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A BASIS
for
RATING WEEKLY NEWSPAPERS

by

Donald R. Goe

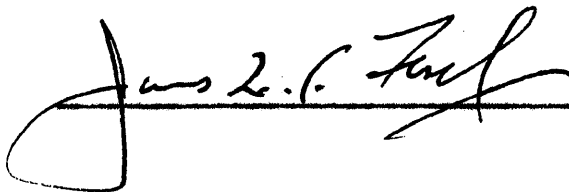
B.A., Southwestern College, 1938

Presented in partial fulfillment of the
requirement for the degree of Mas-
ter of Arts.

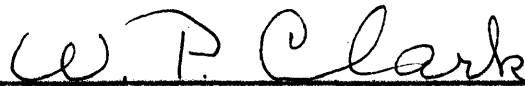
Montana State University

1947

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Many publishers and others connected with newspaper work in the weekly field have often felt the need for a method by which they could compare the news content and quality of their papers with that of other papers. A scientifically sound, workable, and yet simple method of comparison should satisfy that need.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. It was the purpose of this study to prepare a standard for the measurement of weekly newspapers which would:

- (1) Show the nature and extent of the news content in leading weekly newspapers in the United States.
- (2) Establish the proportion of total space devoted to news content as compared with advertising, news pictures, editorial material, and columns.
- (3) Show to what extent the news writing in the selected papers conforms to the standards set forth in textbooks by journalists and educators.
- (4) Determine to what extent the selected newspapers go outside of their own trade territory for state or national news.

Answers to these questions were sought through a qualitative and quantitative measurement of the winners of the National Editorial Association Better Newspaper Contests in the class for general excellence, for 1946 and 1947, and from journalism textbooks. Six issues each of the 12 winning papers were studied.

The NEA winners selected included:

Brighton Argus, Brighton, Mich.; Cobb County Times, Marietta, Ga.; Covina Argus-Citizen, Covina, Calif.; Heron Lake News, Heron Lake, Minn.; Hillsboro Argus, Hillsboro, Ore.; Lapeer County Press, Lapeer, Mich.; Larchmont Times, Larchmont, N. Y.; Mesa Journal-Tribune, Mesa, Ariz.; Oakland Acorn, Oakland, Ia.; Sumner Gazette, Sumner, Ia.; Weekly Reflex, Kaysville, Utah, and Western Springs Times, Western Springs, Ill.

The results obtained from the measurement were compared with the results of a similar analysis of six Montana weekly newspapers--winners of the Montana State University School of Journalism awards in general excellence for 1946.

The Montana papers analyzed were: Bozeman Courier, Bozeman; Cutbank Pioneer Press, Cutbank; Glasgow Courier, Glasgow; Kalispell News, Kalispell, and Missoula County Times, Missoula.

Each weekly newspaper was measured for the second issue of each of the following months over a period of a

year: May, July, September, and November, 1946, and January and March, 1947. The same issue in six definite months was selected so that the results of the study would show no partiality in reasonable news content or advertising.

II. IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

Comparison with other weekly newspapers. The publisher of the weekly paper has no method, other than by his own judgment, by which to determine whether his paper compares favorably in news content and writing with newspapers which have been selected as outstanding.

The results of the present study may give the publisher of the community paper a basis for comparison with papers which competent judges believe to be fulfilling the news-function of the weekly paper.

Charles L. Allen lists these news-functions as:

- (1) To get all the local news.
- (2) To get all the news of local interest out of a story which is of general interest.
- (3) To give news in the form of "local features" and helpful material for the country and town resident.¹

Conscientious weekly publishers are continually on the alert for methods to improve their papers. Unless the

¹ Charles Laurel Allen, Country Journalism (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1928), p. 21.

publisher is certain about judging news content he lacks a yardstick which might aid him in improving his paper. A dependable yardstick may aid the publisher in understanding why some papers garner important contest points in news content and quality categories year after year, while his own paper does not even make a showing.

The publisher is also interested in the success of his paper with his own readers. By taking the time and effort to find out what his paper lacks, and then by making the necessary corrections, he may be able to improve the status of the paper in the community.

A method of comparison is discussed in this study which may be used by publishers in comparing their papers with those which win the better newspaper contests.

Judging regional newspaper contests. The National Editorial Association uses a system devised in 1940 by Charles Laurel Allen in judging its Better Newspaper Contest. By Allen's system, each paper is graded on a basis of 100 points. A maximum of 30 points is given for news writing under this system.²

Many state press associations conduct annual regional

² Information received in a letter from Walter Curtis, assistant manager of the National Editorial Association, Chicago.

contests and judge member newspapers, using the same or similar methods. In this study, a method is presented by which the state papers can be compared with the winners of the NEA contest. Such comparisons would provide useful information for the judges of these regional contests.

In addition, the publisher of the paper entered in the regional contest could see for himself what his paper lacks from a news standpoint, as compared with national prizewinners. If he is interested in improving his papers, as most publishers are, he can use this information as a guide in filling gaps in the news content of his paper.

Use by historians and sociologists. It is conceivable that the results contained herein might be used by journalism historians and sociologists in comparing the news content of weekly papers of one era with that of another. The categories in the quantitative study are designed to permit the measurement of news which might appear in any weekly newspaper.

III. ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS

Methods of procedure. The following chapter will explain in detail the method used in measuring the news content of the weekly papers, and of arriving at a standard for the various categories chosen to represent each type of news

subject likely to be found in any weekly paper.

The chapter will also explain the methods used in arriving at a standard for measuring the quality of the news found in the papers.

Results of the survey. Two chapters are devoted to recording the results of both the qualitative and quantitative surveys. The results are arranged so that a comparison can be made with other weekly newspapers analyzed in a similar manner.

Conclusions and interpretations. The final chapter includes a summary of the work completed in the study and the results obtained. Also included in this chapter will be the author's interpretations of the findings and the implications involved in them.

IV. REVIEW OF PREVIOUS STUDIES

The Country Newspaper. One of the best known attempts to analyze weekly newspapers quantitatively was by Malcolm M. Willey.³ Willey made an analysis of the weekly newspapers in Connecticut and devised a system which has been used by others in making similar studies of the weekly papers of

³ Malcolm M. Willey, The Country Newspaper (Chapel Hill, N. C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1926), pps. 74-85.

their own states. Among the states whose weekly newspapers were analyzed by Willey's method were Minnesota and Nebraska.⁴

The system devised by Willey included seven categories. They were civic, economic, cultural, sensational, sports, personal, and editorial. Willey selected the category for each story from the "what" angle of the lead.

Quantitative study of daily papers. Several attempts have been made to analyze the content of daily papers, the first being made by Speed as early as 1893.⁵ One of the most exhaustive of these attempts was made by the graduate department of social economy and social research at Bryn Mawr College.⁶ A study which covers only a part of the material, that of foreign news, was made by Woodward in 1930.⁷ Willard G. Bleyer is one of the few newspaper men and journalists who have attempted a quantitative analysis of newspapers.

⁴ Irene Barnes Taueber, "Material in Minnesota Weekly Newspapers," Journalism Quarterly, IX: 281-289, September, 1932, and G. C. Walker, "A Yardstick for the Measurement of Country Weekly Service," Journalism Quarterly, VII: 293-302, December, 1930.

⁵ J. G. Speed, "Do Newspapers Now Give the News?" Forum, XV: 705-711, August, 1893.

⁶ S. M. Kingsbury, H. Hart, et. al., Newspapers and the News. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1937).

⁷ J. L. Woodward, Foreign News in American Morning Newspapers (New York: 1930).

⁸ Willard G. Bleyer, "Research Problems and Research Analysis," Journalism Quarterly, I: 17-23, March, 1924.

CHAPTER II

METHODS OF PROCEDURE

I. QUANTITATIVE MEASUREMENT

The object of the quantitative measurement of selected newspapers was to establish, in percentages of total space, the news content of leading weekly newspapers in the United States.

A simple group of news categories was selected and tested under which could be listed by subjects the news content found in any weekly paper. Sub-categories were then selected which would include in more detail the types of news measured.

Although advertising was not included as a basic part of the study, a measurement was made of the several types of advertising: display, classified, legal, promotion, and reader.

News categories. The main news categories include "economic" under which are placed all agriculture, business, and labor news stories. The "government" category has as sub-categories: administration, judiciary, legislation, and politics. "Sociology" includes the sub-categories: education, religion, weather, and personal. The personal category was further broken down into such sub-categories as:

**COPY OF FORM USED IN TABULATING RESULTS
OF QUANTITATIVE SURVEY**

Paper **WEEKLY REFLEX**

Published at **KAYSVILLE, UTAH**

Date **NOVEMBER 14, 1946**

7 Columns by 21 Inches 8 Pages 1135 Total Inches

	LOCAL										STATE										NATIONAL										TOTAL	PCT.
	Inches	Pct.	Col.	Pct.	Editorial	Pct.	Pictures	Pct.	Total	Pct.	Inches	Pct.	Col.	Pct.	Editorial	Pct.	Pictures	Pct.	Total	Pct.	Inches	Pct.	Col.	Pct.	Editorial	Pct.	Pictures	Pct.	Total	Pct.		
Economic																																
Agriculture	4	0.4				18	1.6	22	2.0											10 1/2	0.9							10 1/2	0.9	32 1/2	2.9	
Labor	7	0.6						7	0.6																					7	0.6	
Business	16	1.4						16	1.4																					16	1.4	
Totals	27	2.4				18	1.6	45	4.0											10 1/2	0.9							10 1/2	0.9	55 1/2	4.9	
Government																																
Administration	11	1.0						11	1.0											1	0.1					4 1/2	0.4	5 1/2	0.5	16 1/2	1.5	
Judiciary	1 1/2	0.1						1 1/2	0.1																					1 1/2	0.1	
Legislation																																
Politics																																
Totals	12 1/2	1.1						12 1/2	1.1											1	0.1					4 1/2	0.4	5 1/2	0.5	18	1.6	
Sociology																																
Education	44 1/2	3.9				2	0.2	46 1/2	4.1											10	0.9					12	1.1	22	2.0	60 1/2	5.1	
Religion																																
Weather																																
Personal																																
Accident																																
Country Corres.	120	10.6						120	10.6																					120	10.6	
Crime	6	0.5						6	0.5																					6	0.5	
Health	4	0.4						4	0.4																					4	0.4	
Human Interest	1	0.1	15 1/2	1.4		5	0.4	21 1/2	1.9											1 1/2	0.1					12	1.1	13	1.2	55	5.1	
Local Items	23 1/2	2.1						23 1/2	2.1																					23 1/2	2.1	
Obits																																
Society	54 1/2	5.0				56	5.2	70 1/2	6.2																					70 1/2	6.2	
Sports	12	1.1						12	1.1																					12	1.1	
Veterans Affairs	15	1.3	9 1/2	0.8		3	0.3	27 1/2	2.4																					27 1/2	2.4	
Totals	260 1/2	23.0	25	2.2		46	4.1	331 1/2	29.3											11 1/2	1.0					24	2.2	36 1/2	3.2	367	32.5	
Advertising																																
Display	564	49.6						564	49.6																					564	49.6	
Classified																																
Legal	6	0.5						6	0.5																					6	0.5	
Promotional	26	2.3						26	2.3																					26	2.3	
Readers	34	3.0						34	3.0																					34	3.0	
Totals	630	55.4						630	55.4																					630	55.4	
Art																																
Cartoons																														17	1.6	
Comics																														10	1.9	

accident, correspondence, crime, health, human interest, local items, obituaries, society, sports, and veteran's affairs.

Economic news. The sub-categories included under economic include agriculture, business, and labor.

Many weekly papers are printed in agricultural communities, and circulation is derived in a large part from people interested in agriculture. Included under this category was all news connected with farming, livestock raising, dairying, etc.

Under business was placed all news stories pertaining to trade and commerce.

Labor news consisted of labor problems and news of labor organizations. The availability of workers, strikes, settlements, and similar stories were classified under labor.

Government news. This category contained four sub-categories, three of which are direct governmental functions. These are administration, judiciary, and legislation. The fourth, politics, is included here because it is directly concerned with government.

Administration news included all stories of local, state, and national administrative government. Council meetings, commission meetings, approval of housing projects,

and the issuing of hunting licenses are some examples of administrative news, taken at random.

Under legislation was placed news stories which were concerned with the proceedings of law-making bodies.

The judiciary category included all news concerning local, state, or national courts. The story of a person arrested for an infraction of a law was placed under crime in the sociology news. When this person was tried in court the resulting news story was listed as judiciary.

Sociology news. General news with a sociological aspect was placed under four sub-categories. These were: education, religion, weather, and personal. Personal was further broken down into the following sub-categories: accident, correspondence, crime, health, human interest, local items, obituaries, society, sports, and veteran's affairs.

Education included a large variety of stories such as those originating from the school system. Activities of Boy and Girl Scouts, 4-H clubs, and similar organizations were also listed under education.

An example of the information placed under the education category is found in a speech given by the wife of a church pastor in Western Springs, Ill., and reported in the Times. The title of the talk was "India, Today and Tomorrow," and was a study of conditions in India. Although the talk

was given before a church women's group, in a church, by the wife of the pastor, there seemed to be very little else in the story to suggest religious connotations. ¹ More of the story suggested education and therefore it was placed in the education category.

The usual weekly directory of churches was placed under religion. There was no indication in any of the papers that these were paid for, so they were not included as advertisements.

Weather reports and stories were placed under weather.

The final sub-category in this group was called personal and was further broken down into several sub-categories. These, unlike, weather, education, and religion, dealt with personal rather than general sociology subjects. They included the small local and correspondence paragraphs found in most weekly papers.

Under local items was included the short one-paragraph items telling of the activities of local residents. Many of these were scattered throughout the papers and were not limited to a column under a common heading.

Only the printed material which was clearly headed "correspondence" or "News from _____", or was in some other way identified as such, was measured under correspondence.

Some stories sent in by correspondents are taken

¹ News story from Western Springs Times, November 15, 1946.

from the one-paragraph items and given a head of their own. Unless these stories were maintained under the common heading of correspondence, they were treated in the same manner as a news story.

The Lapeer, Mich. County Press printed stories of this type under the heading of the community where they originated, even though they were given separate heads. As long as these stories were identified as correspondence items they were classified under correspondence. The method used by the Lapeer paper accounts to some extent for the large amount of correspondence that is evident in that paper.²

In many cases it was hard to ascertain where local items ended and society began. A few papers, like the Covina Argus-Citizen and the Cobb County Times, published at Marietta, Ga., maintain a society page under a heading. Other papers group the society news in a few special columns. Some of the papers scattered the society news throughout the paper.

Weddings, parties, and women's club meetings were among the types of news listed as society when society news was not otherwise identified. One-paragraph items telling of visitors from out of town were listed under local items.

Human interest stories playing upon the emotions,

² See Appendix A

some feature stories, columns of miscellaneous material which contained jokes and other unclassified material, and stories for entertainment purposes were all placed under human interest.

Because of the large amount of news carried in the papers pertaining entirely to veterans, it was found necessary to have an additional sub-category under sociology for veterans' affairs. The majority of the news listed in this sub-category could normally be placed under local items, with some going into administration, under the government category.

Accident, crime, health, obituaries, and sports, all sub-categories under sociology, are self-explanatory.

Method of classification. In selecting the proper category for each news story it was necessary to arrive at a uniform system for classifying the story. A problem which had to be settled arbitrarily was created by the news stories which contained cross-lines of interest, i.e., the stories which contained both legislation and administration news. It was found that when these cross-lines of interest did occur in a news story, there was usually one subject which was given more space and was of more importance than the others. In such cases, the major subject was used for the classification.

As an example of how the problem of the cross-lines of interest was handled, a story which appeared in one of the papers used in the study is typical. The lead contained information concerning a citizen who was appointed chairman of a chamber of commerce committee to spearhead a bond-issue drive. The remainder of the story contained information about the proposed bond issue itself and what it entailed. The majority of space was devoted to the bond issue and the story was classified under government, legislation, rather than economic, business, which would have been the case had the story continued in the same vein in which it started--³ relating chamber of commerce activities.

The problem of headlines. Is the headline a logical part of the news story? At least one previous study has tried sampling headlines apart from the rest of the story.⁴ Others have included the headline as part of the story.

As one of the two main functions of the headline is to summarize the news, it is measured in this study as part⁵ of the news story.

³ From a news story appearing in the Western Springs Times, Western Springs, Ill., Nov. 15, 1946.

⁴ Kingsbury and Hart, op. cit., p. 9.

⁵ Norman J. Radder and John E. Stempel, Newspaper Editing, Make-up and Headlines (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1942), p. 146.

In the papers measured it was assumed by the writer that various sizes of heads used in the paper corresponded to the importance of the story, which is the general journalistic practice. To ignore the headline, would be to omit an integral part of the story itself.

Other classification methods. In addition to separating and measuring the news by categories, it was also found necessary to classify news according to geographical origin. Local news was considered to be news which:

(1) Originated in the trade territory of the paper publishing the news.

(2) Originated elsewhere but given a local angle.

State news was considered to be news which originated within the state but outside of the paper's trade territory.

News originating outside of the state was classified as national. Occasionally the weekly newspapers printed news which had a source outside of the United States. Because of the small amount of such news it also was listed under the national classification.

Pictures, editorials, and columns were classified in the same manner as other types of news, but each was placed in a column by itself. A local sports picture, for instance, was listed under sports and under pictures. It was included in the total percentage for sports for the entire paper, and

also in the total percentage for pictures of all classifications. Or if a local column was written about agriculture, it was measured and the results placed under agriculture, but also listed as a column.

The information thus collected and listed presented an over-all picture of the news printed in selected issues of 12 of the leading weekly newspapers in the United States.

II. QUALITATIVE MEASUREMENT

An attempt is made in this study to analyze the quality of the writing of at least one news story appearing in each of the papers studied. The purpose for doing this was to find out whether the news is written to conform to the principles of writing taught by journalism educators and working journalists--authors of standard textbooks on the subject of news writing.⁶

Standard news story structure was used as a basis for the analysis of each story. What Neal refers to as "hind-end-to" writing, and what others call the "inverted pyramid" type of writing was considered for this purpose as

⁶ Textbooks used were: George C. Bastian and Leland D. Case, Editing the Day's News (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1932); Stanley Johnson and Julian Harriss, The Complete Reporter (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1942); Curtis D. MacDougall, Interpretive Reporting (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938); Robert M. Neal, News Gathering and News Writing (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1946); Norman J. Radder and John E. Stempel, Newspaper Editing, Make-up and Headlines (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1942).

typical and traditional in American newspaper writing.⁷

One story from each paper was selected for the qualitative analysis. In each selection, the story was one of the "spot" news (as distinguished from features or editorial news) variety. In order to obtain a uniformity in the importance of the stories, the main story from each issue of the paper was selected.

According to Bastian and Case, and other textbook authors, the last, or right-hand, column of page one is the position usually reserved for the most important story of the day.

It was from this position that the story was selected for study. In some instances the type of makeup in use would not permit the placing of the main story in the upper right-hand corner of the page. This has to be taken into consideration when selecting the most important story in the paper.

It is a widely-known principle of American news story writing, that, to be complete, the lead must contain the five W's--who, when, what, where, why, and how.⁸ These were the lead essentials considered in the qualitative analysis of the selected stories.

⁷ Neal, op. cit., p. 72.

⁸ James Clifford Saffley, The Country Newspaper and Its Operation (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1930), p. 61.

Occasionally however, a lead which contains all this information becomes cumbersome, and the information is then usually placed in two paragraphs. The main feature of the story is played up in the lead, and the remaining answers to the five W's are placed in the second paragraph.

The following example of this use is taken from the Cobb County Times:

Cobb county overwhelmingly elected Jimmie Carmichael as governor of Georgia yesterday, but the rest of the state seems to have gone "agin" us-- DAMN IT!

Of the almost 13,000 votes cast in Cobb county, Jimmie Carmichael polled 8,724; Gene Talmadge, 3,590; Ed Rivers, 384, and Hoke O'Kelley, 161. Subtract the total of 1,200 Negroes registered in the county from the total and Carmichael would still be the winner in Cobb county by a 3,124 margin.⁹

The subsequent paragraphs of the story were used in filling out the details explained in the two lead paragraphs.

Two of the most important essentials of a well-written news story, both often ignored, are short sentences and short paragraphs. A long paragraph, especially in the lead, will often discourage a potential reader from tackling the story. If he does attempt to read it, he is usually forced to read it more than once in order to find out what it contains. This causes him to forget some of the story's most important points before he is through with it.

⁹ News story appearing in the Cobb County Times, July 18, 1946.

The sentence and paragraph length of the story selected from each paper was measured in this study. According to authoritative sources, both sentence and paragraph length should be limited to a reasonable number of words.

Most of the writers of journalism textbooks emphasize the desirability of short sentences and short paragraphs in news story writing. Most of the authors, however, leave the actual length of the paragraph and sentence to the discretion of the student. Some suggestions are given, such as that of Johnson and Harriss, who say the length of the paragraph should be confined to 75 words.¹⁰ As long ago as 1917, Phil C. Bing cautioned his readers to limit their paragraphs to 50 or 75 words.¹¹

A standard for paragraph length was arbitrarily set at a maximum of 50 words for the present study. This was the number most often suggested by the authors.

Flesch has found that, in writing for the average adult reader, sentences should average 17 words in length. In the present study entire sentences were counted, while Flesch counted two or more sentences if phrases were separated by colons and semi-colons instead of periods. Flesch also made allowance for the number of times personal

¹⁰ Johnson and Harriss, op. cit.

¹¹ Phil Carleton Bing, The Country Weekly (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1917), p. 58.

references are made in a story.

In the present study a standard of 20 words was set as the average length of a sentence. Although more than Flesch's average of 17 words, the extra words were added as an allowance for the variance in method of counting sentences and taking into account the use of personal references as Flesch does in his study.

MacDougall has placed in one chapter of his book, the canons of good news writing which most experts agree to be fundamental.¹³ These canons were considered in this study in analyzing the quality of the news stories appearing in the papers.

Besides the length of sentences and paragraphs, the fundamental rules mentioned by MacDougall include the proper use of active and passive voice, figures of speech, and the elimination of bromides and shopworn personifications.

According to proper newspaper usage, active voice is preferable to passive voice except when the latter is warranted by the importance of the grammatical object of a sentence.¹⁴

¹² Rudolph Flesch, The Art of Plain Talk (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1946), p.197.

¹³ MacDougall, op. cit., pp. 189-207.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 199.

The proper use of passive voice in a newspaper sentence is illustrated in this sentence from the Sumner Gazette:

" . . . ruled that Chris Hansen was elected mayor of Sumner, March 25, by a vote of 162-151."¹⁵

Also a part of the qualitative analysis was a study of the use of editorializing in the selected stories.¹⁶ The expression of opinion by puffs and boosts, superlatives, adjectives, nouns, etc. was considered in the study.

Summary. In this chapter, the methods used in the quantitative and qualitative analysis has been given. The entire news content of the selected papers was measured and recorded in the category which most closely applied to the subject of the story. The news categories selected were those under which nearly every story appearing in a weekly paper can be classified.

The most important news story in each of the papers was analyzed for its quality. The essentials of good newspaper writing emphasized by journalism textbook authors were used as a basis in studying the quality of the writing which appeared in the selected weekly newspapers.

¹⁵ From a news story in the Sumner Gazette, May 16, 1946.

¹⁶ For an example of editorializing see the story from the Cobb County Times on p. 18.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS OF QUANTITATIVE SURVEY

In Chapter I of this study it was pointed out that the object of the quantitative survey of the selected weekly papers was to:

- (1) Show the nature and extent of the news content of those papers.
- (2) Establish the proportion of total space devoted to news content as compared with the proportion of space in advertising content.
- (3) Determine to what extent the selected papers go outside of their own trade territory for state or national news.

The methods used in arriving at the results of the quantitative study were mentioned in Chapter II. Measurement of the news content of each paper was first made in inches and reduced to percentages of total space. Following that, an average was obtained of the news space in each category in the six issues of each newspaper studied, and finally an over-all average was obtained for each category and sub-¹category for the 72 papers.

The results obtained from the quantitative analysis

¹ Infra, Appendix B.

are discussed in this chapter of the study. These results² show:

(1) The predominance of local news in the weekly papers selected for study. It was found that 33.3 per cent of the total space in the papers was in local news, and that 96.1 per cent of the news space was in local news.

(2) That the weekly papers studied devoted only 1.4 per cent of their total space and 3.8 per cent of their news space to state and national news.

(3) Local sociology news occupied more of the total space (26.8 per cent) than news in any of the other four major news categories. Of the news space in the paper, 77 per cent was in the local sociology category.

(4) Local news in the economic category was second to local sociology news in the quantity of space used in the papers. News in this category occupied 3.8 per cent of the total space and 11.1 per cent of the news space in the papers.

(5) Local government news occupied 2.7 per cent of the total space, and 8.0 per cent of the news space in the papers.

(6) Advertising was measured in this study in order to obtain a ratio of news content to advertising content in

² Infra, Table I, p. 24.

TABLE I
 DISTRIBUTION OF PRINTED MATTER IN TWELVE
 WEEKLY NEWSPAPERS

Category	Local News		State News		Nat'l News		Total News	
	Pct. News Space	Pct. Total Space	Pct. News Space	Pct. Total Space	Pct. News Space	Pct. Total Space	Pct. News Space	Pct. Total Space
Economic	11.1	3.8	0.8	0.3	0.6	0.2	12.5	4.3
Government	8.0	2.7	0.6	0.2	0.6	0.2	9.2	3.1
Sociology	77.0	26.8	0.5	0.2	0.7	0.3	78.2	27.3
Art								0.7
Advertising								61.3
Miscellaneous								3.3
Total	96.1	33.3	1.9	0.7	1.9	0.7	100.0	99.9

the papers. Of the total space in the papers, 61.3 per cent was devoted to some form of advertising.

(7) Art, which included cartoons and comics, occupied 0.6 per cent of the total space, and 1.8 per cent of the news space in the papers.

(8) Pictures, editorials, columns, and straight reading matter were all classified separately by subject and the results included as part of the total in the various categories and sub-categories. Classified in this manner, straight news matter occupied 26.6 per cent of the total space in the papers; columns, 2.7 per cent; pictures, 2.6 per cent, and editorials, 1.1. per cent.

(9) Fillers, white space, and the few news stories which defied efforts to list them by categories, were placed in the miscellaneous group. This group occupied 3.2 per cent of the total space in the papers.

I. BACKGROUND OF THE SELECTED PAPERS

Location. Before presenting the results of the quantitative survey in detail it seems desirable to point out several facts about the background and location of the papers included in this study.³

With but one exception, all of the 12 papers are

³ Infra, Table II, p. 26.

TABLE II
 DISTANCE OF WEEKLY NEWSPAPER TOWNS
 FROM NEAREST LARGE CITIES

Town	Distance	Nearest City
Brighton, Mich.	39 18 37	Detroit Ann Arbor Flint
Covina, Calif.	40	Los Angeles
Heron Lake, Minn.	85 165	Mankato Minneapolis-St. Paul
Hillsboro, Ore.	18	Portland
Lapeer, Mich.	20 30 55	Flint Pontiac Detroit
Kaysville, Utah	20 18	Salt Lake City Ogden
Larchmont, N. Y.	12	New York City
Marietta, Ga.	19	Atlanta
Mesa, Ariz.	16	Phoenix
Oakland, Ia.	27 29	Council Bluffs Omaha
Sumner, Ia.	38	Waterloo
Western Springs, Ill.	15	Chicago

published within 40 miles of cities with one or more daily papers. The one exception is the Heron Lake News, which seems isolated in comparison by reason of the 85 miles separating Heron Lake from Mankato, and the 165 miles between Heron Lake and Minneapolis.

Ten of the 12 papers are within 55 miles of the largest city in its state, or in a neighboring state. Besides the Heron Lake News, the other exception is the Sumner Gazette, published at Sumner, Iowa, approximately 100 miles from Des Moines.

Whether the location of the paper has any relation to the amount and type of news appearing in each paper is questionable. Offhand it would seem that the farther away the weekly paper is located from a possible competing daily, the more state and national news would be evident in the paper. With only two papers used in the study located more than 55 miles from the largest city in its state, a fair interpretation of the results of such a situation is not possible. One of the two papers had a smaller than average percentage of state and national news, while the other paper had a larger percentage.

A summary of statistics concerning each of the towns⁴ where the weekly papers are published is given below:

⁴ Statistical information is taken from N. W. Ayers 1946 Newspaper Directory (Philadelphia: N.W. Ayer and Son, Inc., 1946).

Brighton, Michigan. Population 1,353, located in Livingston county on the Pere Marquette railroad. Manufactured articles include metal stampings for the auto industry, and boxes. The Ayers directory lists potatoes and beans as major agricultural products. The Argus is an independent paper with a circulation of 1,496. It has no competition.

Covina, California. Population 3,049, located in Los Angeles county on the Southern Pacific and Pacific Electric railroads. Industries include the fabrication of steel parts, and the manufacture of spray products and ladders. Agriculture products are oranges, lemons, and walnuts. Covina has citrus fruit packing and cold storage plants. The Argus-Citizen is a non-partisan paper with a circulation of 2,700. It has no local competition.

Heron Lake, Minnesota. Population 852, located in Jackson county on the Chicago and Northwestern railroad. Heron Lake is primarily an agricultural community with a butter factory and stock, poultry, and grain farms. The News has a circulation of 950 and has no local competition.

Hillsboro, Oregon. Population 3,747, located in Washington county on the Southern Pacific railroad. Industries include lumber, canning, milk products, brick and tile, and diversified farming. The Argus is an independent paper with a circulation of 5,655. It has no local competition.

Kaysville, Utah. Population 1,211, located in Davis county on the Union Pacific and the Denver and Rio Grande railroads. Hay, peas, and tomatoes are the most important agricultural products. The town has a cannery and a flour mill. The circulation of the Weekly Reflex is 1,012. It is an independent paper with no local competition.

Larchmont, New York. Population 5,970, located in Westchester county on Long Island sound, on the New York, New Haven, and Hartford railroad. Larchmont is a residential suburb of New York City. The Times has a circulation of 1,800, and has no local competition.

Marietta, Georgia. Population 8,667, located in Cobb county on the Nashville, Chattanooga, and St. Louis, and the Louisville and Nashville railroads. Manufactured products include chairs, hosiery, steel castings, sashes and doors, cigars, monuments, finished marble, and steel castings. Agricultural products include cotton and grain. The Cobb County Times is an independent paper with a circulation of 3,194. It has daily competition.

Mesa, Arizona. Population 7,224, a winter resort located in Maricopa county on the Southern Pacific railroad. Agricultural products include cotton, citrus fruit, and lettuce. It is also a cattle market. The Journal-Tribune is

an independent paper with a circulation of 2,620. It has no local competition.

Oakland, Iowa. Population 1,317, located in Pottawattamie county on the Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific railroad. It is an agricultural and livestock community of grain, poultry, and stock farms. Principal agricultural products are corn, wheat, and oats. Industries include a rendering works and a hatchery. The Acorn is a Republican paper with a circulation of 1,840. It has no local competition.

Sumner, Iowa. Population 1,752, located in Bremer county in an agricultural community of dairy, poultry, stock, and grain farms. Sumner is on the Chicago, Great Western railroad. Manufactured products include butter, butter tubs, and chemicals. It has a machine shop and a nursery. The Gazette has a circulation of 1,220, and is an Independent-Republican paper without local competition.

Western Springs, Illinois. Population 4,856, located in Cook county on the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy railroad. It is a residential district primarily, but has a seed house and nursery. The Times is an Independent-Republican paper with a circulation of 1,285. It has no local competition.

II. LOCAL NEWS IN THE WEEKLY PAPERS

An attempt was made by Willey, when analyzing Connecticut weekly newspapers, to set a minimum figure for the amount of local news which he felt should appear in the weekly newspapers of that state. His figure, 50 per cent of all news space, was an arbitrary conclusion.

According to Willey:

It does not seem unreasonable to assume that a paper devoting more than one-half of its space to other types of reading matter is, by the sheer weight of proportions, relegating local news to a secondary place.⁵

Table III on page 32 shows the distribution of local news by percentage of news space in the three major news categories. The table shows what part of the news is presented in straight news writing, columns, editorials, and pictures. Table IV, page 33, shows the distribution of local news in percentages of total space.⁶

Journalism educators and authors, with experience in the weekly newspaper field, place on the weekly newspaper a much greater responsibility in presenting local news to its readers than that placed on the weekly papers by Willey.

It is Allen's contention that only by giving the

⁵ Malcolm W. Willey, The Country Newspaper (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1926), p. 56.

⁶ Infra, Table III, p. 32, and Table IV, p. 33.

TABLE III

DISTRIBUTION OF LOCAL NEWS BY PERCENTAGE OF NEWS SPACE
IN THREE MAJOR NEWS CATEGORIES IN TWELVE WEEKLY NEWSPAPERS

Method of Presentation	Economic	Government	Sociology	Total
Straight News	8.5	5.2	63.9	77.6
Column	0.6	0.5	6.4	7.5
Editorial	0.5	1.4	1.5	3.4
Pictures	1.4	0.9	5.2	7.5
Total	11.0	8.0	77.0	96.0

TABLE IV

DISTRIBUTION OF LOCAL NEWS BY PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL SPACE
IN THREE MAJOR NEWS CATEGORIES IN TWELVE WEEKLY NEWSPAPERS

Method of Presentation	Economic	Government	Sociology	Total
Straight News	3.0	1.7	22.3	27.0
Column	0.2	0.2	2.3	2.7
Editorial	0.1	0.5	0.5	1.1
Pictures	0.5	0.3	1.7	2.5
Total	3.8	2.7	26.8	33.3

reader news of those persons and things with which he comes in contact, and which have a bearing on his life can the paper accomplish its purpose.⁷

The reason for a high local news content in the weekly newspaper given by Allen is probably not a truly accurate definition. Many events which transpire in Washington and elsewhere have a "bearing" on a reader's life. It does not necessarily follow that in printing the news from Washington and elsewhere the weekly newspaper is performing its duty.

A great many of the readers buy the weekly paper for the local news which it contains. For state and national news they depend upon the daily papers which circulate throughout most of the area covered by the weekly papers. The daily can better afford to give more adequate and timely coverage of state and national news than the weekly papers.

Radio, also, has played an important part in furnishing the small town and country resident with news of state and national importance.

The weekly paper is then left to cover the local field which the radio almost completely ignores and which seems to be only partly covered by the competing daily.

That the local field is important is stressed by

⁷ Allen, op. cit., p. 21.

Safley, who assures his readers that the metropolitan newspaper cannot supplant the weekly paper no matter how extensive may be the circulation of the metropolitan paper in the country town.

This is due to the fact that the large paper must concentrate upon the big news of the world and upon the more important news of the city in which it is published. Its news coverage of its own city is to it the most important matter. It must concentrate on those things which will appeal to city subscribers. Country circulation is secondary, and is cultivated only to swell the total as a bid for further advertising patronage or an excuse for increasing advertising rates.⁸

What is local news? In this study, local news was considered to be that which directly affected the people in the town in which the paper is published, or in the trade territory surrounding that town. In effect, local news is town-plus-county news. Many weekly papers have a larger circulation among farm families and in neighboring communities than they have in the town of publication.

Safley defines the trade territory of the weekly paper as follows:

- (1) The town in which the paper is published.
- (2) The surrounding rural communities, or that territory which is tributary to the town in which the paper is published.
- (3) The neighboring towns and outlying territory outside the area of the town of publication. These towns and contiguous territory usually are in the county in which the paper is situated, and

⁸ Safley, op. cit., p. 34.

therefore the more important happenings constitute genuine news appropriate to its columns; for the interests of the town in which it is published and those of neighboring towns to a large extent are identical.

(4) The wide world, so far as former residents of the town are concerned, for readers will be desirous of knowing of the activities of old time friends and acquaintances.

(5) The state and nation, so far as news pertains directly to the local community, or possesses a local angle.⁹

III. THE SOCIOLOGY CATEGORY

The category under which a major share (26.8 per cent of the total space) of the local news in the weekly papers was classified, was the sociology category. Under sociology was classified all education, weather, religious, and personal news such as local items, country correspondence, crime, society, accidents, etc.¹⁰

Country correspondence. In defining the limits of a weekly newspaper, Safley said: "(the trade territory includes) the surrounding rural communities or that territory which is tributary to the town in which the paper is published."

The type of news which comes from the territory referred to by Safley in the above statement is commonly known

⁹ Ibid. p. 35.

¹⁰ Infra, Table V, p. 37.

TABLE V

DISTRIBUTION OF LOCAL SOCIOLOGY NEWS BY PERCENTAGE
OF TOTAL SPACE IN TWELVE WEEKLY NEWSPAPERS

Sub-category	Straight News	Column	Editorial	Pictures	Total
Country Corres.	6.5			0.1	6.6
Society	3.1			0.5	3.6
Education	2.8	0.2	0.1	0.3	3.4
Local Items	2.7	0.3			3.0
Sports	2.2	0.2		0.3	2.7
Human Interest	0.8	1.0	0.2	0.2	2.2
Religion	1.3	0.3	0.1	0.1	1.8
Veterans' Affairs	0.9	0.2		0.1	1.2
Health	0.7	0.1	0.1	0.1	1.0
Obits	0.8				0.8
Accident	0.4				0.4
Crime	0.2				0.2
Weather	0.1				0.1
Totals	22.3	2.3	0.5	1.7	26.8

as country correspondence. It is usually reported by a resident of that community or section of the trade territory about which the news is written. The amount of correspondence news in the 12 weekly papers used in this study exceeded all other news in any of the sub-categories.

The best argument for printing country correspondence in a weekly newspaper is that it is profitable. Increased advertising from both the local community and neighboring communities is evident in the paper with a large amount of country correspondence.

One editor has said:

"Every time a new name appeared in the country items he had found a prospect for a new subscriber and generally had the subscription already sold."¹¹

In the weekly papers studied by the writer, it was found that 6.6 per cent of the entire space in the papers was in country correspondence. Of all the news space in the papers, 18.9 per cent was in correspondence from outside of the town in which the paper is published. In three papers, more than 10 per cent of the total space was in country correspondence. In the Oakland Acorn the percentage was 18.6; in the Lapeer County Press, 15.3, and in the Kaysville Weekly Reflex, 12.1.

¹¹ Allen, op. cit., p. 113.

Three papers, the Larchmont Times, Mesa Journal-Tribune, and Western Springs Times had no country correspondence in any of the six issues of each studied. The location and population of these towns may be the reason for this. Each is located within 16 miles of the largest city in its state. Larchmont is 15 miles from New York City, Mesa is 16 miles from Phoenix, and Western Springs is 15 miles from Chicago. Another factor which might have some bearing on the lack of country correspondence in these papers is the size of the towns. They are three of the four largest cities whose papers were included in the study. The population of Mesa is 7,224, that of Larchmont, 5,970, and of Western Springs, 4,856.

It is probable that none of these papers attempt to get business outside of their own town because of competition of nearby dailies, or because the towns in which they are published are large enough to provide all the business the papers can handle. Perhaps the reason is a combination of these two.

Society news. With the exception of country correspondence the largest amount of news measured in any one subcategory was that of society news. Of the total space in the papers, 3.6 per cent was in society news.

The five papers with the highest average percentage

of society news were the papers which had the smallest amount of country correspondence. These were the papers published in the metropolitan areas mentioned in connection with country correspondence. This might lead one to believe that papers with competing dailies nearby concentrate on news of the town in which the paper is published in order to compete successfully with the daily papers.

Society news and country correspondence seemed to have a direct relation with each other. Papers which printed a large amount of either one of these types of news seemed to be deficient in the other.

Education news. News of society (3.6 per cent of the total space in the papers) and education (3.4 per cent) occupied approximately the same percentage of space in the weekly papers. Because news stories which dealt with many forms of education were included in the education sub-category, the resulting space occupied in the papers was much greater than if only stories concerning the school systems were used.

Local items. Small one-paragraph personal items are still popular in the weekly newspaper. Of the total space in the papers, 3 per cent was in local items. Practically the same in content as the country correspondence except that they originate in the town of publication (instead of

outside the town of publication) the local items are popular because they contain information either about the reader himself or about one of his neighbors or acquaintances.

The papers with the smallest circulations had the largest amount of local items. The Heron Lake News, circulation 950, devoted a larger percentage (6.7) of its total space to local items than did any other paper. The circulation of the Cobb County Times is 3,194 but only 1.5 per cent of the Times was in local items.

Sports. Local sports news occupied 2.7 per cent of the total space in the selected weekly papers and 7.6 per cent of the news space in those papers. The Western Springs Times, with a large local territory to choose from, used 5.0 per cent of its total space for sports news. The Cobb County Times, printed in a town with a population larger than any of the other towns from which papers were chosen, used only 0.8 per cent of its space for sports news. The other papers did not deviate from the average more than a few percentage points.

Compared with the results of Willey's study, sports news seemed to be on an increase in the weekly papers. Only 3.46 per cent of the news in the Connecticut papers concerned sports, according to Willey.

The percentage of total space devoted to sports in

the 12 papers equaled the percentage of space devoted to all government news.

Religion. Only 1.8 per cent of the total space in the papers was in religious news. A large part of this was in a weekly directory of churches which was printed in several of the papers. The copy in this directory was practically the same week after week, with only the topic of the sermon and the calendar of activities changed.

Human interest. The human interest sub-category was responsible for 2.2 per cent of the space used in the weekly papers. One point of Allen's definitions of the functions of the weekly paper, previously stated, said:

"To give news in the form of local features and helpful material for the country and town resident."¹²

Features were classified under the human interest sub-category in this study.

A statement in a recent issue of Publisher's Auxiliary reads:

All publications contain, to a varying degree, three elements--news, features, advertising. And the degree of emphasis placed on news or features seems to determine the volume of advertising. If news is heavy, advertising usually runs lighter. If features are heavy, advertising is apt to run heavier.¹³

¹² Supra, p. 3.

¹³ From an editorial in Publisher's Auxiliary, April 26, 1947.

In this study it was found that news and features maintained approximately the same proportion throughout the papers. If news was light, features were light, if news was heavy, features were heavy. If both news and features were heavy, advertising usually ran lighter; if news and features were light, advertising was heavy.

Much of the human interest type of news was included in Willey's report as "magazine material" and measured as a separate unit in his study. Boiler plate was included as magazine material in Willey's study. Boiler plate was then, and still is, used in large quantities in the weekly newspaper although it was practically non-existent in the papers used in the present study. Just how much boiler plate was used will be discussed more fully later in this chapter.¹⁴

Veterans' affairs. News concerning veterans appeared quite often in the papers used in this study. The veterans' affairs category was included because of the difficulty in delegating a large amount of this type of news to any other sub-category. Veterans's affairs accounted for 1.2 per cent of the total space in the papers studied.

Obituaries. Only 0.8 per cent of the news in the papers selected for study were obituaries. The Cobb County Times and the Kaysville Weekly Reflex were the only papers

¹⁴ Infra, p.58

which devoted more than 1.0 per cent of their space in obituaries.

That obituaries are among the most widely read types of news appearing in weekly newspapers is demonstrated by a readership survey of 10 Missouri weekly newspapers. From 43 to 77 per cent of the readers of these 10 newspapers read the death notices.¹⁵

Death notices, however, are one of the few types of news which publishers can, and probably do, report 100 per cent. The space allowed obituaries in the news columns is dependent upon the number of deaths in the community and on the amount of space each publisher allots to each obituary. Some publishers make even the most unimportant person sound like a hero in the profuse writing of their obituaries, while other publishers stick to the essential statistics concerning the person's life and of his death. This variation in writing can make considerable difference in the final figures in a quantitative type of research.

Crime news. The quantity of crime news in the weekly newspapers accounted for only 0.2 per cent of the total space in the papers. There are three probable reasons for

¹⁵ Lester E. Finley, Measurement of Reading in Five Weekly Newspapers (University of Missouri Bulletin, Journalism Series, Vol. 41, No. 13, and Vol. 42, No. 15).

this low figure in relation to crime news.

(1) Weekly newspapers are usually published in small towns where major crimes are infrequent, if not rare.

(2) Publishers are reluctant to mention crime news in their papers because in the small town it is almost sure to injure his business in one way or another.

(3) Those who do print such news usually boil it down to a minimum of space, or just enough to get by without too much criticism.

Weather news. Weather news amounted to only 0.1 per cent of the space in all the papers. Only two papers, however, the Cobb County Times and the Kaysville Weekly Reflex, failed to have a weather report or a story concerning the weather in their papers.

Weather reports such as those obtained from government meteorology stations were noticeably absent from the weekly papers. The reason for this is plainly evident. The papers studied did not have access to these government reports.

The weather reports which did appear in a few of the papers were general reports covering a wide area. Only the Lapeer County Press printed anything which closely resembled a local weather report. In the Press the weather report was camouflaged in a short humorous feature, usually tying in the name of some local resident.

The following is an example of the Press weather report:

forecast

Len Ganeway admits the County Press is doing a mighty fine job handling the weather this year. Says he had rain every time he needed it and dandy haying weather. He did however, suggest that things are looking a mite dry again.

To satisfy him, Mac McMath, with a string of 12 hits out of 14 tries, comes up with the following: Increasing cloudiness and warmer today with showers Friday.¹⁵

IV. THE ECONOMIC CATEGORY

The economic category consisted of the sub-categories, agriculture, business, and labor. The economic news found in the papers selected for study amounted to 3.8 per cent of the total space in the papers, or about one-sixth¹⁶ of the quantity of news in the sociology category.

Agriculture news. Agriculture news printed in the papers amounted to 1.5 per cent of the total space in the papers. Ten of the 12 papers listed agriculture as part of the economics of their community, but few seemed to do much about printing agriculture news for their readers.

Papers printed in the middle west, with the exception of the Western Springs Times, printed more agriculture news

¹⁵ News item in the Lapeer County Press

¹⁶ Infra, Table VI, p.47.

TABLE VI
 DISTRIBUTION OF LOCAL ECONOMIC NEWS BY PERCENTAGE
 OF TOTAL SPACE IN TWELVE WEEKLY NEWSPAPERS

Sub-category	Straight News	Column	Editorial	Pictures	Total
Agriculture	1.1	0.2		0.2	1.3
Labor	0.1				0.1
Business	1.8		0.1	0.3	2.2
Total	3.0	0.2	0.1	0.5	3.8

than did the papers in the other sections of the country. The Times was one of two papers which did not list agriculture as part of the community statistics.¹⁸

The Heron Lake News, with 3.6 per cent, and the Lapeer County Press, with 3.3 per cent, printed a larger proportion of agricultural news than any of the other papers.

Business news. All of the papers used from 1.0 per cent to 4.3 per cent of their total space to print news of the business activities in their communities. Three papers which printed very little agricultural news were among the first four in the amount of business news printed. They were: Larchmont Times, Western Springs Times, and the Covina Argus-Citizen. The Heron Lake News led all the papers in the quantity of agriculture news and was second to the Larchmont paper in the quantity of business news.

Labor news. Labor was one of the three subjects about which there was very little news, either local or otherwise. Only 0.1 per cent of the total space in the papers was in local labor news. No individual paper exceeded 0.2 per cent of total space devoted to this type of news. Several papers had such an insignificant amount that measuring in a tenth of a per cent did not seem feasible.

¹⁸ Ayers, op. cit., p. 266.

V. THE GOVERNMENT CATEGORY

Administration. Of the four sub-categories under government, administration received the most attention as a source of news in the weekly papers studied. Of all the space in the papers, 1.3 per cent consisted of administration news of local importance. Most of this was information of council and commission meetings, and their business.¹⁹

Politics. In selecting papers for this study, those printed over a years time were taken in order to include seasonable events such as elections. The September and November issues of 1946 precede and follow the 1946 congressional elections, and the March and May and July issues contain news of the primary elections for that year.

It was found that few of the papers devote much attention to politics, evidently leaving that to their competing dailies. Only 0.8 per cent of all the space in the papers concerned local politics. The only paper which exceeded this amount to any great extent was the Cobb County Times which tried hard to convince its readers that Jimmie Carmichael should have precedence over Eugene Talmadge in the campaign for governor. (Carmichael beat Talmadge in Cobb county by several thousand votes).

¹⁹ Infra, Table VII, p. 50.

TABLE VII

DISTRIBUTION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT NEWS BY PERCENTAGE
OF TOTAL SPACE IN TWELVE WEEKLY NEWSPAPERS

Sub-category	Straight News	Column	Editorial	Pictures	Totals
Administration	1.0		0.2	0.2	1.4
Judiciary	0.1				0.1
Legislation	0.2	0.1			0.3
Politics	0.4	0.1	0.3	0.1	0.9
Totals	1.7	0.2	0.5	0.3	2.7

Most of the political news in the Cobb county paper was published in May, following the primary election. At that time 9.4 per cent of the total space in the paper was in political news.

Judiciary and legislation. Only 0.1 per cent of the total space in the six issues of each paper was devoted to judiciary news, and only 0.2 per cent to legislation news. As in printing crime news publishers are reluctant, it seems, to print judiciary news even when it is available. Local county legislation news is infrequent in the small town and as a consequence there is not much information concerning it.

V. STATE AND NATIONAL NEWS

One of the most noticeable results of the present quantitative study of the leading weekly newspapers in the United States is the small amount of state and national news.

A preponderance of local news might be taken as an indication that the publishers of these papers are becoming aware of the reason for the existence of the weekly newspaper as stated by Allen and discussed in Chapter I of this study.²⁰

Tables were prepared in this study which show the

²⁰ infra, Table VIII, p. 52.

TABLE VIII
 PERCENTAGE OF AVERAGE SPACE IN EACH PAPER DEVOTED
 TO STATE AND NATIONAL NEWS

Paper	% Total Space			% News Space		
	State	Nat'l	Total	State	Nat'l	Total
Sumner Gazette	3.4	2.3	5.7	8.0	5.3	13.3
Keysville Reflex	1.7	1.8	3.5	3.6	3.9	7.5
Lapeer County Press	1.0	0.9	1.9	2.6	2.4	5.0
Covina Argus-Citizen	0.6	1.2	1.8	0.7	1.3	2.0
Cobb County Times	0.3	1.2	1.5	0.9	3.5	4.4
Heron Lake News	0.4	1.0	1.4	0.8	1.9	2.7
Hillsboro Argus	0.6	0.4	1.0	2.0	1.1	3.1
Larchmont Times	0.0	0.4	0.4	0.0	0.7	0.7
Oakland Acorn	0.0	0.2	0.2	0.0	0.5	0.5
Mesa Journal-Tribune	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.6	0.0	0.6
Brighton Argus	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.2
Western Springs Times	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Average	0.7	0.8	1.5	1.7	1.8	3.5

distribution of state and national news by categories in the
²¹
 twelve weekly newspapers.

VII. METHODS USED IN PRESENTING THE NEWS

Straight news matter. News in the weekly papers was classified under one of four headings--straight news, columns, editorials, and pictures.
²²
 It was found that all news in the weekly papers was presented in one of these methods. It was possible, also to classify the news by categories, no matter by which method it was presented in the papers.

Previous studies, including Willey's, seemed to ignore the possibility that news could be presented to the reader in any other method than straight news writing and occasional editorials.

News stories written in the conventional news style, without any other special method of identification other than a headline, were classified as straight news matter. As can be expected, this method was the most widely used in the weekly papers. Of all the news in the papers studied, 80.3 per cent was presented to the reader in this manner.

The straight news method led in percentage of space in all the categories but one. National news in the sociology category had a greater percentage in pictures (0.15 per

²¹ Infra, Table IX, p.54.

²² Infra, Table X, p. 55.

TABLE IX
DISTRIBUTION OF STATE AND NATIONAL NEWS BY CATEGORIES
IN TWELVE WEEKLY NEWSPAPERS

Category	% Total Space			% News Space		
	State	Nat'l	Total	State	Nat'l	Total
Economic	0.3	0.2	0.5	0.8	0.6	1.4
Government	0.2	0.3	0.5	0.6	0.6	1.2
Sociology	0.2	0.3	0.5	0.5	0.8	1.3
Totals	0.7	0.8	1.5	1.9	2.0	3.9

TABLE X
METHODS OF PRESENTING THE NEWS BY PERCENTAGE OF
TOTAL SPACE IN TWELVE WEEKLY NEWSPAPERS

Category	Straight News	Column	Editorial	Pictures	Totals
Economic	3.4	0.2	0.1	0.5	4.2
Government	2.0	0.2	0.5	0.3	3.0
Sociology	22.5	2.3	0.5	2.0	27.3
Totals	27.9	2.7	1.1	2.8	34.5

cent of the total space) than in straight news matter (0.08 per cent of the total space).

Columns. The second most popular method of presenting news in the weekly papers was by columns. It has been said that nearly every cub reporter on a weekly paper wants to start by writing a column. Whether he gets his wish is doubtful, but, in the papers studied at least, it is certainly true that someone writes the columns, one or more of which were found in each of the papers studied.

Although far from approaching the straight news method of presenting the news in volume, columns nevertheless occupied 2.7 per cent of the total space and 8.1 per cent of the news space in the papers. The papers devoted from 0.4 per cent of their total space (in the Kaysville Weekly Reflex) to 5.9 per cent (Cobb County Times) to columnar material.

The type of column found most often in the papers was that with short human interest paragraphs concerning persons and events in the community in which the paper was published. Other types frequently found in the weekly papers were the columns of local items and the columns concerning information on agriculture, politics, humor, etc.

Pictures. While Willey failed to classify pictures

as a news source in his study, possibly because of the infrequency of their appearance, they cannot be slighted in papers measured today because of that reason. Willey said: "The relatively few photographs reproduced in the weekly papers made it seem unwise to classify them further."²³

In the present study pictures occupied 2.7 per cent of the total space and 8.1 per cent of the news space in the papers.

Because of the low cost of reproducing pictures from mats one might think that a majority of the pictures printed in the weekly newspapers would be those concerning state and national events obtained from mats sent out by picture services. Another source of pictures which occupy space in many weekly newspapers are from mats sent out by the many "press agents" and advertising agencies containing what amounts to free advertising.

In the papers studied, pictures do not come from these sources. Of all the space occupied by pictures 91.8 per cent were local pictures which infers that they were taken and prepared for publication at the expense of the paper printing them.

There were two papers in the present study, the Kaysville Weekly Reflex (5.1 per cent of total space) and the Mesa Journal-Tribune (5.1 per cent) which devoted more than

²³ Willey, op. cit., p. 47.

5 per cent of their total space in the six issues of the papers studied to local pictures. In both of these papers, there were more society pictures than any other type. Another paper in which pictures played a prominent part was the Cobb County Times, mainly due to the number of pictures used in publicizing a proposed rezoning ordinance to be voted on by the electorate at a special election.

Editorials. None of the papers measured allotted more than 4.4 per cent of its space to editorials, with the average for the 12 papers at 1.1 per cent of the total space. The Heron Lake News devoted 4.4 per cent of its total space to this type of news. The Western Springs Times had no editorials in any of the six issues of that paper studied.

Boiler plate. An indication that the better weekly newspapers do not use boiler plate is obtained from this study. Only one paper, the Heron Lake News, used boiler plate in any form other than cartoons. Even in the Heron Lake paper the use of boiler plate was negligible. Although this type of material was not measured as such, a few human interest stories of national scope was noticed in the News, and classified in the human interest category, under national.

VIII. ADVERTISING

Advertising of all types occupied 61.3 per cent of the space in the papers studied. Walker, in an article in the Journalism Quarterly, said that a 60-40 ratio of advertising to news was a fair proportion.²⁴ If these figures can be relied upon then the ratio of advertising to news in the present study is fairly well proportioned.

If, as Walker says, papers which exceed the 60-40 ratio are open to the charge of not giving full value to their subscribers for their subscription dollar, then six of the papers used in this study can be so charged. These six exceed the 60 per cent in advertising content by 0.7 per cent in the Covina Argus-Citizen to 13.9 per cent in the Mesa Journal-Tribune.

Types of advertising and the percentage of space used for each include: display, 51.6; classified, 5.5; legal, 2.9; readers, 0.7, and promotional, 0.5.

IX MISCELLANEOUS

To make up the difference between the total space in the paper and the printed matter therein, a miscellaneous category was created which accounted for 3.2 per cent of all the space in the papers. This included such items as white

²⁴ Walker, G. C., "A Yardstick for the Measurement of Country Weekly Service" Journalism Quarterly, VII:293-302, December, 1930.

space, flags, mastheads, and like material which could not be measured as news or advertising, other than cartoons and comics.

X. SUMMARY

In summarizing this chapter it can be said that a large part of the news matter of the leading weekly papers consists of local news, and that the majority of local news was classified under the sociology category. Types of news which make up a large part of the reading matter in the weekly papers are country correspondence, society, education, local items, and sports in the sociology category, and business in the economic category. Straight news matter leads all other methods of presenting the news, and display advertising is the most common form of advertising used.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS OF QUALITATIVE SURVEY

A quantitative study of news stories is intended to show the amount of the different kinds of news printed in the selected newspapers. It is necessary to go deeper into fundamental journalism practices in order to find out how well the news is being written from a journalistic standpoint. This is the purpose of the qualitative study of news stories in the selected papers which was undertaken in this chapter.

In the preceding chapter it was shown that the weekly papers included in this study printed more local news than state or national news. It was also shown that a larger part of the news was classified in the sociology category (26.8 per cent of the total space in the papers) than in the economic category (3.8 per cent) or the government category (2.7 per cent).

This chapter of the study takes up an entirely different method of newspaper analysis--that of finding to what extent the news writing was based on journalistic principles as taught by practicing journalists and journalism educators who have written textbooks on the subjects of news reporting and news editing. The textbooks used for this

purpose were selected from those used in course work and as reference books by the faculty of the School of Journalism,¹ Montana State University.

Among the principles taken into consideration were:

- (1) The length of sentences and paragraphs.
- (2) The type of news writing employed in the stories.
- (3) The completeness of the lead--whether it answered the questions, who, what, when, where, how, and why.
- (4) The proper use of words, figures of speech, conciseness of the sentences, and the absence of bromides.

A study of the quality of the news writing in the 6 issues of each of the 12 papers included in the study showed the following results:

(1) Most of the news stories exceeded the established maximum length of 20 words per sentence, but remained well within the maximum paragraph length of 50 words established as a standard for this study.

(2) The news stories followed the inverted pyramid style of writing exclusively, in the accepted method of

¹ Textbooks used were: George C. Bastian and Leland D. Case, Editing the Day's News (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1932); Stanley Johnson and Julian Harriss, The Complete Reporter (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1942); Curtis D. MacDougall, Interpretive Reporting (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938); Robert M. Neal, News Gathering and News Writing (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1946); Norman J. Radder and John E. Stempel, Newspaper Editing, Make-up and Headlines (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1942).

modern news story writing in the United States.

(3) The leads were usually complete in that they answered all, or as many of the five W's as the facts of the story required.

(4) The leads and the stories as a whole were not as concise as they could have been, and space was wasted by the use of superfluous words and phrases.

(5) Most of the stories were written with an understanding of the proper use of active and passive voice, and figures of speech, as they apply to news story writing.

Method of analyzing. One story from each issue of the 12 papers was selected for careful study. Because the most important story of each issue usually appears at the top of the right hand column of page one of the newspaper, this was the story selected for study.

Each of the 72 stories thus selected for study was of local origin. Whether it was economic, government, or sociology news, publishers of the papers studied here seemed to be aware of the value of local news to their papers, as stated in Chapter III.² This was further emphasized when it was found that a local news item was considered important enough to occupy the most important news position in each of the 72 papers studied.

² Supra, Table I, p. 24.

Of the 72 stories, half of them were of the business and administrative categories, equally divided with 18 each.

Sports and agriculture stories each appeared in the most important news position eight times. Politics and education stories appeared four times each; stories dealing with health, religion, and accident appeared three times each, and human interest, veterans' affairs, crime, and judiciary, once each.

One subject seemed to be predominant in several issues of a particular paper. Various steps in the establishment and operation of a junior college in Covina, Calif. occupied the No. 1 position in three of the six issues of the Covina Argus-Citizen. Improvement of roads occupied a similar position in three issues of the Sumner Gazette.

Only the Covina and Oakland papers failed to have at least one story concerning business in the lead position in any of the six issues. The Weekly Reflex of Kaysville, Utah was the only paper in which a different news source was used for each lead story in the six papers.

Sentence length. Rudolph Flesch, in his study, "The Art of Plain Talk," has found that 75 per cent of the adults in the United States have received the equivalent of an eighth grade education. The percentage drops to 40 when

³ Rudolph Flesch, The Art of Plain Talk (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1946), p. 205.

applied to those adults who have received some high school education. Flesch therefore assumes that the average person reading newspapers in this country has eight years of school training.⁴

Flesch has also determined that the standard length of sentences which those with an eighth-grade education can read and understand without difficulty, is 17 words.⁵ A news story with an average sentence length of 17 words would be one best suited for a newspaper audience, according to Flesch's study.

In the present study the standard for sentence length was set at 20 words. This allowed three extra words for personal references and a different method of counting sentences used by Flesch in his study. In his yardstick, Flesch gave credit for the number of times personal references were made in the sentence. In counting sentences, Flesch counted each phrase set off by a semi-colon as one sentence.

The standard of 20 words per sentence used in this study is still lower than Flesch's next higher category of "fairly difficult" reading, or 21 words per sentence.

⁴ Flesch's figures are higher than those of a report made in 1944 by the Committee on Education of the United States Chamber of Commerce. This report, "Education, An Investment in People" was compiled from U. S. Census figures. It shows that only 60 per cent of the adults in the United States have the equivalent of an eighth grade education, and that only 29 per cent have had some high school education.

⁵ Flesch, op. cit.

In the 72 papers studied here, the average length of sentences in the news stories was 23.3 words.⁶ This average was obtained from papers whose stories averaged from 15 words per sentence as in the Lapeer County Press to 27.7 words per sentence as in the Brighton Argus.

Besides the Lapeer paper, only two other papers, the Hillsboro Argus (19.8) and the Mesa Journal-Tribune (17.4) averaged below the standard of 20 words per sentence.

All sentences of a news story should not be of the same short length. Short, jerky sentences should be avoided as much as long, flowing sentences. One is as monotonous to the reader as the other.

A combination of short sentences with longer ones which are simple and easily understood is preferable in a news story.⁷ By putting these two types of sentences together and obtaining an average of under 20 words a pleasing effect is obtained.

Of the three papers which were below the 20-word average, the Mesa Journal-Tribune came closest to a style of writing which meets the requirements of most of the writers upon whose works this study was based. The result was a free and flowing style which was both easy to read and easy to understand. Each of the six stories studied in the Mesa

⁶ Infra, Table XI, p. 67.

⁷ Johnson and Harriss, op. cit., p. 44.

TABLE XI

AVERAGE NUMBER OF WORDS PER SENTENCE, PARAGRAPH,
AND LEAD IN THE TWELVE PAPERS

Paper	Av. No. Words Per Sentence	Paper	Av. No. Words Per Paragraph	Paper	Av. No. Words Per Lead
Lapeer	15.9	Mesa	30.5	Lapeer	24.1
Mesa	17.4	Lapeer	31.3	Mesa	30.0
Hillsboro	19.8	Cobb County	33.4	Kaysville	33.6
Cobb County	22.8	Sumner	38.4	Covina	36.0
Oakland	23.7	Covina	41.3	Cobb County	37.0
Sumner	23.8	Hillsboro	41.8	Sumner	38.0
Heron Lake	24.0	Larchmont	42.6	Larchmont	39.1
Covina	25.2	Western Spgs.	43.6	Hillsboro	42.5
Western Spgs.	26.0	Oakland	49.6	Brighton	43.8
Kaysville	26.4	Kaysville	51.8	Oakland	47.1
Larchmont	26.9	Brighton	53.0	Heron Lake	52.6
Brighton	27.7	Heron Lake	54.6	Western Spgs.	53.6
All Papers	23.3		42.6		39.7

paper contain long and short sentences alternating so that usually not more than two of either type appeared in sequence.

The Lapeer County Press used shorter sentences than the Journal-Tribune but the short sentences appeared too frequently and resulted in a jerky style of writing.

Compare the following paragraphs from the Lapeer paper with those from the Mesa paper.

From the Lapeer County Press:

Unprecedented demand had taken all tickets for the Dairy Banquet early this week.

No tickets were sold in Lapeer. The Chamber of Commerce decided that farmers should have all of them. Many requests from farmers for tickets have come in and have been impossible to fill.

Seats will be available for the program after the banquet. Those wishing to attend are asked to be on hand at 8:15 p.m. The banquet and program will be held in the Lapeer State Home banquet hall.

The sale of 102 registered dairy animals will begin at 10 o'clock Saturday morning. Ayrshires will sell first, followed by Guernseys, Jerseys, Brown Swiss and Holsteins.

The following number will be offered: . . .

Five heifer calves will be offered for sale to 4-H members only. This number includes one Ayrshire, two Jersey and two Brown Swiss calves.

The auctioneer is C. B. Smith of Pinconning. Sales manager is County Agent Stanley Mahaffy.⁸

From the Mesa Journal-Tribune:

A carnival spirit will prevail at the July 24 program honoring LDS pioneers, with festivities centering around the annual chuck wagon dinner, always a major attraction, and a number of concessions and booths.

A parade, scheduled at 5:30, will start

⁸ News story from the Lapeer County Press, May 16, 1946.

things off Wednesday evening. The parade will assemble in back of El Portal hotel and will follow a route along Main street to Robson where it will return on Main to Rendezvous Park. More than a dozen floats have already been entered.

Two things denote a far better program this year than last. For one, there will be a band in the parade, Lane Few and company performing the chore. For another, the chuck wagon dinner will "start on time," the quotes being those of Bill Wright, chairman, who wants to emphasize that the dinner will commence promptly at 6:30 instead of 8 o'clock, as was the case last year.

There will also be three serving lines instead of two.

As usual, the youngsters will share the limelight during the evening's entertainment, with a number of events being arranged especially for them in the way of games and contests.

The difference in reading made by the short, choppy sentences on the one hand, and the steady flow of words in a short sentence and a longer one, can be seen in the above examples.

The advantage which either of the above examples have over several paragraphs of long sentences is illustrated below:

From the Brighton Argus:

A new plant of the Detroit Reamer and Tool Company, manufacturers of reamers and speed cutting tools, will be built in Brighton in the near future, Fred Hyne revealed in an interview yesterday.

Meeting Monday evening the Brighton Business Men's Association approved the granting of the remainder of the association's property in the rear of the Brighton-Advance Corporation building, on the condition that the Detroit company build a plant on

the industrial site sometime in the near future.

Willis Young, who has been largely instrumental in bringing the new plant to Brighton, stated that the company plans to build an attractive modernistic building, 60 X 120 feet, on the site as soon as possible. Recreational facilities for employees are included in the company's plans, he added.

Approximately 40 of the 50 men the plant will employ will be drawn from the citizens of Brighton and its environs, Young said, while about ten men will probably be brought here from the mother plant to act as department heads. The company plans to train local men in the highly specialized work of making the reamers and cutting tools.¹⁰

Paragraph length. Journalism educators and practicing journalists all mention the necessity of short paragraphs in news stories. The reason given most often for this is the need for a news story which will not discourage the reader after a paragraph or two is read because of the difficulty of reading long paragraphs.

When a figure is given for the maximum length of paragraphs, it usually runs from 40 to 75 words, with 50 words per paragraph being mentioned the most often. For this study, 50 words is used as a standard for the maximum average length of all well-written paragraphs.

Like sentences, the longer paragraphs should also be alternated with shorter ones. Paragraphs with approximately the same number of words throughout a story make that story appear monotonous to the eye.

¹⁰ News story from the Brighton Argus, May 15, 1946.

The length of the paragraph in the news story is a mechanical and arbitrary conclusion, rather than a model of rhetoric art. Unity of thought is not usually the rule in determining the length of a paragraph in news writing. Instead, the length is determined by:

- (1) Ease of reading and comprehending.
- (2) Attractiveness to the eye.

Short paragraphs serve a practical purpose in making the story easy to read. The width of a newspaper column usually makes a monotonous blur of type out of a long paragraph. On the other hand, short paragraphs add white space and in other ways aid in reading.

The purpose of good news writing is to attract the reader and hold his attention throughout the story. Long paragraphs tend to discourage a reader even before he begins reading a story.

Of the stories included in this study, only a few were found with very long paragraphs. Three papers averaged more than 50 words per paragraph. These were the Kaysville Weekly Reflex (51.8), the Brighton Argus (53.0), and the Heron Lake News (54.6). Paragraphs in the other papers ranged from an average length of 30.5 (Mesa Journal-Tribune) to 49.6 words (Oakland Acorn).¹¹

¹¹ Supra, Table XI, p. 67.

The average number of words per paragraph for all of the papers included in the study was 42.6.

Lead paragraphs. The average length of paragraphs of the stories included in the present study did not include lead paragraphs. The lead in a news story performs a separate function--that of summarizing the entire story--and should be considered apart from the body of the story.

In most of the textbooks used as a basis for establishing a standard for the quality of the news stories used in the present study, there was no mention of lead length except that they should be brief.

A study of the leads which the textbooks quote as good examples showed that the longest leads averaged 37 words each. None of the leads exceeded 50 words.¹² A. Y. Aronson, managing editor of the Louisville Times, has established an arbitrary rule for his writers limiting lead sentences to 35 words.¹³

In the present study it was found that only three of the papers maintained a maximum average lead length of below 35 words. These papers were the Lapeer County Press (24.1), Mesa Journal-Tribune (30.0), and the Kaysville Weekly Reflex, (33.6).

¹² Textbooks containing leads from which this average was computed were Warren, Johnson and Harriss, and Bastian and Case.

¹³ Stempel, op. cit., p. 53.

In two papers, the Heron Lake News and the Western Springs Times, lead paragraphs exceeded the established 50 word maximum for paragraph lengths. The average length of lead paragraphs in three of the papers included in this study was 39.7, nearly three words less than the average length of the other paragraphs. In three papers, Cobb County Times, Hillsboro Argus, and Western Springs Times, the average length of leads exceeded the average length of the other paragraphs.

Following is an example of a lead paragraph in the Western Springs Times. It contains 98 words.

The performance of "One Sunday Afternoon" by the Little Theatre of Western Springs at the Western Springs Village club, November 21-24, is the result not alone of the people you see on the stage. The actors who take their well-deserved bows at the end of the play might accurately remind you of the fighting men during the war who had to have so many civilian workers behind them to keep them supplied with food, ammunition, and transportation. Behind the actors, too, is a goodly company of unseen workers who have been on the job for many weeks.¹⁴

Although the above lead has many faults, the most obvious one, which can be seen without reading the paragraph, is its enormous length. Its length probably would discourage a large number of potential readers from tackling the story at all.

¹⁴ News story from the Western Springs Times, November 15, 1946.

A comparison of the papers. In Table XII an attempt has been made to compare the standings of the papers in sentence, paragraph, and lead lengths. This was done by ranking each paper in each test on a comparative basis and then finding the average position of the paper in all three tests combined.

The Lapeer County Press ranked first in this comparison by reason of the lowest number of words per sentence, the lowest number of words per lead, and the second lowest number of words per paragraph, for an average position of 1.3.

The Mesa Journal-Tribune ranked second with the lowest average in words per paragraph and the second lowest in words per sentence and words per lead, for an average of 1.7.

In this manner, the third best score was made by the Cobb County Times, with an average of 4.0, while the highest, or least satisfactory, score was made by the Brighton Argus with 11.7.

Table XII showed that the papers with the lowest number of words per sentence, paragraph, or lead were usually low in rank in the other two categories. This was especially true of the Mesa and Lapeer papers which ranked first

¹⁵ Infl., Table XII, p. 75.

TABLE XII
 COMPARISON OF PAPERS IN TESTS FOR LENGTH
 OF SENTENCES, PARAGRAPHS, AND LEADS

Paper	Av. No. Words Per Sentence	Av. No. Words Per Paragraph	Av. No. Words Per Lead	Av. Pos.
Lapeer	1st	2nd	1st	1.3
Mesa	2nd	1st	2nd	1.7
Cobb County	4th	3rd	5th	4.0
Sumner	6th	4th	6th	5.3
Hillsboro	3rd	6th	8th	5.7
Covina	8th	5th	4th	5.7
Kaysville	10th	10th	3rd	7.6
Oakland	5th	9th	10th	8.0
Larchmont	11th	7th	7th	8.3
Western Spgs.	9th	8th	12th	9.6
Heron Lake	7th	12th	11th	10.0
Brighton	12th	11th	9th	11.6

second in all three categories, length of sentences, length of paragraphs, and length of leads.

A similar correlation is indicated for the papers which had the most words in one or more of the tests. It was found that these papers usually were below the set standard in all three, if they were deficient in any one of the tests.

News story style. In the inverted pyramid style of writing, the feature, or climax of the story is played up first in the lead with the rest of the important facts following immediately thereafter.

MacDougall gives four reasons why newspapers in the United States have adopted this form:

(1) To facilitate reading. The reading matter of the average newspaper, if printed in book form, would fill a large volume. The American newspaper reader hasn't time to read that much daily. Neither is he interested in all of the articles appearing in any newspaper. If the climax of each story is at the beginning, the reader can learn the gist of the news shortly, and, if interested, can continue to the details of the stories which attract him. He should not have to read any article to its conclusion to learn what it is about.

(2) To satisfy curiosity. This is the natural way of telling an important item of news. If someone drowns while swimming, the average person would not begin by telling of the incident narrating the dead person's preparations for a visit to the beach with a group of friends. Rather he would tell the important news first--John was drowned while swimming. Then he would relate the supplementary details of how, when, and where it happened.

(3) To facilitate headline writing. The

headline consists of the "key" words or their synonyms, necessary to give an idea of what a story contains. If the story is well written, the headline writer should not have to look beyond the first paragraph or two to find these words.

(4) To facilitate makeup. In rectifying a page the makeup editor often finds it necessary to cut the length of some articles. If the least important details are at the end of a story, he can do this without harming the story. The makeup editor should feel free to cut ordinary articles without consulting other editors.¹⁶

In the papers studied here it seemed certain that the writers of the stories were aware of this fundamental journalistic principle. All the stories were evidently written with this style in mind, although some of them could undoubtedly have been improved upon.

Not all news stories in newspapers today are written in the inverted pyramid style of writing. In recent years some papers, especially the larger tabloids, have adopted the chronological form for a large part of their newspaper writing. By suspending the interest until the final paragraph on some stories, the writer is able to entertain the reader more effectively than had he divulged the point by using the inverted pyramid.

At least one story, the lead paragraph of which was quoted on page 73, was an attempt by a writer to use feature story material in writing a story of the "spot" news variety, using the inverted pyramid.¹⁷

¹⁶ MacDougall, op. cit., p. 143.

¹⁷ Supra, lead from Western Springs Times, p. 73.

The news stories used in this study followed the accepted principle for the most part, and could be improved only by better writing.

The lead. Another method in which most of the news stories studied in this paper conformed to an accepted journalistic pattern was in the completeness of the lead paragraph.

The leads usually, but not always, answered as many of the five W's as the facts of the story made necessary. In every story but one, the questions what, where, when, and who were answered. The questions why and how were usually implied, if not answered in words.

One story which appeared in the Mesa Journal-Tribune, the lead of which was quoted elsewhere in this chapter, omits answering the question where. ¹⁸ Most readers of the paper would probably take the location of the event cited for granted, although it might have left a reader less familiar with the area uncertain as to the location.

News writing in the leads. Most of the stories studied for this paper could have been improved upon in some way or another. The canon of good news writing most often ignored was the lack of conciseness. Other faults appeared

¹⁸ Part of a story from Mesa Journal-Tribune, quoted on page 62.

less often. Misplaced emphasis, opinionated writing, and the use of trite expressions and bromides were found in several of the leads.

Examples of superfluous words in leads are quoted below. Words which could be changed or omitted are underlined. A suggested method of improving the sentences is included in parenthesis in some of the sentences.

" . . . this coming Friday and Saturday, March 14¹⁹ and 15."

" . . . under vastly different conditions."²⁰

" . . . which will get under way (start)."²¹

" . . . outstanding list of prizes."²²

Misplaced emphasis was discovered in several of the leads. In a large number of these cases the feature of the story was buried in the lead because of the wordiness of the writer.

One story, for instance, read:

A sizeable reduction in debt service working against sharp increases in salaries and estimated operational costs has led to a drop of \$1.21 in the tax rate for the unincorporated Town of Mamaroneck . . . "²³

19 From the Brighton Argus, March 12, 1947.

20 From the Kaysville Weekly Reflex, May 16, 1947.

21 From the Hillsboro Argus, November 14, 1946.

22 From the Western Springs Times, July 19, 1946.

23 From the Larchmont Times, November 14, 1946.

Unless the people of Mamaroneck are different from those of most American towns they are more interested in the fact that the tax rate has dropped, and how much, than in the reason for that drop. The information as printed in the above example is news, however, and should be printed as such. The point made here is that the drop in tax rates, and the amount of the reduction, is the main feature and should be placed as near the opening of the lead sentence as possible.

Another example of what appears to be misplaced emphasis appeared in the Kaysville Weekly Reflex.

Three officials of the Davis county Democratic organization were re-elected to office at a meeting of the group held Saturday in the court house at Farmington.²⁴

The names of the three re-elected officials, along with some newly elected officers did not appear in the story until the second paragraph.

Or this one from the Sumner Gazette:

After being in session 2½ hours the Sumner re-count board, composed of Harry Bergman, chairman, A. F. Miller and Felix Morf ruled that Chris Hansen was elected mayor of Sumner Mar. 25 by a vote of 162-151.²⁵

Several weeks after the election when it was finally determined who was to be mayor, the Gazette lets its readers

²⁴ From the Kaysville Weekly Reflex, May 16, 1946.

²⁵ From the Sumner Gazette, May 16, 1946.

wait until it gets through a secondary point and rehashes the names of the men serving on the recount board before the readers are told who finally won the election.

Editorializing in the leads was evident in a number of the news stories. Much of the editorializing was done by the use of superlatives such as "well-deserved bows", "enjoying a fine dinner" and "butstanding list of prizes."

There were a few examples of outright editorializing such as was found in the Cobb County Times and quoted in Chapter II of this study. ²⁶ The Cobb county paper was found to be the most persistent violator of this rule of news writing of any of the twelve papers.

Another lead from the Cobb County Times read:

The controversy which broke out a few days ago about who's been holding up who on the Marietta hospital property has really started something and the dirt is about to fly.²⁷

Some of the bromides and trite expressions which were found in the leads of the 72 stories include the following:

"off to a rousing start."²⁸

"scheduled to get under way."²⁹

²⁶ Supra, story from Cobb County Times, p. 18.

²⁷ News story from Cobb County Times, November 14, 1946.

²⁸ From Oakland Acorn, January 16, 1947.

²⁹ From Larchmont Times, September 19, 1946.

"one of the hottest derbies in history."³⁰

"became the mecca."³¹

"big grid jamboree."³²

"festivities will start."³³

"freak accident."³⁴

Only a few of the deviations from good journalism practice which were found in the 72 stories studied were included in this chapter as examples. It should be pointed out that a majority of the stories were well-written and seldom more than one, if that, rule of good journalism writing was broken in any one story. Only in a few cases were leads so badly written that they would have to be re-written to conform to the principles of the educators and practicing newspapermen whose books were used as a basis for this study.

Summary. It was found in this chapter that the average sentence length for all of the 72 papers was 23.3 words. This is a little more than the maximum of 20 established as a standard of quality for this study. Only three papers, the Lapeer County Press, the Mesa Journal-Tribune, and the

³⁰ From Cobb County Times, May 16, 1946.

³¹ From Hillsboro Argus, September 19, 1946.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., January 16, 1947.

Hillsboro Argus maintained an average sentence length of less than 20 words.

The average length of paragraphs for all the papers was found to be 42.6 words, nearly 8 words less than the maximum of 50 words set as a standard of quality for this study. In this test for paragraph length, the Mesa paper had the lowest average (30.5 words per paragraph), with the Lapeer paper next (31.3), and the Cobb County Times third lowest with 33.4 words per paragraph.

The Kaysville Weekly Reflex (51.8), the Brighton Argus (53.0), and the Heron Lake News (54.6) all exceeded the 50 word maximum.

The average number of words per lead in the papers was 39.7. The standard for lead paragraph length was considered to be the same as the length of the other paragraphs. Two papers, the Heron Lake News (52.6 words per lead) and the Western Springs Times (53.6) were the only papers which exceeded an average of 50 words per lead.

Many of the papers contained leads which could be improved upon from the standpoint of good news-writing, although a majority of the deviations from standard journalistic principles were of a minor nature. The deviations were seldom found in a large number in any one lead.

The news writing was of the inverted pyramid style

following the accepted method of writing stories of the "spot" news variety. The leads usually answered as many of the five W's as were necessary. Good journalistic practices were often ignored through failure to be concise and the over-use of trite expressions and bromides.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS

I. CONCLUSIONS

RECAPITULATION OF PROCEDURES OF ANALYSIS

In the preceding chapters of this study an attempt was made to obtain a standard for the measurement of weekly newspapers by means of a study of the news content of 12 of the leading weekly newspapers in the United States.

It was ascertained that a purely quantitative study of the contents of the papers, as had been attempted by a few previous studies, would not be sufficient in setting up the desired standard. A qualitative measurement of the papers was therefore included with the quantitative study. The results of the study were intended to establish a basis for rating weekly newspapers.

Several steps were established in order to complete the qualitative study. In the first place it was necessary to devise a method of classifying news content into a group of selected categories. These were designed to accommodate all types of news matter to be found in the papers studied, or in any other weekly newspaper.

Quantitative analysis. The method used in carrying

out the objective of the quantitative study was explained in Chapter II. Four major categories were selected. Each was sub-divided into straight news matter, columns, editorials, and pictures. By doing this it was possible to classify news in its proper category no matter what form the news might take when presented in the papers. A society wedding picture, for instance, was classified as society news although listed as a picture.

Measurement of all forms of news was accomplished by the use of the column inch as a unit of measurement. The number of inches in each category was reduced to percentages of the total space in the paper.

The next step in preparation for the quantitative measurement was to establish a uniform system by which the news stories could be classified in their proper category. It was found that headlines could not always be trusted to give the proper subject of the story. Also, many stories contained cross lines of interest, and could properly have been classified under more than one category. It was found, however, that one subject in each story was more predominant than any other. When this subject was ascertained the story was classified in the category corresponding to that subject. No story was classified in more than one category.

Finally, the origin of the story was taken into consideration. If it was a local story, or given a local angle,

it was placed under local news. Stories originating within the state outside of the trade territory of the paper, or those originating outside of the state were similarly segregated.

Although not related to a study of news content, advertising was measured in all of the papers in order to establish a ratio of space devoted to advertising with that of news content.

Qualitative analysis. Chapter II also contains an outline of the technique used in the qualitative analysis of the news writing in the weekly papers studied. One news story from each of the 12 weekly papers was selected for this part of the study.

The object of the qualitative study was to find to what extent the writing in the papers conformed to the principles of news writing taught by journalism educators and practicing journalists. Textbooks and reference books used in the Montana State University School of Journalism were used as authority for the principles involved.

Most newspapers practice the accepted pattern of placing the story of major importance in any particular issue in the upper portion of the right hand column of page one. The story selected for the qualitative study was taken from this position in each paper.

Factors taken into consideration in the study of the quality of the news stories found in the papers include:

- (1) Length of sentences and paragraphs.
- (2) Type of news writing used.
- (3) The completeness of the lead.
- (4) The proper use of words in sentences.

Practicing journalists and educators in journalism almost unanimously agree on certain fundamental principles of news story writing. These principles are to be found in almost every textbook written on the subject of reporting.

Among the important canons of good news writing are several which were used as a basis for the analysis of the quality of news writing found in the weekly papers used in this study.

Authorities agree:

- (1) That short sentences and paragraphs are desirable. Some even name a maximum number of words which they feel no sentence or paragraphs should exceed.
- (2) That "spot" news stories should be written in the inverted pyramid style of writing.
- (3) That all leads should answer as many of the five W's as the information given requires.
- (4) That news stories should be written with a proper understanding of active and passive voice, figures of speech, the elimination of bromides and trite expressions, and the

elimination of unnecessary words in sentences.

MAJOR FINDINGS

Summary of the quantitative survey. It was mentioned in Chapter III that only by printing a large amount of local news can a weekly newspaper fulfill its obligations to its readers. How well are those obligations fulfilled, regarding local news at least, in 12 of the leading weekly newspapers in the United States?

It might be answered that the publishers of the 12 weekly newspapers are well aware of the importance of local news. The study revealed that 96.1 per cent of the news in the papers was of local origin. The remaining four per cent was almost equally divided between state and national news.

Local news was distributed throughout three of the five categories, economic, government, and sociology news. The other two categories were advertising and art. A major share (77 per cent of all the news) was classified in the sociology category.

News of country correspondence, society, education, and local items, all sub-categories under sociology, was found to be most prevalent in the papers, accounting for approximately three-fifths of the news in the sociology category. The remaining two-fifths of the sociology news was classified in the following sub-categories listed here in

the order of their importance: sports, human interest, religion, veterans' affairs, health, obituaries, accident, crime, and weather.

Economic news was second to local sociology in the amount of news space occupied in the weekly papers. Of the total amount of news in the papers, 11.1 per cent was economic news. Business, under the economic category, accounted for 6.5 per cent of the news in the papers; agriculture, 4.2 per cent, and labor, 0.3 per cent.

Eight per cent of the news space in the weekly newspapers was occupied by government news. This was divided among four sub-categories as follows: administration, 4.3 per cent; politics, 2.6 per cent; legislation, 0.6 per cent, and judiciary, 0.5 per cent.

The papers showed some consistency in the amount of news used from each category. Eight of the twelve papers were within 10 percentage points of each other in the amount of space devoted to sociology news. Two of the other four were above, and two below, this range. The range of total space in the papers devoted to news in the economic category, with the exception of one paper (7.1 per cent) was from a low of 2.7 per cent to 4.6 per cent. In the government category the range was from 1.3 to 7.2 per cent.

The study of the papers revealed that none of the papers concentrated on printing news of state or national

importance. State news in the economic category amounted to 0.8 per cent of the news space in the papers. This was the largest amount of news devoted to any one category in state or national news. National news in the sociology category occupied 0.7 per cent of the news space. National news in the economic category and in the government category occupied 0.6 per cent of the news space. State news in the sociology category accounted for 0.5 per cent of the news space.

Summary of the qualitative survey. The study of sentence length revealed that the sentences in the 72 news stories averaged 23.3 words. The desirable standard for maximum sentence length established for this study was 20 words. This standard was established after a study of Flesch's report on the educational level of the average adult in the United States.

In three of the papers, sentences averaged below 20 words. These papers were the Lapeer County Press (15.9 words per average sentence), Mesa Journal-Tribune (17.4), and Hillsboro Argus (19.8). Sentences in the other papers averaged from 22.8 in the Cobb County Times to 27.7 in the Brighton Argus.

Paragraphs in the 72 papers made a somewhat better showing in relation to the maximum length of 50 words used as a standard for this study. The paragraphs averaged 42.9 words.

Three papers exceeded the 50-word standard for paragraph length. They were the Kaysville Reflex (51.8 words per average paragraph), Brighton Argus (53.0), and Heron Lake Times (54.6).

Three other papers used less than 35 words per average paragraph. They were the Mesa Journal-Tribune (30.5), Lapeer County Press (31.3), and the Cobb County Times (33.4).

Lead paragraphs were analyzed separately from other paragraphs in the study for length. It was found that the average lead paragraphs were shorter than the other paragraphs. Lead paragraphs averaged 39.7 words. The Lapeer County Press (24.1 words per average lead), Mesa Journal-Tribune (30.0), and Kaysville Reflex (33.6) were the three papers with the lowest average of words per lead.

The Heron Lake Times (52.6 words per average lead) and the Western Springs Times (53.6) exceeded the 50-word standard set for paragraph length in their leads.

With a few exceptions the study of the leading weekly newspapers shows that they approached or have attained a standard for sentence, paragraph, and lead length which might be difficult to improve.

There is little comment to be made on the conclusions reached in the study of news story style. All the news stories studied used the inverted pyramid style of writing for their "spot" news stories. The use of this style is one

of the principles of news story writing on which all of the textbooks agree. The use of the inverted pyramid has been lessened somewhat in recent years by the larger tabloid dailies which have adopted the chronological style to some extent.

The completeness of the lead, answering all questions in the lead which a reader might desire to know, was another technique in which a majority of the papers were proficient. In only one paper was a necessary part of the story omitted from the lead.

Of the principles of good news story writing, the lack of conciseness was most often ignored. In a number of instances sentence length could have been reduced considerably, even possibly to a point where the average would have been at or below the standard of 20 words per sentence, if the writers of the stories had not been too wordy.

Wordiness in sentences was noted more often in papers whose news stories were above the average in words per sentence.

Misplaced emphasis was a fault found in a number of the leads. Most of these instances might have been due to carelessness on the part of the writer, rather than lack of training in news story writing.

Other canons of good news writing which were broken were editorializing, both by puffs and boosts, and by outright

expression of opinion, and the use of bromides and trite expressions in some of the stories.

It should be emphasized here that many of the 72 stories were well written. If they contained any of the above errors, these errors were few in number, and could be eliminated by additional care on the part of the writer.

II. PERSONAL INTERPRETATIONS

On the basis of the analysis of the 12 weekly newspapers included in this study, several interpretations can be drawn which shed some light on the performance of these papers in presenting news to their readers.

Personal interpretations of the significance of the facts established from the study include the following:

(1) The 12 weekly papers performed a service to their readers and their communities by printing a high percentage of news from local sources.

(2) It appeared that too much effort was concentrated on "names", rather than on news which would aid the reader in a better understanding of his community.

(3) Of the four methods used in presenting the news, one, that of editorials, should be given more attention and care than it receives in the leading weekly newspapers.

(4) Some papers devoted too much of their space to advertising, although the average for all papers was close to the accepted 60/40 ratio.

(5) Most of the papers used sentences too long for the average reader to understand with a minimum of effort, on the basis of a scientific study by Rudolph Flesch.

(6) The 12 weekly papers contained short paragraphs which aid in attracting and holding the attention of the reader.

(7) News writers did not pay enough attention to the proper use of words and phrases in their news story writing.

On each of these points an elaboration of the interpretation seems necessary.

(1) The 12 weekly papers performed a service to their readers and to their communities by printing a high percentage of news from local sources. The amount of local news in the papers studied (96.1 per cent of all news in the papers) was exceptionally high. It appeared to the writer that one of the reasons these papers were selected as outstanding among weekly papers throughout the United States was because of this large amount of local news.

A statement made by C. L. Allen, and quoted in Chapter III of this study, explains the reason for the existence of the weekly newspaper. Allen said that "only by giving the reader news of those persons and things with which he comes in contact, and which have a bearing on his life can the paper accomplish its purpose."¹

The growth of daily newspaper circulation makes it possible for almost every family in the United States to read a daily newspaper within a day or two at the most after publication. Receiving set sales have placed 13 $\frac{1}{2}$ million² more radios in American homes than there are telephones.

¹ Supra, p. 34.

² Morris Ernst, The First Freedom (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1946), p. 125.

Weekly newspapers cannot hope to compete in the national and foreign news-gathering fields with well-staffed daily papers and radio stations, each with one or more news-gathering agencies aiding them in supplying the latest state, national, and foreign news to their readers.

News from the small community field is left virtually untouched by many of the daily papers and radio stations,³ and here the weekly paper has a job of its own. That job is to supply local readers with local news.

Many other reasons why weekly newspapers should print local news are given by authorities in the weekly newspaper field. All agree that local news is the type of news in which the weekly newspaper should concentrate. Two of the papers did not print even a trace of state news in the six issues their papers which were included in the present study. Three papers failed to print any national news. Several of the other papers printed only a short item or two of state or national significance, amounting in one paper to two inches of space. When a paper can concentrate to such an extent on local news, and place a local angle on state or national news which the publisher feels is of interest to a sufficient number of readers, then the paper seems to have arrived at an ideal situation.

³ James Clifford Saffley, The Country Newspaper and Its Operation (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1930), p.34.

(2) It appeared that too much effort was concentrated on "names", rather than on news which would aid the reader in a better understanding of his community. Three of the four sub-categories under which more than half of the total news was classified were country correspondence, society, and local items. Other types of news which received much less attention included the sub-categories under economic and those under government.

It is this writer's belief that too much attention is concentrated on the small one-paragraph items which make up the major part of those first three sub-categories mentioned and not enough on the economic and government news from which the readers can learn and understand more about their community.

More effort should be taken to elaborate on what a person is doing in his every day life. It should not be sufficient to say "Farmer Smith brought a load of high-protein wheat to market." A story which would tell the reader how the wheat got that way would be of much greater benefit and probably have greater appeal to the readers.

It should be pointed out that the writer is entirely aware of the value of one-paragraph items in the weekly paper. It has been said that the "first great interest a

man has is in himself, and the second is in his neighbors.⁴ A large number of these items, however, could be improved upon by making stories of them, rather than in leaving them as skeleton paragraphs.

News of business and government activities in the papers was found to be lacking. There is no evidence to point to the fact that news in each community was not reported thoroughly, but the low percentage of news in such sub-categories as business, labor, agriculture, politics, administration, and legislation makes it apparent that little effort had been made to stress news of this kind. Many news stories can be obtained from personal interviews with business men, farmers, laboring men, and others.

Regarding labor, especially, the deficiency most noticeable. Only 0.3 per cent of all the news space in the papers was in labor news. This ranged from 0.01 per cent in the Lapeer County Press to 0.9 per cent in the Mesa Journal-Tribune. It is evident here that the publishers are waiting for some labor strife before anything concerning labor is printed. In such small towns, this might never happen. It would seem to be equally important to print news of labor-management relations which are working as it is to

⁴ Charles Laurel Allen, Country Journalism (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1928), p. 16.

print the news of only those which have resulted in difficulties.

Agriculture was listed as an important source of revenue in all but two of the communities where the 12 leading weekly newspapers are printed. Yet only 4.2 per cent of the news space in the papers concerned agriculture news. A similar situation existed with business news, and news of city and county government and politics.

(3) Of the four methods used in presenting the news, one, that of editorials, should be given more attention and care than it received in the leading weekly newspapers. The space occupied by editorials in the papers amounted to 1.3 per cent of the entire space in the papers. Roughly this would amount to little more than a column per paper. The whole story is not told by these figures, however.

Five of the papers averaged less than 1 per cent in the total amount of space devoted to editorials in six issues of each paper. One paper had no editorials at all and one had less than a column in the entire six issues. The largest amount of editorial space in any of the papers was in the Larchmont Times (2.7 per cent of the total space in the six papers) with the Sumner Gazette devoting the next largest amount of space to editorials (2.6 per cent).

Some country editors today feel that writing and

printing editorials is a waste of time and space. These publishers seem to have forgotten, temporarily, at least, that the weekly newspaper as well as the daily newspaper has long been active as a leading force for the betterment of the community.

The editorial is one of the most effective ways in which to bring a matter to the special attention of the readers of a paper. The editor injects his personality and his thoughts into a well-written editorial, and it is this personal touch which makes the paper one which commands attention.

It appears to the writer that publishers of the weekly papers which have no lively editorials are neglecting a major function--that of community service. Nearly every problem which comes up for community discussion, and there are many, deserves the editor's careful attention. The paper is expected to be the means of publicity for community projects, which need cooperative effort and organization. In matters which need careful leadership, the paper, through its editorials, is expected to take that lead.

For the most part the editorials which were found in the 12 leading weekly newspapers concerned local subjects. For this they should be commended, for there is nothing less interesting than weekly paper editorials which do a haphazard job on subjects which have previously been discussed

by experts in editorials in the daily papers.

(4) Some papers devoted too much of their space to advertising, although the average for all papers was close to the accepted 60/40 ratio. In the papers studied advertising occupied an average of 61.3 per cent of the total space, while the remainder of the space was devoted to news and miscellaneous material. If each paper maintained this average, or nearly so, there would be no need to comment. Unfortunately, a wide range of figures made up the final average.

Advertising in the Larchmont Times occupied only 40.1 per cent of the total space. In the Mesa Journal-Tribune 74.9 per cent of the space in the six issues was used for advertising.

The paper which exceeds 70 per cent advertising is open to the accusation of not giving the reader full value for his money.

Because advertising revenue is the lifeblood of the newspaper, and circulation revenue only pays a small portion of the cost of production, advertising should occupy a major part of the space in the paper. Forty per cent news to 60 per cent advertising seems to be a fairly logical distribution of the space in any weekly newspaper. This figure should be elastic enough to allow the publisher to raise the proportion of advertising occasionally without increasing the

number of pages if advertising should run exceptionally heavy during certain weeks out of a year.

In the papers studied, only the *Mesa* paper exceeded an average of 70 per cent. In two papers advertising occupied from 50 to 60 per cent, and in six papers advertising ran between 60 and 70 per cent.

(5) Most of the papers used sentences too long for the average reader to understand with a minimum of effort, on the basis of a scientific study by Rudolph Flesch. As long as newspaper stories are written for the purpose of attracting and holding the reader's attention, the writer should bear in mind that they must be written so they can be read with a minimum of effort. Too many stories are written with the idea of getting everything possible into one sentence.

The conclusion that sentences which exceed 20 words in length are too long comes from a scientific study of the educational level of newspaper readers, and the length of sentences which they can read with a minimum of effort. According to Rudolph Flesch, the average adult in the United States has the equivalent of an eighth grade education. The length of sentences which eighth graders can read with a minimum of effort are those of 17 words or less, with personal references counting as less than a full word. In this

paper, a standard of 20 words was set as the minimum length for the average newspaper sentence.

Sentences in the stories in this study averaged 23.3 words per sentence, and ranged from a low of 15.9 words per sentence to a high of 27.7. Only three papers averaged below 20 words per sentence in their news stories. The other nine can be said to have sentences in their stories which are too long and difficult for their readers.

It is not difficult to produce short sentences in news writing. With a little concentration toward that end it would seem that all papers concerned would be able to produce the desired results.

(6) The 12 weekly newspapers contained short paragraphs which aid in attracting and holding the attention of the reader. With the aid of textbooks on news writing, a maximum figure of 50 words was established as a desirable standard for the length of news paragraphs. As was pointed out in Chapter IV, too-long paragraphs detract from the appearance of the story and cause the would-be reader to shun them. If he is still desirous of reading the story the long paragraphs would cause him difficulty because of the poor legibility caused by crowding a monotonous mass of printed words together.

The average paragraph length for all the papers included in this study was 42.6 words. Only three papers

exceeded the 50-word standard. Three other papers kept paragraph length below 35 words.

As a result of the short length of paragraphs, the newspapers included in this study presented stories which were attractive and inviting to the eye, and legible enough to be read without difficulty.

(7) News writers did not pay enough attention to the proper use of words and phrases in their news story writing.

One of the faults most obvious to the writer of this study in the news writing of the 12 weekly papers was the use of superfluous words, and the use of trite and worn-out expressions.

Not all of the writing contained these errors. The few stories that did contain them could be improved upon by the use of simple, straight-forward news writing for stories of the same nature. It is this writer's contention that each news story should simply be well-written. Any apparent effort on the part of the writer to make a story stand out by the use of superfluous words, worn-out adjectives, and a few editorial puffs should be omitted. Let the reader decide for himself whether a story deserves the space it gets in the paper.

FINAL SUMMARY

In selecting the papers from which the standard of quality and content for weekly newspapers was derived, the winners of the annual Better Newspaper Contest conducted by the National Editorial Association were chosen as a representative group of the best weekly newspapers in the United States.

It was not expected that these papers would be perfect from a news content and quality viewpoint. Papers which, in the future, are revised or analyzed to meet the findings of this study will not necessarily be good newspapers merely because they contain the same proportions of news which these newspapers contained. There are many other factors in newspaper operation besides news writing which have to be considered in obtaining all-around excellence.

By analyzing the results of this study, however, a publisher might be able to improve the content and quality of the news writing in his paper and thereby make some progress towards obtaining a better paper.

This study has pointed out that the papers represented are among the better weekly newspapers in the United States. As such they were used as a standard of quality and content on the basis of which other papers may be judged. It is apparent that even these papers could be improved.

Local conditions affect the quantity and quality of news writing in any weekly paper. The remedy for some of the defects caused by local conditions depends upon factors for which a study of the present type has no solution. Among these might be the availability of trained reporters, a budget which might not permit the hiring of sufficient trained reporters, a bias on the part of the publisher or reporter towards certain kinds of news, and pressure from outside which might limit the scope of the news presentation. In a study of the present type local conditions such as those mentioned must be taken into account when applying corrective measures to the news writing in weekly newspapers.

Other defects in the papers studied can be remedied by the publishers if they are aware of them. Three of these defects stand out above any others in the papers studied.

They are:

(1) Lack of balance and variety among certain categories in the news stories.

(2) Overemphasis and wordy news writing.

(3) Insufficient emphasis on editorials.

A lack of variety in news stories is evident especially in the economic and government categories. Additional effort by reporters could produce news stories of as much interest to the reader as stories now carried and, at the same time, of greater value to the community as a whole.

A solution for this problem might lie in training writers to handle the more complicated news, to exercise better judgment of news values, and to use greater imagination in the selection and coverage of news sources.

If the person writing the news could learn to recognize the value of what he sees and hears, to obtain information from the most reliable source, and present it to the reader in the most efficient manner, news in the weekly papers might be more satisfactorily balanced.

The need for improvement in writing is indicated by the long sentences and the lack of clear and concise news stories which appear in some of the papers.

In some of the stories it was evident that more care on the part of the reporter in writing the news stories would remedy many of the difficulties. All stories should be copyread carefully to eliminate superfluous words, trite expressions, and long sentences. Such action would make stories not only more interesting to the reader by also easier for him to read and understand.

Papers which carry only occasional editorials are in danger of losing what influence they possess in the community. In his use of editorials the editor utilizes his greatest opportunity to support civic organizations and improvements. Readers learn to depend on the judgment of the editor. They are anxious to learn his opinion on public

affairs. It is the editor's duty to weigh all sides carefully in print and support the one which he thinks will be the best for his community.

That a newspaper which does not carry editorials should be chosen in a nationwide contest for general excellence was surprising to the writer. The judges of the Better Newspaper Contest were not setting sufficiently high standards for this phase of editorial responsibility.

Several reasons were evident why these papers were chosen to represent the best weekly newspapers in the United States. A large part of the news is of local origin. Most of the papers use local pictures to illustrate the news. Boiler plate was almost absent from the papers. With few exceptions, editorials concerned local subjects. A large part of the news writing was concise and easy to read and understand.

Factors involved in improving news writing in weekly papers are analyzed in this study. Also presented here are the methods by which news is presented in national contest winning papers. Careful analysis and application of these results should produce better weekly newspapers.

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