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## UNIT 24 WRITING FOR PRINT – 1

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### Structure

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### 24.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this unit, you will

- be introduced to the range and scope of print media,
- learn about the characteristics of print media,
- understand how readers use the print medium, and
- learn how to approach writing for print.

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### 24.1 INTRODUCTION

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Have you ever thought about how many newspapers are printed in India (if not in the world), and in how many languages? Can you make a guess? How many names of newspapers and magazines can you recall easily? Try also to remember the variety of messages that reached you through the print medium yesterday. Did you read a printed advertisement, a brochure, or a book or article in connection with your hobby or your profession?

Now that most homes have a television set, do we still need the daily newspaper and the weekly or monthly newsmagazine? Do you know anyone who does not get a newspaper or newsmagazine at all, because they get all their news from the television or the Internet?

These are the kinds of questions this unit raises and answers. When a new medium such as television or the Internet becomes available to us, we often fear that this means the old media – print, or radio – will fall into disuse. What happens, however, is a little more complex. The various media find their own space in our lives, depending on their particular strengths. Print has a **permanence** that other forms of mass media do not have. So it is still the best medium for messages that we expect to be useful or true for a long time: rules and regulations, analysis of events, and research reports, for example. Thus we find that different media get better at finding out what they can do best, who their audience is most likely to be, and what their particular audience wants.

If we conduct a survey of media use, we might find that young people who work with computers, and work unconventional hours (in shifts, or at nights) tend to turn

to the Internet for news. Housewives who spend their morning making breakfast might like to have the radio on; and retired people may look forward to their morning newspaper. We might find that different people within a family have different attitudes to the print media, and use it in different ways. When we write for print, we must begin by understanding how and why our audience reads us.

The newspaper is organized from front to back, from beginning to end, in a **linear pattern**. But readers can use it in a **lateral** (sideways) fashion, jumping from one page to the other at random, not necessarily in the order the pages appear. They 'browse', or 'scan', or 'skim.' This is why newspapers use headlines and graphics, as a way of attracting the reader's eye.

## 24.2 IS PRINT A THING OF THE PAST?

For the past several years, as electronic and visual forms have come to dominate the mediascape, the death of print has been predicted time and again. (The word 'mediascape', made on the analogy of 'landscape', means 'the media scene'. You may know that the landscape is what you can see of earth and sky from a particular place: it is a scene.)

But it's clear that print media – newspapers, magazines, and journals of various kinds – are far from extinct. While patterns of readership and circulation may have changed, all these forms of communication are still alive and vibrant. Millions of people in India and all over the world still wait for their morning newspaper; millions more still pick up their weekly newsmagazine or their favourite sports magazine from the corner news stand, and many thousands of professionals and academics still subscribe to their disciplinary journals – whether in medicine, mathematics or management – to keep up with new knowledge in their fields.

The Registrar of Newspapers in India (RNI) reported in 2005 that there were 60,413 registered newspapers in India, with a combined circulation of 13,30,87,588 (The Press in India, 2004-2005). The year saw the entry of 1948 new publications. This figure combines the number of dailies, weeklies, fortnightlies, monthlies and other periodicities, published in English and all other Indian languages (see [www.newswatch.in](http://www.newswatch.in) for more information on the press in India.). These figures show that print continues to be an important form of information for a large number of Indians, no matter what language they speak. The highest number of daily newspapers was in Hindi (799) followed by English (181).

### Activity

Ask people you know where they get their information from, and where they go to for different kinds of information (professional, entertainment, politics, etc.). You may want to inquire where they get sports news from, or cinema listings, or travel and tour information (ticket prices, routes, etc.).

Make a chart of how print compares with other media such as television or the Internet. Collect information from at least five people, preferably of various age groups.

What reasons do people give for preferring one medium over another? For example, some people may leave for work too early to see the morning newspaper – and they may be at a computer for most of their working day. So they may depend on the Internet. Others may want to enjoy a quiet morning cup of tea along with the newspaper!

Look for differences among age groups, and between those who work in offices, those who travel a lot, and those who stay at home.

The print media span a variety of publications. These include:

- Daily newspapers (e.g. *Times of India*, *Dainik Jagran*)
- News magazines (e.g., *India Today*, *Time*)
- Special interest and niche magazines (*Outlook Traveller*, *Health & Fitness*) (a 'niche', pronounced *neesh*, is actually a small shelf made in the hollow of a wall, where a photograph, flowers or candles can be kept. A 'niche magazine' means a magazine that carves out its space for a small, specialist audience.)
- Trade and industrial publications (magazines for specific industries or professions)
- Professional journals (*Journal of Teacher Education*, *Indian Journal of Medicine*)

### Activity

Try to find more examples of each kind of publication. Where do you find them and what do you think is the audience for each?

Can you make any comments on the style, content and design of each type of publication? What does this tell you about the audience?

[Some features to look for are:

*style*: the kind of language used – formal, informal, friendly, ...; the kinds of headlines or headings for articles, the arrangement of text into subparts or columns

...

*content and design*: the kind and number of pictures and photographs; the use of colour; the print size and font type – is it easy to read, eye-catching, or does it need serious attention?

This will help you to think about the age of the audience, their educational level, and so on.]

Apart from journalistic media, there are other forms of communication that employ print to get the message across, such as advertising, public relations, advocacy and the emerging arena of info-tainment or edu-tainment. These are words coined to show the combination of information and entertainment, or education and entertainment. This combination is typical of television, and of some forms of print as well—for instance, youth supplements, or children's sections of the newspaper.

### ✓ Check Your Progress 1

1. From your own experience, or from a friend or from a library, find out the names of two disciplinary journals. What disciplines are these journals meant for?
2. What language in India has the highest number of daily newspapers? What language has the next highest number of daily newspapers?
3. Explain the words *mediascape*, *infotainment* and *edutainment*. Find sentences from English magazines or newspapers where these words are used.
4. Name one each of the following: a daily newspaper in English, a news magazine in English, and a special interest/ niche magazine, or an industrial publication, or a professional journal in English.

## 24.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF PRINT

How is writing for the print media any different from other forms of writing? In one sense, it is no different. All writing, regardless of medium, is dictated by primarily three factors: The **Message** (what do you want to say?), the **Audience** (who do you want to say it to?) and the **Sender** (your own style and your intentions in sending the message). All writing, regardless of medium, has primarily two objectives:

- to be understood by the audience, and
- to achieve its intended impact .

This said, however, it is also important to understand the demands of the print medium, as distinct from other media of communication.

A printed document has a **permanence** that other forms of mass media do not have. A newspaper has a life of a day, a newsmagazine stays alive for a week or more, but often, these forms of media are stored and retrieved at will to be read when the fancy takes one. The newspaper is organized from front to back, from beginning to end, in a **linear pattern**. Most people begin reading on page one but often skip through the paper to go to the sections they are particularly interested in, such as sports or business. So despite the linear organization of the paper, it is possible for readers to use it in a **lateral** (sideways) fashion, jumping from one page to the other at random, not necessarily in the order the pages appear. With a newspaper, or even a magazine or any other printed document, it is possible for the reader to do this, without getting lost—a few turns of the pages and they are back to where they started! This makes it different from the Web, for instance, where people tend to get lost when they browse in a random manner.

But within a publication or a section of a publication, stories are told in a **linear** manner, which means that readers must go from one point to the next directly, without any twists and turns along the way. However, design and layout approaches have made it possible for printed publications to create the illusion of hypertextuality (a feature of the World Wide Web, that allows linking of related items in a way that lets the user go from one to the other easily), demanding new ways of writing and thinking about how to present ideas. Marshall McLuhan called print a ‘hot’ medium because it demands a high level of involvement from the reader, unlike television, which provides so much stimulus at many levels that viewers do not have to do much ‘work’ to understand messages.

The print medium also places certain constraints on those who create content for it. They must write in a certain structured manner, in a way that people can ‘see’ as well as ‘hear’ what they are talking about. The other difference stems from the technical aspect of production. Because printed publications take longer to create and disseminate than do electronic forms, those who write for the printed news media do not have the same advantage of immediacy that say, television, radio or the Internet do. The newspaper reaches us much after a news story has broken on television, so it must be written in a manner that is different, draw on a wider range of information, and answer different information needs. We will talk more about how this impacts writing style later in this chapter.

*Activity* Look at newspapers and magazines over the past ten years and see how they have changed in look—what do you think has influenced this change?

What function do you think different layout devices such as boxed text, pictures, different kinds of headlines and captions, have played?

Talk to people of different age groups and ask them how they read the paper and what they like (or don't like) about the design. What does this change indicate about how people read or use newspapers and publications in general?

### ✓ Check Your Progress 2

#### Fill in the blanks:

5. All writing depends on three factors. The **Message** is \_\_\_\_ you want to say. The **Audience** is \_\_\_\_ you want to say it to. And the **Sender** has his or her own \_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_ in sending the message).
6. A printed document has a \_\_\_\_\_. A newspaper has a life of \_\_\_\_\_ and a newsmagazine stays alive \_\_\_\_\_ or more, but newspapers and magazines are often stored and read again, so they have a longer life.
7. We say the newspaper is organized in a **linear pattern** because it is organized \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Despite the linear organization of the paper, it is possible for readers to use it in a \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, jumping from one page to the other, and not reading the pages in the order they appear.

## 24.4 HOW PEOPLE READ

Twenty or more years ago, a person who picked up a newspaper or magazine would begin at the top left hand corner of page one and go on till he or she reached the bottom right hand corner of the last page. But now, ask anyone who picks up a newspaper or magazine how they read, and they will tell you that they 'browse', or 'scan' or 'skim'.

When people want to understand something in depth, they employ a strategy known as '**study reading**', where they read slowly, paying attention to words and what they mean at a surface level as well as what they imply at a deeper level. People rarely use this method when reading newspapers and magazines.

More often, what we do is to pick up the newspaper and quickly get an idea of the contents—we run our eyes over headlines and the beginnings of articles so that we have a rough idea of what the main stories are. This is known as **skimming**. When we skim the newspaper or a magazine, we tend to read things that are in bold print, text that is 'pulled out' and highlighted, captions of photographs, items that are set apart in boxes, and so on. By the time we finish, we know broadly the topics that were covered, and maybe a few details of each story.

Sometimes we look through a paper for specific items of interest. We glance over the headlines to see if there have been any new developments on an issue we have been following. We look to see what the highlights of the latest cricket test match were. This approach to reading is called **scanning**. It is more purposeful than skimming, though it is not as involved as study reading.

Reading styles determine how information is presented in print. In order to capture and maintain reader interest, writers – and designers – must use a variety of techniques to make their product interesting, attractive and engaging, while also paying attention to clarity, completeness and accuracy.

*Activity*

Discuss how you and your friends or family members read the daily newspaper. How much time do you/they spend on it?

What elements do they pay attention to and what do they spend time on?

What is the primary reading style they use? (skimming, scanning, or study reading?)

√ **Check Your Progress 3**

9. Pick out the words and sentences in the section above that define and describe *skimming*, *scanning* and *study reading*.

10. Now pick up a newspaper or magazine. Run our eyes over the headlines and note them down. Read and note down the items that are in bold print, text that is ‘pulled out’ and highlighted, captions of photographs, items that are set apart in boxes and the beginnings of articles.

You have now “skimmed” the newspaper. You also have written down the topics that were covered, and maybe a few details of each story. Share this with your study group.

Discuss the kinds of layout and print that your eyes were drawn to.

11. Choose a subject that interests you (sport, politics, city news, crime ...). *Scan* the newspaper or magazine for news about this subject. Report the headlines in writing.

## 24.5 WRITING FOR PRINT

We have already seen that we cannot speak of the print media as a homogeneous entity. There are many different types of publications, each with a distinct audience with its own needs, and therefore, many different ways to approach writing for print. We shall consider here some general characteristics of writing for print and focus on one particular genre of writing—newspaper writing.

All writing depends on three major factors:

- **The audience** (Who are you writing for? What is their level of knowledge and interest? What is their purpose in reading this?)
- **The message** (What is the subject you are writing about, and what is your basic purpose in sharing this information? How much material do you have and what are your sources? How much time do you have to write?)
- **The medium** (How is the material to be presented? What are the constraints and possibilities of the medium? How do people use this medium?)

Writing for print, like most kinds of purposive communication (as distinct from communication that is primarily for self-expression, such as fiction or poetry), must focus above all on the reader. Keeping the reader in mind at all times as your approach your writing brings to the whole process a focus that will ensure that the final product does its job—to capture the reader’s attention and interest and add to their understanding of a given topic or issue. This is true for all kinds of publications, whether it is a magazine for children or a journal for engineers. If you know the audience, you know the level at which you need to write, and you know how much or how little information you need to provide.

*Activity*

Find an article in

- a) a children's supplement in a daily newspaper,
- b) a newsmagazine, and
- c) a women's magazine.

on the same topic, such as an issue of national importance (about Republic day or Independence day, on Gandhiji's birthday, the day of the presentation of the budget, or the swearing-in of a new government, for example).

How is the subject treated in each case? What are the characteristics of each audience that the writer has kept in mind?

Understanding the needs of your audience makes the whole process of writing easier. This understanding dovetails into the way you treat the message, and how it shapes up. Immediately, you can identify what topics such an audience would find interesting and what angles within that topic would capture their interest. You also know what level of language to use, what style they would respond to, and the detail they would want or need.

As you write to the needs of the audience, you must also keep in mind the characteristics of the medium you are working within. Daily newspapers demand fast work, writing that is crisp, clear and to the point. The emphasis is on facts with some room for opinion and analysis, but all presented in a very condensed format. The longest articles in the main section of a daily newspaper would be no more than 1000 words, while most are between 250 and 500 words. Magazines, on the other hand, allow for writing that is slightly more interpretive and descriptive, and also make use of more illustration in the form of illustrations and photographs that can supplement and elucidate the text. Articles may be longer and divided into sections, or an issue may be explored through several complementary stories.

News and feature writing – the kind of writing that we see in daily newspapers, news magazines and special interest magazines – demands a style and approach that is distinct from other forms of writing (recreational or academic/scholarly writing). The main characteristics of such writing are

- **Accuracy**—facts are all important; there is a clear distinction between fact and opinion, between observation and hearsay.
- **Brevity**—all writing must fit a given space; sentences are short, paragraphs are short, and articles are brief.
- **Clarity**—everything must be clear at the first reading, as people will not spend too much time and energy on trying to understand it. Also, since the news media deal with facts and issues of current importance, it is important that things are presented in a manner that helps the public understand and participate in the dialogue.

**Check Your Progress 4**

12. Find examples of articles that are 1000 words in length, 500 words in length, and 250 words in length, from the daily newspaper.
13. Compare the lengths of the articles you have looked at for the activity suggested in this section. How long is the article in the children's supplement?

14. Find and underline the expressions that mark the report below as “hearsay” rather than fact.

- i. An old couple are reported to have been assaulted by their son last night.
- ii. The neighbours alleged that the young man came home very late last night.
- iii. It is understood that he was inebriated.
- iv. The parents apparently admonished him.
- v. The young man is currently said to be in police custody.

## 24.6 LET US SUM UP

- The patterns of readership and circulation of newspapers, magazines, and journals have changed, but print media are far from extinct.
- Print continues to be an important form of information for Indians. In 2005 there were 60,413 registered newspapers in India, with a combined circulation of 13,30,87,588. The year saw 1,948 new publications. The highest number of daily newspapers was in Hindi (799) followed by English (181).
- The print media span a variety of publications: daily newspapers, news magazines, special interest and niche magazines, trade and industrial publications, and professional journals.
- Other forms of communication that use print for their message are advertising, public relations, advocacy and info-tainment or edu-tainment.
- All writing, regardless of medium, is dictated by primarily three factors: The **Message**, the **Audience** and the **Sender**; and has primarily two objectives: to be understood and to have an impact.
- Print has a **permanence** that other forms of mass media do not have.
- The newspaper is organized from front to back, from beginning to end, in a **linear pattern**.
- But readers can use it in a **lateral** (sideways) fashion, jumping from one page to the other at random, not necessarily in the order the pages appear.
- They ‘browse’, or ‘scan’ or ‘skim’. When we run our eyes over headlines and the beginnings of articles so that we have a rough idea of what the main stories are, we are **skimming**.
- When look through a paper for specific items of interest, we are **scanning**. Scanning is more purposeful than skimming.
- Writing for print, like most kinds of purposive communication, must focus above all on the reader.
- Daily newspapers demand fast work, writing that is crisp, clear and to the point. The longest articles in a daily newspaper would not be more than 1000 words; most are 250-500 words.



- Magazines allow for a slightly more interpretive and descriptive writing, and use more illustration.
- News and feature writing demands accuracy, brevity and clarity.

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## 24.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

1. (For example) Indian Journal of Medicine (general medicine); Economic and Political Weekly (economic analysis of current issues/events)
2. Hindi; English.
3. The word 'mediascape', made on the analogy of 'landscape', means 'the media scene'. Info-tainment or edu-tainment are words coined to show the combination of information and entertainment, or education and entertainment.

### Check Your Progress 2

4. Please give the names of your choice.
5. what, who, style, intentions
6. permanence, a day, for a week
7. from front to back, from beginning to end
8. lateral (sideways) fashion

### Check Your Progress 3

9. Please pick out the words and sentences as requested.
- 10 & 11. Please do the activities suggested.

### Check Your Progress 4

- 12 & 13. Please do the activities suggested.
14. are reported to; alleged that; It is understood that; apparently; said to be