

THE WHAT OF JOURNALISM

Module 3



WHY THIS TOPIC MATTERS

Being able to define journalism is crucial to understanding the best ways to protect and promote the practice. Evolving definitions make it important to know what exactly someone means when they use the term “journalism.”

Knowing the different mediums and topics in the field of journalism enables consumers to become more media literate.

The promise of a free press may not be enough to protect individual journalists from corporate and political influences.

DEFINING JOURNALISM

What comes to mind when you hear the word “journalism?” Perhaps you think of the hard-hitting investigative reporting featured in Hollywood [movies](#) like [Spotlight](#) and [All the President’s Men](#). Maybe you recall the most recent news article you read on Facebook, or if you’re more traditional, in a print newspaper. That [podcast](#) you were listening to on your way to work may also qualify.

You may wonder, is it really possible that all these fall under the umbrella of journalism? The simple answer is yes. Journalism is all that and more. However, pinning down a definition has proven to be a challenge for media professionals and academics alike.

Though the word “journalism” has been a hallmark of media vocabulary for centuries, its definition is ever-evolving in an attempt to keep up with a changing media landscape and a growing understanding of its potential for good. The [American Press Institute](#) provides this definition:

Journalism is the activity of gathering, assessing, creating, and presenting news and information. It is also the product of these activities.

Fig 3.1 Pull quote

While the conciseness of the definition is appealing, it fails to address crucial elements that separate journalism from other methods of collecting sharing information. For example, researchers Ed Carter and Rosalie Westenknow highlight the role of independence in journalism. [They wrote](#): “The core of freedom of journalism is independent activity to seek and disseminate truth on matters of public interest, and it primarily serves a government watchdog role with justice and civic virtue as central values.”

In addition to independence, their research addresses one of the distinct characteristics of a journalist as having the [public interest in mind](#). This motivation to inform the public for their good drives journalists to cover issues like elections, politics, and the performance of public officials. Beyond government coverage, journalists may also choose to tell human-interest stories that they believe the public may benefit from hearing.

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS VS FREEDOM OF JOURNALISM

Throughout history, legal cases regarding journalism have been [lumped into the same category as broad free-speech and free press rights](#) under the First Amendment. In some circles, advocates have been calling for the need to separate the protections of journalism organizations, what is known as “freedom of the press,” from protections specifically for individual journalists.

[Those in favor of the separation argue that](#) “individual freedom increasingly should be seen as distinct from an institutional media or press right, in part because media organizations may not be sufficiently independent from economic and political perspectives.”

In other words, the autonomous, altruistic journalist striving to fulfill their responsibilities needs to be safeguarded from commercial and political pressures. Furthermore, these safeguards must be extended to [individuals who complete journalistic functions regardless of whether they hold institutional media jobs](#).

Ensuring freedom of journalism could be the next step toward advancing legal protections for the media. Instead of institutional protections for journalism which mainly benefit market-dominating conglomerates, individual journalists could enjoy security that allows them to do their work ethically and freely.

TYPES OF JOURNALISM: TOPICS AND MEDIUMS

While “journalism” is often used as a blanket term, there is an extensive list of topics covered by journalists, and various mediums used to cover them. Some journalists specialize in a specific topic, but many will cover an array of subjects in their work. Below is a list of some of the more common types of journalism by topic.



Political Journalism covers government officials, political events, campaigns, policies, and their impact. [Its goal is to help citizens understand political matters and prevent abuses of power.](#) What does it look like?

Tracking important legislation or providing updates on the presidential election.



Sports Journalism refers to [news stories related to events, people, or issues](#) in the world of sports. Responsibilities could include reporting game statistics or interviewing players. Most major news

outlets include a sports journalism segment. What does it look like? Providing game commentary or analysis. Think ESPN.



Investigative Journalism [aims to uncover truth](#) about a given topic. It relies upon the fundamental journalistic principles of verification and presentation of facts. What does

it look like? Exposing fraud or corruption in politics or a business. Think Watergate.



Business Journalism entails writing about [global economies](#) including business leaders, trends, and breaking news. The goal is to [keep businesses connected and informed about the market.](#) What does it look like?

Reporting on big mergers or providing stock market updates.



Entertainment Journalism covers popular culture, including icons, trends, and events. Content is usually centered around [movies, music, books, or celebrities.](#) What does it look like? Writing a story about a

movie premiere or an author’s planned sequel to a best-selling novel.



Watchdog Journalism is similar to political journalism in that it guards against corruption and abuses of power. However, [watchdog journalists primarily monitor the activities of large companies and influential figures and report on activities that may have negative impacts on society](#). What does it look like? Inquiring about employee protection violations at a company or providing a platform for victims of injustice.



Trade Journalism reports on a [particular industry or field](#). Authors are typically [experts](#) in the field who write about important developments, newsworthy trends, and market conditions. What does it look like? [Aviation Week's article](#) addressing progress toward emissions-free flights.



Some might include **Opinion Journalism** on this list, which is the only type of journalism that is based on subjective ideas rather than objective facts. Opinion journalists share personal insights and tell stories from their perspective. For our purposes, opinion journalism is excluded and preference is given to types of journalism that strive to report unbiased facts.



There are nearly as many mediums, or methods of distributing content, as there are topics. The days when someone can say they solely work in print journalism have all but dissipated. In the 21st century, most print publications also publish their content online, and promote it through myriad mediums. Keep this in mind as you read through the list of journalism mediums below.



Broadcast Journalism is primarily associated with television and radio stations. Its content can be [more quickly distributed](#) than traditional print media, like a newspaper. [Accessibility](#) is also a strength of broadcast journalism. Anytime you receive news through an [electronic medium](#), you are benefiting from this type of journalism. As a professional in this field, you could have an on-air presence or work behind the scenes preparing stories.



Print Journalism is usually seen in the form of newspapers or magazines. News writing for this medium [conforms to a rigorous style](#). Professionals in print journalism can expect to be involved in the [entire process of publication](#), including editing, copy-editing, design, and fact-checking. Though it is the oldest form of journalism, its [popularity has been in decline](#) due to the rise of digital news resources. Many print publications are adapting by posting content online.



Online Journalism is also commonly known as [digital journalism](#). Content is distributed through the internet, making it accessible to anyone with a Wi-Fi signal. This type of journalism can take many forms, but a few of them include blogs, YouTube channels, and social media posts. It often features [multimedia elements](#) such as text, graphics, sound, and motion video. The innovation of online journalism has altered the way that many people consume news.

CONCLUSION

At its core, journalism is reporting news in the public's interest. It is important to understand the varying definitions of journalism so that we, as citizens, can protect the practice. Furthermore, knowing the different topics and mediums in the field can enhance our ability to be an advocate for freedom of journalism.



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