
EFFECTIVE WRITING FOR TODAY'S MEDIA

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INTRODUCTION

Dear friends,

For better or for worse, the influence of media in our countries is becoming ever stronger. The rather cynical sentence „If it was not on TV, it didn't happen“ seems to be coming true — whether we like it or not. It is particularly important for those of us who work in the environmental arena to be able to compete with our adversaries for the public's attention. To do this, we must understand how the media works and how we can work with it to our best advantage.

Granted, our opponents often have superior strength of numbers and resources. Arguments are often suppressed with money, which plays its role in all kinds of discussions, whether on a major project or the removal of an illegal small-scale dumping site. Corporations, special interest groups, and even governmental organisations know it pays for them to improve their media image. Often an amateur spokesperson from a non-governmental organisation (NGO) must try to compete with a professional journalist from a public relations agency hired by an affluent opponent.

But there are other reasons why we often lose in our struggle to address the public. For example, consider the kind of debate NGOs have started in the past few years. Unfortunately, these debates often do not remain factual and they tend to get politically biased. If you are skilful in relaying your message, however, it is possible to get your ideas before the public even though yours may be the minority viewpoint.

Supporting such optimism with the help of some practical pieces of information and theory is the goal of this brochure. It is an attempt to outline ways of helping your message get into the news media and thus to the general public. Presenting the public with varying viewpoints on an issue is the best way to ensure open discussion and a competition of opinions that is the basis of every democratic society.

The material is not aimed at experienced speakers and journalists. On the contrary, this brochure is primarily for local NGOs who, whether they are already well established or just getting started, need to inform the public about their activities and encourage public support. Neglecting the seemingly obvious details can either deny us access to the media or at least make it more difficult.

Besides my own personal knowledge, I also draw upon the experiences of other journalists in the text. The brochure contains some specific examples as well as theoretical information gathered during the courses for journalists, which are organised by the Centre of Independent Journalism in Prague.

HOW TO WRITE AN ARTICLE

Types of articles When writing an article, whether for your own periodical or a national daily newspaper or magazine, it is necessary to distinguish between two basic types — a news article (release) and a feature story. Most NGOs and other civic organisations frequently use news releases to inform the public about an event or an issue. Its length usually does not exceed one page.

In some media where the editors are either not informed about the issue or they are under time pressure, the published piece of text may be practically identical with the news release, including original misprints from your release appearing in print. This means that you cannot rely on a professional editor to polish your press release. (*Bear this in mind before you write a release at the last moment and neglect proper proofreading and factual check-up.*)

Sometimes you will write a report for your own newsletter or a feature story for a general circulation newspaper. In these cases preserving accuracy of the main idea is important and a "checking" intervention by an editor is not only impossible, but also even undesirable. Let us look at how to prepare a news release.

NEWS RELEASE

The contents of a report Already the name of such a piece of text suggests that a release is „news“ and should have nothing to do with a commentary, evaluation or any of the author's opinions. The task of a release is to answer the questions of **what, who, when, where, why and how**. Nevertheless, our newspaper and radio/television reporters are frequently guilty of adding some evaluation to the information.

The goal of a news release is merely to inform. Praising, denouncing, objecting and agitating can be done in other types of writing, as we will see later.

'A PYRAMID TURNED UPSIDE DOWN'

News release structure The structure of your release should fit in this model. This model portrays what weight should be given to individual parts of a release. Emphasis should be placed right on the first paragraph. The less important facts are revealed nearer the end of the story.

This method of writing began at the dawn of modern journalism. In the beginning of the development of telecommunications, a report being sent via telegraph or telephone by a journalist to the editorial office was often interrupted during the transmission. If the journalist had saved the core of the bulletin for the last sentences, the editorial office would not know the content in case of a sudden interruption. On the other hand, if the author stuck to the theory of a pyramid turned upside down, the editor knew right after the first paragraph what the author wanted to say.

How to start According to the theory of an inverted pyramid, the first sentence or the introductory paragraph should contain the main facts about the event being described, i.e. **who, what, where, when, why, and how**. It also should contain the **source of information** („said the chairman of the county council,“ or „according to the campaign leader,“ or „as stated in the study by the Ministry of Environment,“ etc.).

Continuing the story Other, more detailed pieces of information and quotations strictly related to the contents are inserted then by the degree of their importance. The article finishes with the least important information such as details about the essence and circumstances of the problem.

Describing an event News releases written in such a way do not describe the given event chronologically but according to importance and effect. This allows the editor to cut off parts that he may consider unnecessary or that would not fit onto a page, or to place the information in the Short Notices section. If a report is well written, this process will not harm its comprehensibility or essence.

Space limitation It is wrong to suppose that the longer the release you supply to the press, the more space it will be granted in the paper. The sheer opposite is usually true. Most editors have limited space at their disposal and judge the releases submitted on this basis. A few editors will edit and shorten the article themselves. In the process, however, accuracy may suffer, especially if a technical or generally little-known issue is being discussed. On the other hand, there are also editors who simply refuse to bother with a verbose piece of text and the result of your labour ends up in a waste paper basket. (If an article is overspecialised or biased, or deliberately manipulates facts, this process is assured, in which case a waste paper basket is the only proper destination for the release.)

Another advantage of an inverted pyramid article is that the reader can finish reading at any time without missing important facts. The writer of a release should, just for sure, assume that the article may not be too interesting to the readers and allow them to stop reading at any time.

Attracting the reader

The introductory part or „lead“ of a release should suggest why the readers should be interested in the rest of the article. Ideally, the lead should attract their attention and persuade them that the given problem affects their lives directly.

In conclusion, the following examples demonstrate that writing news releases in the form of an inverted pyramid is very quick and economical.

An example

Think about the way you would describe a car accident you have witnessed. „*The car went too fast, the driver was still trying to pass. In addition, his right rear tyre was half-empty and it had rained just before the accident. Then suddenly the car skidded at the bend, it went into a ditch and after hitting a tree it caught fire.*“

This is how you might describe the accident it when speaking. However, in the news you must start with the basic information A report about the same accident might read like this: „*Two people were killed in a car crash on the road near Milton today. The driver lost control of his car while passing another vehicle. The car went into a ditch where it caught fire immediately after the crash.*“

A pyramid turned upside down' structure can be seen in the following sample article.

UKRAINE ELECTIONS

Warsaw Voice 10/10/99

Bomb Blast Disrupts Campaign

Ukrainian presidential candidate Natalya Vitrenko was injured on Oct. 2 when homemade bombs were thrown at her at a campaign rally in Dnepropetrovsk. Vitrenko, a flamboyant leftist running neck-and-neck with President Leonid Kuchma before of the Oct. 31 elections, was one of 17 people who suffered injuries. She underwent surgery at the Feofaniya hospital in Kiev which removed five bomb fragments, two from her stomach and three from her legs.

According to witnesses, Vitrenko had ended her speech and was coming down the steps of the stage with about 50 other people when two devices made of nails and barbed wire were thrown at her. Vitrenko has declined to speculate on the motive for the attack. "Such terrorist acts and attempts on life are certainly proof of a primeval mentality," she said.

Vitrenko has made her mark by lashing out at Ukraine's relations with international financial institutions and at market reforms in general. She favors ending relations with the International Monetary Fund, halting payments on foreign debt and channeling the money saved toward social programs.

"This incident will boost Vitrenko's popularity," said Mikhailo Pohrebinsky, head of the Kiev Center of Political Studies. "Generally speaking, her electorate is much wider than that of other socialist candidates." Mykola Tomenko, director of the Institute of Politics, said Vitrenko now had every chance of facing off against Kuchma in the runoff. But he added, "Her chances of winning are still lower than Kuchma's."

Tomenko said Socialist Party leader Olexander Moroz, who is also running for president and was hitherto seen as Kuch-

ma's likely second-round opponent, would probably suffer most as a result of the incident. Police said two people from Rostov-on-Don, just over Ukraine's eastern border in Russia, were detained. A police spokesman said that one of the suspects was the brother of the head of Moroz's regional campaign headquarters. "This accusation is a strong blow to Moroz's popularity and his political weight in society," Tomenko said. Moroz refused to comment.

The apparent assassination attempt was the first such incident since Ukraine's independence in 1991, although violence was widespread in last year's parliamentary elections.

The European Union this week urged Ukraine, a long-shot hopeful for fast-track membership, to make its third presidential election since the collapse of the Soviet Union free and fair. Kuchma condemned the attack and telephoned Vitrenko to wish her well. He also ordered campaign security to be boosted.

Compiled from Reuters reports

HEADING

A very important part of a release is its „heading.“ Of course, you cannot expect that your article will always be published with the title you have given it. The choice, style and combining headings of individual articles on a page have their own rules (repetition of words, length of a release, the number of columns the story will occupy, etc.). The editor makes the final decision. At any rate, this does not prevent you from suggesting a heading. It will even make your work easier because when writing it, you may re-evaluate the content of your release.

Heading as the news

The heading should summarise the release, which makes it possible to include some information from the article itself. Applying this method has two advantages: first, it will make a report a bit shorter without losing its informative value, and second, it provides readers with the core of the story. Remember that readers, not only of daily newspapers and magazines but maybe even many of your „greens,“ have less and less time. The heading should offer them the chance to learn about the basic point of your news without working through the rest of the text.

[NOTE: Editors from the Czech Republic daily, called MF DNES, always write their headings in entire sentences (i.e. at least a subject and predicate) that summarise the content of the text. After reading such a title the reader can easily decide whether he wants to learn more and continue reading or turn the page.]

A clue One of the clues to writing an informative and attractive heading is to start by cramming the contents of the whole report into a single long sentence. By gradually crossing out redundant words, you will get to the very core of the matter.

The choice of verbs used plays a great psychological role. Compare: „*he has decided not to approve*“ and „*he has refused to approve.*“ There is no doubt that the word „*refused*“ is much stronger and certainly preferable in a heading.

WRITING A FEATURE ARTICLE

As stated in the introduction to this part of the brochure, there are two basic types of articles that can help you in your work. You cannot always settle with a short news release and you do not always want to merely inform. Sometimes it is desirable to write a longer article, or "feature." Let us look at those circumstances.

For our purposes, a „long“ article means a piece of text of about 1,000 words or more, which would be among the longest articles published in dailies. Articles this length more frequently are published in magazines.

In such a piece of text you usually try to depict a certain problem more closely, including its chronological and story development, circumstances, serious reasoning, etc. It is not „news-reporting“ anymore. On the contrary, you can fully incorporate your thoughts and opinions. However, they must be well founded and, since this brochure deals with reliable journalism, supported by facts.

THE STRUCTURE OF AN ARTICLE

You will achieve the best results in supporting your argument or presenting your case if you stick loosely to a sort of framework. It will help you keep individual parts of the text proportional and it may also help keep the core of the story in tact, in the event it is cut by editing. Also, by confronting your work with a framework you can more easily assess whether you really have anything to say, whether or not your arguments are consistent, and if you have sufficient evidence to support your contentions.

Obviously, experienced journalists do not consciously go through this process each time they write, but if you pick up a few excellent articles from your newspapers and magazines, you will find that the authors adopted the style described below long ago.

Heading We have discussed the heading and suggested ways to write it. We also know that editors do not always use your heading. If you insist on using your heading as part of the article (e.g. when fearing it would be replaced with a misleading or false one), you should make it absolutely clear to the editor when submitting your article and resolve any differences in wording at that point.

Introduction The introduction serves as the opening scene of your story and should take about 10% to 15 % of the total length of an article. The introduction should make the whole text interesting and thus attract the reader's attention. It is particularly compelling if it is connected with a particular person or group of people and their story. The introduction should logically lead in to the body of the article.

Core of an article The core of an article is its most important part in which the purpose should be summarised. The paragraph should be unambiguous, concise and informative. Other parts are there to merely support and elaborate. Therefore you should give the core paragraph a lot of care. If you have trouble writing this part, perhaps you are not sure

yourself what the article should be about. You can test whether you have something to write about if you try to express the essence of the article in one sentence consisting of a subject and a predicate. The core of any article, despite its importance, does not necessarily have to address the reader yet, especially if it deals with an abstract or special issue or event.

Importance of the article to the reader Here you tell the readers why the story described so far is important to them. This part is important, too. If you have nothing to say without using bombastic exaggeration and dramatisation, you should raise the question „Do I have anything to offer to the reader?“ For example, you can point out that the matter is valid in other fields as well, that you are dealing with an issue that is going to develop further, etc. Of course, not everyone will agree with your way of seeing things, views of the world and conclusions. Nonetheless, you can win even such a reader over to your side by means of sound arguments supported by facts.

Accepting a counter-argument In a paragraph that could be summarised as „you are right but,“ you actually admit a possible counter-argument so that you can disprove it. It is a classic method of assertive behaviour (which must not be confused with manipulation!). The counter-argument not only serves as a means of blunting possible criticism, but it also provides you with a sort of alibi — some space for an escape that can be used if you exaggerate the core of the article a bit.

It is a standard method used in Western journalism, whose strict moral laws are rather an academic matter in our part of the world (i.e. Central and Eastern Europe - *translator's note*). That is why it is quite common to find deliberate exaggeration, even in periodicals that are supposed to be respectable, while any hope of finding a sign of admitting a counter-argument would be in vain.

Three points of view After this part of the article, we arrive at the point of developing the story further and using evidence to support the problem or your hypothesis. Sixty five per cent of the total story length should be sufficient for this step. Your objective should be to look at the essence of the problem (story) from three different points of view. In practice this may represent a description of three different aspects of the subject matter, statements by three people who have anything to say about it, etc. You can also use a step-by-step method to describe a certain practice, its effects and, finally, the reactions of the people in the vicinity, competitors, etc.

Conclusion or summary A conclusion or summary follows. In the ideal case, it should be again a „human interest“ story of a particular person, just like the introduction to the whole text. Ideally the introductory story continues here. This paragraph should confirm the validity of the article's core or suggest the direction of further development of the matter. This summary should be granted the last 10% of the article.

An article written according to the rules mentioned above could look like this:

Title *In Newford the Bell Tolloed for Wandering Dogs*

A lead-in scene *Mrs Jones has lived alone with her dog Spot for years when their contented living was interrupted by a letter from her daughter who lives abroad. „She's invited me to visit her for a few days, but I don't know what to do now. I can't take Spot on the plane and there's no one to look after him at home,“ laments the old woman, who suddenly cannot decide whether she prefers spending time with her daughter or her quadruped pal.*

The core of the article *Thus, the only hope for Mrs Jones is a hotel for dogs, which has opened recently by the League for Protecting Animals in Newford. It is not only possible to leave your pet there when going on vacation, but one quarter of the kennel is reserved for wandering dogs who would otherwise have died under car wheels or been „put to sleep.“*

- The meaning for readers** *Opening the hotel and kennels has solved the pressing problem of desperate animals in the town who used to end up in the streets due to their heartless owners. Also, it is valuable to people who have found themselves in a situation similar to Mrs Jones. Newford, then, may serve as a model for other towns fighting the problem of caring for domestic animals.*
- Accepting a counter-argument** *The running of the centre is financed partly from the town treasury, but the opposition in the town hall wants to raise the question at the next session of the Board of Representatives whether or not it is an appropriate luxury when the town lacks money for running the kindergarten. Nevertheless, according to interim estimate, subsidising the hotel will represent half of the public cost of catching wandering dogs and disinfecting children's playgrounds every year.*
- Three points of view** *„I'm glad conservationists have taken up the task. In my opinion, the problem of wandering dogs is important, not only from the medical point of view, but also the ethical one,, says Councillor Dr Thomas, who has succeeded in putting through the financing of the hotel from the town budget. „Neither children in the sandpits nor the animals should suffer because of irresponsible people who have turned out their dogs,“ he explained.*
- „I don't think this is the town's business,“ an opposition member of the Board of Representatives Mr Simpson objects. „Caring for animals is a surplus, cream on the top of a cake. The town hall should deal with much more important matters,“ he states. According to Mr Simpson, the town council may be, at the most, more active in charging people for letting their dogs run about freely, and the money gained may be used partly for running the hotel. „Anyway, I think that the care for animals is too much talked about,“ he said, shaking his head uncomprehendingly.*
- While the question of the dogs' hotel has brought to a head the already tense atmosphere in the town hall, only few inhabitants of Newford know about its founding. „A dogs' hotel? This is the first time I heard about it,“ Mrs Strong states in front of the shopping centre while other three women nod in agreement. The head of a scrap-yard, Mr Bignose, does not know about the conservationists' deed either. „But it's true that there's been fewer mongrels in the streets lately. I've noticed 'cause I used to feed them sometimes,“ he smiles.*
- Conclusion** *The League for Protecting Animals argues that cutting off the subsidies would mean a quick end of the dogs' hotel. It is not certain then if the hotel will operate at the time Mrs Jones wants to travel abroad. „I should fly off in July. I don't like the idea of entrusting Spot to strange people but I think I'd place him in the hotel. I'm sure those conservationists won't do him out of grub,“ says the old woman dreamily while scratching her black mongrel.*

HOW TO WRITE ARTICLES

The creation of an article itself usually comes out of an idea to write about a problem, or a disturbing situation. Although this stage of your work may seem quite primitive, you can make your work easier even before you sit down at a PC or grab a pencil. You should approach the writing of an article as depicting an activity, story, event (i.e. a sewage farm being built too slowly, stallholders destroying snowdrops in preserves). You should never describe a thing, state of affairs (i.e. a sewage farm, endangered spring nature). This approach will help you formulate the core of the article and will make the entire piece of text more readable.

How to begin First of all, decide on the core of the article and jot down notes. Then develop it into a story with supporting arguments. You should not be afraid to alter your hypothesis created beforehand. Of course, the article may suddenly gain a new meaning and you may question whether or not you still want to write it under such circumstances. For example, a report intended to describe another badly needed highway being put into operation may result in an article about its prolonged construction because of the lack of money. However, you must realise this in the beginning of your work. It is not possible to question your sources of information retroactively or to „bend“ your argumentation according to the new situation.

Memory as a test of attract-iveness Let us suppose that writing an article has been preceded with gathering information, statements and facts in your reporter's diary. When starting to work on a piece of text you should keep the diary closed at first and only try to recall all you know about the matter. This is usually the most interesting and important data about the issue. If you remember it easily, it will certainly be easier for the reader, too. (This holds true especially for odd and enlightening details.) Therefore, if it is related to the topic, none of it should be missing in your article. Only after writing this down, open the diary and make the data more precise, correct the direct quotations and add all the important things you have already forgotten.

You should not draft an article the way it will be printed. On the contrary, as we have noted, start off with its core and the data you remember. Write other parts, such as interviews, in the chronological order in which you have noted them. Then put them in the desired order.

This way of writing resembles the making of a film, whose individual parts are not created in the order in which they later dazzle you from a TV or movie screen.

The use of information You should not try to pack an article with all you know about the given matter. The ideal is to use in the article about one-third of the information you have accumulated. This demands that you have extensive knowledge about the subject. (*It is true that you can show off with an extensive article in front of your boss, and it may also satisfy your desire to astonish readers with your knowledge. But realisation of such ambitions is usually detrimental to the quality of any piece of text. Another danger is that you may be asked to complement your text, to continue it or to defend it orally on TV or the radio. In this case you will be extremely sorry about stating all in a single article.*)

A link to the core In an article you should not write anything that does not support its core. This can also be one of the ways you can naturally pare down the information for your story. From the reader's point of view, non-related reflections are unnecessarily distracting. From the editor's point of view, they make the article unnecessarily long. (An experienced editor is usually able to pick out such parts of text and cut them from the story.) The fact that you leave out some of the passages you have originally wanted to use in the article does not mean you throw them away. You may use them another time.

The use of quotations Superabundance of quotations and supporting arguments harm the quality of a piece of text. The optimal number of three points of view, quoted people, etc. has not been chosen at random but on the basis of experience.

If you miss any of the three views, you can show the core (i.e. your opinion, view of the problem) to people who have something to do with the matter (e.g. experts, competent officials, interest groups, etc.) and record their reaction. This will help you obtain the third view, without which your article would be a bit deficient.

Target group of readers Always bear in mind exactly who will be reading the piece you are writing. This holds true for spoken text as well. Every daily newspaper has its typical range of readers with a specific structure in age and education. You should remember this when choosing arguments (and the extent of details) and vocabulary before you start to make the final

draft. These should be adjusted to the readers so as to make the article as comprehensible as possible. (Notice that we are not talking about adjusting arguments as such, only about the form of their interpretation.)

EDITING A PIECE OF TEXT

Three stages of editing

When you gather all the material you want to use in your article and arrange individual pieces the way you wish them to appear in the text, you are ready for another important stage of your work — editing the text. Editing should be done in three separate stages in the order stated below.

Careful editing is often neglected, usually because of the time pressure. The result is unnecessarily plain and powerless leaflets, posters, and publications, not to mention errors in spelling and style.

1. EDITING CONTENTS

When reviewing the contents of a piece of text, you must ask whether the information you have gathered corresponds with the core of the story that you defined beforehand. At the same time, you must not forget about an ethical principle that says that you cannot simply ‘throw away’ everything you do not find convenient. If you have successfully supported your assumptions with evidence, then try to replace bland parts with stronger and more colourful descriptions that will help the reader imagine the event more easily.

For example, you can replace the expression „dirty river“ with the words „a river in which plastic bottles and sewage from a nearby neighbourhood were floating“ or at least „a river resembling a sewer.“ In the same way, you can also „colour“ remarkable phenomena and „a beautiful meadow“ may thus become „a meadow resembling a botanical garden.“

A person in each paragraph

If possible, try to have a particular person with his opinions and statements in each paragraph. It will make the text more interesting to the reader. Of course you cannot accomplish this with some highly technical materials. Nevertheless, if you write about a scientific study, it is a good technique to interview the author and insert direct quotes about the subject into your story. For example, consider the following two sentences:

According to the study by the Faculty of Social Studies at the Bonebridge University, building a motorway in the middle of a village can disturb relationships among the inhabitants.

„If you build a motorway in the middle of a village, it stands to reason that it will have negative effects on the social life of the local people,„ said Professor Johnson of the Faculty of Social Studies at the Bonebridge University, the author of an extensive study on this issue.

When comparing these two sentences of practically the same meaning, we discover that the second version is much more readable. If you want to engage the reader in the story, you should choose this one.

The author's viewpoint

Here we think about the choice of words and expressions with which you actually show your attitude towards the matter.

Compare the following four sentences to see how you can highlight or condemn someone's opinion with a single word. If you want more examples, look at any newspaper and see how they cover statements of individual politicians.

"Opening a landfill will help the environment,„ John Jones assured us.

„Opening a landfill will help the environment,„ said John Jones.

According to John Jones, opening a landfill will probably help the environment.

According to John Jones, opening a landfill is said to help the environment.

As you can see, the imaginary writer of the first sentence views the matter in the same way as Mr Jones and he exposes this attitude with the expressive word „assured.“ The second writer is either a professional journalist who does not reveal his opinions or he does not know much about the matter or involve himself in it. The writer of the third sentence probably doubts Mr Jones’s thesis while the fourth one raises doubts with the questioning expression „is said to help.“

At the same time, all four sentences are equal „impartial,“ which is required in journalism. Put briefly, weigh your words.

Removing dull parts

At this stage of editing, you should try to make the contents more lively where dry facts put the reader to sleep. Now it is the best time to assess whether you have a sufficient number of stories and quotations and if your article will be suitable for the publication you are targeting.

2. EDITING FLUENCY OF AN ARTICLE

Logical link As has been said previously, it is practical to write down the parts as they occur to you and as you gradually find out about individual connections. Before the second stage of editing you already have arranged all passages the way you would like to see them printed. Now you have to link paragraphs and chapters so ideas flow smoothly. It is necessary to give the reader a thread running through the entire article so that he has a sense of orientation. A kind of logical bridge in a piece of text is usually most needed when you start to depict the three mentioned points of view on your issue.

Short sentences Be careful not to have long compound sentences in a piece of text. The reader can handle a maximum of four clauses without loss of comprehension.

The use of foreign words Since it is most customary to publish in your native language, it stands to reason that you should not use foreign words or expressions. Nevertheless, if you cannot avoid them completely, bear in mind the following aspects of their usage.

Although you may feel masterful using numerous unintelligible words and you secretly imagine readers dazzled by your „expertise,“ a lot of readers have disdain for extensive use of foreign words and phrases. Also, you run the risk of a greater expert than you revealing great gaps in your knowledge behind the foreign-sounding padding. If you want to address readers with your ideas or issues, do not irritate them unnecessarily. Besides, just because you know the meaning of a foreign word, it does not mean that all readers know it as well. Moreover, it does not necessarily mean a reader is not well read. Few people study the spectrum of scientific and technical areas and can thus handle their terminology safely. Remember this and do not narrow the range of your readers.

Make sure that the foreign word you have decided to use actually fits the intended meaning. A lot of people use foreign expressions without being sure about their real meaning. Remember that you cannot judge the correctness of certain expressions by their frequency of use in the media. Some media, especially commercial radio and TV stations, cannot even serve as a model in the use of native words and spelling!

If your NGO publishes more than occasionally, it certainly would be wise to buy one of the voluminous editions of foreign-word dictionaries.

3. EDITING THE JOURNALISTIC ‘POETRY’

Readability of text This is the last stage of your writing, followed only by spell checking. Whether you write about lynx’s overpopulation or an incineration plant, in general circulation magazines you should always opt for attractiveness of an article over verbosity. Perhaps subconsciously, the reader will appreciate it if there are no redundant or

meaningless words, and if the article is expressive. For example, replace diplomatic expressions such as „discussion“ and „they were discussing“ with words such as „an argument“ and „they were arguing.“

Reading out loud At this stage you should read the article out loud. If some passages are less melodious to your ear, they probably will not delight the reader's eyes either.

„Cold eyes“ Before submitting your article to an editor, give the final draft to „cold eyes“— a person who does not know anything at all about the issue you are depicting. This person can reveal stylistically weak parts and more important, he can point out passages in which you enthusiastically describe something, thinking that each of your readers knows it as well. Usually this is not the case, which only an uninitiated person, not a colleague or an expert on the matter, can help you realise.

When writing an article, you should step out of your role of an initiated expert or enthusiastic activist from time to time and ask yourself questions that will occur to your potential reader while reading your work. This technique, however remorseless, significantly reduces the possibility for any holes in your story by tactics such as deliberately leaving out inconvenient connections, etc.

Remember your reader This method is connected to the general principle that you should not underestimate nor overestimate the readers' intelligence and knowledge. From your point of view, both extremes might be readers of the particular periodical you are writing for and thus people you want to address. Remember this again while doing the final revision of the material. At this point do not judge its contents but the form in which you are giving the article to the reader.

SPELLING

The issue of mistakes in spelling can be isolated from the previous three stages of editing. For one thing, you will certainly correct mistakes immediately after finding them and for another, have the final draft strictly checked out for spelling and possible misprints even after doing all final factual and stylistic revisions.

Mystakes degrade text Some media experts believe that there is no connection between the sense of a message and its spelling standard. However, the reader usually views the matter differently. In their eyes, spelling mistakes often degrade an otherwise very good piece of text.

Not everyone knows his language perfectly. Therefore when writing anything important you should stick to these principles:

Grammar handbooks & dictionaries Always have 'wise' books at hand, which can help you in critical moments to reveal the tricks of your mother tongue.

Language Editor Every piece of text destined for the public, whether it is a poster, a translation of a foreign study, or your own article, should be carefully checked by a language editor. If you do not have your own, do not save money on this matter. It is always better to pay money to a professional proofreader than to print thousands of leaflets that are unusable because of crude errors. Of course, if you hand in an article or write a letter to a periodical it will be edited there. At any rate, you should not neglect removing mistakes. A careless spokesperson of an organisation does no good to its reputation.

GATHERING INFORMATION AND ITS ETHICS

Gathering information and its ethical aspect are so interconnected that I have decided to discuss both topics in a single extensive chapter.

A hidden microphone or camera If you say „journalistic ethics,“ laymen will think first of recording with a hidden microphone or camera. This is obviously because of television reporting and media

exposes that popularised this practice; and the people who felt harmed by this technique and sued for damages in court.

When hearing the word „ethics,“ however, an experienced journalist will probably think of verifying information or publishing second-hand data. Let us begin the chapter on journalistic ethics with the journalist’s viewpoint.

DO NOT USE A HIDDEN MICROPHONE

I recall attending a seminar for journalists from the local press. When the lecturer, a renowned publicist, stated this imperative, it made some of the participants surprised and cheerful. It still is one of the basic journalistic „commandments.“

Not discounting considerations such as your conscience and the good reputation of your organisation, information gathered via a hidden microphone is mostly useless. Such data can seldom be used as proof of some mischief. You would probably have the same problem if you publish a secretly recorded scandalous statement in your materials. The use of a recorder without the person’s knowledge can be even illegal under certain circumstances.

Journalism professors usually agree that journalistic ethics in post-communist countries is only „budding“ when compared to countries with a long tradition of independent journalism. Therefore, it is still possible to use similar controversial methods when gathering information with little objection except, perhaps, from the victim or some prominent publicists.

While it may be tempting to use unethical methods of obtaining information, especially when dealing with dubious activities that certainly deserve a closer look, environmental groups and other activists should remember that their moral credit is necessary for their group’s good reputation and the public’s respect.

Apart from the ethical issues, secret recordings may have these limitations:

1. A serious journalist can never take a recording obtained surreptitiously as trustworthy material. In fact, many media incorporate this principle into a moral code that is often made part of employment contracts.
2. If you secretly record an information source, you will not be trusted by either your opponents or your allies and will not be able to count on them for information in the future.

What should you do if you get on the hot trail of some earth-shaking development?

You always have to ask for a permission to use any recording device, such as a microphone, a camera or telephone answering machine. Whether or not you receive permission to record, take notes during an interview or meeting. These notes will either help you orientate yourself after a long recording session or, on the other hand, they will be your only guide in your information search.

An exact quotation of a „shocking“ statement, coupled with a note on the change in the interviewee’s face colour or nervous stirring of his coffee, is no less meaningful than a recording. What is more, the interviewee will speak more easily if he has the sense of being safe, which a ‘harmless’ pencil or a casual-looking listener will provide. The presence of a recording device automatically sets up a more guarded atmosphere for the interview.

Start verifying and supplementing controversial statements, but be careful about deliberate misinformation.

Unethical methods threaten an organisation’s reputation

Verifying the statement

Always try to obtain a written text. Although someone may give you much clearer and more comprehensive information orally, a copy of the related document, such as a statement distributed at a press conference, is preferred.

Archives Be creative when searching for new information and verifying what you have already obtained. Do not forget about archives, specialised and corporate libraries, press-clipping services, computer search opportunities, and land registers. This is how you may learn, for instance, that the person interested in getting a permit to mine limestone in your town is a brother-in-law of an official at the local council.

The right for information If your country has some form of „Freedom of Information“ laws, know your rights and use your ability to obtain materials from both government (such as ministries and regional councils) and local officials.

VERIFYING INFORMATION

One of the principles in journalistic practice is verifying information from two independent sources. By verifying your information, you can avoid publishing untrue stories and minimise inaccuracies. This is both a professional and ethical matter. Let us look at how to proceed when gathering materials for your articles and verifying facts, while bearing in mind the need for two independent sources of information.

Second-hand information If you work with second-hand information and it is not possible to check the data from another more trustworthy source, you should clearly state the source of the information and let the reader judge its authenticity.

If a well-meaning elderly woman tells you at the village green that the local 100-year-old boulevard is probably going to be demolished, you can publish this information only after the local council or road administration body or some other competent office confirms that it is true, or when you witness it personally. Otherwise you would have to mention the elderly woman as the source of information. She would not meet the criteria for a „well-informed source.“ You must consider an informer's credibility, and not just the way the given data fits your theories.

Of course, if your source is a really well informed and competent person, whose information has always proved reliable, you can drop your vigilance. However, this will not take away your responsibility for potentially publishing wrong data.

Deliberate mis-information Deliberate misinformation may represent a great danger for your work. You should never discount the possibility of your informant having his or her hidden agenda, such as trying to discredit a rival company or a colleague who aspires to get the same promotion, or a neighbour with whom he or she is having a dispute.

(Let us remember how public opinion was shaken by the never-verified information that Greenpeace was financially supported by the oil company Aral in their campaign against Aral's rival, Shell Oil, in the Brent Spar Affair in 1995 when Shell intended to sink an old oil platform.)

Reliability of a source When gathering materials you should be particularly wary about former (embittered) employees or people who tend to agree with all of your remarks without question. Although their motives may be pure, the possibility of bias is intensified and fact checking should be particularly meticulous.

Data from daily press Magazines especially tend to use data gathered from daily newspapers and television.. Of course, you can do the same. A precondition is that you always have to acknowledge the periodical, radio or TV-broadcast or the book from which you took the information.

The so-called stealing of materials is a hot issue among journalists, and it is one of few areas where they are able to agree (although it stands to reason since it is the journalists themselves who plagiarise their brighter colleagues). If you do not want to lose face, adhere faithfully to the acknowledgement principle. With controversial or sensational

information, this also will help protect you from a lawsuit in case the information is not true.

If you take information from other news sources, you should always wait for further progress and not draw upon the first article to appear, especially with some still developing stories such as a scandal, revelation of corruption, or damages caused by a fire. Usually there are some connections missing, data is not exact, or depicting the event may represent only one point of view.

Founding your organisation's press conference on a single (though scandalous) article or a few articles drawing on the same sources may be „suicidal“ or at least can cost you a great deal of credibility.

Contradicting information If you draw on two different sources that contradict each other, you should use both the pieces of information and acknowledge both of them.

Concealing inconvenient information can be intentional or it can be the result of laziness. Reporters must go deeper into the matter and describe it from all possible perspectives.

Counter arguments Obviously if anybody asks your organisation for a two-page statement on the construction of a ski-slope in a national park where you have been planting trees, you will not waste the limited space to elaborate on the enthusiastic response of the ski team to this idea. On the other hand, if you are asked to write an extensive report on felling forests and its impact on the population of protected predatory species, you should not deliberately avoid your opponents' arguments. Trust the readers' ability to judge. If you are right, they will certainly get it even though you leave some space for the counter-arguments.

Healthy scepticism The more revolutionary and crucial information you have, the more careful you should be at considering and verifying it. The healthy scepticism and criticism towards scandalous revelations can often save your reputation as well as that of a completely innocent person, organisation or corporation.

If you believe you have discovered the greatest scandal of the year or if you get a euphoric feeling because of a revelation that will shake the chairs of ten government officials, it is necessary to use your senses instead of emotions. Ask yourselves questions like: Do they need to bribe anybody? Is the mayor John Jones really the same John Jones who owns two hundred shares in the oil company that wants to build a petrol station here? etc.

Because of the reasons mentioned above it is highly advisable to have at least two people managing a highly explosive press release or article (or an entire campaign). It is better to argue within one organisation (and have a fierce row over your hypotheses) than to risk losing face from publishing one person's view, which has not been checked and corrected by someone who is more objective.

If you are on the track of some offences committed by a particular company, institution or person, you should go to them at the very end of your investigation. Only then, when you have all accessible materials, copies of important documents, etc., the subject of your investigation cannot dismiss you by saying „You've got wrong information.“

Even then, do not lay your trump cards on the table right after sitting down in an offered armchair, but use them to support your arguments only when there is no other option.

ANONYMOUS AND UNNAMED SOURCES

If you want to lose your reputation for reliability, using information introduced with words „it is said that,“ is the best way to accomplish it. Unless it is the fruit of

somebody's imagination, there should be no problem writing „*as a long-time employee of the company, Mr Davis says...*“

Nevertheless, there may be some hot information, which will only be shared with you if you keep the source anonymous. (It may be a sign of your credibility but it may also be a crafty attempt to misinform, as has been mentioned before.) Sometimes this is understandable, such as when talking with a whistle-blower who fears harm or loss of a job from revealing possible underhanded activities of an employer. Then you acknowledge such a person as a „well-informed source who has requested to remain anonymous.“ This technique is frequently used in television news shows and newspapers.

The need to state a reason

Here are a few principles to apply when using this technique. You should always state the reason why the informant does not wish to be named (fear of losing a job, fear for his safety, reactions of neighbours, etc.) Of course, you must not narrow down the circle of probable informers too much or even unintentionally reveal your source in a roundabout way.

This procedure will give your information plausibility and the term „anonymous source“ will not be considered merely buck-passing by the author's pushing data of dubious quality or unknown origin into the article.

There is a limit to everything

Limit the number of anonymous sources, especially within a single article. If an entire report is based on unnamed sources, it rapidly loses credibility, although the flavour of 'mystery' always attracts certain groups of readers.

Anonymous speaker

Never hide yourself behind an anonymous source. If a journalist wants to express his dislike for environmental activists who are, for example, blocking a highway, it is easy to write: „*As one of the onlookers said, the environmental activists should be planting trees.*“ Although there usually are such onlookers nearby, when they are absent the journalists gladly stand in for them. Such a tactic cannot be considered a model for journalists-to-be.

In your article you should never invent unnamed „experts“ or „observers“ who are often quoted in dailies. Although it is tempting for a person who has had years of experience with the issue to express his opinion anonymously, this tactic is quite transparent to professional journalists and should not be used.

INTERVIEW

An interview is quite a special category of gathering information. If you manage to arrange and conduct a good interview with an interesting person, you can even use it as a refreshing item in your magazine.

In the following paragraphs let us ignore the possibility of your falling prey to a journalist with a notepad. Nevertheless, this chapter may be useful even for those who have not experienced anything like this yet.

All your interviews will not be confrontational. You will not always need some startling information or controversy. Often you want to give space to a person who shares the same views as you. Despite this fact let us take the more probable presumption that you interview a person who is in a certain social or age distance from you, and not your long-time colleague. What to do then?

An interview in person

It is always better to do an interview in person rather than via telephone or e-mail. Only personal contact allows the chance to react immediately, to be aware of mimicry and numerous unconscious gestures that make an interview interesting. Colourful communication between two people can seldom be accomplished in a phone call..

- Preparation** You should be well prepared for any interview and know more about the topic than what you will be able to use in your story. This is true for any article. Unless you just write a profile of a person, you should employ the technique of asking about things you already know from other sources so that the interviewee only needs to restate them.
- Coming on time** Come to an interview on time and always behave appropriately. Know the customs for familiar and formal forms of address. Remember that you might reflect poorly on the news medium you represent through improper conduct.
- Neutral ground** If you intend to do an interview with an officer or high authority of a company, you should always try to meet on neutral ground. This prevents a director from having him/herself called away by a secretary because of „an urgent call“ at the moment of being asked a key question. It also reduces their manoeuvring space. But also grassroot employees are much more likely to talk freely when out of their office environment. That is why it is advisable to suggest a meeting in a café or, for example, to talk to them on the way to their company's construction site of a planned incineration plant just outside of town.
- A light start** You start off an interview with light questions that will create a relaxed atmosphere. Then some concrete questions about the topic can follow. However, you should keep questions leading to controversial attitudes, intentions, etc. for a later stage of the interview.
- Preparing questions** You should have the basic questions prepared in advance. It would be a mistake, however, to ask these during the interview according to a prepared list. If it is possible, let the dialogue flow freely and insert the key questions as incidentals along the way.
- Inexpertness is not a defect** Do not be ashamed of being a layman in the given area. You can even use your ignorance of a subject to your advantage. Besides receiving interesting answers (e.g. from an ecologist dealing with the atmosphere) you can also get a lot of new information. It also flatters many people if you take up the role of a little-informed person who would like to be enlightened.
- What is more, if an interviewee underestimates you, they are less careful when choosing words, which may also be an advantage under certain circumstances.
- Whether you record an interview or not (and especially in the latter case), always take notes. Do not write down important answers only, but also the questions that have just come into your mind. If the interviewee hesitates at a certain moment and you sense something suspicious in it, it is good to get back to the matter after a while. A short note in your notepad may fit this purpose.
- Two to one** Sometimes it is useful to do an interview with two interviewers, though it is necessary to add that this is not too fair. Two journalists, or two people asking questions, have the chance to take turns relaxing and one of them can be writing down the answers and watching the reactions of the interviewee while the other one is asking the questions..
- Avoiding questions** If it is obvious that the interviewee dislikes answering a question, go on with the conversation calmly and fluently. You can manage to get a desired answer more easily with a reformulated question after a while.
- A concrete value of answers** Never be satisfied with an assertion like „we will be tough with the procedures,“ „it will all end up well,“ or „we have already been saying this for a long time.“ Although such abstract answers are not always deceptions or attempts to avoid concrete answers, you should always pursue them to obtain more specific information.
- You might ask: „*What will your tough procedures look like in the practice? What exactly do you consider a good result? Can you say more precisely when you formed this opinion?*“ Not only can the interviewee formulate his ideas better (and make your editing of the interview much easier) but due to your perseverance you can also learn a lot of interesting things. Be sure that your perseverance is not hostile, however.

Do not be afraid to bluff to a certain extent, and to pretend that you know more than you actually do. This can unnerve a difficult opponent, whose activities you find extremely dubious.

Controlling an interview If an interviewee speaks so long that you start losing control over the interview and you do not have a chance to ask your questions, it is necessary to interrupt the person gently. These are possible techniques:

- put down your pen and notepad
- interrupt the person with a new question, which he must answer with a yes or no. (Normally an interviewer would not ask this type of question as an interview consisting of questions and one-word answers would not be worth much.)
- ask him in a friendly manner to attempt to answer in, say, five words

To be continued Before leaving you should ensure future access to the interviewee, especially if he/she is an expert in your field.

You can do this by asking whether you can call him in case you need some clarifications. It is proper to call the interviewee in a few days for the sake of decorum even if you do not have anything to ask about anymore. This procedure will help you keep a source of information that may be useful in the future.

The end By the end of the interview, when you are about to leave, you can go back to the original „warm-up“ topic. The interviewee, who is glad you are leaving, will get relaxed and you can use this loss of watchfulness for inconspicuously drawing answers or statements that may have come to mind during the meeting. If you have recorded the interview, a look at the recorder turned off and packed in will also reduce the interviewee's watchfulness.

PRE-PUBLICATION REVIEW

Offering an authorisation

Allowing the interviewee to „authorise“ or review the story prior to publication is a troublesome issue in the practise of journalism. However, the following principle should be sufficient for your purposes: you should allow authorisation when writing articles of a technical character where, because of your unfamiliarity with the issues, you might inadvertently embarrass your subject by misunderstanding information. Authorisation is redundant in other cases when you have the interview recorded. You can prevent the interviewee from asking for authorisation with a paradoxical step — by offering the authorisation yourself. When you are open in offering the authorisation, the interviewee may suddenly consider it unnecessary. It is generally true that the more prominent the person you interview, the smaller the probability that he will ask for an authorisation. With the offer of authorisation beforehand, you can prevent possible complaints from the interviewee who may not like his/her own answers after they appear on the pages of a magazine.

An agreed deadline

If you do not succeed with this tactics and you are forced to present the interview before publishing it, you should be sure that this does not prevent you from keeping your deadlines. It is advisable to agree on a date by which the interviewee has a chance to comment on the submitted version of the interview. Let him know that if he has not commented by this date, it is assumed he will settle for the article as you have presented it.

Unless the person being interviewed objects, you should record every interview. By doing so you will have exact words for quoting and the necessary background in case an interviewee denies the authenticity of some statement during pre-publication authorisation review or after publishing.

Respect an interviewee's wishes

If an interviewee says something he later does not wish to be published, it is necessary to respect his wishes, assuming the printing deadline has not passed. This is a valid request when reviewing copy prior to publication or after a quite banal interview. Perhaps the person interviewed decided to withdraw his statements on a particular issue for some personal reasons. Everyone has the right for an unguarded moment. Besides, you certainly do not want to close your door to the person for possible future interviews. However, you may try to persuade him that publishing the „unwanted“ statement may be beneficial. Often the interviewee will abandon his request at this point.

READERS' LETTERS

One of the easier ways of reaching the public with your opinions is to write a letter to the editor. Most newspapers and magazines have letter departments in editorial offices that review letters from readers, select those for publication, and edit them so they are publishable. This means primarily correcting mistakes in spelling and stylistic errors, and shortening. Nevertheless, you should carefully check your letter for mistakes prior to sending it for the sake of your own self-esteem, which could be ruined if you saw your letter full of mistakes printed in a paper where the editors did not have the time nor the inclination to correct them.

Letters have great influence

Letters have the power to influence public opinion. When looking at the section of readers' letters, you can see a reflection of public opinion. Granted this reflection is often distorted, but it provides an insight into the ideas of people you meet in the streets every day, rather than just the attitudes of a few hundred journalists. The effect of a letter section may be the same as of an opinion poll; quite a lot of people subconsciously adapt their own opinions to those of the majority. This means that you should be aggressive in writing letters if you consider your opinion right and worth sharing.

[Ed. Note: It was interesting to monitor the ratio of letters reacting to the Czech railway workers' strike that occurred on several days in the winter of 1997. Whereas, according to the opinion polls published after the end of the strike, the numbers of its supporters and opponents were more or less balanced, the letters printed in MF DNES condemned the strike with very few exceptions.

This can be partly explained by the paper's rather "right-wing" orientation, thus also of its readers. Also, the newspaper severely criticised the strikers from the beginning. But the supporters' passivity might have been a significant contribution as well. It is also possible that letters were selected for publication based on their stance on the subject; however, such a tactic will not be discussed in this brochure. Unfortunately, this "I-can't-change-anything" attitude can be observed in many other situations.]

LETTER 'CAMPAIGN'

Much more meaningful than writing letters haphazardly on any issue that has just crossed your mind is organising a campaign for several people to send letters with opinions concerning a current problem. Sometimes editors are inundated with letters obviously written by the same person, only with a different type of handwriting or computer style and signatures. This is a tactic of very low ethical value and should have nothing to do with your work in general.

Nevertheless, it is not improper if ten people who share practically the same views agree on the need to write letters and if they do so at about the same time when the matter is topical, e.g. a controversial decision made on the Earth Day, etc.

Reacting to controversial articles

If there is an interview in your local paper with a controversial industrialist who uses unscrupulous tactics and no one reacts to it, the issue may be soon forgotten. The businessman may even later say, with some justification, „But there wasn't even one critical comment on my proposal one month ago!" However, if the editors receive some letters of objection after publishing the interview, they have a good reason to investigate further.

In some media, a pile of letters from concerned readers may give a journalist a strong argument and green light to go ahead in their efforts to investigate, even if their superiors, for whatever reason, want to discourage them from dealing with a suspicious matter. Otherwise, their editor may say „Why write about it when nobody's interested?„

WHAT TO THINK OF WHEN WRITING A LETTER

Whether you write a letter on behalf of a cause or in opposition to an idea, you should always remember a few things that will help your letter avoid the wastepaper basket in an editorial office and actually appear in the newspaper.

Brevity Any letter should be brief. If you stick to this principle, you will not only make the editor's work easier, but even more important, you will reduce his need to rewrite or cut your letter.

If you send a two-page response (a standard page being 30 lines) to an article by the Minister of Transportation in your favourite daily newspaper, and space permits only ten lines, the editor has the right to choose which fifty lines of your letter to cut. This means the whole intent of your letter may disappear, either deliberately or unintentionally, due to the editor's interventions. It is also possible that the meaning of your letter may be distorted.

Before submitting your letter, look at the letter section in the newspaper, count the usual number of words in printed readers' letters, and then try to adapt to it. This way you will minimise the chance of cutting the text of your letter, which may seem excessive to you but it is often necessary from editors' point of view.

Less may mean more Your letter should touch only one aspect of the problem in question. This is important not only to keep your letter brief, but also to focus on concrete arguments. If you want to argue against the construction of a chemical factory behind your house, ten lines would not be enough even for listing all aspects of the matter in one-word definitions. On the other hand, if you choose one single aspect (e.g. water pollution, health of children from the nearby school, etc.), you have much more space for presenting concrete arguments. It is the job of editors to create a "mosaic" from letters representing different opinions.

It stands to reason that a lot fewer letters will be printed if they are very similar (i.e. „A chemical factory damages health and the environment, and it will put off tourists.") You should remember this when your friends or acquaintances are about to write letters to the same paper.

Topical relevance The letter should be sent quickly because editors deal with a particular matter only for a limited time. If you decide to write about polluting a river with toxic waste ten days after it happened, you might have missed the "deadline" by which editors were ready to provide more space for the issue. Many letters concerned with the issue may already have been printed. Another scandal might have broken out meanwhile, and thus there are a lot more up-to-date letters.

PHOTOGRAPHS

A photo tells a story Sometimes authors have a chance to submit an article together with a photograph in a newspaper or magazine. If you have some good photos to offer, you should capitalise

on this opportunity. Photos serve a number of purposes. A photo in a long article may be a welcome refreshing point of a page. Just like a drawing, it serves as "relaxing space" for readers and divides a page graphically, which makes it more readable. In addition, it can often say more about the issue or your attitude towards it than the text itself. By submitting your own photo, you will also avoid the danger of editors choosing an unsuitable photo to accompany your story. A wrong choice of a photo may unintentionally totally contradict the intent of your text.

Colour vs. black and white If you are asked for a photo, ask in advance whether it will be printed in colour or black and white. A colour photo is generally less desirable as it may lose much of its quality if it is printed in black and white, which is usually the case in newspapers. Also, a black and white print may be less risky than a coloured photo when printing the wrong shade of colour might convey misleading information.

Archives Always have a few good photos in stock that are related to the case you are following. Even if you are not asked to write an article, editors may contact you with a request for photo-documentation. This may be an opportunity to help to raise public awareness of the given problem as well as your activities related to it.

It is not always possible to get good enough photographs without the help of a professional photographer. If an exhibition is approaching or if you are preparing a lecture on a natural area where a casino for tourists is to be built, you should not hesitate to find and hire a professional photographer well in advance. If you need a large collection of photos, one year in advance is not too early to book a good photographer. Do not forget that weather and visibility are not always ideal, and it is worth remembering beforehand that starting to gather photos of summer mountain flowers for a November exhibition in September is not an appropriate procedure.

Photo legend Do not underestimate the power of a good photo legend and provide editors with it along with the photo. Also write down the photographer's name and the place and date of the photograph. This reduces the possibility that a less responsible editor or one unfamiliar with the issue will write inappropriate text to accompany your photo. In addition, a poor legend can show the photo in a different light. Always remember that a photo legend is no less important for the reader than the article — it is rather the other way round. Due to our inborn curiosity we usually read the legend first and only then we take an interest in the photo itself and the other text on the page.

It seems quite practical to make your own modest photo archives. Besides pictures of landscapes, towns or whatever you deal with, there should be pictures of important persons. For example, if a renowned ecologist arrives in your town to give a lecture on the problems of a proposed factory, take a picture when he is talking to citizens or the chairman of your organisation. It is possible that you will use his opinion to support your position at some time and editors will surely appreciate being able to accompany the text with a photo that is directly related to your subject.

You should remember this even when going out to gather some information or to do an interview for your own purposes. Even your organisation's magazine does not have to look plain. You can also get pictures of your opponents this way, which can be used to accompany your articles as well.

A photo of the author It is common for newspapers to publish an author's photo together with a certain type of article. If requested, you should be ready to supply a good-quality current black and white photo. Studies show that mainly middle-aged and older readers read newspapers. If you give an average reader an article accompanied by a photo showing a writer who is middle-aged, and then exactly the same piece of text with a photo of a twenty-year old author, they will consider the first one much more credible.

The custom of publishing an author's photo together with certain types of articles has been spreading lately, especially in dailies. If you want to publish in those that do so, you have to be ready to supply your photo when asked.