

The Media's Definition of News

By Marie Zhuikov

Charles Dana, who ran the New York Sun from 1869-1897, said news is: "anything that interests a large part of the community and has never been brought to its attention before."

One of his editors provided the classic comment, "If a dog bites a man, it's not news. If a man bites a dog, it's news." That is still true today. Definitions of news vary somewhat depending on the time period, but basically, news is:

- Information about a break from the normal flow of events, an interruption in the expected.
- Information people need in order to make rational decisions about their lives.

To help determine whether your topic/issue will be of media interest, test it with these seven factors that determine newsworthiness.

1. **IMPACT:** Events or activities that are likely to affect many people.
2. **TIMELINESS:** Events that are immediate and recent. (No matter how important the event, news value diminishes over time.)
3. **PROMINENCE:** Events involving well-known people or institutions.
4. **PROXIMITY:** Events in the circulation or broadcast area.
5. **CONFLICT:** Events that reflect clashes between people and/or institutions.
6. **THE BIZZARE:** Events that stray from the normal experiences of everyday life.
7. **CURRENCY:** Events and situations that are being talked about "around the watercooler."

Most newsworthy events/ideas are a combination of these guidelines. I'm not saying it's always the best thing for society, but this is what many journalists are taught.