

CHAPTER 17

ROUTINE NEWS FORM

ON a recent July day the phone rang in the office of the Tree Fruit branch of the State Experiment Station at Wenatchee, Washington. The horticulturist in charge answered the call and listened to the query that came. He replied by saying, "160 and 479," and hung up.

A reporter was at the other end of the wire, calling from the editorial offices of the *Wenatchee Daily World*. He wanted to know the figures on the day's catch in the two moth-flight traps operated by this branch experiment station.

Wenatchee is the center of the largest apple-growing section in America. An annual menace to these orchards is codling moth. By use of the two traps, the entomologists at the station keep tab on the emergence of the moths and thus are able to advise the growers as to exact time of applying sprays.

That night in the Wenatchee paper, the following table was printed, with the figures given over the phone as the last line in the table:

MOTH FLIGHT

Date	Station Moths	S. Slope Moths
July 11.....	4.....	95
July 12.....	16.....	82
July 13.....	25.....	100
July 14.....	16.....	11
July 15.....	25.....	100
July 16.....	16.....	26
July 17.....	51.....	110
July 18.....	60.....	272
July 20.....	39.....	149
July 21.....	89.....	423
July 22.....	55.....	230
July 23.....	149.....	526
July 24.....	250.....	601
July 25.....	161.....	733
July 26.....	160.....	479

This table was not given display position on the front page. It was buried on an inside page, appearing in about the same

position each day. Yet this table was probably the most important item in Wenatchee any day during the season when the codling moths had to be controlled. Apples, along with other fruits, constitute the biggest business in Wenatchee. The welfare of the city and surrounding orchard land depends largely upon apples—not only the welfare of the growers and the packers and shippers, but merchants, banks, and nearly everybody else.

This important news was not presented in a form that would fit into any of the types described in previous chapters. It was a simple statistical table, designed to fit a special news need. No explanation accompanied it; that was not necessary. Everybody around Wenatchee understood it.

The table illustrates how a large proportion of news in daily or weekly newspapers and in trade and technical publications of many kinds is handled. The method might well be labeled as a routine form of news presentation.

Its purpose may be said to be to present the most information in the least possible space.

Familiar types of routine news: A very common example of daily routine news is the weather report, usually carried on the front page or in some other regular position, and written in stereotyped phraseology. This refers to the statistical record and not to the rather fanciful weather story published by many newspapers when weather conditions are out of the ordinary or for any other reason that appeals to some reporter.

The list of routine items presented is long, as an examination of any daily newspaper will disclose. Here are some of them: deaths, births, traffic accidents, marriage licenses, wedding announcements, divorces, fire runs, arrests, certain court activities, contract awards, building records, church notices, radio time tables, amusement attractions.

In newspapers on the seaboard, especially in shipping cities, the daily table of tides may be found, and the arrival and departure of ocean vessels. Along the Ohio and Mississippi rivers a table of river stages appears daily. In some irrigated sections, newspapers present tables showing the water levels in irrigation reservoirs.

City dailies in the Great Lakes region report the passage of boats through the Sault Ste. Marie and by Mackinaw City. Highway detours are presented weekly.

Scores of sports contests are presented in tabular form, as are racing forms, racing results, awards in livestock and flower shows and other exhibitions. In areas of forests and streams, fishing conditions of streams and lakes may be presented.

Market reports and prices: An examination of the financial and market pages of daily newspapers will quickly give evidence that they and many of their readers consider routine news of markets of all kinds as of utmost importance. Literally, pages are given to such information by such publications as the *New York Times* and the *Chicago Tribune*. They tell the story of a day's dealings in stocks and bonds, cattle and hogs, grains, produce of all kinds, fruits, cotton, textiles, meats, metals, lumber, foreign exchange, electric power production, and so on and on, in every market of the world, until the whole tale of the world's activities in trade is completed.

The gathering of that news, its transmission in quick time, and its publication constitute one of the marvels of news presentation.

As part of this story, the skilled experts in the news fields prepare tables of market averages, past and present, chain store sales, trends, and the like; they must be accurate to the last detail. The *New York Times* has a booklet (price 25 cents) which under the title, *Financial News*, lists 200 daily and weekly and monthly reports of business and finance published by that newspaper.

In areas where special production of raw materials and finished goods and foods has developed—such as in the Wenatchee apple country referred to at the beginning of this chapter—newspapers publish routine news to fit. For example, in Tulsa, center of oil, many tables of production and shipment are prepared and presented as news; in mining areas, the output of copper, of silver or zinc, is reported; in California and Florida, citrus fruit production has its special place.

Special publications for routine news: In many trade and industrial fields are special journals which carry prices and other

market and production information in detail. They carry much weight, and their tabulations are accepted as accurate and reliable.

Among them are the *Chicago Daily Drovers' Journal* and similar dailies published at other livestock market centers. A recent issue of the Chicago publication carried thirty-seven different tables dealing with livestock and thirty-four dealing with grains and produce. *The Packer*, issued in several regional editions, contains the prices and trade news for readers interested in the production and marketing of vegetables, fruits, and the like. Department store buyers, wholesale merchants, and manufacturers of clothing and dress accessories find their news in the daily, *Women's Wear*. There are also special financial dailies, as *The Wall Street Journal* and *Barron's*.

The *Engineering News Record* carries a monthly department giving a business summary which contains tables of construction volume and new capital, FHA mortgages, construction costs, wage rates, material shipments, building permits, cost-of-living indexes, and engineering construction contracts. Elsewhere, prices from twenty or more cities are given for cement, aggregates, ready-mixed concrete, paving brick, road oils, iron and steel products, various kinds of pipe, lumber, glass, explosives, chemicals, piles, ties, lime, paint, roofing, skilled and common wage rates. Classified construction reports for the entire country are given.

Iron Age has a record of many years for being the accepted source of prices for iron and steel. Figures on coal production and consumption are a regular feature of *Coal Age*. In *Engineering and Mining Journal* can be found a monthly summary of the markets, much of it in tabular form.

How routine news is gathered: The gathering and distribution of much of this routine news is highly organized on a country-wide scale. The United States Department of Agriculture and the United States Department of Commerce have in recent years entered the field. Through the years the great news agencies, especially the Associated Press, have been the principal reliance of most dailies. However, some publications maintain their own staff representatives in market centers, sometimes in cooperation with

other journals. There are also private agencies which serve clients either in special or general fields.

In the market centers, the various exchanges provide an essential source of routine news; they are the official gatherers of this information, and they make it available to the representatives of press associations, news agencies, and publications. This news is gathered with great speed. Within a short time after a market closes, its news in detail is on the wires for all parts of the country and of the world (in peace time).

Local routine news gathering is the job of some reporter, who sometimes has a rather difficult task because in smaller fields there is no exchange or other central assembly point to which this information goes. He must establish his own several sources of information and then use his trained judgment in establishing fair market figures. That is especially true in the local weekly newspaper field.

The worker in the field of market news needs to be a good reporter at bottom, and in addition, he must like the work and undergo a good deal of training on the job. The beginner in the field on such a newspaper as *The New York Times*, for example, must serve a long period of apprenticeship and observation by his superiors. He must convince them that he has the knack, that he is accurate, absolutely reliable, and that he wants to make his career in the field. Carelessness and less than 100 per cent integrity cannot be tolerated. However, when a reporter makes good, his pay is relatively high.

In some states the state and Federal governments maintain a staff of men in a central office to gather and compile information about livestock, crops, poultry production, and dairying. They have the assistance of reporters in every county—sometimes in many townships, who gather first-hand information about livestock population, dairying and dairy production, poultry production, and crop plantings, conditions, and harvest. They also gather information on prices received by farmers. Their frequent reports of state-wide conditions are supplied to the daily and weekly press and farm journals. They present not only the current figures on crops, livestock and prices, but compare them with the figures

for other years. In some states valuable statistics on the buying power of the farmer's dollar as compared with other periods are included. Often these information bureaus include on their staffs a man or two with a combination of training in economics and statistics and journalism.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Examine and list all the types of routine news to be found in one issue of a daily newspaper, a class or trade daily or weekly, and an engineering or industrial periodical.
2. Clip and turn in examples of five different kinds of routine news from any publication.
3. Prepare a calendar of coming events for the rest of the college term.