

Writing the News: Different Formats and Their Functions

Standard 7.3: Writing the News: Different Formats and Their Functions

Explain the different functions of news articles, editorials, editorial cartoons, and “op-ed” commentaries. (Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for History and Social Studies) [8.T7.3]



[News Reporters Watch the Launch of the Apollo 11 Moon Mission \(July 15, 1969\)](#)

NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration), Marshall Image Exchange, Public Domain

FOCUS QUESTION: What are the Functions of Different Types of New Articles?

News writing has multiple genres, including news articles, editorials, editorial cartoons, and Op-Ed commentaries. Each type of news writing has a specific style and serves a particular function.

News articles report what is happening as clearly and objectively as possible. In reporting the news, the [Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics](#) demands that reporters:

1. Seek truth and report it
2. Minimize harm
3. Act independently
4. Be accountable and transparent

While news articles are supposed to present information without bias or opinion, **editorials, editorial cartoons** and **Op-Ed commentaries** are forums where writers may freely express their viewpoints and advocate for desired changes and specific courses of action. As students learn about these different forms of news writing, they can compose their own stories and commentaries about local and national matters of importance to them.

Modules for This Standard Include:

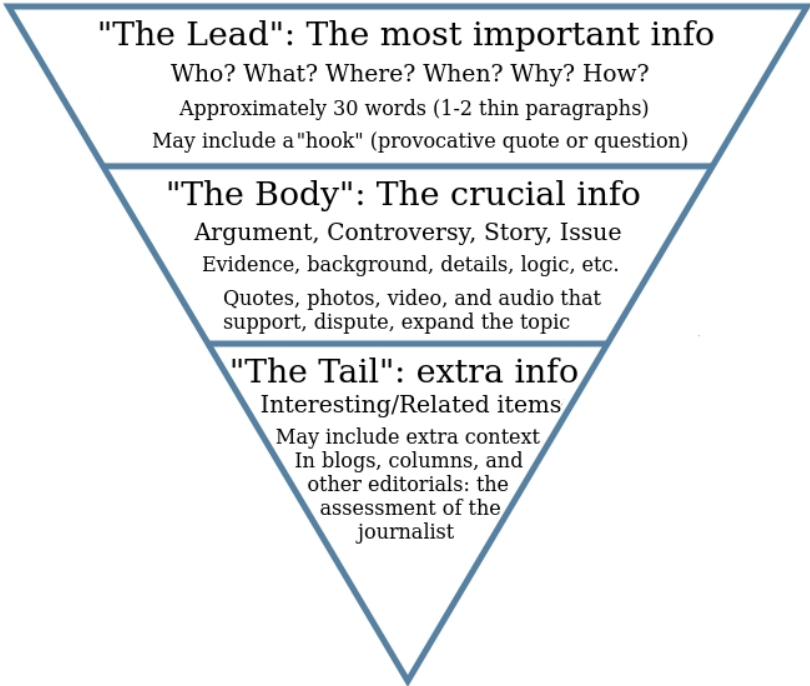
1. [INVESTIGATE: Reading and Writing News Articles, Editorials, Editorial Cartoons, and Op-Ed Commentaries](#)
2. [UNCOVER: Two Pioneering Women Cartoonists: Jackie Ormes and Dale Messick](#)
3. [ENGAGE: What is the Role of a War Correspondent?](#)

1. INVESTIGATE: Reading and Writing News Articles, Editorials, Editorial cartoons, and Op-Ed Commentaries

Writers of news articles are obligated to maintain **journalistic integrity** at all times. They are not supposed to take sides or show bias in written or verbal reporting.

News articles follow an [Inverted Pyramid](#) format. The lead, or main points of the article—the who, what, when, where, why and how of a story—are placed at the top or beginning of the article. Additional

information follows the lead and less important, but still relevant information, comes after that. The lead information gets the most words since many people read the lead and then skim the rest of the article.



"Inverted pyramid in comprehensive form" by Christopher Schwartz is licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0

Editorials are written by the editors of a newspaper or media outlet to express the opinion of that organization about a topic. Horace Greeley is credited with starting the "Editorial Page" at his *New York Tribune* newspaper in the 1840s, and so began the practice of separating unbiased news from clearly stated opinions as part of news writing ([A Short History of Opinion Writing](#), Stony Brook University).

Editorial cartoons (also known as **political cartoons**) are visual

images drawn to express opinions about people, events, and policies. They make use of satire and parody to communicate ideas and evoke emotional responses from readers. There are differences between a cartoon and a comic. A “cartoon usually consists of a single drawing, often accompanied by a line of text, either in the form of a caption underneath the drawing, or a speech bubble.” A comic, by contrast, “comprises a series of drawings, often in boxes, or as we like to call them, ‘panels,’ which form a narrative” (Finck, 2019, p. 27).



[Caricature of Boss Tweed](#), by Thomas Nast, {{PD-art-US}}

An exhibit from the Library of Congress noted how political or editorial cartoons are “no laughing matter.” They are “pictures with a point” ([It's No Laughing Matter: Political Cartoons/Pictures with a Point](#), Library of Congress). Washington Post cartoonist Ann Telnaes

stated: “The job of the editorial cartoonist is to expose the hypocrisies and abuses of power by politicians and powerful institutions in our society” ([Editorial Cartooning, Then and Now](#), Medium.com, August 7, 2017).

Benjamin Franklin published the first political cartoon, “Join, or Die” in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, May 9, 1754. [Thomas Nast](#) used cartoons to expose corruption, greed, and injustice in Gilded Age American society in the late 19th century. Launched in 1970 and still being drawn today in newspapers and online, [Doonesbury by Gary Trudeau](#) provides political satire and social commentary in a comic strip format. In 1975, *Doonesbury* was the first politically-themed daily comic strip to win a Pulitzer Prize. Editorial and political cartoons are widely viewed online, especially in the form of Internet memes that offer commentary and amusement to digital age readers.

Op-Ed Commentaries (Op-Ed means “opposite the editorial page”) are written essays of around 700 words found on, or opposite, the editorial page of newspapers and other news publications. They are opportunities for politicians, experts, and ordinary citizens to express their views on issues of importance. Unlike news articles, which are intended to report the news in an objective and unbiased way, Op-Ed commentaries are opinion pieces. Writers express their ideas and viewpoints, and their names are clearly identified so everyone knows who is the author of each essay. The modern Op-Ed page began in 1970 when the *New York Times* newspaper asked writers from outside the field of journalism to contribute essays on a range of topics ([The Op-Ed Page's Back Pages](#), *Slate*, September 27, 2010). Since then, Op-Ed pages have become a forum for a wide expression of perspectives and viewpoints.

Suggested Learning Activities

- **Create a Class Newspaper**
 - Assign students different roles and responsibilities (e.g.,

photographer, editorial writer, Op-Ed writer, editorial cartoonist, news writer).

- Use digital tools like [LucidPress](#), Google Docs, or [Wix](#) to publish the newspaper.
- Have students present about the importance of their designated role (e.g., photographer, editorial writer) for the class news.

- **Compose a Broadside About a Historical or Contemporary Issue**

- A **broadside** is a strongly worded written statement attacking a political opponent or political idea, written on single large sheets of paper, printed on one side only, and designed to have an immediate emotional impact on readers.
- History teacher Erich Leaper has students construct colonial broadsides as a learning activity when teaching Op-Ed Commentaries. During colonial times, proponents of the American Revolution posted broadsides expressing their opposition to British colonial acts and policies. Broadside were the social media and Op-Ed commentaries of the time. Students are grouped and to begin, each group pulls one sheet of paper from five options: the Tea Act, Sugar Act, Stamp Act, Intolerable Acts, Quartering Act, and the Townshend Act.
 - The teacher writes a broadside as a model for the students. Erich wrote his about the Sugar Act, entitling it "Wah! They Can't Take Away My Candy!"
 - Analyzing one of the acts, each group **writes and draws a broadside** expressing opposition to and outrage about the unfairness of the law. Groups display their broadside posters around the classroom or in a virtual gallery.

- In their groups, students view all of the other broadsides and discuss how they would **rate the Acts on an oppressiveness scale**—ranging from most oppressive to least oppressive to the colonists.
- The assessment for the activity happens as each student chooses the top three most oppressive acts and explain her/his choices in writing.
- Resources for writing colonial broadsides:
 - [Colonial Broadsides: A Student Created Play](#), Edsitement (NEH.gov)
 - [Printed Broadsides in the British American Colonies, 1700-1760](#), National Humanities Center
 - [Broadsides and Their Music in Colonial America](#), Colonial Society of Massachusetts

Online Resources for Writing News Articles

- [Writing a Newspaper Article](#), Scholastic (grades 3-8)
- [Newspaper Article Format](#), Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation
- [A Good Lead Is Everything--Here's How to Write One](#), NPR Training

Online Resources for Writing Editorials and Political Cartoons

- Writing editorials
 - [Writing an Editorial](#), Alan Weintraut, Annandale (Virginia) High School
 - [Guidelines for Editorials](#), Santa Barbara City College
- Political cartoons
 - [Analyzing Political Cartoons \(French Revolution](#)

- [Example](#)) | Social Studies Samurai
- [A Free World Needs Political Cartoons](#), TED Talk by Patrick Chappatte (2019).
 - Chappatte stated: "Political cartoons were born with democracy, and they are challenged when freedom is challenged"
 - [Why Drawing Political Cartoons is a Form of Resistance](#). TED Talk by Rayma Suprani (2019).
 - Suprani stated: "Dictators Hate Cartoons."
 - [Editorial Cartoons: An Introduction](#), The Ohio State University Department of History
 - [Editorial Cartoons: An Introduction](#), Teaching Tolerance Magazine
 - [Cartoon America](#), Library of Congress
 - [The Evolution of Political Cartoons through a Changing Media Landscape](#)
 - [The First 150 Years of the American Political Cartoon](#), Historical Society of Pennsylvania
 - [Cartoons for the Classroom](#), Association of American Editorial Cartoonists
 - [It's No Laughing Matter: Political Cartoons/Pictures with a Point](#), Library of Congress

2. UNCOVER: Two Pioneering Women Cartoonists: Jackie Ormes and Dale Messick

[Zelda "Jackie" Ormes](#) is considered to be the first African American woman cartoonist. In comic strips that ran in Black-owned newspapers across the country in the 1940s and 1950s, she created memorable independent women characters, including Torchy Brown and Patty-Jo 'n' Ginger. Her characters were intelligent, forceful women and their stories addressed salient issues of racism and

discrimination in African American life. In 1947, a **Patty-Jo doll** was the first African American doll based on a comic character; there was also a popular Torchy Brown doll.



[Jackie Ormes in her Studio](#). Public Domain

[Dale Messick](#), a pioneering female cartoonist, debuted the comic strip, **[Brenda Starr, Reporter](#)** on June 30, 1940. The comic ran for more than 60 years in hundreds of newspapers nationwide. Throughout its history, the creative team for the comic strip were all women, including the writers and artists who continued the strip after Messick retired in 1980. Based on the character, style, and beauty of Hollywood actress Rita Haywood, Brenda Starr was determined and empowered, lived a life of adventure and intrigue, and always got the news story she was investigating.

Suggested Learning Activity

Assess the Historical Impact of Jackie Ormes and Dale Messick

- [Jackie Ormes to Enter Will Eisner Comic Hall of Fame](#), Comic Book Legal Defense Fund
- [The Woman Whose 1940s Comics Starred Chic, Socially Aware Black Women](#), VICE
- [Farewell Brenda Starr: 70-Year-Old Reporter Faces Her Final Deadline](#), The Washington Post (December 9, 2010)
- [She Changed the Comics: Pre-Code and Golden Age](#), Comic Book Legal Defense Fund
- [Brenda Starr, Reporter](#), America Comes Alive!

State Your View: *Why is it difficult for women to enter and succeed in professions where there are mostly men?*

3. ENGAGE: What is the Role of a War Correspondent?

War Correspondents and **War Photographers** have one of the most important and most dangerous roles in the news media. They travel to war zones, often right into the middle of actual fighting, to tell the rest of us what is happening to soldiers and civilians. Without their written reports and dramatic photos, the public would not know the extent of military activities or the severity of humanitarian crises.



[War Correspondent Alan Wood typing a dispatch in a wood outside Arnhem; September 18, 1944.](#) Public Domain

Americ's first female war correspondent was **Nellie Bly** who covered World War I from the front lines for five years for the New York Evening Journal. **Peggy Hull Deuell** was the first American woman war correspondent accredited by the U.S. government. Between 1916 and the end of World War II, she covered battlefields in Mexico, Europe and Asia. For 28 years, **Martha Gellhorn** covered fighting in the Spanish Civil War, World War II, Vietnam, the Middle East and Central America. Combat photojournalist **Dickey Chapelle** was the first American female war photographer killed in action in World War II.

War correspondents and photographers face, and sometimes meet, death. **Ernie Pyle**, who won a Pulitzer Prize for his stories about

ordinary soldiers during World War II, was killed by Japanese machine gun fire in 1945. **Marie Colvin**, who covered wars in Chechnya, Sri Lanka and the Middle East was killed by Syrian government shelling in 2012. When asked why she covered wars, Marie Colvin said, “what I write about is humanity in extremis, pushed the unendurable, and that it is important to tell people what really happens in wars—declared and undeclared” (quoted in [Schleier, 2018, para. 8](#)).

How did the lives and deaths of these two reporters and their commitment to informing others about war reflect the role and importance of a free press in a democratic society?

Suggested Learning Activities

- **Write a People's History**

- Describe the life of Marie Colvin, Ernie Pyle, Dickey Chapelle or another war journalist or photographer and highlight their time spent covering war (see the online resources section below for related information).

- **Compare and Contrast**

- How do the lives and jobs of modern war correspondents compare and contrast to those in different historical time periods (i.e. American Revolution, the World War II, Vietnam War).

- **Engage in Civic Action**

- Design a Public Service Announcement (PSA) video or podcast to convince politicians to provide war correspondents with mental health care support and services once they return from reporting in a war zone.

- **Consider and Report Out**

- In 2019, the U.S. was engaged in **military operations** in 7 countries: Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Libya, and Niger.
 - [Report on the Legal and Policy Frameworks Guiding the United States' Use of Military Force and Related National Security Operations](#) (2018)
- What do you and people in general know about these engagements? How are war correspondents covering these wars?

Online Resources for War Correspondents

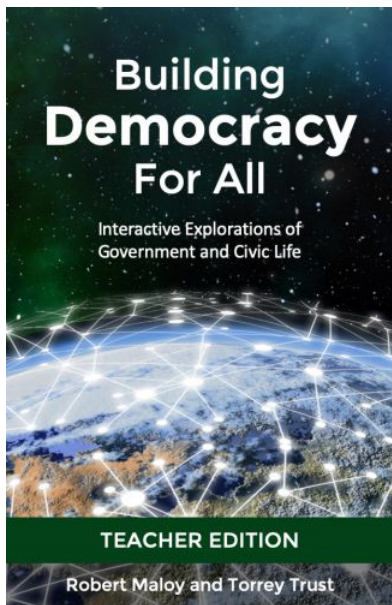
- **Marie Colvin**

- BOOK: [*In Extremis: The Life and Death of War Correspondent Marie Colvin*](#). Lindsey Hilsum (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019)
- [A New Biography of Marie Colvin, Eyewitness to War](#), NPR (November 4, 2018)
- **Dickey Chapelle**
 - [Dickey Chapelle Biography](#)
 - [The Brilliant Photos of the First American Female War Photographer Killed in Action](#)
 - [Inside the Daring Life of a Forgotten Female War Photographer](#), National Geographic
- **Other Female Journalists**
 - [6 Female Journalists of the World War II Era](#), Literary Ladies Guide
 - [Edith Wharton: War Correspondent](#), EDSITEment
 - CNN's Interactive "Free Press: What's at Stake" - [Media Martyrs: Among Those Who Died While Working as Journalists in the Past 15 Years](#)
 - [Marguerite Higgins Hits Red Beach](#) - She was the only woman who received a Pulitzer Prize for covering the Korean War in 1951
- **Ernie Pyle**
 - [Ernie Pyle: Wartime Columns](#), Indiana University
 - [Obituary: Ernie Pyle is Killed on Ie Island; Foe Fired When All Seemed Safe](#), *The New York Times* (April 19, 1945)

Standard 7.3 Conclusion

In this standard, **INVESTIGATE** looked at the differences between news articles and editorials, political cartoons, and Op-Ed commentaries - where writers and artists present their opinions and

perspectives on events. **ENGAGE** explored the roles of war correspondents, using the historical experiences of Marie Colvin (writing 1979 to 2012) and Ernie Pyle (writing 1925 to 1945) as examples. **UNCOVER** told the stories of two important feminist comic strips drawn by pioneering women cartoonists, Jackie Ormes (writing 1930 to 1956) and Dale Messick (writing 1940 to 1980).



Maloy, R. W. & Trust, T. (2020). *Building Democracy for All: Interactive Explorations of Government and Civic Life*. EdTech Books. Retrieved from <https://edtechbooks.org/democracy>