

Humphrey Discounts Allegations

You are a newspaper editor who supports the opposition to Conservative M.P. Humphrey Humphrey.

Vocabulary Choices:

HUMPHREY DISCOUNTS ALLEGATIONS
or
"DRUG TALK ALL LIES," SNARLS HUMPHREY

OTTAWA (UBI) Conservative M.P./warhorse and liquor baron/distillery executive Humphrey Humphrey denounced/denied today that reports/allegations implicating/involving him in undercover/subversive drug/dope retailing/peddling were true/had any basis in fact. Addressing a dinner/blowout for colleagues/hangers-on at a swank/exclusive Ottawa restaurant, Humphrey angrily denied/calmly refuted swarms of rumours/numerous reports that he and a gang/group of cronies/acquaintances had sneaked/smuggled into the national's capital/Ottawa lethal doses/dangerous amounts of diluted/adulterated ambrosia under cover of dark/at night.

"Such talk is all lies," snarled/said Humphrey, hunched over/seated with a tumbler of booze/an after-dinner cocktail.

Rumour-mongers/sources around Parliament Hill suggest/hint tonight Humphrey's alleged crime/scrape is the subject of Cabinet investigation/talk. Meantime, Bay Street analysts/mandarins note/point to the fact that Humphrey stock has plummeted/fallen in the last two days/suddenly in the face of/as a result of a wave of panic/selling.

Source: Jim Henderson, *Mediascan* (Toronto:pub, 1976), pp.40-41

Assignment

- You have been given the article on Humphrey by one of your reporters.
- You have the option of choosing from the vocabulary provided.
- What choices in the vocabulary would you make?
- How would you have the story placed in your paper?
- Select the most appropriate headline.
- Explain the reasons for each of your responses. (Remember that you oppose Humphrey.)
- Once you have done this, imagine that you are now supportive of Mr. Humphrey.
 - What do you choose to do now?
 - What does this exercise tell us about media values?

Source: *Indirections*, December 1989, p.76.

News Judgement

Trying to define what constitutes news is a delicate business. Some of the key factors include:

Impact: Is the only factory in town closing down? That has a bigger impact than two people being laid off, so it's bigger news. A disaster is big news because of its impact, leaving people hurt and homeless.

Conflict: A demonstration for animal rights in which people peacefully march and chant slogans is not a major news story. But if a confrontation develops between the protesters and a fur coat merchant, and someone gets hurt, it becomes a major story because the level of conflict has increased.

Prominence: Are celebrities or politicians involved in a story? If so, it's a bigger story. A failed marriage in the Royal Family is a big headline around the world, but the same problems, if they happened to your next-door neighbour, wouldn't even make the local paper.

Proximity: If your newspaper is in Timmins, Ontario, and a homeless person freezes to death on Timmins' main street one winter night, that's big news. But if your newspaper is in Whitehorse, Yukon, you are not as interested in a death in Timmins, because it isn't close to your readers.

Freshness: News has a short shelf life. If a development happened an hour before the paper's deadline, it's bigger news than if it's 24 hours old.

Novelty: There's a saying that "if a dog bites a man it isn't news, but if a man bites a dog, that's news." Human interest: Related to novelty. Stories about the 96-year-old who swims in the ocean every morning, winter and summer, or about the family with 20 foster children and how they cope, are of interest to readers. These factors are all a part of news judgement.

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