What Makes Good News?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

These factors are all a part of news judgment.
Sir Sam Steps Down!

*Toronto Times*
November 1916

**SIR SAM STEPS DOWN!**

Sad news was announced in Ottawa today. Sir Sam Hughes is no longer the minister of Militia. The prime minister, bending to howls of criticism from Quebec, has dismissed this able, competent minister. Hughes has done more for the war effort than any other Canadian. He has recruited thousands of volunteers and raised thousands of dollars.

Canada entered the war with only 3000 in the armed forces. By the end of 1915, thanks to Sir Sam's tireless energy and inspired leadership, more than 200,000 of our noble sons have taken their places on the battlefield.

Without Sir Sam's efforts, how will Canada maintain its contribution to the war cause? Many English Canadians are angered by the reluctance of French Canadians to volunteer for overseas service. English Canadians are willing to defend the British Empire. The Empire that has done so much for Canada.

Sir Sam Hughes, through the force of his personality, has persuaded reluctant industrialists to invest heavily in the production of much needed war materials. We should be thankful that, through the contracts negotiated by the minister, tons of vital munitions are making their way to our soldiers at the front.

Hughes FIRED FROM CABINET

*Montreal Matin*
November 1916

**HUGHES FIRED FROM CABINET**

At long last, Prime Minister Borden has done the honourable thing! He has thrown Sir Sam Hughes, his incompetent minister of Militia, out of the Cabinet. Now, Hughes will be unable to do any more damage to Canadian unity. Hughes, more than any other person, has divided and torn this country apart with his policies.

Hughes has managed to antagonize everyone in Quebec. Those French Canadians who have volunteered for the English war have been insulted. The recruitment posters, training and instruction manuals are in English only. More importantly, promotions have only been given to the English-speaking officers. How can Hughes and other Canadians expect French Canadians to join in the war effort when they are treated so poorly?

As Minister of Militia, Hughes has disgraced the nation by rewarding his friends and cronies with munitions contracts. These shady deals have allowed his friends to make millions at the taxpayer's expense.

Why should we spill one more drop of precious French-Canadian blood in Europe. Canada only wants Quebec in Confederation when we are willing to sacrifice for the British Empire. Britain started this war. Let Britain finish it!
How to Detect Bias in the News

At one time or other we all complain about "bias in the news." The fact is, despite the journalistic ideal of "objectivity," every news story is influenced by the attitudes and background of its interviewers, writers, photographers and editors.

Not all bias is deliberate. But you can become a more aware news reader or viewer by watching for the following journalistic techniques that allow bias to "creep in" to the news:

**Bias through selection and omission**
An editor can express a bias by choosing to use or not to use a specific news item. Within a given story, some details can be ignored, and others included, to give readers or viewers a different opinion about the events reported. If, during a speech, a few people boo, the reaction can be described as "remarks greeted by jeers" or they can be ignored as "a handful of dissidents."

Bias through omission is difficult to detect. Only by comparing news reports from a wide variety of outlets can the form of bias be observed.

**Bias through placement**
Readers of papers judge first page stories to be more significant than those buried in the back. Television and radio newscasts run the most important stories first and leave the less significant for later. Where a story is placed, therefore, influences what a reader or viewer thinks about its importance.

**Bias by headline**
Many people read only the headlines of a news item. Most people scan nearly all the headlines in a newspaper. Headlines are the most-read part of a paper. They can summarize as well as present carefully hidden bias and prejudices. They can convey excitement where little exists. They can express approval or condemnation.
Bias by photos, captions and camera angles
Some pictures flatter a person, others make the person look unpleasant. A paper can choose photos to influence opinion about, for example, a candidate for election. On television, the choice of which visual images to display is extremely important. The captions newspapers run below photos are also potential sources of bias.

Bias through use of names and titles
News media often use labels and titles to describe people, places, and events. A person can be called an "ex-con" or be referred to as someone who "served time twenty years ago for a minor offense." Whether a person is described as a "terrorist" or a "freedom fighter" is a clear indication of editorial bias.

Bias through statistics and crowd counts
To make a disaster seem more spectacular (and therefore worthy of reading about), numbers can be inflated. "A hundred injured in aircrash" can be the same as "only minor injuries in air crash," reflecting the opinion of the person doing the counting.

Bias by source control
To detect bias, always consider where the news item "comes from." Is the information supplied by a reporter, an eyewitness, police or fire officials, executives, or elected or appointed government officials? Each may have a particular bias that is introduced into the story. Companies and public relations directors supply news outlets with puffpieces through news releases, photos or videos. Often news outlets depend on pseudo-events (demonstrations, sit-ins, ribbon cuttings, speeches and ceremonies) that take place mainly to gain news coverage.

Word choice and tone
Showing the same kind of bias that appears in headlines, the use of positive or negative words or words with a particular connotation can strongly influence the reader or viewer.
Humphrey Discounts Allegations

You are a newspaper editor who supports the opposition to Conservative M.P. Humphrey Humphrey. Using your highlighter, select an appropriate combination of vocabulary to limit the use of bias in this article.

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

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

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

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