

# NEWSEUM COVERING A CATASTROPHE

## Unit Overview Pre- and Post-Visit Activities

We believe that your visit to the Newseum, along with this unit of study on how journalists respond to catastrophic events, will help you and your students better understand the role of the press in our society and the guidelines and principles reporters use in their work. Through this study, students will become more informed and analytical news consumers and, by deepening their understanding of our society, be better equipped to exercise their civic duties.

By actively participating in this unit, including pre-visit activities, a Learning Center class and gallery exploration at the Newseum and post-visit activities, students will come to understand the vital role journalists play in the wake of a disaster. They will also explore the three guiding principles of ethical journalism – fairness, accuracy and clarity – and have the chance to grapple with real-life dilemmas that journalists face covering a range of traumatic events.

Our guiding questions in this unit – What is the role of journalists during a disaster, and what challenges do they face in fulfilling this role? – engenders a number of additional questions that you and your students should keep in mind during your Newseum visit:

Why do we need the press when disaster strikes?

What additional challenges do reporters face when covering catastrophic events?

How should the public evaluate breaking news coverage?

- How do journalists reconcile their personal and professional ethics?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of breaking news coverage?
- How does the press shape our experience of major events?

We appreciate your interest in using the Newseum as an educational resource, granting your students the opportunity to experience the elements of civic engagement, the First Amendment and history that our classes and galleries bring to life.

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## National Standards of Learning

National Center for History in the Schools, National Standards for U.S. History (5-12):

Content	Standard
<p><b>The student understands contemporary American culture.</b>  <b>7-12</b> Explain the influence of media on contemporary American culture. [Explain historical continuity and change]</p>	<b>Era 10, Standard 2D</b>
<p><b>The student understands how a democratic polity debates social issues and mediates between individual or group rights and the common good.</b>  <b>5-12</b> Explore the range of women's organizations, the changing goals of the women's movement, and the issues currently dividing women. [Explain historical continuity and change]</p>	<b>Era 10, Standard 2E</b>

Center for Civic Education, National Standards for Civics and Government

Grades 5-8

Content	Standard
<p><b>The public agenda.</b> Students should be able to explain what is meant by the public agenda and how it is set.</p>	<b>III.F.1.</b>
<p><b>Political communication.</b> Students should be able to evaluate, take, and defend positions on the influence of the media on American political life.</p>	<b>III.F.2.</b>
<p><b>Political rights.</b> Students should be able to evaluate, take, and defend positions on issues involving political rights.</p>	<b>V.B.2.</b>
<p><b>Scope and limits of rights.</b> Students should be able to evaluate, take, and defend positions on issues regarding the proper scope and limits of rights.</p>	<b>V.B.4.</b>
<p><b>Knowledge and participation.</b> Students should be able to explain the importance of knowledge to competent and responsible participation in American democracy.</p>	<b>V.E.5.</b>

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Grades 9-12

Content	Standard
<b>The public agenda.</b> Students should be able to evaluate, take, and defend positions about how the public agenda is set.	<b>III.E.1.</b>
<b>Public opinion and behavior of the electorate.</b> Students should be able to evaluate, take, and defend positions about the role of public opinion in American politics.	<b>III.E.2.</b>
<b>Political communication: television, radio, the press, and political persuasion.</b> Students should be able to evaluate, take, and defend positions on the influence of the media on American political life.	<b>III.E.3.</b>
<b>Political rights.</b> Students should be able to evaluate, take, and defend positions on issues regarding political rights.	<b>V.B.2.</b>
<b>Scope and limits of rights.</b> Students should be able to evaluate, take, and defend positions on issues regarding the proper scope and limits of rights.	<b>V.B.5.</b>
<b>Knowledge and participation.</b> Students should be able to explain the importance of knowledge to competent and responsible participation in American democracy.	<b>V.E.5.</b>

## National Council for the Social Studies, Curriculum Standards for Social Studies

Middle Grades

Content	Standard
Learners will understand: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How people from different cultures develop different values and ways of interpreting experience.</li> <li>• Learners will be able to:</li> <li>• Evaluate how data and experiences may be interpreted differently by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference.</li> </ul>	<b>1. Culture</b>
Learners will understand: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That groups and institutions influence culture in a variety of ways.</li> <li>• Learners will be able to:</li> <li>• Analyze the effects of interactions between and among individuals, groups, and institutions.</li> <li>• Identify and analyze the impact of tensions between and among individuals, groups, and institutions.</li> <li>• Understand examples of tensions between belief systems and governmental actions and policies.</li> <li>• Evaluate how groups and institutions work to meet individual needs and promote or fail to promote the common good.</li> </ul>	<b>5. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions</b>

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High School

Content	Standard
<p>Learners will understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How people from different cultures develop diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference.</li> <li>• That awareness of knowledge of other cultures is important in a connected society and an interdependent world.</li> <li>• Learners will be able to:</li> <li>• Evaluate how data and experiences may be interpreted differently by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference.</li> </ul>	<b>1. Culture</b>
<p>Learners will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research and analyze past periods, events, and recurring issues, using a variety of primary sources (e.g., documents, letters, artifacts, and testimony) as well as secondary sources; validate and weigh evidence for claims, check the usefulness and degree of reliability of sources, and evaluate different interpretations in order to develop their own interpretation supported by the evidence.</li> </ul>	<b>2. Time, Continuity, and Change</b>
<p>Learners will understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The influence of individuals, groups, and institutions on people and events in historical and contemporary settings.</li> <li>• How groups and institutions work to meet individual needs, and can promote the common good and address persistent social issues.</li> <li>• Learners will be able to:</li> <li>• Understand examples of tensions between belief systems and governmental actions and policies.</li> <li>• Investigate how groups and institutions work to meet individual needs, promote or fail to promote the common good, and address persistent social issues.</li> </ul>	<b>5. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions</b>

## Center for Civic Education, National Standards for Civics and Government

Grades 5-8:

Content	Standard
<b>The public agenda.</b> Students should be able to explain what is meant by the public agenda and how it is set.	<b>III.F.1.</b>
<b>Political communication.</b> Students should be able to evaluate, take, and defend positions on the influence of the media on American political life.	<b>III.F.2.</b>
<b>Political rights.</b> Students should be able to evaluate, take, and defend positions on issues involving political rights	<b>V.B.2.</b>
<b>Scope and limits of rights.</b> Students should be able to evaluate, take, and defend positions on issues regarding the proper scope and limits of rights.	<b>V.B.4.</b>
<b>Knowledge and participation.</b> Students should be able to explain the importance of knowledge to competent and responsible participation in American democracy.	<b>V.E.5.</b>

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<b>Knowledge and participation.</b> Students should be able to explain the importance of knowledge to competent and responsible participation in American democracy.	<b>V.E.5.</b>

## National Council of Teachers of English, Standards for the English Language Arts

Content	Standard
Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.	<b>1</b>
Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).	<b>3</b>
Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.	<b>4</b>
Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).	<b>12</b>

## Common Core State Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies (6-12):

Content	Standard
Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.	<b>Reading, 1.</b>
Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.	<b>Reading, 8.</b>

# NEWSEUM COVERING A CATASTROPHE

## Pre-Visit Activities

### **Evaluating Disaster News**

In this activity, students look at news coverage of a recent catastrophe and evaluate the information it provides. By exercising analysis and critical thinking skills, they improve their media literacy and gain an understanding of the vital role the press plays in the wake of a disaster.

### **Where News Comes From**

Students explore where information about important events comes from and how it travels. After studying examples of news stories and charting the sources of information, students stage a mock press conference to experience the process and challenges of effectively communicating and disseminating information.

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## Evaluating Disaster News

**Rationale/Main Concept:** In this activity, students look at news coverage of a recent catastrophe and evaluate the information it provides. By exercising analysis and critical thinking skills, they improve their media literacy and gain an understanding of the vital role the press plays in the wake of a disaster.

**Time:** 30-minute worksheet (to be completed as homework), plus 30 minutes of class discussion

**Materials:**

- Copies of “Evaluating Disaster News” worksheet (1 per student, included in this packet)

**Procedure:**

- Tell your students they’re going to be exploring the role of the press. What is the press? What does the press include? [Make sure students name a wide array of news media: cable news, public access TV, radio, weekly news magazines, online newspapers, etc.] Has the press always included all of these things? *No. The First Amendment was written with the printing press in mind, but new technologies have developed that expanded the forms of press.*
- Freedom of the press is one of the five freedoms protected by the First Amendment. What does it mean that the press is free? [Discuss your students’ ideas. Sum up the discussion by telling them that freedom of the press means the government can’t stop us from publishing information, even if powerful government officials don’t like that information, or even if it is upsetting or unpopular.]
- Tell students they’re going to focus on how reporters exercise freedom of the press in the wake of disastrous events.
- Distribute the “Evaluating Disaster News” worksheets. Tell students they will need to consult printed materials and/or go online to find two sources of news (articles, video clips, blog posts, etc.) about a recent catastrophic event. (This could be a natural disaster, a bombing or other violent attack, etc. You can have all students find news sources about the same event or allow students to choose their own events individually.) To analyze their articles, they’ll use the news consumer’s questions:
  - **Who made this?**
    - Who are the authors? (Professional journalists? Citizen journalists? Average Joes? Qualified experts? Consider both those named and those unnamed.)
  - **How was this made?**
    - What tools/techniques were used?
  - **Why was this made?**
    - What is the reason for its existence?
  - **When was this made?**
    - Is it current? Outdated?
    - Has enough time passed to verify the facts?
  - **What is this missing?**

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- Is this the whole story?
- What perspectives aren't represented?
- What questions aren't answered?
- **Were do I go from here?**
  - Where can I find verification of these facts?
  - Where can I find other perspectives on this topic?
- Make sure students have a clear understanding of what each of the questions means.
- After students have completed their worksheets, discuss their answers to the consumer questions. (Students' answers will vary depending on the type of news source they analyzed.)

Prompts:

- **Who made your news sources?** Who are the people reporting about this type of event?
- **How were your news sources made?** Where did the information come from? How was it communicated to readers/viewers?
- **When were your news sources made?** How long does it take to get information about this type of event? How does the information communicated change over time?
- **Why were your news sources made?** What is the role of your type of report after a catastrophic event?
- **What are your news sources missing?** What other information would you like to have about these events?
- **Where do we go from here?** Where could we find more information about these events?
- Discuss their answers to the questions comparing different forms of disaster news.
  - How many ways are there to share news about this type of event? List the various media.
  - What are the pros and cons of each of these types of news? [Make lists on the board.]
  - Which news source did you find more engaging? Why might this matter when trying to communicate information after a disaster?
  - Did one type of news source emerge as the most useful/informative?
  - If you were on the scene after this type of event, what method of sharing news would you use to report about what was happening?



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Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Evaluating Disaster News

Find two news reports (articles in print or online, TV news segments, blog posts, etc.) about a recent disaster. You should choose two different forms of media. Read/watch the reports and answer the questions below.

### News Source 1

Headline/Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Source: \_\_\_\_\_

*Apply the consumer's questions to your source of information.*

**Who** made this source? \_\_\_\_\_

**How** was this source made? \_\_\_\_\_

**Why** was this source made? \_\_\_\_\_

**When** was this source made? \_\_\_\_\_

**What** is this source missing? \_\_\_\_\_

**Where** do I go from here? \_\_\_\_\_

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## News Source 2

Headline/Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Source: \_\_\_\_\_

*Apply the consumer's questions to your source of information.*

**Who** made this source? \_\_\_\_\_

**How** was this source made? \_\_\_\_\_

**Why** was this source made? \_\_\_\_\_

**When** was this source made? \_\_\_\_\_

**What** is this source missing? \_\_\_\_\_

**Where** do I go from here? \_\_\_\_\_

Which news source did you find more engaging? Why?

Which news source did you find more useful/informative? Why?

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## Where News Comes From

**Rationale/Main Concept:** Students explore where information about important events comes from and how it travels. After studying examples of news stories and charting the sources of information, students stage a mock press conference to experience the process and challenges of effectively communicating and disseminating information.

**Time:** 30-minute worksheet (can be completed as homework), plus 45 minutes for classroom discussion and activity

### Materials:

- Copies of “Where News Comes From” worksheet (1 per student, included in this packet)
- Copies of “Preparing for a Press Conference” worksheet (half of class will need “Press” version, half of class will need “Mayor’s Office” version; included in this packet)

### Procedure:

- Tell students they’re going to explore where information comes from after a major event and how it travels. As in the rest of this unit, they’ll be focusing on the news after catastrophes.
- To begin, where do reporters get the information they use in their news stories about catastrophic events? [Possible ideas: people who witnessed what happened, experts, public documents, anonymous sources, emergency responders, politicians, etc.]
- You’re going to complete a worksheet that will help you track specific examples of how reporters get the information they use in their stories.
- Have all students complete the “Where News Comes From” worksheet in class (individually or in groups) or as homework. They will need to consult printed materials and/or go online to find a written news source (article, blog post, etc.) about a recent catastrophic event.
- After students have completed the worksheet, discuss their answers. Prompts:
  - What sources did journalists use in their reports?
  - When were you unable to determine what the source of the information was? Why do you think this was the case?
  - If you were a journalist covering a disaster, what sources would you seek out to gather information for your report?
- One way reporters may gather information is by attending a press conference. What is a press conference? *A prearranged gathering with news reporters, held by a government official/dignitary/notable personality to gain publicity, to fulfill a request from the press, or pass needed information to the public.*
- What do the officials who call a press conference want to get out of the event? *To share information with the public, using the press/journalists as a means of reaching the general public.*
- What do the reporters present want to get out of a press conference? *To find out about new developments in a story and gather fresh information that they can then report to the public.* Keep in mind that members of the public generally don’t/can’t attend press conferences, so

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we rely on reporters to be there and funnel the information to us.

- Tell students they're going to put on a simulated press conference to experience how it works, including the challenges of both sharing and gathering information in this setting.
- Distribute the "Preparing for a Press Conference" worksheets. Half of the class will act as reporters, and the other half will act as representatives from the mayor's office. If your class is large, you may want to create two teams representing the press and two teams representing the mayor's office.
- Allow students time to read the background information and prepare their facts/questions.
- Conduct the press conference simulation according to the directions on the worksheets.
- After the simulation, discuss the students' experiences. Prompts:
  - What was that experience like? Was it stressful? Frustrating? Informative?
  - What was the most difficult part of the experience? What was the easiest?
  - What was it like being a reporter in this situation? How did you decide what questions to ask? Were all of your questions answered?
  - What was it like being a public official in this situation? Was it difficult to field the reporters' questions? How did you decide which questions to answer?
  - Did the reporters and the officials have the same goals for the press conference?
  - Make a chart of the pros and cons of using press conferences as a source of information for reporting on a catastrophic event, from the perspective of the general public.

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Where News Comes From

Find a written news report (an article in print or online, a blog post, etc.) about a recent disaster. Read the report and identify at least eight facts. You may want to underline or highlight the facts as you read. Then fill out the chart below, identifying each fact's source (examples: eyewitness account, statement by the mayor, etc.). If you cannot identify the source of any of the facts, write "unknown" and then write your best guess as to where the information may have come from.

FACT	SOURCE

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Preparing for a Press Conference PRESS

### **Background:**

- A tornado touched down in your town approximately half an hour ago.
- Your newsroom has been receiving calls from residents reporting heavy damage in the downtown area, including broken windows, downed power lines and fallen trees.
- The last tornado that struck your town was in 1982. It killed two dozen people and caused millions of dollars in damage.
- Heavy thunderstorms continue to move through your area.

### **Your task:**

On a piece of paper, work together to write at least 10 questions that you would like to ask the public officials holding the press conference in order to fill in the gaps in the information above. You will have the opportunity to ask these questions at the press conference. Keep in mind that your ultimate goal is to get vital information to the public so that everyone will understand what has happened and will happen.

### **Steps for the simulation:**

1. Seat members of the press and the mayor's office on opposite sides of the room.
2. A representative or representatives for the mayor's office will go to the front of the room and present a two-minute overview of the situation.
3. The mayor's office will answer questions from the press for five minutes. Members of the press must raise their hands and wait to be called on by a member of the mayor's office.
4. The press conference will conclude after no more than 10 minutes.

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Preparing for a Press Conference MAYOR'S OFFICE

### Background:

- A tornado touched down in your town approximately half an hour ago.
- The tornado was very strong. It was rated F3 – “severe” – on a scale of F0 to F5.
- The tornado struck the heavily populated downtown area, breaking windows in hundreds of buildings.
- Power lines have fallen throughout the city and at least half of the city is without electricity. The mayor’s office is currently using back-up generators. More people will likely lose power as trees that were destabilized by the storm continue to fall.
- You do not yet have a count of how many people have been injured or killed, but 911 calls have reported at least three fatalities.
- The structure of at least one large building downtown was heavily damaged, leaving the building in danger of collapsing.
- The downtown area is currently being evacuated due to the amount of debris and questions about building stability.
- Several firefighters and two fire trucks are currently trapped in a collapsed warehouse near the edge of the downtown area.
- Many roads are impassable, making a full assessment of the damage impossible at this time.
- Some of the generators at the 911 call center are working, and callers may have difficulty getting through to an operator.
- Heavy thunderstorms continue to move through the area; more tornadoes are possible.

### Your task:

On a piece of paper, work together to write a two-minute statement summarizing the information above. You will deliver this statement and then take questions from the press. Before the press conference begins, decide if you want to invent any details beyond the facts listed above. When answering questions, be prepared to deal with questions you can’t answer, either because you do not think it wise to share the information or you do not know the answer. Keep in mind that your ultimate goal is to satisfy public curiosity while also protecting public safety.

### Steps for the simulation:

1. Seat members of the press and the mayor’s office on opposite sides of the room.
2. A representative or representatives for the public officials will go to the front of the room and present a two-minute overview of the situation.
3. The public officials will answer questions from the press for five minutes. Members of the press must raise their hands and wait to be called on by an official.
4. The press conference will conclude after no more than 10 minutes.

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## Post-Visit Activities

### **The Fairness Formula**

Students reinforce their understanding of media ethics by reading an article about the many concerns the news media must juggle to ensure fair coverage of events. An activity sheet guides analysis of the article and applies its principles to the type of disaster reporting situations students encountered in their Learning Center class.

### **Planning for the Unpredictable**

Working in teams, students prepare a plan of action for responding to possible traumatic events from the perspective of journalists. Through class discussion, students grapple with how to balance these plans with the unpredictable nature of disasters and compare and contrast how the media and the general public should prepare for such events.



# NEWSEUM COVERING A CATASTROPHE

## The Fairness Formula

**Rationale/Main Concept:** Students reinforce their understanding of media ethics by reading an article about the many concerns the news media must juggle to ensure fair coverage of events. An activity sheet guides analysis of the article and applies its principles to the type of disaster reporting situations students encountered in their Learning Center class.

**Time:** 40 minutes

**Materials:**

- Copies of “Fairness Formula Starts with Accuracy” article (1 per student, included in this packet)
- Copies of “The Fairness Formula” worksheet (1 per student, included in this packet)

**Procedure:**

- Have students read the article “Fairness Begins with Accuracy” and answer the questions on the corresponding worksheet. Discuss their answers as a class.
- Compare and contrast these five principles to the three guidelines discussed in the Learning Center class (accuracy, fairness and clarity). Possible prompts:
  - Which approach do you find more appealing? Why?
  - Which approach do you find more comprehensive? Why?
  - Are these two approaches to ethical reporting compatible? Why or why not?
- Compare and contrast the challenges of covering routine news stories and disastrous events. Possible prompts:
  - In the first sentence of the article, Charles Overby writes, “People who talk with the Freedom Forum about news complain that the media can and should do a better job.” Does this statement apply to all kinds of news coverage? Do you think people complain equally about coverage of major catastrophes and smaller stories? Why or why not?
  - From the perspective of the reporter, how are these guidelines helpful in times of crisis? How might they make the job more difficult?
  - What guidelines should we, the news consumers, follow when reading/viewing the news? How can we distinguish quality news coverage from that lacking the “fairness formula?” Should we have different standards for breaking news coverage of disasters versus routine daily news coverage?

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## Fairness Formula Starts with Accuracy

By Charles Overby

People who talk with the Freedom Forum about news complain that the media can and should do a better job. Most newspeople tell us the same thing. So what's the problem?

A lack of attention to basics. In meetings with small groups around the country, we encouraged people to talk about fairness in the media. The topic quickly became a broad umbrella for complaints in general about the media. Most of the complaints focused on the basics of news gathering and presentation. From those discussions, I have broken down the components of fairness into five basic categories that provide an easy-to-remember formula: A+B+C+D+E = F (fairness).

Accuracy + balance + completeness + detachment + ethics = fairness. There are other ways to state it, but these five categories generally capture most of the complaints we have heard about the need for fairness and improvement in the media. Many editors and news directors may think the components are so basic that their news reports meet those standards easily. But many of the people whom we interviewed do not think so. The public expects all five categories — not two or three — to be applied to all news stories. A quick look at the five categories:

**ACCURACY** — This is the basic component of fairness, but it generated lots of discussion, especially in the area of corrections. Most newspapers still do a superficial job of correcting their errors. Procedures often are not reader-friendly. The better newspapers run more corrections, not fewer, every day than average newspapers. Unfortunately, it is rare to see corrections on television.

**BALANCE** — Many in the public think stories reflect definite points of view. Often, the other side is given scant, secondary attention, far down in the news report.

**COMPLETENESS** — This was the biggest complaint that we heard. Our respondents said reporters fail to tell the whole story because of inexperience, ineptitude, laziness, or lack of space or time. The lack of completeness affects context.

**DETACHMENT** — A frequent complaint lodged by people who deal with the media was that reporters and editors construct their stories in advance and only want news sources to confirm their preconceived notions. Once the news “hook” is established, there is not much fair and open reporting that follows.

**ETHICS** — This involves the way reporters and editors pursue stories, the feeling that editorial viewpoints drive news content, placement and headlines. This category also focuses on the methodology of reporting, ranging from paparazzi photography to insensitivity to victims.

These five areas need more discussion in newsrooms. If the public could see improvements and regular explanations about these basic elements, they probably would develop more trust in the mainstream media. This isn't rocket science. Every editor and news director should be capable of identifying ways to improve these deficiencies. For those news executives who think they are doing just fine in all these categories, bring in a dozen readers or viewers and ask them.

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*Charles L. Overby is chairman of the Freedom Forum, Newseum and Diversity Institute.*

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## The Fairness Formula

In your own words, briefly define the five elements of fair journalism.

Accuracy: \_\_\_\_\_

Balance: \_\_\_\_\_

Completeness: \_\_\_\_\_

Detachment: \_\_\_\_\_

Ethics: \_\_\_\_\_

Why do you think the public wants the news to be fair?

The idea of a fair news media only fully developed in the 20th century. From the perspective of reporters, what is an advantage of adhering to this principle? What is a disadvantage?

Advantage	Disadvantage

From the perspective of a consumer, what is an advantage of have news media adhere to this principle? What is a disadvantage?

Advantage	Disadvantage

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Which of the five elements of fair journalism do you think is the most difficult to achieve? Why?

Imagine you are a reporter who covers local politics for a city-wide blog. You attend a city council meeting where two of the council members get into a heated argument about tax cuts. How do you make sure your coverage of this story is ...

Accurate: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Balanced: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Complete: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Detached: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Ethical: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Imagine you are a reporter covering foreign affairs in a small country in Central America. In the middle of the night, an earthquake rattles the city where you are staying. You go outside and find the streets full of chaos. Many buildings have collapsed, and several fires are burning. Injured people fill the streets. What do you do to make sure your coverage of this story is ...

Accurate: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Balanced: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Complete: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Detached: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Ethical: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# NEWSEUM COVERING A CATASTROPHE

## Planning for the Unpredictable

**Rationale/Main Concept:** Working in teams, students prepare a plan of action for responding to possible traumatic events from the perspective of journalists. Through class discussion, students grapple with how to balance these plans with the unpredictable nature of disasters and compare and contrast how the media and the general public should prepare for such events.

**Time:** 45 minutes

**Materials:**

- Copies of the “Planning for the Unpredictable” worksheet (1 per student, included in this packet)

**Procedure:**

- Tell students that now that they’ve explored the role of the press in covering disasters from many angles, they’re going to put their knowledge into action. Working in teams, they’ll create plans for how a media outlet should respond to a catastrophe.
- Divide students into four groups and assign each group a type of news outlet (examples: TV station, local news blog, newspaper, etc.).
- Each group will use the “Planning for the Unpredictable” worksheet to build a plan for how their news outlet will respond to a disaster.
- After groups have completed their plans, have them share them with the class. Discuss the plans and the process of creating them. Prompts:
  - Which part of the plan was the easiest to decide? Which was the most difficult? Why?
  - Would this plan work for all types of disasters? If yes, why? If not, which ones might require different plans, and why?
  - How effective do you think these plans would be when responding to a real disaster? Which policies would work? Which might have to be changed?
  - How comprehensive is this plan? Is it missing any key issues? What did you list under “Other ideas for how your news outlet will respond to a disaster?”
  - How much more detailed would you have to make your plan to make it work in real life?
  - Do the plans vary among the different types of news outlets?
  - How flexible is your plan?
  - Imagine you were making a disaster response plan for yourself and your family. How would it be the same as and different from this plan?

# NEWSEUM COVERING A CATASTROPHE

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Planning for the Unpredictable

You and your team are going to design a plan for a news outlet to respond to a possible disaster. When formulating your plan, keep in mind that you may want to have multiple options in response to each question to maximize flexibility.

Your news outlet (TV news station, local news blog, etc.): \_\_\_\_\_

### Disaster Response Plan

When will you begin reporting on the disaster? (Immediately? After public safety officials have briefed the public on what happened/is happening? The next day?)

How will you communicate with your staff? (Keep in mind that some forms of communication may be working better than others.)

Who will work? (If large numbers of your staff are unable to reach the office, are people available to fill in?)

Where will your staff work? (If your office space is no longer safe, where will you go?)

# NEWSEUM COVERING A CATASTROPHE

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Who will you attempt to contact to get information about what has happened/is happening?  
(Keep in mind that many people will be trying to gather this information. Some sources may become overwhelmed, so you will need multiple options.)

How will you share information with the public? (What if your usual form of publication is not working? Are there other ways to share the information you gather?)

What instructions will you give your staff concerning balancing their safety with the need to gather information?

What instructions will you give your staff concerning fact-checking/confirming information about what has happened/is happening?

Other ideas for how your news outlet will respond to a disaster:

# NEWSEUM COVERING A CATASTROPHE

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## In the Newseum

### Visit the 9/11 Gallery (Level 4)

**Find the chronology of 9/11 events that encircles the crumpled broadcast antenna at the center of the gallery.**

Find the events listed below. Read the captions and examine the photographs, then fill out the chart to compare and contrast how each group reacted some of the day's events. Think about the actions each individual might take, and be specific in your answers.

<b>Time/Event</b>	<b>How would a journalist at the scene respond?</b>	<b>How would a firefighter or police officer at the scene respond?</b>	<b>How would a member of the public at the scene respond?</b>
<b>8:53 a.m.</b> Plane crashes into World Trade Center			
<b>10:07 a.m.</b> One World Trade Center tower collapses			
<b>10:30 a.m.</b> New York Gov. George Pataki declares state of emergency			

**Think about and discuss:** What did all of these groups' responses to the events of 9/11 have in common? How was each group's experience that day unique?



# NEWSEUM COVERING A CATASTROPHE

Find the wall of front pages from 9/11. Choose two that you think are interesting and fill out the chart below. You can also find copies of the pages in a binder below the display.

## Front Page #1

Name of Newspaper :

## Front Page #2

Name of Newspaper:

What images do these front pages use?

Paper #1	Paper #2

When you look at each page, how do you feel?

Paper #1	Paper #2

What aspect of the event does this newspaper focus on? Terrorism? Victims and their families? Something else?

Paper #1	Paper #2

If this were the first news report that you saw about 9/11, what might you think about the event?

Paper #1	Paper #2

**Think about and discuss:** Are there any ideas or themes that multiple 9/11 front pages have in common? How has the way 9/11 was portrayed in the news affected our understanding of the event?