UNDERSTANDING NEWS

So...what is news anyway?
A DEFINITION OF NEWS

1. News must be factual, yet not all facts are news.
2. News is primarily about people, what they say and do.
3. News is not necessarily a report of a recent event.
4. What is important news to one person, community or school may or may not be important to another person, community or school.
5. What is news today is often not news tomorrow.
6. Two factors necessary to news, interest and importance, are not always synonymous.
What...a story can be about an event even if it’s not recent?

- Maybe something was just disclosed.
- What if something in a person’s past just surfaced.
- It could be a parole board decision about a murder that took place 40 years ago. (Susan Atkins killed Sharon Tate in 1969)
- Perhaps the events have not yet happened.
Maybe I should explain “synonymous”!

- First, “synonymous” means the same or equivalent.
- Now, let’s revisit the point made earlier: Two factors necessary to news, interest and importance, are not always synonymous.
- Why aren’t interest and importance always equivalent?
- Well, the most important news story isn’t always the most interesting (That’s just the way it is!)
- Here’s an easy example to illustrate:
- Page 1 of the Happy School Gazette has two stories: School board announces the building of a new gym and the school’s athletic director is being sued for sexual harassment by one of the coaches.

Hmm…let’s see…which one would you read first?

Get The point?
HARD NEWS vs SOFT NEWS

- Hard News: has significance for relatively large numbers of readers, listeners and viewers about timely events that have just happened or are about to happen.
- Topics include government, politics, foreign affairs, education, religion, courts, financial markets and the like.
- Despite its importance, attracts fewer readers, listeners or viewers (less interesting and more difficult to understand than soft news)
Hard News/Soft News Continued

- Soft News: is usually less important because it entertains, though it may also inform, of course, and is often less timely than hard news.

- It includes human interest and feature stories that may often relate to hard news.

- It appeals more to emotions than the intellect and the desire to be informed.
The story discussing the announcement by President Obama that Banks will be required to work with homeowners to avoid foreclosures (Hard News)

A story about Sam Smith’s struggles to make ends meet and how he hopes the new requirements by Obama will allow him to save his house that he’s lived in with his family for 20 years (Soft News)

Skilled writers combine hard and soft news elements by highlighting a human angle to a story with an important subject.
TEN ELEMENTS OF NEWS

1. Immediacy or timeliness
2. Proximity or nearness
3. Consequence or impact
4. Prominence
5. Drama
6. Oddity or unusualness
7. Conflict
8. Sex
9. Emotions and instincts
10. Progress
IMMEDIACY OR TIMELINESS

- The most essential element of most news.
- For daily papers and broadcast and online news, the words “yesterday,” “last night,” “today” and “tomorrow” characterize most stories.
- Even stories about past events focus on a “today” angle to the previous event.
- How do editors of school newspapers accomplish this with early deadlines?
Timeliness in school papers

- **Scenario** – Your newspaper comes out Nov. 13. Your principal resigns on Nov. 1 and the public was informed. How do you cover this huge story that is 2 weeks old? Do you cover it?

- **Scenario** – The governor speaks at an all-school assembly on Nov. 3. The timeliness is gone, but is it really? What spin-off stories might come out of this if a reporter does his/her homework? Maybe the speech ties to pending legislation or leads students to take action on an issue.

- **Scenario** – Class schedules are going to change effective next year. Announced at school board meeting, in letter to parents, and a letter to students at school. Straight news story is pointless, but what else would be newsworthy?

- Many news stories have the potential for an update or further reporting if the reporter persists!
PROXIMITY OR NEARNESS

- Geographic as well as interest nearness (impact)
- Readers are more interested in events geographically near
- Students are more interested in events that affect their school than a neighboring one
Interest Nearness (Impact)

- An incident in Iraq between the Army and insurgents isn’t very near geographically.
- Email correspondence between a high school student in Iraq and a high school student in California isn’t geographically near, but it might have interest nearness, or impact.
Interest Nearness (Impact)

- Emphasize a local or school angle of a story whenever possible – “School prepares emergency plan for violence”
  → story in Indiana emphasized local angle of a new state law shortly after Columbine shootings.

- Other topics for student interest stories that have local angle: abortion, nutrition, sexuality, road rage, gun violence, alternative medicines, censorship of the Internet and legal restrictions on personal freedoms (to name a few 😊)
CONSEQUENCE

- Refers to importance and impact
- Stories that affect every student in school will have more interest than one affecting only members of one class or club.
- What are some topics???
- Don’t forget…impact isn’t always bad!
PROMINENCE

- Includes persons, places, things and situations known to the public by reason of
- Wealth
- Social position
- Achievement
- Previous positive or negative publicity
- Lindsay Lohan and Amanda Bynes seem to fit several 😊

NAMES MAKE NEWS!!!!

What about at school???

Is it fair? Is it balanced with “true” importance?
DRAMA

- Mystery, suspense, comedy, the unusual and even the bizarre
- Three hikers in Yosemite National Park lost for four days during a blizzard...that's drama!
- So many different angles to write the story from...makes for interesting story!!
ODDITY OR UNUSUALNESS

- Greater the unusualness, the greater its value as news.
- One-of-a-kind stories or rarely happening events are news. Millennium stories…other examples?
- Some stories depend entirely on this feature.
CONFLICT

- One of the most basic and important news elements.
- Inherent in stories about sports, war, crime, much news of government, etc.
- Stories containing conflict often contain drama and oddity which create emotional appeal.
SEX

- Is the news value in stories about romance, marriage, divorce, etc.
- Exploited by media through video and images.
- Obviously, this element is used carefully in a student newspaper.
EMOTIONS AND INSTINCTS

- Relates to human desire for food, shelter and clothing; universal interest in children and animals; and the elements of fear, jealousy, sympathy, love, and generosity.

- What would that look like in student newspapers?

- Stories with emotional elements are generally the most read in print media.
PROGRESS

- Involves any significant change for the betterment of humanity.
- Topics might include advances in treatment of diseases; solving pollution problems; positive relations with fighting countries; etc.
- In school papers may refer to adding new courses to the curriculum or expanding the school.