Generations of journalists have used similar standards in deciding what constitutes news. These criteria help in determining what is important enough to publish and how to prioritize each day's happenings. These decisions take into account the audience for which the news is intended. Audiences differ, so the focus of the writing will vary accordingly. The traditional criteria for judging what is worthy of publication follow:

- *Impact/Consequence.* How many people in your audience will the story affect and to what degree? You must consider how much of the audience will feel the effect, how direct the effect is and how immediate it is. Here are some headlines to illustrate:

  Town terrified as 100 police hunt fugitive

  Police hypnotist helped get confession in college slaying

  Police suspend ex-convict hunt; city bolts doors

- *Proximity.* A new lottery in Missouri isn't likely to interest readers in Texas. Your intended audience will determine if you write about it at all. If your audience is a local one, then you need to look for a local connection to an event. If your audience is global — as it often is on the Internet — then you need to make a local event meaningful to a broader audience if you are to use it at all. Among stories of equal importance, the one nearest your audience will be the most newsworthy.

- *Timeliness/Immediacy.* The Internet allows for immediate delivery of the news. News is a change in status quo, but the status quo can change in a matter of hours or even minutes. Your temptation will be to try to be the first to publish a story, which could lead to the use of information that has not been substantiated with sufficient credible sources. It is vital that you take the time you need to be thorough, informative and accurate.

- *Prominence.* If Andy Hunter of Houston has an episode of arrhythmia, it means nothing to a general audience. If the president of the United States has the same thing happen, this ordinary part of life becomes a news event for the entire nation and possibly beyond. A person's importance bears a strong influence on newsworthiness. Many people are interested in the offstage lives of public figures. Unofficial actions of such people often yield insight into their character.

- *Novelty/Oddity.* The first of something, the last of something else, and the only occurrence of another event are staples of publications. Freak happenings make interesting reading. Unusual or unexpected events capture the imagination, provide diversion and lighten the gloom and doom of much of the daily news. While strange events and people make good copy, the writer must limit himself within the bounds of good taste.

- *Drama/Conflict.* These stories comprise many front pages. Murders, manhunts, wars and other forms of mayhem and tumult appeal to reader interest and offer information that might be used to warn them of immanent threat. Beyond stories of violence, political and religious head bashing provide high interest for many readers.

  Sports also provide high-drama conflict that is compelling for sports fans and other readers who enjoy watching the fracas. Many of those sports fans get involved in it, too — oftentimes among themselves and sometimes right out there on the playing field.

  Conflict is present, even in subtle forms, in most important news. Participants may not know the causes of the conflict. When combatants know what they are fighting over, they will attempt to obscure the issues.

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Conflicts over matters of right and wrong result because people enter the fight from different fields of experience, which leads to varying points of view. Seldom is the conflict fully resolved in such instances. Right is seldom on one side of the issue only — and sometimes may not be on any side. When the battle ends, it is often difficult to declare the winner. Sometimes nobody wins.

- *Disaster*. Hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, earthquakes and wildfires make up a few of the possible disasters that befall most people at one time or another. While widespread disasters certainly merit being reported, other events qualify as well. For example, the toll unemployment takes on the life of an individual or a family can be disastrous. An accident on a busy freeway creates havoc for commuters and can result in death and injury. Civil unrest not only creates drama with an impact, but it can also result in disaster.

- *Politics*. Matters of world, national or local politics are important to how people live. While many people are out of touch with politics, most people carry some interest because of the way public policy and rule of law affects the way people interact with their society. Accurate presentation of facts is essential to aiding readers in understanding the activities of public officials whether elected, appointed or simply hired.

- *Human Interest/Emotion*. Fascinating stories of ordinary people having extraordinary experiences add a quality of inspiration, humor or sadness to a mundane world. These stories take a positive tone and generally appeal to our shared humanity. Human interest usually involves human beings, but it can focus on animals as well.

- *Entertainment*. Movies, television, theater, sports and music are among the myriad forms of entertainment that amuse members of a varied audience. That is why we see so much about the antics of Hollywood entertainers, follies of sports heroes and plans of the hottest musicians. Reviews of movies, plays, TV shows and concerts make up an important part of a publication. After all, consumers of entertainment spend a lot of money on their amusements. They deserve the opportunity to know about the product before they spend.

As you find topics to research and write, it is important that you consider the human side of the news. Legal concerns as well as ethical matters often dictate what you write and publish. Even in a society where free expression is a hallmark, you must temper your expressions with responsibility and accountability. In American culture, free expression is your right; responsibility is your obligation.