3 Interviewing

Bill Reiter knew he was onto a great story. The problem was how to *get* it. Reiter was only about a year into his first job out of journalism school. He was 22. He was from Iowa. He was white. The story was the life of Edith McClinton. Mrs. McClinton had lived through the turbulent birth of civil rights in Little Rock, Ark. She had overcome poverty, racism and blindness to achieve professional success and personal dignity. She was 89 years old and African American.

Reiter discovered immediately that telling Mrs. McClinton's story would require all the skills he had learned in school and some he would have to develop on the spot. Here's his recollection:

> Interviewing Mrs. McClinton was difficult for a number of reasons. Her age alone presented a pretty daunting challenge. Some days, she was in fine spirits and her memory was sharp as anyone's. But some days we'd be talking for five or 10 minutes and then I'd lose her. . . .
>
> Another problem was my paper. *The Democrat Gazette* does not have an excellent reputation with the black community. Early on, Mrs. McClinton and her daughter Joyce (who lives with her and takes care of her) made it clear that they didn't trust my paper and that they didn't trust me. So that's where it started.

By the time it ended eight months later, Reiter had earned the family's trust and written a seven-part, front-page narrative telling the story of race in Arkansas through the experiences of one courageous woman. The series ended with this quote from Mrs. McClinton:

> "Great things can come from freedom," she says. "I take my freedom and pass it on to my children and my grandchildren."

Not every interview is that difficult, time-consuming or important. But every successful interview begins with establishing trust and ends with telling a story.

Interviewing — having conversations with sources — is the key to most stories you will write. Your ability to make people comfortable being with you is often the difference between mediocre reporting and good reporting.

Information is the raw material of a journalist. While some of it is gathered from records and some from observation, most of it is gathered

In this chapter you will learn:

1. **How to prepare for an interview.**
2. **How to phrase your questions.**
3. **How to establish rapport with a source.**
4. **How to ensure accuracy.**

in person-to-person conversations. The skills that go into those conversations are the most basic reporting tools of any reporter for any medium. If you're interviewing for television, broadcast or webcast, your goals and techniques may be different from those of a print reporter, but the basics are the same.

BUILDING TRUST

The most basic requirement of any successful interview is a reasonable degree of trust between reporter and source. Usually, as a reporter you have to earn that trust. Here's Bill Reiter again, explaining how he broke through the barriers of race and age to earn the trust of Edith McClinton and her daughter.

> In the beginning, I would go to Mrs. McClinton's house. Without a notebook, I'd talk to her. We often talked about her story, but more than not we talked about me, about my paper, about why she should trust her story to either of us, about her concerns.
>
> I overcame her suspicions the same way I do with most sources. First, I'm honest. I told Mrs. McClinton that I'd be fair but that the story would be personal and honest. She might not like some of the things I wrote, I told her. . . . I guaranteed only that it was honest and accurate. We had this conversation many times. . . .
>
> I never understand reporters who talk to their sources like the source is some nameless bureaucrat. So I just talked to Edith the way I talk to anyone. I got to know her. More important, she got to know me. The trust came later.
>
> By the end, Mrs. McClinton had grown to trust me. So had her daughter, I think, and this led to honesty. It's amazing what people will tell you when they trust you. . . . And the last thing I had going for me, something I think can't be faked, was empathy. I really liked this lady, respected her, and thought her story was important. I think sources, when they're around us enough, can pick up on that.

You probably won't have months to develop trust with a source. Most times, you won't need that much time. What you will need, though, are the honesty and empathy that lead strangers to be honest with you.

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

Interviews are best used to solicit reactions and interpretations, not to gather facts. Good reporters do their fact-gathering before interviews.

How you prepare for the interview depends in part on what kind of a story you intend to write. You may be doing a news story, a personality profile or an investigative piece. In each case, you check the newspaper library and search online databases, talk to other reporters and, if there's enough time, read magazine articles and books.

To prepare for a news story, you pay more attention to clips about the subject of the story than to those about the personality of the individual to be interviewed. To prepare for a profile, you look for personality quirks and the subject's

interests, family, friends, travels and habits. To prepare for an investigative piece, you want to know both your subject matter and the person you are interviewing. In all these stories, do not overlook other reporters and editors who know something about the person or subject. Let's look at each of these three types of stories more closely.

The News Story

One day Paul Leavitt made a routine telephone call to a law-enforcement source. Leavitt, then assistant city editor for *The Des Moines* (Iowa) *Register*, was working on a story. He knew the source from his days as a county government and courts reporter for the *Register*.

He expected the story, and the interview, to be routine. Polk County was building a new jail. Leavitt wanted to find out about progress on the new building. The source pleaded ignorance. He said, "Oh, Leavitt, I don't know. I haven't had time to keep up on that, what with all these meetings on the pope's visit."

Leavitt didn't say anything right away. A less astute reporter might have let the source know he was surprised. The pope in Des Moines? Are you kidding? Instead, Leavitt remembered a story he had read about an Iowan who had extended an invitation for the pope to stop in Iowa during his American visit. Leavitt didn't think the Iowan had much of a chance. When the Vatican had announced the pope's visit, people from every state were bartering for a chance to bask in the worldwide limelight.

Still, the source's slip of the tongue seemed genuine. Leavitt finally replied, "Oh, yeah, that's right. When's he coming, anyway?"

"October 4," the source said.

Before the conversation ended, Leavitt had learned of a meeting among the Secret Service, the Vatican, the U.S. State Department and Iowa law-enforcement officials to discuss the trip. He also had learned when the pope would arrive, where he would arrive, where he would celebrate Mass and when he would leave.

As a result, the *Register* stunned its readers the next morning with a copyrighted story saying the pope would speak in Des Moines. The story was printed three weeks before the Vatican released its official itinerary of the visit. Other area reporters scoffed at the story. One newspaper even printed a story poking fun at the thought of a pope hobnobbing in an Iowa cornfield.

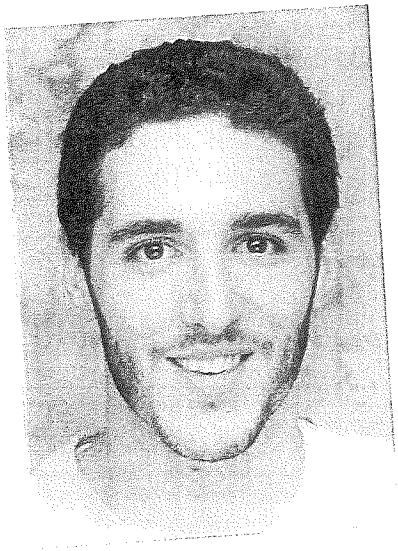
Leavitt and the *Register* were vindicated. As scheduled, the pope arrived Oct. 4 — and celebrated Mass in an Iowa cornfield.

Remembering his conversation with the source, and how a routine question turned into a bona fide scoop, Leavitt said, "I don't even remember what the original question was."

Leavitt probably would not have gotten the story had he not remembered the earlier story about the invitation and known something else about interviewing: When a source unwittingly gives you a scoop, sometimes it is best to act as if you already know it. That may encourage the source to give you more information.

On the Job

Telling Compelling Stories



Bill Reiter is a reporter for *The Des Moines* (Iowa) *Register*. His experience at his first job after college, in Little Rock, Ark., introduces this chapter. Now he talks about interviewing, about building trust, about getting the material to tell compelling stories:

"My goal was to write a series that would take our readers inside the lives of homeless teenagers. The task seemed daunting. I had to find these young people, build enough trust to enter their world and somehow show the complex problems and dilemmas that kept them on the street.

"So, knowing they were out there but not sure where to go, I followed the first rule of reporting, the one my college professors drilled into me. . . . I left the office. I stopped folks who looked like they might be homeless. I went by a shelter. I talked to a police officer whose beat takes him to poor parts of town. It didn't take long to hear that the man to see about life on the street was a homeless-youth outreach worker named Howard Matalba."

Matalba introduced Bill to his world and to Gabrielle, a pregnant teenager. Bill again:

"I spent the next three months with Gabrielle. I wandered town with her, listened for hours to her complaining, filled notebook after notebook with quotes that never made the newspaper. I ate with her at the soup kitchen, followed her when she applied for food stamps and stuck around when she and her boyfriend snuggled up together on a bench or against a building. . . . I was there when Gabrielle applied for an apartment, when she ran out of money and food, and when she took back her boyfriend despite his abusive tendencies. I was there when she gave birth to her daughter. . . .

"My reporting came with costs. I was knocked down by a homeless man. I was punched and scratched by a homeless 19-year-old girl. I conquered my fear of heights because one of my sources, with me right behind him, scuttled over a rickety train bridge on his way to town. I worked nights and weekends, wandered for miles in the cold, and was told in no uncertain terms by a group of homeless men that they'd kill me if I came back. I went back anyway, again and again. . . .

"I looked for moments, dialogue and action that gave life to the issue I was writing about. I didn't rely on quotes that reconstructed something I wanted to write about. Instead, I wrote down what my sources actually said to each other, not what they said to me. I relaxed, acted like myself and remembered the people I was writing about had been through a lot."

His series ran on Page 1 of the *Register* and set Des Moines talking. For Bill Reiter, that's what counts.

The Profile

A reporter who decided to write a profile of a local freelance writer prepared differently. Because the reporter had used the writer as a source in an earlier story, she knew something about the writer. She needed to know more, so she looked in *Contemporary Authors* and found biographical information. She also asked the writer to send her copies of some of the articles she had written. Before the reporter went to see the freelancer, she read several of the articles. She also interviewed the editor at one of the magazines that bought the writer's material.

The reporter was prepared. Or so she thought. She had to pass one more test. The writer was an animal lover, and when the reporter arrived, she first had to make friends with a handful of dogs. Fortunately, she loved dogs. That immediately established rapport with the freelancer. The resulting story was full of lively detail:

> Joan Gilbert stretches lazily to soft sunbeams and chirping birds. She dresses casually in blue denim shorts and a plaid, short-sleeved blouse. She and her favorite work companions, five playful dogs, file out the door of her little white house to begin their day with a lazy walk in the surrounding woods. When she returns, she'll contentedly sit down at her typewriter. Such is work.
>
> Joan Gilbert is a freelance writer.

Walt Harrington specialized in in-depth profiles when he worked for *The Washington Post Magazine*. In his book, he says he spent one to three months on each profile. For profiles on George Bush and Carl Bernstein, he conducted about 80 interviews each. He also accompanied his subjects. Few journalists are afforded the luxury of three months to work on a profile, but whether you do eight or 80 interviews, the lessons are still the same: Be prepared. Be there.

TIPS: Before the interview

- Know the subject.
  - Seek specific information.
  - Research the subject.
  - List the questions.
- Know the person.
  - Know salient biographical information.
  - Know the person's expertise regarding the subject matter.

The Investigative Piece

The casual atmosphere of the Joan Gilbert interview is not always possible for the investigative reporter. An adversarial relationship determines both the preparation required for an investigative piece and the atmosphere of the interview itself. An investigative reporter is like an attorney in a courtroom. Wise attorneys know in advance what the answers to their questions will be. So do investigative reporters. Preparation is essential.

In the early stages of the investigation, you conduct some fishing-expedition interviews: Because you don't know how much the source knows, you cast around. Start with persons on the fringes. Gather as much as you can from them. Study the records. Only after you have most of the evidence do you confront your central character. You start with a large circle and gradually draw it smaller.

Getting the interview is sometimes as big a challenge as the interview itself. Sources who believe you are working on a story that will be critical of them or their friends often try to avoid you. Steve Weinberg, author of an unauthorized biography of industrialist Armand Hammer, had to overcome the suspicion of many former Hammer associates. Their former boss had told all of them not to

talk to Weinberg. Instead of calling, Weinberg approached them by mail. "I sent letters, examples of my previous work, explained what I wanted to cover and why I was doing it without Hammer's blessing," Weinberg says.

He recommends that you use a letter or an e-mail to share some of what you know about the story that might surprise or impress the source. For instance, a reference such as "And last week, when I was checking all the land records . . ." would indicate the depth of your research.

In his letter to former Hammer assistants, Weinberg talked about how Hammer was one of the most important people in the history of business. The letters opened doors to all seven of Hammer's former executive assistants whom Weinberg contacted.

Weinberg, former director of Investigative Reporters and Editors, also offers to show the sources relevant portions of his manuscript as an accuracy check. He makes it clear in writing that he maintains control of the content.

Requesting an interview in writing can allow you to make your best case for getting it. And an offer to allow your sources to review the story assures them that you are serious about accuracy. E-mail makes both the request and the offer simpler and faster.

TIPS: Set up the interview

- Set the time.
  - At interviewee's convenience — but suggest a time.
  - Length of time needed.
  - Possible return visits.
- Set the place.
  - Interviewee's turf, or
  - Neutral turf.

BROADCAST INTERVIEWS

When you're interviewing someone in front of a camera, the basic rules of interviewing don't change. Some of your objectives and techniques, however, do.

The first thing to remember is that broadcast journalism is a performance. Television journalists, at least those who appear on camera, are also performers. Sure, they have to report and write, but they also have to be able to tell their stories with both words and body language to people who are watching and listening — not reading. An important part of the television reporter's performance is the interview.

TIPS: Discuss arrangements

- Will you bring a recording device?
- Will you bring a photographer?
- Will you let interviewee check accuracy of quotes?

Both print and broadcast reporters often interview to develop information that can be used in further reporting. Interviews on camera usually have a different goal. That goal is the soundbite, the few seconds of words with accompanying video that convey not only information but emotion. Print is a medium that mainly provides information. Television is a medium of emotion. The best interviews for television are those that reveal how a situation feels to the participants or witnesses.

Al Tompkins, the Poynter Institute's group leader for broadcast and online journalism, offers what he calls "a new set of interviewing tools" intended to produce better storytelling for television. You can find these and other tools at **www.poynter.org**. Here are some that show both differences and similarities in print and television interviewing:

- *Objective and subjective questions.* To gather facts, ask objective questions: "When?" "Where?" "How much?" But subjective questions usually produce the best soundbites. "Why?" "Tell me more. . . ." "Can you explain . . . ?"

- *Focus on one issue at a time.* Vague, complicated questions produce vague, complicated, hard-to-follow answers. Remember that readers can review until they understand, but viewers can't rewind an interview. Help them follow the story by taking your interviewee through it one step at a time.
- *Ask open-ended questions.* For print, you often want a simple yes or no. That kind of answer stops a television interview. Open-ended questions encourage conversation, and conversation makes a good interview. (More on this on page 58.)
- *Keep questions short.* Make the interviewee do the talking. Tompkins points out that short questions are more likely to produce focused responses. They also keep the viewer's attention on the person being interviewed and what she or he has to say.
- *Build to the point.* The best interviews are like the best stories. They don't give away the punch line in the first few words. Soft, easy questions encourage relaxation and trust. Then move to the heart of the issue.
- *Be honest.* As true for television as for print and online, the importance of honesty is too often overlooked by rookie reporters. You do neither your source nor yourself a favor if you lead the source to expect an interview about softball when you have an indictment in mind. Tell the source ahead of time that you'll want to ask some tough questions. Say, and mean, that you want to get the whole story, to be fair. Then politely but firmly dig in. As Tompkins notes, honesty has the added benefit of helping you defend yourself against any later accusations of malice.

Other Preparatory Considerations

All this homework is important, but something as trifling as your appearance may determine whether you will have a successful interview. You would hardly wear cutoff shorts into a university president's suite, and you wouldn't wear a three-piece suit to talk to underground revolutionaries. It is your right to wear your hair however you wish, pierce your body and wear whatever clothes you want, but it is the source's prerogative to refuse to talk to you (see Figure 3.1).

Most interviews are conducted in the source's office. Especially if the story is a profile or a feature, it usually is better to get the source away from his or her work. If you are doing a story about a rabbi's hobby of collecting butterflies, seek a setting appropriate to the topic. Suggest meeting where the rabbi keeps the collection.

In some interviews, it would be to your advantage to get the source on neutral territory. If you have some questions for the provost or a public official, suggest meeting in a coffee shop at a quiet time. A person has more power in his or her official surroundings.

It is important, too, to let the source know how much time you need and whether you expect to return for further information. And if you don't already know how the source might react to a recording device, ask when you are making the appointment.

You have now done the appropriate homework. You are properly attired. You have made an appointment and told the source how much time you need. Before

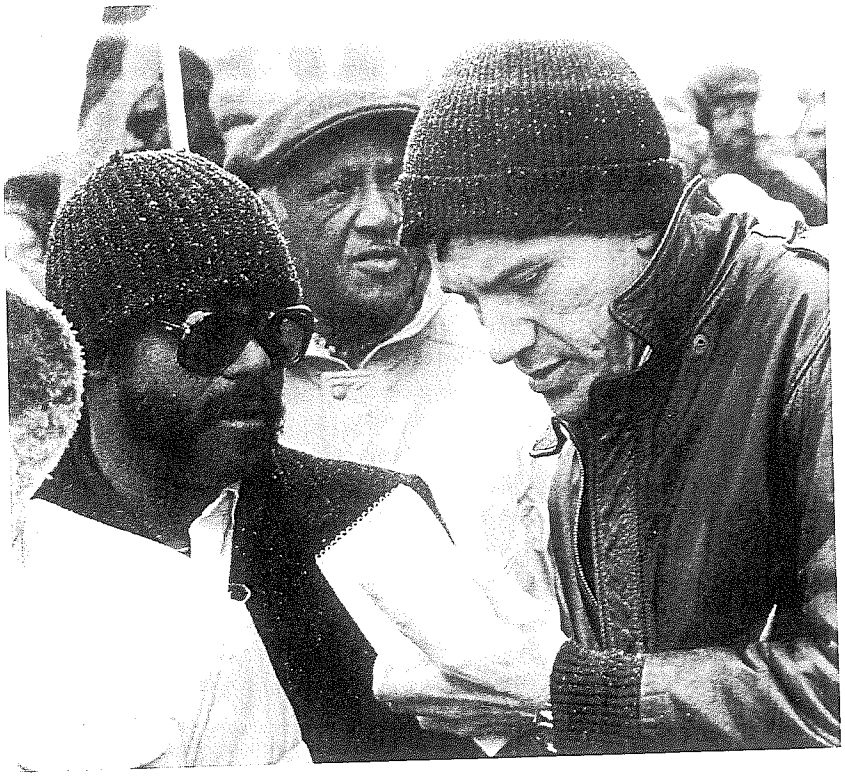


Figure 3.1
This reporter dresses to fit in with the marchers he is interviewing; he gains their confidence by being friendly and attentive.

you leave, you may want to write down a list of questions to ask. They will guide you through the interview and prevent you from missing important topics altogether. The best way to encourage a spontaneous conversation is to have your questions prepared. You'll be more relaxed. The thinking you must do to write the questions will help prepare you for the interview. Having questions prepared relieves you of the need to be mentally searching for the next question as the source is answering the last one. If you are trying to think of the next question, you will not be paying close attention to what is being said, and you might miss the most important part of the interview.

Preparing the questions for an interview is hard work, even for veterans. If you are writing for your campus newspaper, seek suggestions from other staff members. You will find ideas in the newspaper's electronic database. If you anticipate a troublesome interview with the chancellor, you might want to seek advice from faculty members, too. What questions would they ask if they were you? Often, they have more background knowledge, or they might have heard some of the faculty talk around campus. Staff members are also valuable sources of information.

Although you may ask all of your prepared questions in some interviews, in most you probably will use only some of them. Still, you will have benefited from preparing the questions in two important ways. First, even when you don't use

many, the work you did thinking of the questions helped prepare you for the interview. Second, sources who see that you have a prepared list often are impressed with your seriousness.

On the basis of the information you have gathered already, you know what you want to ask. Now you must be careful about how you ask the questions.

PHRASING QUESTIONS

How questions are structured often determines the answer. Reporters have missed many stories because they didn't know how to ask questions. Quantitative researchers have shown how only a slight wording change affects the results of a survey. If you want to know whether citizens favor a city plan to beautify the downtown area, you can ask the question in several ways:

- Do you favor the city council's plan to beautify the downtown area?
- The city council plans to spend $3 million beautifying the downtown area. Are you in favor of this?
- Do you think the downtown area needs physical changes?
- Which of the following actions do you favor?
  - — Prohibiting all automobile traffic in an area bounded by Providence Road, Ash Street, College Avenue and Elm Street.
  - — Having all the downtown storefronts remodeled to carry out a single theme and putting in brick streets, shrubbery and benches.
  - — None of the above.

How you structure that question may affect the survey results by several percentage points. Similarly, how you ask questions in an interview may affect the response.

By the phrasing of the question, many reporters signal the response they expect or prejudices they have. For instance, a reporter who says, "Don't you think that the city council should allocate more money to the parks and recreation department?" is not only asking a question but also influencing the source or betraying a bias. A neutral phrasing would be "Do you think the city council should allocate more money to the parks and recreation department?" Another common way of asking a leading question is "Are you going to vote against this amendment like the other legislators I've talked to?"

If you have watched journalists interviewing people live on television, you have seen many examples of badly phrased questions. Many are not questions at all. The interviewers make statements and then put the microphone in front of the source — for example, "You had a great game, Bill" or "Winning the election must be a great feeling." Then the source is expected to say something. What, precisely, do you want to know?

Sometimes a reporter unwittingly blocks a response by the phrasing of the question. A reporter who was investigating possible job discrimination against women conducted several interviews before she told her city editor she didn't

TIPS: When you arrive at the interview

- Control the seating arrangement.
- Place the recording device at optimum spot.
- Warm up person briefly with small talk.
- Set the ground rules.
  - Put everything on the record.
  - Make everything attributable.

think the women with whom she talked were being frank with her. "When I ask them if they have ever been discriminated against, they always tell me no. But three times now during the course of the interviews, they have said things that indicate they have been. How do I get them to tell me about it?" she asked.

"Perhaps it's the way you are asking the question," the city editor replied. "When you ask the women whether they have ever been discriminated against, you are forcing them to answer yes or no. Don't be so blunt. Ask them if others with the same qualifications at work have advanced faster than they have. Ask if they are paid the same amount as men for the same work. Ask them what they think they would be doing today if they were male. Ask them if they know of any qualified women who were denied jobs."

The city editor was giving the reporter examples of both closed- and open-ended questions. Each has its specific strengths.

TIPS: The interview itself

- Use good interview techniques.
  - Ask open-ended and closed-ended questions.
  - Allow the person to think and to speak; pause.
  - Don't be threatening in voice or manner.
  - Control the flow but be flexible.
- Take good notes.
  - Be unobtrusive.
  - Be thorough.
- Use the recording device.
  - Make sure it's on.
  - Note digital counter at important parts.

Open-Ended Questions

Open-ended questions allow the respondent some flexibility. Women may not respond frankly when asked whether they have ever been discriminated against. The question calls for a yes-no response. But an open-ended question such as "What would you be doing today if you were a man?" is not so personal. It does not sound as threatening to the respondent. In response to an open-ended question, the source often reveals more than he or she realizes or intends to.

A sportswriter who was interviewing a pro scout at a college football game wanted to know whom the scout was there to see. When the scout diplomatically declined to be specific, the reporter tried another approach. He asked a series of questions:

- "What kind of qualities does a pro scout look for in an athlete?"
- "Do you think any of the players here today have those talents?"
- "Whom would you put into that category?"

The reporter worked from the general to the specific until he had the information he wanted. Open-ended questions are less direct and less threatening. They are more exploratory and more flexible. However, if you want to know a person's biographical data, don't ask, "Can you tell me about yourself?"

Closed-Ended Questions

Eventually the reporter needs to close in on a subject, to pin down details, to get the respondent to be specific. **Closed-ended questions** are designed to elicit specific responses.

Instead of asking the mayor, "What did you think of the conference in Washington, D.C.?" you ask, "What did you learn in the session 'Funds You May Not Know Are Available'?" Instead of asking a previous employee to appraise the chancellor-designate's managerial abilities, you ask, "How well does she listen to

the people who work for her?" "Do the people who work for her have specific job duties?" "Does she explain her decisions?"

A vague question invites a vague answer. By asking a specific question, you are more likely to get a specific answer. You are also communicating to your source that you have done your homework and that you are looking for precise details.

Knowing exactly when to ask a closed-ended question or when to be less specific is not something you can plan ahead of time. The type of information you are seeking and the chemistry between the interviewer and the source are the determining factors. You must make on-the-spot decisions. The important thing is to keep rephrasing the question until the source answers it adequately. Gary Smith wrote in *Intimate Journalism*, "A lot of my reporting comes from asking a question three different ways. Sometimes the third go at it is what produces the nugget, but even if the answers aren't wonderful or the quotes usable, they can still confirm or correct my impressions."

Every reporter seeks anecdotes, and closed-ended questions help elicit them. "What is the funniest thing you've ever done?" "The weirdest?" "What's the saddest thing that ever happened to you?" When the source talks in generalities, ask a close-ended question to get to specifics. "You say Mary is a practical joker. Can you think of an example of a practical joke she played on someone?" The answers to these types of questions yield the anecdotal nuggets that make your story readable.

ESTABLISHING RAPPORT

In her career with the Associated Press, Tad Bartimus interviewed hundreds of people. She began practicing when she worked for her hometown paper at age 14. Her assignment: interview former President Harry S. Truman. She approached him and said, "Excuse me, sir, but I'm from the local paper. Could you please talk to me?"

"Well, young lady, what would you like to know?" Truman responded.

Years later, Bartimus recalled, "For the first time in my life, I was struck dumb. What did I want to know? What was I supposed to ask him? How do you do this interviewing stuff, anyway?"

Bartimus knows the answers to those questions now. One piece of advice she offered her colleagues in an article for *AP World* was to share and care. Bartimus urges reporters to reveal themselves as people. "A little empathy goes a long way to defuse [the] fear and hostility that is so pervasive against the press," she says.

Rapport — the relationship between the reporter and the source — is crucial to the success of the interview (see Figure 3.2). The relationship is sometimes relaxed, sometimes strained. Often it is somewhere in between. The type of relationship you try to establish with your source is determined by the kind of story you are doing. Several approaches are possible.

Figure 3.2
Establishing rapport with interview subjects helps a reporter to get better story information.

Interview Approaches

For most news stories and personality profiles, the reporter gains a great deal if the subject is at ease. Often that can be accomplished by starting with small talk. Ask about a trophy, the plants or an engraved pen. Bring up something humorous you have found during your research. Ask about something you know the source will want to talk about. In other interviews, if you think the subject might be skeptical about your knowledge of the field, open with a question that demonstrates your knowledge.

Rapport also depends on where you conduct the interview. Many persons, especially those unaccustomed to being interviewed, feel more comfortable in their workplace. Go to them. Talk to the business person in the office, to the athlete in the locker room, to the conductor in the concert hall. In some cases, though, you may get a better interview elsewhere if the source cannot relax at the workplace or is frequently interrupted. Reporters have talked to politicians during car rides between campaign appearances. They've gone sailing with business

Masson vs. Malcolm: A Cautionary Tale

The "fabricated quotes" case of Masson vs. Malcolm is a bad soap opera. The lead characters are writer Janet Malcolm, the defendant, and psychoanalyst Jeffrey Masson, the plaintiff.

Here is the main scenario:

Masson became disillusioned with Freudian psychology when he was serving as projects director of the Sigmund Freud Archives in London. He was fired for advancing his controversial theories about Freud in 1981. Malcolm wanted to write about the situation. She established a rapport with him and taped more than 40 hours' worth of interviews. But she said she did not tape-record all of their conversations, especially those that occurred when they were walking or traveling in her car.

Malcolm wrote about Masson for *The New Yorker* in 1983. Book publisher Alfred A. Knopf later published a book from that material. The placement of quotation marks around certain statements in these works provoked a dispute between subject and author. Malcolm wrote that Masson said his superiors at the Sigmund Freud Archives considered him "an intellectual gigolo — you get your pleasure from him, but you don't take him out in public." Masson said he never said that. A tape recording shows that he said, "I was, in a sense, much too junior within the hierarchy of analysis for these important training analysts to be caught dead with me."

Did he call himself an "intellectual gigolo" or not? It is a catchy phrase. Masson claimed that quote and others were fabricated. He sued *The New Yorker*, Knopf and Malcolm for libel.

In 1989, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in favor of the defendants. The court said that an author may "under certain circumstances, fictionalize quotations to some extent." Because Masson had conceded that he was a public figure, he had to prove "actual malice" — knowledge of falsity or reckless regard (see Chapter 22).

The court said:

> Malice will not be inferred from evidence showing that the quoted language does not contain the exact words used by the plaintiff provided that the fabricated quotations are either *"rational interpretations of ambiguous" remarks made by the public figure . . . or do not "alter the substantive content" of unambiguous remarks actually made by the public figure.* (Italics added.)

In 1991 the Supreme Court overturned the 9th Circuit's decision, rejecting the lower court's "rational interpretation" standard. The Court said that "quotation marks indicate that the author is not interpreting the speaker's ambiguous statement, but is attempting to convey what the speaker said."

The Court said:

> Were we to assess quotations under a rational interpretation standard, we would give journalists the freedom to place statements in their subjects' mouths without fear of liability. By eliminating any method of distinguishing between the statements of the subject and the interpretation of the author, we would diminish to a great degree the trustworthiness of the printed word and eliminate the real meaning of quotations. Not only public figures but the press doubtless would suffer under such a rule.

The Court clearly was trying to protect the sanctity of quotation marks, but the Court also made it clear that not every change in a quotation is going to lead to a lawsuit. To some extent, some reporters do clean up quotes. Some reporters correct errors in grammar. Some delete "uh" or "um" without using ellipsis points. Those changes will not get a reporter into trouble. The change in words has to result in a material change in the meaning of a statement for actual malice to be present. But courts are going to look hard at cases where a writer has put words in a speaker's mouth.

The Supreme Court remanded the case. In 1992, the 9th Circuit let Knopf off the hook, saying, in effect, that Knopf relied on *The New Yorker* in concluding that Malcolm's manuscript was accurate.

In June 1993, a jury heard the case. It found two fabricated

(continued)

Masson vs. Malcolm (continued)

quotes libelous — the "intellectual gigolo" quote was not one of them. Here are the two quotes:

Malcolm quoted Masson as describing his plans for Maresfield Gardens, the home of the Freud Archives, which he hoped to occupy after the death of Anna Freud, Sigmund's child: "I would have renovated it, opened it up, brought it to life. Maresfield Gardens would have been a center of scholarship, but it would also have been a place of *sex, women, fun.* (Italics added.) It would have been like the change in *The Wizard of Oz*, from black-and-white into color." He said on tape of his meeting with a London analyst: ". . . we were going to pass women on to each other, and we were going to have a great time together when I lived in the Freud house. We'd have great parties and . . . we were going to live it up."

The second quotation involved the placement of the sentence "Well, he had the wrong man." Masson is recounting being fired by the director of the archives. The director says Masson is upsetting Anna Freud and it might kill her. Malcolm quotes Masson talking to the director:

"What have I done? You're doing it. You're firing me. What am I supposed to do — be grateful to you?" "You could be silent about it. . . ." "Why should I do that?" "Because it is the honorable thing to do." "Well, he had the wrong man."

Masson seems to be calling himself dishonorable. On the tape, the conversation, starting with the director, says:

"You could be silent about it." . . . "Why?" . . . "Because it's the honorable thing to do and you will save face. And who knows? If you never speak about it and you quietly and humbly accept our judgment, who knows that in a few years if we don't bring you back?" Well, he had the wrong man.

While agreeing the two quotes were libelous, the jury deadlocked on damages. The judge ordered a retrial on all issues — liability as well as damages. But another defendant dropped by the wayside. The jurors did not think *The New Yorker* deliberately published false quotes, so the judge dismissed the case against the magazine.

In November 1994, a jury decided in favor of defendant Malcolm.

Then, belatedly, in August 1995, Malcolm recovered a lost notebook containing her notes on some of the contested conversations.

The moral is clear. Material changes in quotations are perilous. They can lead to long court cases and expensive attorney's fees even if ultimately there is no liability for damages.

— Sandra Davidson

people and hunting with athletes. One student reporter doing a feature on a police chief spent a weekend with the chief, who was painting his home. To do a profile, which requires more than one interview, vary the location. New surroundings can make a difference.

Lisa Kremer, reporting the story of a mountain avalanche for the *Tacoma News-Tribune*, recognized that where she interviewed the rescuers was important. She approached the climbers at a restaurant and said she wanted to talk to them. They weren't sure they wanted to talk to her. "I said, 'Would you be more comfortable here at the restaurant? I could sit down right now. Or would you rather go back to the hotel?'"

They said they would meet her at the hotel. They did, and she got the interviews.

There are times when the reporter would rather have the source edgy, nervous or even scared. When you are doing an investigation, you may want the key

characters to feel uneasy. You may pretend you know more than you actually do. You want them to know that the material you have is substantive and serious. Seymour Hersh, a Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative reporter, uses this tactic. *Time* magazine once quoted a government official commenting on Hersh: "He wheedles, cajoles, pleads, threatens, asks a leading question, uses little tidbits as if he knew the whole story. When he finishes you feel like a wet rag."

In some cases, however, it is better even in an investigation to take a low-key approach. Let the source relax. Talk around the subject but gradually bring the discussion to the key issues. The surprise element may work in your favor.

So may the sympathetic approach. When the source is speaking, you may nod or punctuate the source's responses with comments such as "That's interesting." Sources who think you are sympathetic are more likely to volunteer information. Researchers have found, for instance, that a simple "mm-hmmm" affects the length of the answer interviewers get.

Other Practical Considerations

Where you sit in relation to the person you are interviewing can be important. Unless you deliberately are trying to make those interviewed feel uncomfortable, do not sit directly in front of them. Permit your sources to establish eye contact if and when they wish.

Some people are even more disturbed by the way a reporter takes notes. A tape recorder ensures accuracy of quotes, but it makes many speakers self-conscious or nervous. If you have permission to use a tape recorder, place it in an inconspicuous spot and ignore it except to make sure it is working properly. Writing notes longhand may interfere with your ability to digest what is being said. But not taking any notes at all is risky. Only a few reporters can leave an interview and accurately write down what was said. Certainly no one can do it and reproduce direct quotes verbatim. You should learn shorthand or develop a note-taking system of your own.

ENSURING ACCURACY

Accuracy is a major problem in all interviews. Both the question and the answer may be ambiguous. You may not understand what is said. You may record it incorrectly. You may not know the context of the remarks. Your biases may interfere with the message.

Knowing the background of your sources, having a comfortable relationship with them and keeping good notes are important elements of accuracy. All those were missing when a journalism student, two weeks into an internship at a major daily, interviewed the public information officer for a sheriff's department about criminal activity in and around a shelter for battered women. The reporter had never met the source. She took notes on her phone interview with the deputy and others in whatever notebook happened to be nearby. She didn't record the time, date or even the source. There were no notes showing context, just fragments of quotes, scrawled in nearly illegible handwriting.

Figures stated during an interview must be double-checked. The mere statement of a statistic, even by a reliable source, does not ensure accuracy.

After the story was published, the developer of the shelter sued. Questioned by attorneys, the deputy swore that the reporter misunderstood him and used some of his comments out of context. In several cases, he contended, she completed her fragmentary notes by putting her own words in his mouth. He testified that most reporters come to see him to get acquainted. Many call back to check his quotes on sensitive or complex stories. She did neither.

When the court ordered the reporter to produce and explain her notes, she had trouble reconstructing them. She had to admit on several occasions that she wasn't sure what the fragments meant.

The accuracy of your story is only as good as your notes. David Finkel, whose story on a family's TV-watching habits became a Pulitzer Prize finalist, took extra steps to be certain his material was accurate. Observing what his subject was watching, he obtained transcripts of the shows so he could quote accurately from them. If he knew transcripts would not be available, he set his tape recorder near the TV to record the program.

Some possibilities for making errors or introducing bias are unavoidable, but others are not. To ensure the most accurate and complete reporting possible, you should use all the techniques available to obtain a good interview, including observing, understanding what you hear and asking follow-up questions. Let's examine these and other techniques.

TIPS: Before you leave the interview

- Ask if there's anything else the interviewee wants to say.
- Check facts — spellings, dates, statistics, quotes.
- Set a time for rechecking facts, quotes.
- Discuss when and where the interview might appear.
- Ask the interviewee if he or she wants extra copies.

"Today one has the impression that the interviewer is not listening to what you say, nor does he think it important, because he believes that the tape recorder hears everything. But he's wrong, it doesn't hear the beating of the heart, which is the most important part of the interview."

— Gabriel García Márquez, Colombian writer and Nobel laureate

Observing

Some reporters look but do not see. The detail they miss may be the difference between a routine story and one that is a delight to read. Your powers of observation may enable you to discover a story beyond your source's words. Is the subject nervous? What kinds of questions are striking home? The mayor may deny that he is going to fire the police chief, but if you notice the chief's personnel file sitting on an adjacent worktable, you may have reason to continue the investigation.

People communicate some messages nonverbally. Researchers have been able to correlate some gestures with meanings. For instance, folded arms often signal that someone doesn't want to be approached; crossed ankles often signal tension. Many nonverbal messages, however, may not be the same for all ethnic and cultural groups. Reporters should read more about the subject.

Understanding

Understanding what you see is crucial to the news-gathering process. So is understanding what you hear. It is not enough merely to record what is being said; you must also digest it.

Sometimes what you don't hear may be the message. The reporter who was trying to find out if the mayor was going to fire the police chief asked several questions about the chief's performance. What struck the reporter during the interview was the mayor's lack of enthusiasm for the chief. That unintentional tip kept the reporter working on the story until he confirmed it.

Asking Follow-Up Questions

If you understand what the source is saying, you can ask meaningful follow-up questions. There is nothing worse than briefing your city editor on the interview and having the editor ask you, "Well, did you ask. . . ?" Having to say no is embarrassing.

Even if you go into an interview armed with a list of questions, the most important questions will probably be the ones you ask in response to an answer. A reporter who was doing a story on bidding procedures was interviewing the mayor. The reporter asked how bid specifications were written. In the course of his reply, the mayor mentioned that the president of a construction firm had assured him the last bid specifications were adequate. The alert reporter picked up on the statement:

"When did you talk to him?"

"About three weeks ago," the mayor said.

"That's before the specifications were published, wasn't it?"

"Yes, we asked him to look them over for us."

"Did he find anything wrong with the way they were written?"

"Oh, he changed a few minor things. Nothing important."

"Did officials of any other construction firms see the bid specifications before they were advertised?"

"No, he was the only one."

Gradually, on the basis of one offhand comment by the mayor, the reporter was able to piece together a solid story on the questionable relationship between the city and the construction firm. You should end nearly every interview with the same question: "Is there anything I haven't asked that I should?"

TIPS: After the interview

- Organize your notes — immediately.
- Craft a proper lead.
- Write a coherent story.
- Check accuracy with the interviewee.

Other Techniques

Although most questions are designed to get information, some are asked as a delaying tactic. A reporter who is taking notes may fall behind. One good trick for catching up is just to say, "Hold on a second — let me get that" or "Say that again." Other questions are intended to encourage a longer response. "Go on with that" or "Tell me more about that" encourages the speaker to add more detail.

You don't have to be stalling for time to say you don't understand. Don't be embarrassed to admit you haven't grasped something. It is better to admit to one person you don't understand than to advertise your ignorance in newsprint or on the airwaves in front of thousands.

Another device for making the source talk on is not a question at all; it is a pause. You are signaling the source that you expect more. But the lack of a response from you is much more ambiguous than "Tell me more about that." It may indicate that you were skeptical of what was just said, that you didn't understand, that the answer was inadequate or several other possibilities. The source will be forced to react.

Reporters should do research after an interview to ascertain specific figures when a source provides an estimate. For example, if a shop owner says he runs one of 20 pizza parlors in town, check with the city business-license office to get the exact number.

Many dull interviews become interesting after they end. There are two things you should always do when you finish your questions: Check key facts, figures and quotes and then put away your pen but keep your ears open. You are not breaching any ethical rule if you continue to ask questions after you have put away your pen or turned off the tape recorder. That's when some sources loosen up.

Quickly review your notes and check facts, especially dates, numbers, quotes, spellings and titles. Besides helping you get it right, it shows the source you are careful. If necessary, arrange a time when you can call to check other parts of the story or clear up questions you may have as you are writing. Researchers have found that more than half of direct quotations are inaccurate, even when the interview is tape-recorded. That reflects a sloppiness that is unacceptable. Make sure you are the exception.

As a matter of courtesy, tell the source when the story might appear. You may even offer to send along an extra copy of the article when it's completed.

Remember that although the interview may be over, your relationship to the source is not. When you have the story written, call the source and confirm the information. Better to discover your inaccuracies before you print than after.

Suggested Readings

Biagi, Shirley. *Interviews That Work.* Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1992. A complete guide to interviewing techniques. The instruction is interspersed with interviews of journalists describing their techniques.

Burgoon, Judee K. and Saine, Thomas J. *The Unspoken Dialogue. An Introduction to Nonverbal Communication.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978. An excellent look at the subject for readers who are not acquainted with the field.

Harrington, Walt. *American Profiles.* Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1992. Fifteen excellent profiles and the author's explanation of how and why he does what he does.

Malcolm, Janet. *The Journalist and the Murderer.* New York: Knopf, 1990. Using the Joe McGinnis–Jeffrey MacDonald case, the author accuses all journalists of being "confidence men" who betray their sources.

Metzler, Ken. *The Writer's Guide to Gathering Information by Asking Questions*, Third Edition. Needham Heights, Mass.: Allyn & Bacon, 1997. An invaluable in-depth look at problems of interviewing.

Scanlon, Christopher, ed. *Best Newspaper Writing.* St. Petersburg, Fla.: Poynter Institute for Media Studies. Reprints of winners of American Society of Newspaper Editors Distinguished Writing Awards and interviews with the authors make this an invaluable resource. It is published annually.

Suggested Web Sites

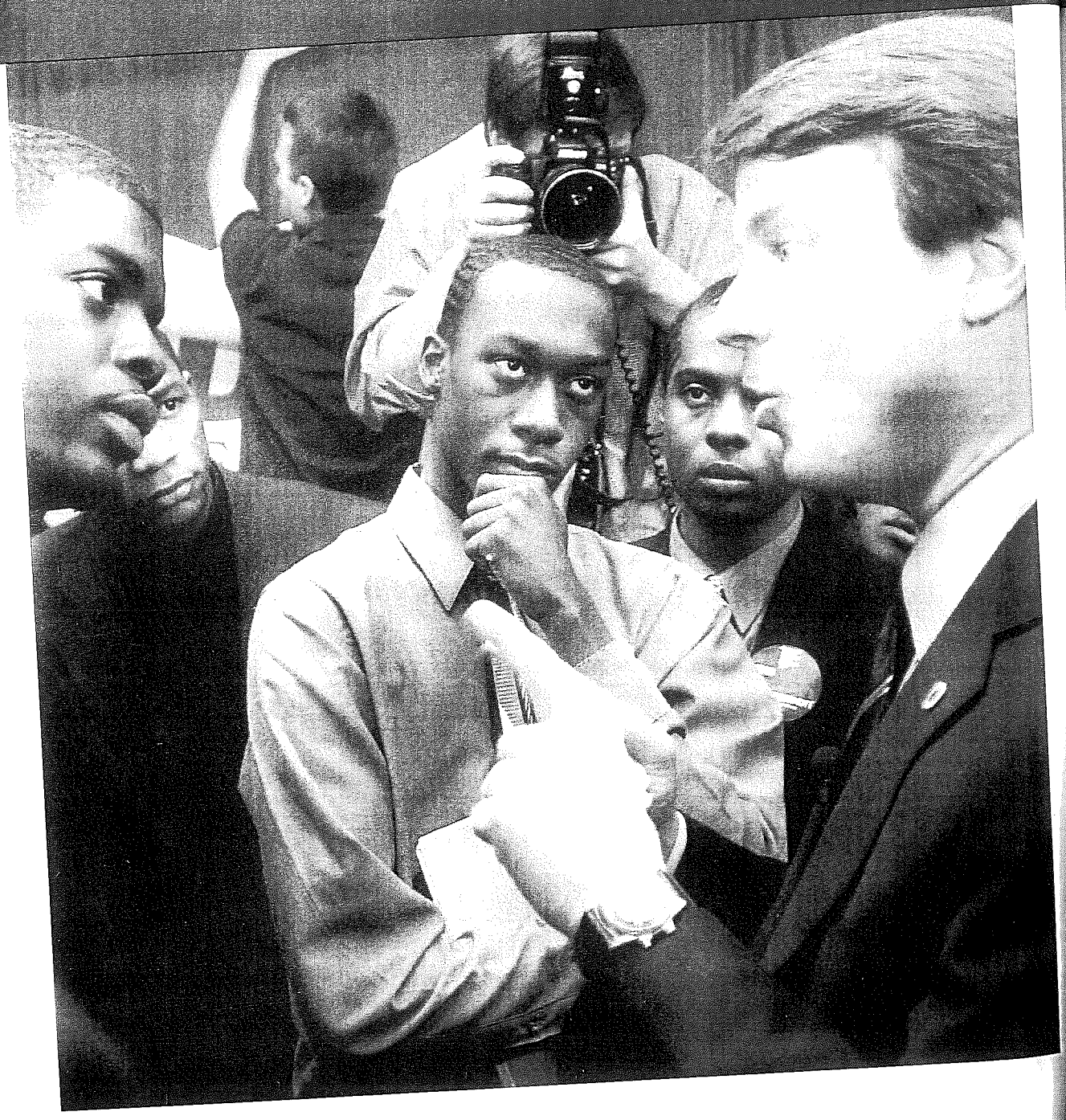
www.poewar.com
The Writer's Resource Center offers advice on a variety of writers' concerns, including interviewing.

www.poynter.org/index.cfm
The Poynter Institute site offers an array of help for journalists. Among the lists are bibliographies on interviewing and a regular column on reporting and writing techniques by Chip Scanlan.

Exercises

1. Learn to gather background on your sources. Write a memo of up to two pages about your state's senior U.S. senator. Concentrate on those details that will allow you to focus on how the senator views the pro-life versus pro-choice issue. Indicate the sources of your information. Do an Internet search on the senator.
2. List five open-ended questions you would ask the senator.
3. List five closed-ended questions you would ask.
4. Interview a student also enrolled in your reporting class. Write a two- or three-page story. Be sure to focus on one aspect of the student's life. Ask your classmate to read the story and to mark errors of fact and perception. The instructor will read your story and the critique.
5. Your instructor will give you a news item. Prepare a list of questions you would ask to do a follow-up interview. As each question is read aloud in class, cross it off your list. See if you can come up with the most original and appropriate questions.

4 In Their Own Words



"And you can quote me on that." Many people who say these words don't expect to be quoted. They mean only that they are sure of what they are saying and are not afraid or ashamed to say it. Nonetheless, these are sweet words to a reporter.

Direct quotes add color and credibility to your story. By using direct quotes, you are telling readers that you are putting them directly in touch with the speaker. Like a letter, direct quotes are personal. Quotation marks signal the reader that something special is coming. Direct quotes provide a story with a change of pace, a breath of air. They also loosen up a clump of dense type.

As Paula LaRoque, writing coach and assistant managing editor of *The Dallas Morning News*, said, "The right quotes, carefully selected and presented, enliven and humanize a story and help make it clear, credible, immediate and dramatic. Yet many quotations in journalism are dull, repetitive, ill-phrased, ungrammatical, nonsensical, self-serving or just plain dumb."

Now that's a quotation worth quoting!

But not everything people say is worth quoting. You need to learn what to quote directly, when to use partial quotes and when to paraphrase. You also must learn how and how often to attribute quotations and other information. Like a researcher, you must know when information must be tied to a source. However, attributing a remark or some information does not excuse you from a possible libel suit. And, of course, you want to be fair.

Being fair sometimes is difficult when sources do not want to be quoted. For that reason you also must learn how to deal with off-the-record quotes and background information.

In this chapter you will learn:

1. **What is worth quoting directly.**
2. **How and when to attribute direct and indirect quotes.**
3. **How to handle both on- and off-the-record information.**

WHAT TO QUOTE DIRECTLY

Crisp, succinct, meaningful quotes spice up any story. But you can overdo a good thing. You need direct quotes in your stories, but you also need to develop your skill in recognizing what is worth quoting. Let's look at the basic guidelines.

Unique Material

When you can say, "Ah, I never heard that before," you can be quite sure your readers would like to know exactly what the speaker said. Instead of quoting someone at length, look for the kernel. Sometimes it is something surprising, something neither you nor your readers would expect that person to say. For example, on *Good Morning America*, Barbara Bush, the president's mother, told interviewer Diane Sawyer she would watch none of TV's coverage of the war on Iraq. Then she said, "Why should we hear about body bags and deaths and how many, what day it's going to happen? It's not relevant. So why should I waste my beautiful mind on something like that?"

When singer Dolly Parton was asked how she felt about dumb-blond jokes, she replied: "I'm not offended at all because I know I'm not a dumb blond. I also know I'm not a blond."

Striking statements like those should be quoted, but not always. *The Arizona Daily Star* did a profile of a chef who writes a weekly column. Describing his food philosophy, the chef said, "I have a food philosophy, but it's a kind of an angry one. I'd eat a baby if you cooked it right. Yeah, that's pretty much it."

The *Star*'s reader advocate wrote that at least a half dozen readers objected. Said one, "Shame on the chef for saying it, and shame on the *Star* for printing it."

There is no reason to place simple, factual material inside quotation marks. Here is a segment of copy from a story about similarities in the careers of a father and son that needed no quotes at all:

> "My son was born on campus," says the elder Denney, 208 Westridge Drive, a professor in regional and community affairs.
>
> "In fact, he was born in the same hospital that I met my wife," he says, explaining he was in Noyes Hospital with a fractured spine when she was a student nurse.
>
> Since that time, he has earned his bachelor's degree "technically in agriculture with a major in biological science and conservation."

Although the quoted material is informative, it contains nothing particularly interesting, surprising, disturbing, new or even different. It should be written:

> Denney, of 208 Westridge Drive, is a professor in regional and community affairs. While hospitalized in Noyes Hospital with a fractured spine, he met a student nurse who became his wife. Eight years later, his son was born at the same hospital.
>
> The son has since earned a bachelor's degree in agriculture with a major in biological science and conservation.

TIPS: Use direct quotes when

- Someone says something unique.
- Someone says something uniquely.
- Someone important says something important.

"I often quote myself. It adds spice to my conversation."

— George Bernard Shaw, playwright

The first version has 72 words; the second, with 60 words, is tighter and better.

A direct quotation should say something significant. Also, a direct quotation should not simply repeat what has been said indirectly. It should move the story forward. Here's a passage from a *USA Today* story about a proposed law that would bar health-insurance companies, employers and managed-care plans from discriminating against people because of their genetic makeup:

> Fear of insurance discrimination based on the results of genetic tests has been on the rise for years. "It stops many people cold from getting tested," says Karen Clarke, a genetics counselor at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore.

The quotation is useful, it is informative, and it moves the story forward.

Sometimes spoken material is unique not because of individual remarks that are surprising or new but because of extended dialogue that can tell the story more effectively than writers can in their own words. The writer of the following story made excellent use of dialogue:

> Lou Provancha pushed his wire-rimmed glasses up on his nose and leaned toward the man in the wheelchair.
>
> "What is today, Jake?" he asked.
>
> Jake twisted slightly and stared at the floor.
>
> "Jake," Provancha said. "Jake, look up here."
>
> A long silence filled the tiny, cluttered room on the sixth floor of the University Medical Center.
>
> Provancha, a licensed practical nurse at the hospital, glanced at the reporter. "Jake was in a coma a week ago," he explained. "He couldn't talk."
>
> Provancha pointed to a wooden board propped up on the table beside him.
>
> "Jake, what is today? What does it say here? What is this word? I've got my finger pointed right at it."
>
> Jake squinted at the word. With a sudden effort, like a man heaving a bag of cement mix onto a truck bed, he said: "Tuesday."
>
> Provancha grinned. It was a small victory for both of them.
>
> The shaggy-haired nurse was coaxing his patient step-by-step back into the world he had known before a car accident pitched him into a two-month-long coma, with its resulting disorientation and memory loss.

Avoid quotes that provide statistics. You are better off paraphrasing and attributing your source. Save quotes for reaction and interpretation.

Here's another example of how dialogue can move the story along and "show" rather than "tell." The story is about the restoration of old cars. A father is passing on a rare technique to his son:

> When the lead is smooth and the irregularities filled to his satisfaction, he reaches for his file.
>
> "How long has it been since you've done this?" his son asks.
>
> "It's been at least 20 years."

"How do you tin it so it won't melt and all run off on the floor?"

"Very carefully."

Before the lesson is finished, a customer and two other shop workers have joined the group watching Larry at work. This is a skill few people know.

"I don't like the way this lead melts," he says.

"That's what it does when there's not enough tin?" his son asks.

"Tin helps it stick."

"Why do you pull the file instead of pushing it?"

"So I can see better."

"I would already have the fiberglass on and be done by now."

"I know, but anything worthwhile you have to work for."

Notice the careful instruction and concerned advice from a teacher/father. His last sentence contains one of life's lessons: "I know, but anything worthwhile you have to work for."

The Unique Expression

When you can say, "Ah, I've never heard it said that way before," you know you have something quotable. Be on the lookout for the clever, the colorful, the colloquial. For example, an elderly man talking about his organic garden said, "It's hard to tell people to watch what they eat. You eat health, you know."

A professor lecturing on graphic design said, "When you think it looks like a mistake, it is." The same professor once was explaining that elements in a design should not call attention to themselves: "You don't walk up to a beautiful painting in someone's home and say, 'That's a beautiful frame!'"

A computer trainer said to a reporter: "Teaching kids computers is like leading ducks to water. But teaching adults computers is like trying to teach chickens to swim."

Sometimes something said uniquely is a colloquialism. Colloquialisms can add color and life to your copy. A person from Louisiana may say, "I was just fixing to leave when the phone rang." In parts of the South you're apt to hear, "I might could do that." A person from around Lancaster, Pa., might "make the light out" when turning off the lights. And people in and around Fort Wayne, Ind., "redd up" the dishes after a meal, meaning that they wash them and put them where they belong.

Important Quotes by Important People

If citizen Joe Smith says, "Something must be done about this teachers' strike," you may or may not consider it worth quoting. But if the mayor says, "Something must be done about this teachers' strike," many papers would print the quote. Generally reporters quote public officials or known personalities in their news stories (although not everything the famous say is worth quoting). Remember, prominence is an important property of news (see Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1
Although quotes from experts and public figures are generally used to strengthen a story's authority, quotes from ordinary citizens with unique experience in a newsworthy event may also add credibility.

Quoting sources that readers are likely to know lends authority, credibility and interest to your story. Presumably, a meteorologist knows something about the weather, a doctor about health, a chemistry professor about chemicals. However, it is unlikely that a television star knows a great deal about cameras, even if he or she makes commercials about cameras.

Accuracy

The first obligation of any reporter is to be accurate. Before there can be any discussion of whether or how to use direct quotations, you must learn to get the exact words of the source.

It's not easy.

Scribbled notes from interviews, press conferences and meetings are often difficult to decipher and interpret. A study by Adrienne Leher, a professor of linguistics at the University of Arizona, shows only 13 of 98 quotations taken from Arizona newspapers proved to be verbatim when compared to recordings. Only twice, however, were the nonverbatim quotes considered "incompatible with what was intended."

At a presidential campaign rally in Naperville, Ill., George W. Bush made a derogatory remark about a journalist while on stage. The remark, meant to be heard only by running mate Dick Cheney, was picked up by the microphone and several reporters' tape recorders.

The Baltimore Sun related the incident this way:

> As the two candidates stood onstage, gazing out over the crowd and waving, Bush remarked, "There's Adam Clymer, major-league asshole from *The New York Times*."
>
> "Oh, yeah, he is, big-time," Cheney agreed.

We know those quotations are accurate because Web sites such as *USA Today*'s provided an actual audio recording. *USA Today*, however, quoted the candidates differently:

> Standing on a stage at the start of a rally in Naperville, Ill., Bush was heard saying to Cheney, "There's Adam Clymer of *The New York Times*, a major-league asshole." To which Cheney replied, "Yeah, big time."

Other newspapers reported censored variations of the quotes. The *St. Petersburg Times* wrote:

> "There's Adam Clymer, major league a___h___," Bush told Cheney.
>
> "Oh yeah, yeah. Big time," Cheney agreed.

The New York *Daily News* censored the quote this way:

> "There's Adam Clymer — major league a___hole from *The New York Times*," Bush noted while waving to the crowd.
>
> "Oh, yeah, he is. Big time," Cheney said, as the smiles on the two men broadened and Bush nodded while continuing to wave with both arms.

One thing's for sure. Bush and Cheney said what they said. Editors might want to censor the vulgarity, but they should not change the words. Your passion for accuracy should compel you to get and record the exact words. Only then can you decide which words to put between quotation marks.

Verification

When someone important says something important but perhaps false, putting the material in quotes does not relieve you of the responsibility for the inaccuracies. Citizens, officials and candidates for office often say things that may be partially true or altogether untrue and perhaps even libelous. Quotations, like any other information you gather, need verification.

In the 1950s, during the time of Sen. Joseph McCarthy's anti-Communism investigations, many newspapers, in the interest of strict objectivity, day after day quoted the Wisconsin senator's charges and countercharges. (It should be pointed out that some publishers did this because they agreed with his stance and because his remarks sold newspapers.) Few papers thought it was their responsibility to quote others who were pointing out the obvious errors and inconsistencies in the demagogue's remarks. Today, however, in the interest of balance, fairness and objectivity, many papers leave out, correct or point out the errors in some quotations. This may be done in the article itself or in an accompanying story.

If candidate Joe Harkness says that his opponent Jim McGown is a member of the Ku Klux Klan, you should check before you print the charge. Good reporters don't stop looking and checking just because someone gives them some information. Look for yourself. Prisoners may have an altogether different account of a riot from the one the prison officials give you. Your story will not be complete unless you talk to all sides.

"When you see yourself quoted in print and you're sorry you said it, it suddenly becomes a misquotation."

— Dr. Laurence J. Peter, author of *Peter's Quotations* and *The Peter Principle*

PROBLEMS IN DIRECT QUOTATION

By now you realize that although you should use direct quotations, they present many challenges and problems. Let's look at some of them.

"The surest way to make a monkey of a man is to quote him."

— Robert Benchley, humorist

Paraphrasing Quotes

While some quotations need verification, others need clarification. Do not quote someone unless you are sure of what that person means. The reason (or excuse) "But that's what the man said" is not sufficient to use the quote. It is much better to skip a quotation altogether than to confuse the reader.

The best way to avoid confusing and unclear quotes or needlessly long and wordy quotes is to paraphrase. You must convey to the reader the meaning of the speaker. As a reporter you must have confidence that sometimes you are able to convey that meaning in fewer words and in better language than the speaker did. You can save your editors a lot of work if you shorten quotes. Digesting, condensing and clarifying quotes take more effort than simply recording them word for word. You will not impress anyone with long quotations. On the contrary, you may be guilty of lazy writing. Here is a quote that could be cut drastically:

> "When I first started singing lessons I assumed I would be a public school teacher and maybe, if I was good enough, a voice teacher," he said. "When I graduated from the university, I still thought I would be a teacher, and I wanted to teach."

A rewrite conveys the meaning more succinctly:

When he first started singing lessons, and even after he graduated from the university, he wanted to be a public school voice teacher.

Using Partial Quotes

It is much better to paraphrase or to use full quotes than to use fragmentary or partial quotes. Some editors would have you avoid "orphan quotes" almost altogether. Here is an example of the overuse of partial quotes:

The mayor said citizens should "turn off" unnecessary lights and "turn down" thermostats "to 65 degrees."

The sentence would be better with no quotation marks at all.

If a particular phrase has special significance or meaning, a partial quote may be justifiable. Sometimes you may want to put a word or phrase in quotation marks to indicate that this was precisely what the speaker said. Look at this use of a one-word quote in a story about genetic engineering in *The Atlantic Monthly:*

> By all but eliminating agricultural erosion and runoff — so Brian Noyes, the local conservation-district manager, told me — continuous no-till could "revolutionize" the area's water quality.

The writer thought it important that readers should know that "revolutionize" was not his word but the word of Brian Noyes. And he was right. "Revolutionize" is a strong word.

When you do use partial quotes, do not put quotation marks around something the speaker could not have said. Suppose a speaker told a student audience at a university, "I am pleased and thrilled with your attendance here tonight." It would be incorrect to write:

The speaker said she was "pleased and thrilled with the students' attendance."

Partial quotes often contain an ellipsis (three spaced periods) to tell the reader that some of the words of the quote are missing. For example:

"I have come here tonight . . . and I have crossed state lines . . . to conspire against the government."

This practice at times may be justifiable, but you should not keep the reader guessing about what is missing. Sometimes the actual meaning of the speaker can be distorted by dropping certain words. If a critic writes about a three-act play, "A great hit — except for the first three acts," an ad that picks up only the first part of that quote is guilty of misrepresentation. A journalist using the technique to distort the message is no less guilty.

Capturing Dialect or Accent

Using colorful or colloquial expressions helps the writer capture a person in a particular environment. The same is true when you write the way people talk:

"Are you gonna go?" he asked.

"No, I'm not goin'," she replied.

In everyday speech hardly anyone enunciates perfectly. To do so would sound affected. In fiction, therefore, it is common to use spellings that match speech. But when conversation is written down in newspaper reporting, readers expect correct, full spellings. Not only is correct spelling easier to read, it is also less difficult to write. Capturing dialect is difficult, as these passages from a story about a Hollywood actress illustrate:

"Boy, it's hot out theah," she started. "I could sure use a nice cold beer. How about it, uh? Wanta go get a couple beers?"

If she said "theah," wouldn't she also say "beeah"? Perhaps she said, "How 'bout it, uh?" And if she said "wanta," maybe she also said "geta."

In another passage, the author has the actress speaking "straight" English:

"Would you believe I used to dress like that all the time? Dates didn't want to be seen with me. I was always being asked to change clothes before going out."

Then, later in the story, she reverts to less formal speech:

"I'm tired of pickin' up checks. I've never been ta college, so I'd like to take a coupla classes. I wanta take law so I can find out who's stealing the country. And I wanta take geology. The San Andreas Fault is my hobby, y'know? I think man can beat out nature."

First the actress wanted "a couple beers." Then she wanted to take "a coupla classes." In the same passage she is tired of "pickin'" up checks, but she wants to find out who's "stealing" the country. It is unlikely she is that inconsistent in her speech.

The writer of this story tried to show us something of the character of the actress. If he wanted to convey her speech patterns, he should either have been consistent or simply reported that she talked the same off the set as on it.

Sometimes when a newspaper attempts to quote someone saying something uniquely, it betrays a bias. During the 1960 presidential election campaign, some Northern newspapers delighted in quoting Alabama Gov. George Wallace exactly, even trying to reproduce his Southern drawl. But some of these same newspapers did not try to reproduce the Boston accent of John F. Kennedy or of his brothers.

However, you should not make everyone's speech the same. Barbara King, now the director of editorial training for the Associated Press, laments "our frequent inability to write other than insipid speech" and "our tendency to homogenize the day-to-day speech patterns of the heterogeneous people we write about." She acknowledges that writers worry about exposing to ridicule the immigrant's halting or perhaps unconventional speech while the stockbroker's speech appears flawless.

King calls the argument specious. Of course, people should not be exposed to ridicule through their speech. "The point here," she says, "is simply that when the writer's intention in writing dialects, quaint expressions, nonconventional grammar, flowery or showy speech, or the Queen's English is to make a person human, that intention is not only acceptable, it's desirable."

J. R. Moehringer of the *Los Angeles Times* did this in his Pulitzer Prize-winning article for feature writing:

> "No white man gonna tell me not to march," Lucy says, jutting her chin. "Only make me march harder."

The only way you can make people human is to listen to them. King says reporters and writers usually hear but rarely listen. She advises reporters to "listen for expressions, turns of phrase, idiosyncratic talk," and to work it into their stories.

USA Today reporter James Cox did that when he wrote about multimillionaire Rose Blumkin and her Mrs. B.'s Warehouse in Omaha, Neb. Cox wrote that the 95-year-old proprietor rues the day she hired her grandsons, Ron and Irv Blumkin, to help her manage her furniture business, especially after she began to feel as if they were trying to go over her head:

> "They don't have no character. They don't have no feelings," says Mrs. B. in her thick Russian accent. "They told me I am too old, too cranky. . . . They don't know nothing. What I got in my finger they don't got in their whole heads."
>
> Mrs. B. is wonderful with customers but has no use for the hired help. "He's a dummy, my salesman. A stupe."
>
> Says salesman Jerry Pearson, "She's hell on the help but great with customers. She closes like a bear trap."

Reporter Cox was listening that day, and he worked those quotes into his story with great effect.

Mix-Matching Questions and Answers

Writers have other problems with quotes. They often agonize over whether they may use answers from one question to answer another question. Later on in an interview or in a trial, a person may say something that answers better or more fully a question posed earlier.

In the preceding Cox quotations of Mrs. B., notice the ellipsis in the quote about her grandsons. Mrs. B. probably did not say those words sequentially. The

On the Job

In Their Own Words

Jo Ellen Krumm was a reporter for the *North Platte* (Neb.) *Telegraph* and a correspondent for *The Denver Post* zone sections before returning to school for a master's degree in health/medical writing and magazine journalism.

"I never thought I'd end up being an editor," she says. But after completing her degree in 1980, she was hired as associate editor of *Muscle & Fitness* magazine. Then she became research editor, articles editor and managing editor, her present position.

Both as a reporter and as an editor, Jo Ellen has had long experience with direct quotations and attribution. Here are some tips from her:

- Get it straight from the horse's mouth. Don't trust secondhand and thirdhand sources.
- Listen. Don't be so wrapped up in your preselected questions that you don't let your subject expound on his or her favorite theme or pet peeve. When your subject's on a roll, listen.
- Cultivate many sources. The more varied sources you have, the more information and points of view you'll obtain. If you rely on the same people all the time, you'll get similar quotes.
- Be nice. Remember that people don't have to talk to you. Usually they're doing you a favor. Even when you write something the source would prefer not be printed or broadcast, be professional and fair in your dealings with the unhappy subject.
- Think ahead. Remember, you may need your sources again.

words after the ellipsis may have been said hours after the previous quote. The only questions you must ask yourself in situations like this are: Am I being fair? Am I distorting the meaning? Am I putting quotes together that change what the speaker intended to say? Sentences that logically go together, that logically enhance one another and that are clearly sequential can and often should be placed together.

Correcting Quotes

The quotes from Mrs. B. bring up perhaps the most perplexing problem tied to proper handling of direct quotations. The Russian immigrant uses incorrect grammar. When do you, or should you, correct grammatical errors in a direct quotation? Should you expect people in news conferences or during informal interviews to speak perfect English?

Although quotation marks mean you are capturing the exact language of a speaker, it is accepted practice at many newspapers to correct mistakes in grammar and to convey a person's remarks in complete sentences. None of us regularly speaks in perfect, grammatical sentences. But if we were writing down our remarks, presumably we would write in grammatically correct English.

Reporters and editors differ widely on when or even whether to correct quotes. A reporter for the *Rocky Mountain News* quoted an attorney as saying, "Her and John gave each other things they needed and couldn't get anyplace else." The reporter said the quote was accurate but, on second thought, said it might have been better to correct the grammar in the written account.

A story on CNN.com about the loss of the crew in the space shuttle Columbia disaster uses these quotes:

> "As we seen (Columbia) coming over, we seen a lot of light and it looked like debris and stuff was coming off the shuttle," Benjamin Laster, of Kempt, Texas, told CNN.
>
> "We seen large masses of pieces coming off the shuttle as it was coming by," Laster said. "The house kind-of shook and we noticed a big sonic boom . . . and then we seen a big continuous puff of vapor or smoke stream come out and then we noticed a big chunk come over."

Did CNN.com perhaps allow these quotes to stand because Laster was on the network using these exact words? But is that a reason for not paraphrasing the quotes and avoiding making the speaker sound uneducated?

Most papers have no written policy on correcting grammatical errors in direct quotations. Because so many variables are involved, these matters are handled on a case-by-case basis. Some argue you should sacrifice a bit of accuracy in the interest of promoting proper English.

However, some would let public figures be embarrassed by quoting them using incorrect grammar. Columnist James Kilpatrick asks, "When we put a statement (of a public figure) in direct quotation marks, must it be exactly what was said? My own answer is yes. On any issue of critical substance, we ought not to alter a single word."

Yet in another matter in a different column, Kilpatrick writes, "It is all very well to *tidy up a subject's syntax* (italics added) and to eliminate the ahs, ers and you-knows, but direct quotation marks are a reporter's iron-clad, honor-bound guarantee that something was actually said."

At times it may be necessary to illustrate a person's flawed use of language. In some cases, you may wish to use "sic" in brackets to note the error, misuse or peculiarity of the quotation. "Sic," Latin for "thus," indicates that a statement was originally spoken or written exactly as quoted. It is particularly important to use "sic" for improper or unusual use of language when you are quoting a written source.

And if you think there is some agreement on the subject of correcting grammar in direct quotations, read what *The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law* says:

Never alter quotations even to correct minor grammatical errors or word usage. Casual minor tongue slips may be removed by using ellipses but even that should be done with extreme caution. If there is a question about a quote, either don't use it or ask the speaker to clarify.

When a reporter asked Kelly McBride of the Poynter Institute about using a quote of a child who said, "Everybody be up here," McBride answered, "Fix it." The reporter asked, "Really? I can do that?"

McBride goes on to say in her column on Poynter Online, "We fix grammar all the time, I explained. Often, we do it as we write the quotes down in our notebook. A week later, one of my colleagues told her the exact opposite. Never change anything inside the quotations marks, he said.

"If a quote contains poor grammar, the bar for using it is surpassed when the substance of the statement contains an important fact, reveals something about the character, and is relevant to the story, he said."

Correcting quotations is even more difficult for radio and television reporters. That's why they don't worry about it as much. Writers and editors for print might remember that the quotation they use may have been heard by millions of people on radio or television. Changing the quote even slightly might make viewers and listeners question the credibility of print reports. They might also ask why print writers feel the need to act as press agents who wish to make their subjects look good.

That applies to celebrities of all kinds (actors, sports figures), but it might also apply to registered political candidates and elected officials. At least, some argue, news agencies should have some consistency. If a reporter quotes a farmer using incorrect grammar, then should the same be done for the mayor or for a college professor?

A letter in *The Washington Post* criticized the newspaper for quoting exactly a mother of 14 children who was annoyed at then Mayor Marion Barry's advice to stop having babies. The quote read: "And your job is to open up all those houses that's boarded up." The writer then accused the *Post* of regularly stringing together quotes of the president to make him appear articulate. The writer concluded: "I don't care whether the *Post* polishes quotes or not. I simply think that everyone — black or white, rich or poor, president or welfare mother — deserves equal treatment."

That's good advice.

Removing Redundancies

Another question you must deal with as a reporter is whether to remove redundancies and other irrelevant material by using ellipses. Again, there is no agreement in the industry. Even though some consider it wrong to clean up quotes, they do not mind omitting words and even sentences from quotes without indicating the omission by an ellipsis. Some newspapers choose not to use ellipses because they make readers wonder what was left out or, as one editor said, "because typographically they make the paper look like chicken pox."

For most reporters and editors, the answer to the problem of correcting quotes is to take out the quotation marks and to paraphrase. However, when you paraphrase, you sometimes lose a lot. The value of quotes often lies in their richness and uniqueness.

Without question, you should know the policy of your news organization regarding the use of direct quotations. But equally without question, that policy should be that you place inside quotation marks only the exact words of the speaker. Make that your personal policy, and you can't go wrong.

Deleting Obscenity, Profanity and Vulgarity

Many news organizations never allow some things people say to be printed or broadcast — even if they are said uniquely. Obscenities (words usually referring to sexual parts or functions), profanities (words used irreverently to refer to a deity or to beings people regard as divine) and vulgarities (words referring to excretory matters) are usually deleted or bleeped unless they are essential to the story. Even on major newspapers, policy often demands that an obscenity, for example, be used only with the approval of a top editor.

Of course, there are legitimate reasons to use proper sex-related terms in health stories and in some crime stories, including child molestation stories. Unlike in the past, newspapers now routinely use words such as "intercourse," "oral sex," "orgasm" and "penis."

The Washington Post used such words in a 1998 article about Kenneth Starr's impeachment report of President Bill Clinton. The article details the controversy of explicit sexual description used in the report, which prompted wire service stories to run a warning that its contents "may be OFFENSIVE to some readers." The *Post* itself used terms in its article such as "oral sex," "sexual favors" and "phone sex."

Obviously, words such as "God" and "Jesus Christ" used in discussions of religion have always been acceptable to most people.

Nevertheless, the rules are different for words when used as what some call "swear" words in direct quotation. Some papers follow the *AP Stylebook* rule that says, "If a full quote that contains profanity, obscenity or vulgarity cannot be dropped but there is no compelling reason for the offensive language, replace letters of an offensive word with a hyphen."

The *AP Stylebook* also says not to use obscenities, profanities and vulgarities, "unless they are part of direct quotations and there is a compelling reason for them." AP style recommends flagging the story on top with a warning that the story contains language that is offensive to some.

Nevertheless, in recent years the news business has become "racier and more streetwise," writes Rita Ciolli of *Newsday*. She quotes Don Fry, of the Poynter Institute in St. Petersburg, Fla.: "There is a lot less priggishness." Fry attributes this change to entertainment programming, especially that of cable TV.

News is more likely to reflect the sensibilities of its audience. Like it or not, language that was once considered vulgar in polite society is now tolerated more widely.

In broadcasting, of course, the FCC can still fine a broadcaster or suspend a license for indecency. Though that's unlikely, audiences are quick to let a station know that it has gone too far.

At times you may wish to use vulgarities to show the intensity of someone's anger, terror, frustration or bitterness. Few inside the news media condone the casual, gratuitous use of vulgarities.

Readers and listeners don't condone them either.

Avoiding Made-Up Quotes

Fabricating a direct quote, even from general things that a source has said or from what the source might say if given the chance, is never a good idea. Even seasoned reporters are sometimes tempted to put quotation marks around words that their sources "meant to say," or to clarify or simplify a quote. The journalist reasons that it's more important to have a clear and concise quote for the reader than to be a slave to the verbose and unclear words of the source. Bad reasoning. Better to paraphrase.

An even worse idea is fabricating a quote that makes a source look bad or that is defamatory or perhaps even libelous. Doing so can result in a lawsuit.

In 1991, in Masson vs. Malcolm, the Supreme Court ruled that suits regarding quotations can proceed to trial if the altered quote "results in a material change in the meaning conveyed by the statement."

Libel or no libel, your credibility as a reporter demands that you be scrupulously exact when you place people's words inside quotation marks. Again, when in doubt, paraphrase.

Practicing Prepublication Review

A decade ago, you would not have had a city editor tell you to check the accuracy of your direct quotations with your source. Today, it is standard practice on many newspapers. Steve Weinberg, a Missouri School of Journalism professor and former head of the Investigative Reporters and Editors, calls it PPR — prepublication review — and he says, "I have practiced PPR as a newspaper staff writer, a magazine freelancer and a book author. Never have I regretted my practice. What I do regret is failing to do it during the first decade of my career because of mindless adherence to tradition."

Weinberg states candidly that it is not sensitivity to the feelings of his sources that is his primary motivator. Rather, he insists that prepublication review loosens the tongues of tight-lipped sources and gets them on the record for making their statements. Prepublication review extends also to checking the facts. Professionals insist it does not compromise their stand or make them surrender control over their stories.

Journalist Philip Weiss offers another reason why more journalists are practicing prepublication review. "The press's quiet acceptance of quote approval surely owes something to the fact that reporters are an influential elite and are

themselves often the subjects of interviews," he writes. "They have had a taste of their own medicine and they don't like it."

Another reason for prepublication review is that it serves as a defense against libel. Jurors are less likely to find "reckless disregard for the truth" in an article that the source reviewed.

But what happens when sources want to change a quote? Weinberg says he makes it clear that the source is checking only for accuracy. He will consider comments about interpretation, phrasing or tone, but he retains the right to change or not to change.

And what happens if someone denies saying something that is in a direct quote? That possibility is why, Weinberg says, you need to have good notes, even if they are in shorthand. Having the interview on tape is even better.

In an article in Poynter Online about reporter Judith Miller's front-page story in *The New York Times* in which she agreed to have her story reviewed by military officials prior to publication, Kelly McBride writes: "Although the conditions for Miller's access to MET Alpha unit were unusual, they are hardly unprecedented in the world of journalism. Every day, beat reporters make deals — explicit and implicit — with their sources about what to print, when to print it, and what to leave out. Rarely do they tell their readers about these deals. Sometimes they don't even tell their editors."

Nevertheless, McBride lists some conditions for when it is appropriate "to even consider letting an outsider read a story before press time":

- Is it even possible? Does your newspaper ever allow it?
- If it's possible, circumstances should be extremely limited. It must be a last resort to getting the story.
- Is this story worth it? Exploiting PPR compromises credibility and public trust.

You need to know the policy of your news organization, and someday you may want to help develop a policy that not only allows but also demands prepublication review of the facts and quotations in a story.

ATTRIBUTING DIRECT AND INDIRECT QUOTES

Now that you've learned some of the complexities of using direct quotations, let's take a look at when and how to attribute them to a source.

When to Attribute

You should almost always attribute direct quotes — with some exceptions. You would not, for example, attribute a quotation to a 7-year-old who witnessed a

Figure 4.2
Getting good quotes in a television interview takes skill and practice.

gang shooting. You may not wish to attribute a quote to someone who saw a homicide suspect with the victim.

You should also have a good reason to allow a paragraph of direct quotations to stand without an attribution. Nevertheless, if you are quoting from a speech, an interview or a press conference and no one else is mentioned in the story, it may be excessive to put an attribution in every paragraph.

Ordinarily you should attribute indirect quotes. You should usually have a source for the information you write, and when you do, attribute the information to that source. The source can be a person or a written document. However, there are exceptions.

If you are a witness to damages or injuries, do not name yourself as a source in the story. Attribute this information to the police or to other authorities (see Figure 4.2). But if you are on the scene of an accident and can see that three people were involved, you do not have to write: "'Three people were involved in the accident,' Officer Osbord said." If you are unsure of the information or if there are conclusions or generalities involved, your editor probably will want you to attribute the information to an official or a witness. Avoid, however, attributing factual statements to "officials" or "authorities" or "sources." "Such constructions," writes journalist Jack Hart, "suggest that we are controlled by form and that we have forgotten about function."

Hart makes a plea for common sense regarding attributions. "Let's save them for direct quotations or paraphrased quotes laced with opinion," he writes. "Or for assertions likely to be especially sensitive. Or controversial." He says we should attribute only "if it matters."

"We, as journalists, know far more about the effect of the printed word than any citizen off the street who talks to us for a story, and that knowledge carries a responsibility with it. If someone is likely to get his head blown off because we run his name, we shouldn't run it without good reason."

— Bob Reuteman, city editor, *Rocky Mountain News*, quoted by Bill Hosokawa

This is good advice for the veteran. Nevertheless, although it is possible to attribute too often and although you do not always need to attribute, when you have doubts, go with the attribution.

That goes for attributing anonymous sources, too. Even though you should seldom use them, you must attribute them. Try to preserve your credibility by giving as much information as you can about the sources without revealing their names. For example, you may report "a source close to the chancellor said." For the second reference to the same source, use "the anonymous source said."

During the Clinton/Lewinsky affair, both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* used anonymous sources for their stories that highlighted details of the Starr report before its release. The *Times* cited unnamed "lawyers familiar with the report," and the *Post* attributed details to "informed sources."

Sometimes, as in stories about crime victims, you may have to change someone's name and follow it with "not her real name" in parentheses.

TIPS: You need not attribute information to a source if you are a witness or if the information:

- Is a matter of public record.
- Is generally known.
- Is available from several sources.
- Is easily verifiable.
- Makes no assumptions.
- Contains no opinions.
- Is noncontroversial.

How to Attribute

In composition and creative writing classes, you may have been told to avoid repeating the same word. You probably picked up your thesaurus to look for a synonym for "to say," a colorless verb. Without much research you may have found 100 or more substitutes. None of them is wrong. Indeed, writers may search long for the exact word they need to convey a particular nuance of meaning. For example:

A presidential candidate announces the choice of a running mate.

An arrested man divulges the names of his accomplices.

A judge pronounces sentence.

At other times, in the interest of precise and lively writing, you may write:

"I'll get you for that," she whispered.

"I object," he shouted.

Nevertheless, reporters and editors prefer forms of "to say" in most instances, even if they are repeated throughout a story. And there are good reasons for this word choice. "Said" is unobtrusive. Rather than appearing tiresome and repetitious, it hides in the news columns and calls no attention to itself. "Said" is also neutral. It has no connotations. To use the word "said" is to be objective.

Some of the synonyms for "said" sound innocent enough — but be careful. If you report that a city official "claimed" or "maintained" or "contended," you are implying that you do not quite believe what the official said. The word "said" is the solution to your problem. If you have evidence that what the official is saying is incorrect, you should include the correct information or evidence in your story.

In some newspaper accounts of labor negotiations, company officials always "ask" and labor leaders always "demand." "Demanding" sounds harsh and unreasonable, but "asking" sounds calm and reasonable. A reporter who uses these words in this context is taking an editorial stand — consciously or unconsciously.

Other words you may be tempted to use as a substitute for "say" are simply unacceptable because they represent improper usage. For example:

"You don't really mean that," he winked.

"Of course I do," she grinned.

"But what if someone heard you say that?" he frowned.

"Oh, you are a fool," she laughed.

You cannot "wink" a word. It is difficult, if not impossible, to "grin," "frown" or "laugh" words. But you may want to say this:

"Not again," he said, moaning.

"I'm afraid so," she said with a grin.

This usage is correct, but often it is not necessary or even helpful to add words like "moaning" or phrases like "with a grin." Sometimes, though, such words and phrases are needed to convey the meaning of the speaker.

Learning the correct words for attribution is the first step. Here are some other guidelines to follow when attributing information:

- *If a direct quote is more than one sentence long, place the attribution at the end of the first sentence.* For example:

"The car overturned at least three times," the police officer said. "None of the four passengers was hurt. Luckily, the car did not explode into flames."

That one attribution is adequate. It would be redundant to write:

"The car overturned at least three times," the police officer said. "None of the four passengers was hurt," he added. "Luckily, the car did not explode into flames," he continued.

Nor should you write:

"The car overturned at least three times. None of the four passengers was hurt. Luckily, the car did not explode into flames," the police officer said.

Although you should not keep the reader wondering who is being quoted, in most cases you should avoid placing the attribution at the beginning of a quote. Do not write:

The police officer said: "The car overturned at least three times. None of the four passengers was hurt. Luckily, the car did not explode into flames."

TIPS: He said, she said: Punctuating direct quotations

"Always put the comma inside quotation marks," she said.

Then she added, "The same goes for the period."

"Does the same rule apply for the question mark?" he asked.

"Only if the entire statement is a question," she replied, "and never add a comma after a question mark. Also, be sure to lowercase the first word of a continuing quote that follows an attribution and a comma.

"However, you must capitalize the first word of a new sentence after an attribution," she continued. "Do not forget to open and close the sentence with quotation marks."

"Why are there no quotation marks after the word 'comma' at the end of the fourth paragraph?" he asked.

"Because the same person is speaking at the beginning of the next paragraph," she said. "Notice that the new paragraph does open with quotation marks. Note, too, that a quote inside of a quotation needs a single quotation mark, as around the word 'comma' above."

However, if direct quotes from two different speakers follow one another, you should start the second with the attribution to avoid confusion:

"The driver must have not seen the curve," an eyewitness said. "Once the car left the road, all I saw was a cloud of dust."

The police officer said: "The car overturned at least three times. None of the four passengers was hurt. Luckily, the car did not explode into flames."

Notice that when an attribution precedes a direct quotation that is more than one sentence long, wire service style requires that a colon follow the attribution.

- *Do not follow a fragment of a quote with a continuing complete sentence of quotation.* Avoid constructions like this one:

The mayor said the time had come "to turn off some lights. We all must do something to conserve electricity."

The correct form is to separate partial quotes and complete quotes:

The time has come "to turn off some lights," the mayor said. "We all must do something to conserve electricity."

- *The first time you attribute a direct or an indirect quote, identify the speaker fully.* How fully depends on how well the speaker is known to the readers. In Springfield, Ill., it is sufficient to identify the mayor simply as Mayor Karen Hasara. But if a story in the *Chicago Tribune* referred to the mayor of Springfield, the first reference would have to be "Karen Hasara, mayor of Springfield" — unless, of course, the dateline for the story was Springfield.
- *Do not attribute direct quotes to more than one person, as in the following:*

"Flames were shooting out everywhere," witnesses said. "Then electrical wires began falling, and voices were heard screaming."

All you have to do is eliminate the quotation marks, if indeed any witness made the statements.

- *Do not make up a source. Never attribute a statement to "a witness" unless your source is indeed that witness.* At times you may ask a witness to confirm what you have seen, but never invent quotes for anonymous witnesses. Inventing witnesses and making up quotes is dishonest, inaccurate and inexcusable. One of the many transgressions of former *New York Times* reporter Jayson Blair was that he quoted people who never existed.
- *In stories covering past news events, use the past tense in attributions, and use it throughout the story.* However, features and other stories that do

not report on news events may be more effective if the attributions are consistently given in the present tense. In a feature story such as a personality profile, when it is safe to assume that what the person once said, he or she would still say, you may use the present tense. For example, when you write, "'I like being mayor,' she says," you are indicating that she still enjoys it.

- *Ordinarily, place the noun or pronoun before the verb in attributions:*

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"Everything is under control," the sheriff said.
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If you must identify a person by including a long title, it is better to begin the attribution with the verb:

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"I enjoy the challenge," says Jack Berry, associate dean for
graduate studies and research.
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HANDLING ON- AND OFF-THE-RECORD INFORMATION

Until you are a source in a story involving controversy, you may not understand why people sometimes don't want to talk to reporters or why they don't want their names in the paper. Your job would be easy if all of your sources wished to be "on the record."

Some sources for sound reasons do not want to be named. You must learn to use professional judgment in handling the material they give you. If you agree to accept their information, you must honor their requests to remain off the record. Breaching that confidence destroys trust and credibility and may get you in trouble with the law. But it is your obligation to take the information elsewhere to confirm it and get it on the record.

Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, who as *Washington Post* reporters helped uncover the Watergate scandal that eventually led to the resignation of President Richard M. Nixon, were criticized for citing "high-level sources" without identifying them. Even though Woodward and Bernstein say they did not use this technique unless two independent sources had given them the same information, anonymous sources should be used rarely.

Not naming sources is dangerous for three important reasons. First, such information lacks credibility and makes the reporter and the newspaper suspect.

Second, the source may be lying. He or she may be out to discredit someone or may be floating a trial balloon to test public reaction on some issue or event. Skilled diplomats and politicians know how to use reporters to take the temperature of public opinion. If the public reacts negatively, the sources will not proceed with whatever plans they leaked to the press. In such cases the press has been used — and it has become less credible.

The third reason that not naming sources is dangerous is that once you have promised anonymity to a source, you may not change your mind without

TIPS: Three reasons for avoiding anonymous sources

1. You damage your credibility.
2. Your source may be lying or floating a trial balloon.
3. You may be sued if you then name your source.

risking a breach-of-contract suit. In 1991 the Supreme Court ruled 5-4 in Cohen vs. Cowles Media Co. that the First Amendment does not prevent news sources from suing the press for breach of contract when the press makes confidential sources public. That's why papers such as *The Miami Herald* have a policy that only a senior editor has authority to commit the paper to a pledge of confidentiality.

Some reporters make these distinctions regarding sources and attribution:

Off the record: You may not use the information.

Not for attribution: You may use the information but may not attribute it.

Background: You may use it with a general title for a source (for example, "a White House aide said").

Deep background: You may use the information, but you may not indicate any source.

By no means is there agreement on these terms. For most people "off the record" means not for attribution. For some it means that you cannot use the information in any way. Some find no difference between "background" and "deep background."

Because there is little agreement among journalists, sources may be equally vague about the terms. Your obligation is to make sure you and your sources understand each other. Set the ground rules ahead of time. Clarify your terms.

Also be sure you know the policy of your paper in these matters. For example, many newspapers do not allow reporters to use unidentified sources unless an editor knows the source and approves the usage. Other news organizations such as the Associated Press will not carry opinions, whether positive or negative, that are expressed by an unidentified source. The news agency will cite statements of fact without attribution, but only if the story makes it clear that the person providing this material would do so only on the condition of anonymity. *The New York Times* has a policy of not allowing direct quotations of pejorative remarks by an unidentified source.

Be careful not to allow a speaker to suddenly claim something is off the record. Sometimes in the middle of an interview a source will see you taking notes and suddenly try to change the rules. "Oh, I meant to tell you, that last example was off the record." With all the tact you can muster, try, without losing the source altogether, to change the person's mind. At least, tell the person to try to avoid doing that for the rest of the interview.

Nevertheless, if a city manager or police chief wishes to have a background session with you, unless it is against newspaper policy, you should not refuse. Often these officials are trying to be as open as they can under certain circumstances. Without such background sessions the task of reporting complex issues intelligently is nearly impossible. But you must be aware that you are hearing only one point of view and that the information may be self-serving.

Miles Beller, at the time a reporter for *The Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, gave this example in *Editor & Publisher:*

> Several years ago a woman phoned this reporter and "wanted to go off the record" in regard to a Los Angeles official's "secret ownership of a Las Vegas radio station" and other questionable holdings tied to this public servant. Funny thing though, the caller plumb forgot to mention that she was working for another candidate. This bit of minutia probably just slipped her mind, what with her man trailing so badly and the election a few weeks away.

Some sources make a habit of saying everything is off the record and of giving commonplace information in background sessions. Although you should not quote a source who asks to remain off the record, you may use information if one or more of the following is true:

- The information is a matter of public record.
- It is generally known.
- It is available from several sources.
- You are a witness.

So as not to lose credibility with your source, it's a good idea to make it clear that you plan to use the information because of one or more of the preceding reasons.

Knowing when and how to attribute background information is an art you will have to give continuing special care and attention to as a reporter. Remember these two important points:

1. When possible, set the ground rules with your sources ahead of time.
2. Know your newspaper's policy in these matters.

"On one of Kissinger's (then Secretary of State Henry Kissinger) sojourns, humorist Art Buchwald attributed information to a 'high U.S. official with wavy hair, horn-rimmed glasses and a German accent.'"

— Alicia C. Shepard, *American Journalism Review*

Quotations from the Internet and Other Concerns

Chat rooms are interesting to read to find out what people are saying about a particular issue, event or person. You can find bizarre and sometimes worthwhile quotations there.

May you use them without the person's permission? May you use them without attributing them?

Another question: Kelly McBride asks whether you are giving people an unfair advantage when you interview them through e-mail. Unlike people interviewed in person or over the phone, those interviewed on e-mail get to write and edit their quotes.

These and other questions surfaced after Jayson Blair, the reporter from *The New York Times* who was caught making up people, events and stories, was exposed. When you quote from man-on-the-street interviews, must you obtain phone numbers and check to see whether it really was the person with whom you spoke?

Do you have special obligations when you use quotations from people who are not fully aware of how their quotes may sound on air or read in print?

What about using quotations from people interviewed by someone other than yourself? The Colorado Rockies' manager Clint Hurdle would not participate in a news conference attended by any reporter from *The Denver Post* because its columnist Mark Kiszla quoted right fielder Larry Walker from an interview by reporter Troy Renck. Jay Alves, the Rockies' media-relations director, said, "There were quotes taken out of context from a player that the columnist never talked to directly."

Denver Post managing editor Gary Clark stood by his reporter. "He did nothing wrong," he said in a *Post* story. "He (Troy Renck) did nothing wrong. He gave a quote to a colleague. The quote is accurate, and the Rockies do not dispute that."

Then the *Post* filed a formal complaint with Major League Baseball and the Baseball Writers Association of American.

Suggested Readings

Brooks, Brian S., Pinson, James L. and Wilson, Jean Gaddy. *Working with Words*, Fifth Edition. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003. The section on quotations is excellent and follows Associated Press style.

Callihan, E. L. *Grammar for Journalists*, Revised Edition. Radnor, Pa.: Chilton Book Co., 1979. This classic text contains a good section on how to punctuate, attribute and handle quotations.

Germer, Fawn. "Are Quotes Sacred?" *American Journalism Review*, Sept. 1995, pp. 34–37. Presents many views of all sides of whether and when to change quotes.

Hart, Jack. "Giving Credit When Credit Isn't Due." *Editor & Publisher*, Sept. 11, 1993, p. 2. Warns against useless attribution.

King, Barbara. "There's Real Power in Common Speech." *Ottaway News Extra*, no. 137, Winter 1989, pp. 8, 16. An excellent discussion of using real quotes from real people.

Stein, M. L. "9th Circuit: It's OK to Make Up Quotes." *Editor & Publisher*, Aug. 12, 1989, pp. 16, 30. Reactions from the press and lawyers to the court decision allowing quotes that are not verbatim.

Stimson, William. "Two Schools on Quoting Confuse the Reader." *Journalism Educator*, vol. 49, no. 4, Winter 1995, pp. 69–73. Strong arguments against cleaning up quotes.

Weinberg, Steve. "So What's Wrong with Pre-Publication Review?" *The Quill*, May 1990, pp. 26–28. Answers objections to prepublication review.

Weinberg, Steve. "Thou Shalt Not Concoct Thy Quote." *Fineline*, July/Aug. 1991, pp. 3–4. Presents reasons for allowing sources to review quotations before publication.

Weiss, Philip. "Who Gets Quote Approval?" *Columbia Journalism Review*, May/June 1991, pp. 52–54. Discusses the growing practice of allowing sources to check quotations before publication.

Suggested Web Sites

www.butte.cc.ca.us/services/irs/tlc/tipsheetsys/01-50/008.html
Excellent outline of rules of punctuation for direct quotations, with an exception or two regarding Associated Press style.

www.owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g_quote.html
A broad discussion of how to handle quotes of all kinds.

www.freep.com/jobspage/academy/king.htm
Barbara King, director of editorial training at the Associated Press, talks about using real people in stories, especially through the use of quotations.

www.journalism.indiana.edu/ethics/great.html
Discusses how much journalists should and do tamper with direct quotations.

www.poynter.org/profile/profile.asp?user=2061
Kelly McBride discusses prepublication review in her article "Wheeling and Dealing and Pre-Publications Review."

Exercises

1. Rewrite the following story, paying special attention to the use of quotations and attribution. Note the sensitive nature of some of the quotations. Paraphrase when necessary.

Christopher O'Reilly is a remarkably happy young man, despite a bout with meningitis eight years ago that has left him paralyzed and brain-damaged.

"I am happy," O'Reilly commented, as he puffed a cigarette.

He has much to be happy about. Physical therapy has hastened his recovery since the day he awoke from a 10-week-long coma. He has lived to celebrate his 26th birthday.

"I had a helluva birthday," he said. "I seen several friends. I had big cake," he added slowly.

He lives in a house with his mother and stepfather in the rolling, green countryside near Springfield.

O'Reilly's withered legs are curled beneath him now, and his right arm is mostly paralyzed, but he can do pull-ups with his left arm. He can see and hear.

"When he came back, he wasn't worth a damn," his mother said. "The hack doctors told me he would be a vegetable all his life," she claimed.

"He couldn't talk; he could only blink. And he drooled a lot," she smiled.

Now, Chris is able to respond in incomplete sentences to questions and can carry on slow communication. "He don't talk good, but he talks," his mother commented.

It all began when he stole a neighbor's Rototiller. His probation was revoked, and he found himself in the medium-security prison in Springfield. Then came "inadequate medical treatment" in the prison system. O'Reilly's family argued that he received punishment beyond what the Eighth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution calls "cruel and unusual."

"Those prison officials were vicious," they said.

As a result, he was awarded $250,000 from the state, the largest legal settlement in federal court in 10 years. "That sounds like a lot of money. But it really isn't, you know, when you consider what happened and when you consider the worth of a human life, and the way they treated him and all, we thought we should get at least a million," his mother remarked.

O'Reilly contracted the infection of the brain after sleeping "on the concrete floor" of a confinement cell,

his mother maintained. He had been placed in solitary confinement because he would not clean his cell. The disease went undiagnosed for eight days, leaving him paralyzed and brain-damaged, she said.

Now O'Reilly likes watching television. "I like TV," he grinned. "And smoking."

His mother said she "never gives up hope" that "one day" her son will "come out of it."

2. Here is part of a speech by Professor Richard L. Weaver II of the Department of Interpersonal and Public Communication at Bowling Green State University. It was delivered at the International Leadership Conference, Bowling Green, Ohio. Assume the speech was given at your university and that you are writing for your school paper. Indicate the direct quotations you would use and why you would use them.

So I want to take a few moments this afternoon and look at this twofold problem that leaders face — building the proper foundation (your credibility) and motivating others. And did you know that the two are closely related? Your ability to motivate others is, according to the research, dependent mostly upon your credibility.

Let's just look briefly at what goes into credibility. Credibility is really the attitude others hold towards you at any given time. Sure, it has to do with the house you build, but as a leader you must realize that much more important than the house itself is the view that others have of the house that you build. Want to motivate others? Get your house in order first.

This might be a good self-test. Let me give you the top five components of credibility. You are all past, present, and/or future leaders. How do you measure up?

According to the research in the speech-communication discipline, the most important and first component of credibility is good, old-fashioned, sociability. Are you the kind of person others think of as friendly, cheerful, good-natured, warm and pleasant? If not, why not?

The second characteristic of credibility is competence. There is no substitute for knowledge. You have to come off as knowing what you are doing. I'm not saying that you have to be the most intelligent, well-trained, informed, expert in your area. But I want you to know right up front, others appreciate those who have done their homework, who know what they are talking about, and who seem to have a grip on what needs to be known. You have to understand that good leaders don't waste other people's time.

The third characteristic of credibility is extroversion. Now, this does not mean that all leaders are bold and verbal, talkative and assertive, or animated and dynamic. But I will tell you this: it sure helps! Extroversion often comes across as enthusiasm. Knowledge is power, but enthusiasm pulls the switch! Think of the extroverted teachers you have had and you often think of the enthusiastic teachers you have had. Why? Because the traits are similar.

The fourth characteristic of credibility is composure. Credible people are often perceived as poised, in control and self-confident. This quality helps keep the extroversion in perspective because a leader who is self-assured without being bombastic or overwhelming instills confidence in others. Are you cool under pressure? Can you retain composure when you are threatened or when your leadership ability is under attack? Composure means being able to remain relaxed, calm and cool in trying circumstances.

The fifth characteristic of credibility is character. Are you someone others view as virtuous (courageous), honest, unselfish, sympathetic, and trustworthy? In my experience, I have always related character with commitment and commitment with passion. How much do you care? There is character in commitment. You look at successful people in any field, and you'll find they're not necessarily the best and the brightest or the fastest and strongest — they are, instead, the ones with the most commitment. Have you ever heard the acronym WIT? — Whatever It Takes! Successful people are willing to do whatever it takes to succeed. Are you one who sees difficulties in every opportunity or opportunities in every difficulty?

3. Attend a meeting, a press conference or a speech and tape-record it. While there, write down the quotes you would use if you were writing the story for your local newspaper. Then listen to the tape, and check the accuracy of the quotations.

4. Interview at least two reporters, and ask them about their policies on handling sources regarding the following:

a. Off the record
b. Not for attribution
c. Background
d. Deep background

Write an essay of at least 200 words on the subject.

5. Check a library's computer database for sources of articles about journalists' use of anonymous sources. Read at least four articles, and write a 200-word report on your findings.

6. Engage a classmate in a half-hour interview about his or her life. In your story, use as many direct quotes as you think are fitting. Then check the accuracy of your quotations with your classmate.