subheadline the word *adherence* means:  
a. brutality b. sticking c. warning
  2. The word *inquiry* means:  
a. cave b. investigation c. jail
  3. In the “kin” headline the word *overzealous* means:  
a. over anxious b. overcome c. over the hill
  4. In the “Firefighters” headline the word *salvage* means:  
a. to destroy b. to salivate c. to save
  5. In the “church protesters” headline the word *riled* means:  
a. angry b. relied c. determined
  6. The word *spurn* means:  
a. to reject b. to turn c. to pray
  7. In the “Satanic” novel headline the word *swipe* means:  
a. strike b. swindle c. sway
  8. The word Islam refers to a:  
a. country b. Holy Leader c. religion
  9. In the “Oprah” headline a *bachelor* is:  
a. college degree b. unmarried man c. batch
  10. In the crash photo caption the word *illuminate* means:  
a. to light up b. aluminum c. something ill
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Make a list of all the verbs from the “Firefighters” article and another list from the “Tax Quiz” article.

Answer the following questions.

1. Which list has more action verbs?
2. Why do you think that is the case?

## UNIT 2—Activity 1

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Based on your day's experiences up to now design your own Front Page. Include a major headline, important features, minor news stories, and even a mock index. Remember to use only those headlines that you personally know about that happened today. Teachers of early morning classes might allow a twentyfour hour period. Think deeply; more happens to you in a day or even half a day than you might realize at first.

Here is a sample, but hands off any of these headlines—create your own.

*(figure available in print form)*

### Using The Index

Answer the questions listed below.

1. How many items are listed in the Index?  
How many pages are in this issue?
2. How many pages long is the Business section?
3. How large is the Classified Ad section?
4. Why is the story about Islam on page one and not on the Religion page? What do you think is on the Religion page? What page is it?
5. On what page will you find your Zodiac sign?
6. Is all city and state news on consecutive pages?
7. What cartoon is on the Editorial page? Why do you think it is there and not on the comics page?
8. How many pages of comics are there?
9. Is there a page for a popular card game? What is the game and on what page is it?
10. Would a crossword puzzle enthusiast want to buy this paper?
11. An article about a flu epidemic might be on what page?
12. Where would you look for your "Letter To The Editor"?
13. Where would you find an article about your father's company moving South?
14. Where would you find a bicycle and a puppy for sale?
15. What else would you include in a newspaper and list in its index?

## THE FIRST SECTION

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Answer the following questions from information contained on page two:

1. How many International News stories are previewed on page two?
2. Write the names of four people mentioned in these articles.

3. Which International story do you think is the most important? Why?
4. How many Local News items are previewed on page two?
5. How many are in Section A? Section B? Which article is the most important?
6. Name two of the country's regions that have news stories in this edition.
7. What other sections have previewed stories on page two?
8. Is there a correction printed in this edition? Who is it about?
9. Name the former Governor, Broadway Producer, and Actress mentioned in the People Section of page two.
10. What is the real Rain Man's name? Why is his last name not given?

## THE FIRST SECTION

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### The Masthead

The masthead of a newspaper, often printed on page two, gives us information about the publication. It provides us with the newspaper's address, publishing schedule, postage rates, subscription rates, advance payment and missed delivery procedure. Next to the masthead are the winning lottery numbers for all six New England states. The newspaper tries to be extremely accessible and provides a list of phone numbers for delivery, advertising departments, complaints, bureaus and other items.

*(figure available in print form)*

Answer the following questions using the information printed in the masthead and "How to Reach Us".

1. What is the newspaper's complete address?
2. Is it mailed by first class postage?
3. How often is the paper published?
4. How much do you save on weekdays by having it delivered instead of buying it at the newsstand?
5. If your paper does not arrive what department should you call?
6. What time should you call on weekdays? Weekends?
7. What is the newspaper's main telephone number ?
8. What number should you call to place an ad to sell your bicycle in the Classifieds?
9. What is the number of their Hartford bureau?
10. What number and extension would you call to make a complaint or report a printed mistake?

## THE WEATHER SECTION

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Information about local, regional, national and international weather conditions is detailed in most urban dailies in the United States. In this publication the weather section occupies the bottom third of page two. Some of the items covered are the current and extended outlook, world temperatures, degree days, record extremes, tides, moon phases, sunset, sunrise and a trivia question. Charts, maps, lists, diagrams, and drawings help the reader to understand the forecast and related information.

Using the Weather Section on page answer the following questions:

1. Write ten weather facts from the information provided.
2. How many Eastern cities are on the weather map?
3. What is the record high temperature for the date of this edition? What was the year?
4. When is the next Full Moon scheduled? The New Moon?
5. What time is sunrise and sunset?
6. What time is high and low tide in New Haven?
7. The weather trivia question is about which state?
8. What is the air quality?
9. How much precipitation have we had since January 1?
10. How much warmer was it last year on this date?

## THE EDITORIAL PAGE

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The Editorial Page, more than any part of the newspaper, is the section that constantly reminds us that we live in a democracy and have the right of free speech. It is on these pages that a free society can express itself without fear of reprisal. Here you can comment on any facet of life, even criticize, if you write tastefully and follow the established procedure.

Who are some of the people that express their opinions on the Editorial pages? The very first section is reserved for the *newspaper's opinions* on local, national and international issues. In a democratic society the editorial content is not controlled or influenced by the government, military or any other outside force. The owners and editors are allowed to be honest to themselves without fear of being shut down, which happens all the time in countries ruled by dictators. The Board of Directors confidently publish their names and just below their opinions.

Another person who expresses his or her opinion is the *political cartoonist*. The cartoonist does it with humor, satire, and often in a sardonic manner. *Readers* contribute their opinions and feelings on the Editorial page with their *Letters to the Editor*. These letters are written to express, inform and correct the newspaper's readership about issues of concern.

In the *Viewpoint* section people have their opinion or response to a particular "question or issue of the day"

printed along with their photographs. *Columnists* also express their opinion and offer solutions to the major issues of the day both national and local. Often the columnists are *nationally syndicated* and have their column read all over the country. Local columnists may be employed by the particular newspaper to produce a daily, twice or thrice weekly, or weekly column.

*(figure available in print form)*

The *Forum* section allows for an expert or professional in a particular discipline or field to comment on some aspect of their area of expertise—especially if it relates to a timely social concern.

The *pages from the Past* section allows us to refer to history and put today’s issues in a proper perspective.

A relative newcomer to the Editorial page is the *Doonesbury* comic strip. Originally it was in the comics section with the other strips. However, as its content became more of a political and social commentary, editors across the nation relocated it to the editorial page, not without the disapproval of its creator.

The Editorial section is the “people’s page.” This is where every citizen should be proud to exercise his or her hardearned right to speak out. No other part of the newspaper will allow you this opportunity unless you make news and are quoted by a reporter. It is the only forum available to the average person from which he can share ideas and opinions with his fellow citizens. Keep in mind that a wellwritten editorial uses facts along with opinions to support and give credence to any argument or position and guide readers into agreement or at least respect.

## **Reading the Editorials**

Answer the following questions using the Editorials printed on page

1. In the list of Editors and Directors who is the Publisher?  
The Editor and CEO? The Editorial Page Editor?
2. What are the issue’s two major Editorials about?
3. What is the main point the editorial about judge selection makes?
4. What sentence in large type serves as the editorial’s topic? Write it in other words.
5. What Holiday is the editorial about hearts directed to?

*(figure available in print form)*

6. What is the editorial’s opinion about candy as a Valentine’s Day gift? Why?
7. Name five things that would make a better gift.
8. Write five facts from the “heart” editorial.
9. What is the topic sentence for the editorial?
10. Do you think these editorials are wellwritten? Why or why not?



## The Editorial Section

Questions for discussion:

1. Why do you think the letter about Ronald Reagan was printed with a shaded background?
2. Do you think that the six people who answered the question of the day in viewpoint represent a good cross-section of our society? Why or why not?  
The Forum is usually reserved for the opinion of professionals or experts in the field which they are writing about. Read the Editorial by Shirlee Taylor Haizlip. How does her position qualify her to write about Black History Month?
3. Who are the syndicated columnists on this issues editorial page? What is the theme of their commentary?
4. Why do you think there is an interest in news from the past? How is the past connected to the present and the future as demonstrated by the items in Pages From The Past?
5. Why is the comic strip *Doonesbury* on the Editorial page and not on the comic page with other cartoon strips?

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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The Editorial pages provide a section which allows a member of the community to speak his or her mind which is a privilege for each person who lives in a free society. Freedom of Speech and Freedom of the Press should never be taken for granted, but exercised as frequently as necessary. This feature is the *Letters To The Editor* section. Later units will focus on writing to express yourself by saying exactly what you feel. The following exercise will point out the different reasons why we would want to be heard.

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS USING THE FOUR LETTERS TO THE EDITOR ON THE NEXT PAGE

1. Which letter is written to say something positive about members of the community? Write the title.
2. Which letter was written to make a correction of a previous news article? Write the title.
3. Which letter was written to garner public support for a cause? What is the cause?
4. Which letter urges immediate action be taken? What is that action? Write the title.
5. Which letter has an incorrect title inaccurately written by the newspaper? Why is the title wrong?

(figure available in print form)

(figure available in print form)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

- 1 . Is this a news article?

2. Does it express an opinion? If so, what is that opinion?
3. Why did the writer submit this letter?
4. Who is the intended audience?
5. What does the writer want his letter to accomplish?
6. What facts are presented in the letter?
7. How persuasive do you feel that this letter is?
8. What major error was made by the newspaper in printing this letter?
9. Write an appropriate headline for the letter.
10. Write a 35 paragraph letter to the Editor expressing your opinion about an issue that concerns you.

### UNIT—ACTIVITY 2

Read the editorials on the Editorial page and make two lists for each. In your first list write all statements that are facts and in the second write the opinions. You may have to think carefully about some of the sentences. Compare the number of facts with the number of opinions. Determine if each editorial is supported more by facts or opinions. Decide which one relies more heavily on facts. Which one relies primarily on opinions? Remember, a good editorial uses an equal proportion of facts and opinions. If one going to outweigh the other, let it be the facts.

### UNIT—ACTIVITY 3

Choose one of the letters from the Letters to the Editor section and take the opposite position. Read it well in order to respond to it effectively. Use facts to support your position. Students will read their rebuttals and the class will discuss the merits of effectiveness for each one.

### UNIT—ACTIVITY 4

Collect the editorials printed during the week. Have the class decide on which *one* it would like to redress. Each student will then write three statements of fact and three of opinion. A committee of six students will then assimilate the material and compose a written editorial to send to the newspaper for publication.

## SHOULD WE BELIEVE EVERYTHING IN THE NEWSPAPER

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Is everything that we read in print true, accurate and unbiased? Do newspapers have a responsibility to be objective to their readers? These questions and more need to be discussed in any treatise about modern newspapers.

Reporters have to rely on others for truth and accuracy, and we should realize that the source or witness is usually taken at his or her word. When research is called for, it is the newspaper's responsibility to find the facts for its readers.

The only place in a newspaper for its opinions and a statement of position should be the editorial section. These pages provide a forum which enables the paper's editor(s) to express their stand on the various social

issues. Every other article, story and report should be completely objective. However, many people feel that our newspapers have become politically or ideologically biased. Such terms as the “liberal eastern press” or the “Republican bent” of rural and suburban newspapers have been around for years.

The best way to use a newspaper and get as much accuracy out of it as possible is to vary your news sources. Read two or more different papers, news magazines, and utilize other media for the “total picture.” Keep in mind that a newspaper is a commercial business whose first responsibility is to make a profit for its stockholders. For this reason they may take steps that appeal to their advertising clients, readership customers, and political benefactors, such as not stepping on too many toes.

A changing society reflects itself in changing newspaper tastes. Many people no longer have the time to read long, detailed articles and editorials. They have come to rely on short news capsules, illustrations, charts and other graphics to provide news at a glance.

The U.S.A. TODAY newspaper has been quick to capitalize on this “fast news” feed to people, the way fast food has changed our eating habits. With modern technology such as VCRs, newspapers are competing for people’s information intake times more than ever. They no longer have to be home for the six o’clock news, but can record and watch anytime—and zap the commercials. However, by forcing the news into brief columns, much detail is often left out. Newspapers today seem to be concentrating on entertaining as much (if not more) as informing. I am often left “hungry for more” after reading a news story or watching a TV account. Today, an informed person needs more than one source of news.

## **The Press and Its Responsibilities**

### **Case in Point: China, Spring, 1989**

People around the world watched and read about the struggle for political and social change in Beijing. Day after day for nearly seven weeks the story was brought into our homes, first with hope then shock and despair. The press, both print and electronic, gave us hundreds of scenes, interviews, stories and commentary.

The Chinese students felt that they were in the hands of the Western press and that the military would not attack with the whole world watching. However, when it became obvious that the students miscalculated the resolve of the government not to make concessions, it was too late.

The reporters and photographers who were the students’ saviors and benefactors only days before, now saw their film and newsprint turned against the students. With Chinese television flashing video film and photographs that were so easily available, the government used the press to roundup hundreds of students who were arrested, jailed and hanged.

A very valuable lesson about the press was learned from the Chinese experience. People everywhere, especially in totalitarian countries, will be more careful in their dealings with the press. It will be more difficult to find people willing to be on camera, give true accounts, or use their real name. Hopefully, in the future the press will assume a greater role in protecting the safety of the people who are left to fend for themselves.

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