



# Harvard Model Congress

## Boston 2024

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## GUIDE TO THE MEDIA

*Edited by Alex Min & Katharine Forst*

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### INTRODUCTION

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Welcome to Harvard Model Congress Media! We are excited to welcome you to one of the conference's most dynamic and engaging committees. You'll have to think on your feet to respond in real-time to breaking news, international crises, and the political decisions of the legislature.

Over the three days of the conference, you will have the chance to experience the life of a journalist, from conducting interviews to writing articles and opinion pieces. In doing so, you'll become familiar with the techniques used by modern-day journalists to gather compelling content, critically analyze important and controversial issues, report on the facts, draft stories, and more.

Most importantly, as a journalist you will learn how to create an article from start to finish, whether that be a feature on a breaking story, or editorial article on critical, controversial, and emerging stories. You will acquire valuable skills that real-life reporters use when collecting evidence and writing dynamic news.

Armed with information, you will be able to shape the course of the conference as your articles, opinion pieces, and works of photojournalism are released on our HMC news website.

If you're excited about the prospect of listening in on confidential briefings, convincing delegates to divulge sensitive information, capturing "on the record" chaos, and having your work read by the entire conference, then this is the program for you! After your HMC Media experience, you will never read a newspaper, scan an online column, or watch the news the same way again.

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### THE CURRENT STATE OF THE MEDIA

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Over the past century, the number of independent newspapers in the United States have faced a steady decline. While the newspaper industry survived the introduction of technologies such as the radio and television, the same cannot be said for the introduction of the internet. In recent years, most newspapers', particularly local newspapers', over-dependency on printed media as their principal revenue source has forced them to downsize staff and ultimately shut down. Due to the advent of the internet and the ubiquity of social media, the dinosaurs of print, from *The New York Times* to the *USA*

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Today, have all undergone severe transformations over the past decade. Indeed the affordability, accessibility, and portability of web-based journalism through modern peripherals such as cell phones, laptops, and tablets have attracted most of journalism's audience away from printed media. Although some newspapers, such as *The New York Times*, have tried to generate online revenue by limiting the number of articles a user can read for free and requiring paid subscriptions, this has not made up for the revenue lost in the Web Era.

Meanwhile, destination sites like *BuzzFeed* and *Huffington Post*—and thousands of other partisan blogs—have grabbed the attention of consumers, and also have broke some amazing stories. Nonetheless, every form of newspapers, newsrooms, and quality journalism is valuable. With Americans more frequently turning to online echo-chambers to reinforce their viewpoints, the nation has become seemingly more divided than ever, making the presence of objective and quality journalism more important than ever. The future of journalism, then, lies at the convergence of the Internet, media, and print. And the future of journalists lies in their ability to embrace a multimedia future, approaching this future with a diverse set of media-savvy skills and know-how.

## JOURNALISTS OF TODAY AND TOMORROW

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Journalism today can be found anywhere and everywhere, whether it's in the form of an opinionated blog post on voting accessibility for *The Huffington Post* or a detailed description of economic reform for *The Wall Street Journal*. These different types of journalism require different skills and abilities. Gone are the days of just paper and print, today's journalists need to be Internet and multimedia-savvy. Look at any article online and not only will you find a story, but you will also experience supplementary pictures, videos, and audio clips. Successful journalists today find themselves filling the role of reporter, editor, producer, or even the cameraperson. Through HMC Media, you will learn and experience the tools needed to become a journalist of today—and be prepared to become the journalist of the future.

## WHAT TO EXPECT IN HMC MEDIA

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Some of you may have already experienced writing and editing journalistic content through a school newspaper or personal blog. Others may be completely new to this form of writing. No matter your experience, HMC Media will present you with exciting new challenges—and a skillset to match—that will turn you into a stronger journalist than ever before.

### *Media at the Conference*

Once you arrive at HMC Media in February, we will engage in a brief but information-packed training on what it means to be a journalist, on how to write news articles and opinion pieces, and on the ways to effectively interview while reporting.

HMC Media strives to realistically replicate and combine the workings of the best multimedia news outlets in the nation—and you'll get to be a part of the fast-paced and energetic environment that defines the way news is reported!

Thus, you will be split up according to “beats,” (for example, Foreign Affairs or Healthcare), based partly on your preference, and partly on the needs of HMC Media as a whole. Leading up to the conference, we will assign you your “beat” and this will become your area of coverage and chief responsibility. You will be the “point person” on all things related to your “beat”. As the resident expert, you will then be able to craft particularly hard-hitting reports on the subject matter.

Don’t worry if you don’t get your top-choice “beat”. The Media at HMC is unique in that you will be able to test different spheres of journalism and conduct investigative research in multiple areas of politics over the course of the conference; later on in the conference we will provide the opportunity to rotate “beats.” Regardless, always ensure that you know the nuances and sources of conflict as well as controversy for your “beat”. As a chief correspondent, you will provide crucial information to the HMC public.

Good reporting then requires plenty of prior research on the issues and individuals involved. Therefore, it is highly recommended that you read committee briefings prior to the conference. Holding a basic understanding of the issues being discussed in committee session will allow you to quickly develop interview questions and grasp the important events in order to write your articles.

In addition, it will be helpful to read news articles and follow publications’ social media accounts that cover a wide range of topics. Learn how an article on congressional military funding is different from a piece on a new policy developed by the World Health Organization (WHO). This too will help you develop articles best tailored to your “beat.”

Ultimately, the greatest source of information will be found when you sit in on committee sessions and interview representatives. Always remember that it is your right and responsibility to conduct embedded journalism within committees! Be sure to take a pad of paper and a pen as you record what legislation is being developed.

You will be loved, hated, used, and misused by the people you break news on, but you've got the power of the media behind you, so they will grow to respect you. No matter which “beat” you're assigned to, it's up to you to become an expert on your assignment. Know its issues, subtleties, and controversies better than the people in it! Read your committee's briefings, sit in on your committee meetings, gather facts on the legislation debated, get to know the key players, and more. You have the fully authorized right to sit in on any committee session. Take notes! Interview members of Congress, lobbyists, everyone involved! Once you're fully “in the know” and have an unparalleled grasp of the subject, you're going to be using this expertise to create compelling and substantive multimedia articles and reports on it the whole conference will read.

Besides gathering preliminary information on the hard facts (what's been passed, who's involved, what's happened), in order to begin to write your articles you'll first be pitching a story topic to the HMC Media staff. We'll help you focus your topic, frame your story, and suggest additional resources you should tap to enrich it. There is no universal method for reporting, and you will be given a lot of freedom and autonomy to do it. But you're going to have to be creative, sometimes even stealthy, and use your time wisely. Once you've finished gathering your information and sifted through your content, you will come back to the newsroom to craft your story. Once complete, an HMC Media staffer (we're both your producers and your editors) will help edit your story, explaining the reasons for any changes made. Then, after we've worked on it together, we'll publish your story online in real-time to the HMC Media website. Gone are the days of publishing one or two newsletters each day; now, you'll have the chance to update your stories instantaneously and round-the-clock. The website will feature multimedia and in-depth investigative reporting at its best. There, you'll have the opportunity to pair your writing with video, audio, hyperlink, and more: everything it takes to write a compelling multimedia article of the future!

As a reporter, everyone will be reading what you write. Just like in the actual US Congress, going through media reports is the method by which all members, political pundits, and news junkies get the information they crave. With HMC Media we'll be reporting the facts, explaining the controversies, and acting as the "fourth branch" of the government. Journalism is one of the only professions explicitly protected by the Constitution. It's our duty, as it has been for over 240 years, to keep the politicians in check—and they're sure to be listening if we expose them.

Newspapers, blogs, and news programs have strict deadlines, and HMC Media is no exception. You'll be working under multiple deadlines and be expected to produce a certain amount of quality content by each deadline. In a matter of hours, you will be able to craft an informative, compelling article with supporting multimedia components. Of course, once you're done with your story, it's back to your assigned "beat" to start collecting information for your next scoop.

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## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

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### *Reporting Your Story*

Great reporters discover and report the truth behind a story without angering their sources, sacrificing accuracy, or sticking too closely to prescribed norms. The following sections will help you organize and think about how to investigate and corroborate the perfect multimedia story.

#### Preparation: Knowing the Issue

One of the most exciting and challenging aspects of reporting is not just learning about new concepts, but also quickly developing a working knowledge of areas that you knew nothing about before. Gaining a full understanding of an issue or topic in a short period of time is a crucial skill for journalists and one of the most rewarding experiences you'll have in HMC Media. Consider each new story a potential learning experience. Only

if you thoroughly understand and feel comfortable with a topic can you objectively and persuasively present it to your audience.

Once you have developed a compelling idea for a story, you may want to make a list of questions that you would like to find the answers to. This will help you to guide your research. As you gather information for a story, you may want to begin outlining or even writing parts of your piece. Ask yourself if you could explain the topic to someone who knew nothing about it if you had to and if you could explain the topic clearly and concisely. Think creatively about the different methods you could use to be persuasive as well. Would a video clip from a person pivotal to the story enrich the story? An audio clip of the committee debating the topic? What will give your audience the fullest, yet most accessible, understanding? In essence, journalism is breaking down important, complicated issues, analyzing them, and presenting them in a way that allows your readers to draw their own informed conclusions.

As you research, make sure to take note of the important congressmen, judges, delegates, lobbyist groups, and other political players. These people will be those with whom you need to speak. You will sit in on most committee sessions to do your reporting, but you may also be required (even encouraged) to take more stealthy measures to get the information that you need. As you gather comments from politicians at the conference, remember to carefully record their responses. As stealthy and resourceful as you may be, accuracy cannot be compromised. Accuracy is the mission of any publication or newspaper, and therefore it's your mission, too. Also, don't forget that HMC staffers want to help: if you do not understand an issue or need the name of a congressman in a committee, feel free to ask the committee chair and vice-chairs.

Finally, you should attempt to create a list of general questions as well as pointed questions to ask key players in your article topic. If some part of a senator's position is controversial, make sure to ask him or her about it, and then ask the opposition the same question. Ask hard-hitting questions. Reporting is not just about writing down the things that other people want you to write—instead, at times, it's reporting on exactly what they don't want you to write about. At the end of the day, you need to consider and write about what your readers care about, and you may have to engage in some full-contact journalism to get the information you need.

### *Researching Your Story*

#### Being in the Center of the Action

Half of life is showing up. As obvious as it might sound, the first step toward a great story is to find out where the story is, and then going there. Locate the room for the committee you are covering. During a lull in the session, when you won't be disrupting the meeting, introduce yourself to the committee chairs; tell them that you'd like to listen to the debate and perhaps briefly pull a delegate out of committee to interview them. Then, remain in the room for a while to hear what people are talking about, and, during breaks or caucuses, look for big groups of people and see what they are arguing about. Take notes and record the discussion throughout: what are the opinions of the key leaders? What policies are they pushing for? What is the reaction of other committee members? How does this discussion relate to other issues being debated at the conference? Finally, generate a list of people with whom you'd like to speak.

### Personal Interviews

Once you've identified key players in committee and generated a list of speakers for whom you have questions, it's time to interview them. Find a good time in debate (or ask the committee chairs) when you can ask a delegate you need to talk to if he or she would mind conducting a brief interview—be respectful, but don't take no for an answer.

As an interviewer, it's your responsibility to strike a balance between asking questions and listening. Listening is crucial. Remember that interviewing is not a passive process. You must always be on your toes and alert to holes in answers and unclear information that you need to probe further. After clearly introducing yourself, you can begin to ask questions. Make sure you give the interviewee time to fully answer the question before you ask your next question. Typically, you should start with more general questions before getting to the hard-hitting, exciting stuff. Knowing how to guide an interview—when to start, when to stop, what questions to ask, when to ask them, and more—is an important instrument in a journalist's arsenal. Ask the interviewee to be more specific if his or her answer is vague, but don't be too pushy with a source.

Sometimes an interview should be conducted aggressively, especially if you're interviewing for an editorial, but remember to be patient as the interviewee tries to answer a hard-hitting question. Also, make sure to take advantage of awkward pauses. They make people nervous, and when people get nervous, they sometimes blurt out interesting information that you couldn't have uncovered elsewhere. Take your time writing down the interviewee's responses, but make sure that the interviewee doesn't become frustrated that you're wasting his or her time. Finally, note the reactions of the interviewee: is the interviewee reluctant to answer your questions? Is the interviewee becoming flustered?

Ultimately, there is no set procedure for interviewing. Be creative! Use more general questions to ease into the tough ones. You can stick to your list of questions or ask new ones as they come to mind. You might not need to ask all of your questions if you have all the information you need, but make sure the issue and your interviewee's stance is clear to you (if it is not, ask more clarifying questions). Adapt the format of the interview to the person you're interviewing, the type of article you're writing, and the information you're getting. In general, though, interviews will tend to be short.

Working with recorded video is a two-edged sword. On the one hand, people, especially politicians, love to be on-camera and recorded. They will flock to it if you let them. On the other hand, people are more careful, more deliberate in their words. They know that it's not just their name on paper, but instead their face that will be associated with whatever they say. Use this to your advantage, but proceed with caution.

The person you are interviewing may ask to keep the comments "off the record." If he or she requests this, you must not attribute the information to your source in your article and, here at HMC Media, must corroborate it with at least one other source. The source may not want that information published because he or she wants to remain anonymous, or, perhaps, because it is not true. However, you can use this information to prompt other sources to confirm that the off-the-record information is true. In general, if you introduce yourself as a reporter, all comments are assumed to be on the record unless the source requests otherwise.

People often talk faster than you can write. Good reporters become skilled at jotting, or using abbreviations to take notes more quickly. Most of what people say will be

useful later as paraphrased information, so you only need to get the gist. However, for each person you talk to, you will want at least three or four direct quotes. Listen for them and write them down word-for-word; ask a person to slow down or repeat themselves if you need them to. These will be the “sound bites” you use in your story so that the major players have a presence in the piece. Misquoting is not only unethical, but it is also bad journalism. Note that should someone you have interviewed want you to read your notes back to him/her, you need only read back direct quotations. Be polite, but make sure that your rights as a journalist are respected. Recording an interview, whether through audio or video, is an easy way to take accurate quotes and sift out the ones that are more important than others. However, there’s a lot more material to work with—and more material means more time to parse through all of it. Use your time wisely.

Finally, although a one-on-one interview with a key player in the debate is useful, it is equally important to get the reactions from other committee members. During a caucus, go into a breakout room with a committee member and ask them what they think. This does not need to be a formal interview. As a journalist, your job includes more than simply reporting the facts, and thus, you should get opinions from various sources.

### *Journalistic Ethics*

Each day, reporters must make choices about which stories to run. Oftentimes, this decision involves serious ethical concerns. Journalists’ peers and the general public often ostracize journalists who cross the line of ethical considerations. For example, not long ago, two *Boston Globe* columnists were fired for ethics violations. One had used the jokes of a famous comedian without citation, while the other had invented people and situations for the purposes of a story. Although these are extreme cases of plagiarism and falsification, most reporters are faced with questions of journalistic ethics many times a day that fall into a less straightforward “gray area.” There are two basic concerns in journalistic ethics: how much to press and how much to print.

How much should reporters press the people they interview for information? On the one hand, they cannot gather the information they need without being intrusive; on the other hand, pressing a source too hard can anger him or her and defeat the purpose of the interview. In most cases, a careful reporter will be able to satisfy both his own needs and the source’s wishes. If you are asking questions and sense a source beginning to balk, do not just press ahead. Try rephrasing your question, breaking it into smaller pieces, or asking a related question. Your goal should be to try to develop a good rapport and conversational dynamic to make the source feel comfortable.

Once reporters have the information they sought, how much of it should actually be printed? When two young *Washington Post* reporters, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, uncovered evidence that incriminated members of former President Richard Nixon’s staff who were attempting to cover up illegal activities, they were told not to publish it. “Deep Throat,” a then-unidentified source in the president’s administration, had confirmed the information. Woodward and Bernstein were confident that Deep Throat was “in a position to know,” but the *Post*’s editor, Ben Bradlee, made them get confirmation from another source before publishing the famous story that eventually led to Nixon’s resignation.

How many and what kinds of sources do you need to verify a story before printing it? The answer depends on what type of story you are reporting. For an event you attend,

such as a congressional debate, you need no source other than yourself. To report a quote from a public figure, you can take notes yourself or borrow notes from another reporter you know to be reliable.

Journalists face the problem of source confirmation frequently, especially when reporting news of a controversial nature. For example, if you hear that the National Security Council plans to bomb a terrorist camp, you must seek confirmation from multiple sources and consider any possible biases that your sources might have. You must ensure that you are not unknowingly spreading potentially false rumors, which could be damaging to the parties involved and also harm your reputation as a journalist. One way to safeguard against biases is to disclose relevant political affiliations and stances for each of your sources so that their backgrounds and biases are transparent to readers. Furthermore, you must take into account whether your story could divulge matters of national or personal security that could be dangerous for the parties involved. For example, some reporters came under criticism during their coverage of the US War in Iraq for their coverage of American troop movements, which some feared could endanger American troops on the front lines.

If you speak with a source that refuses to be identified, you have several options. First, you can explain to the source that he or she can go “off-the-record.” Information you receive off the record cannot be published. However, you can use it to inform your other interviews and prompt other sources to give you on-the-record information. You can also use an off-the-record comment to confirm facts given by another source. Never reveal the source of information you received “off-the-record.” This hurts the integrity and legitimacy of your publication and your organization (not to mention that it could get you fired!). Another option that you have if your source prefers anonymity is to conduct an interview “on background,” which allows you to publish information without attributing it to your source by name. You and your source have to agree on a designation. This committee will accept designations such as “a Republican senator” or “a liberal lobbyist.” However, the designation must offer at least some level of detail to the reader. For example, “a source in a position to know” will not be considered an acceptable designation for your source.

Sources with a particular interest in an issue are not always reliable informants. Make sure you know a source’s biases and filter out fact from fiction by comparing competing points of view. Generally, the more sources you speak to, the more balanced perspective your article will have. Do not be afraid to provide your editors with too much information. We will help you weave it into a meaningful story.

In the end, newspaper reporters and editors are left to decide whether or not to publish sensitive information. The most important considerations to take into account are the impact that it could have on your sources, on the parties involved in the story, and on the city, state, or even country. News organizations have voluntarily waited before publishing information about the military. For instance, Allied generals briefed reporters on the time and location of the D-Day invasion before it happened in 1944, but the press, out of integrity, waited until after the operation to publish anything. Had a paper gone for the scoop, more lives could have been lost, and the paper would have lost the respect of the public and the government.



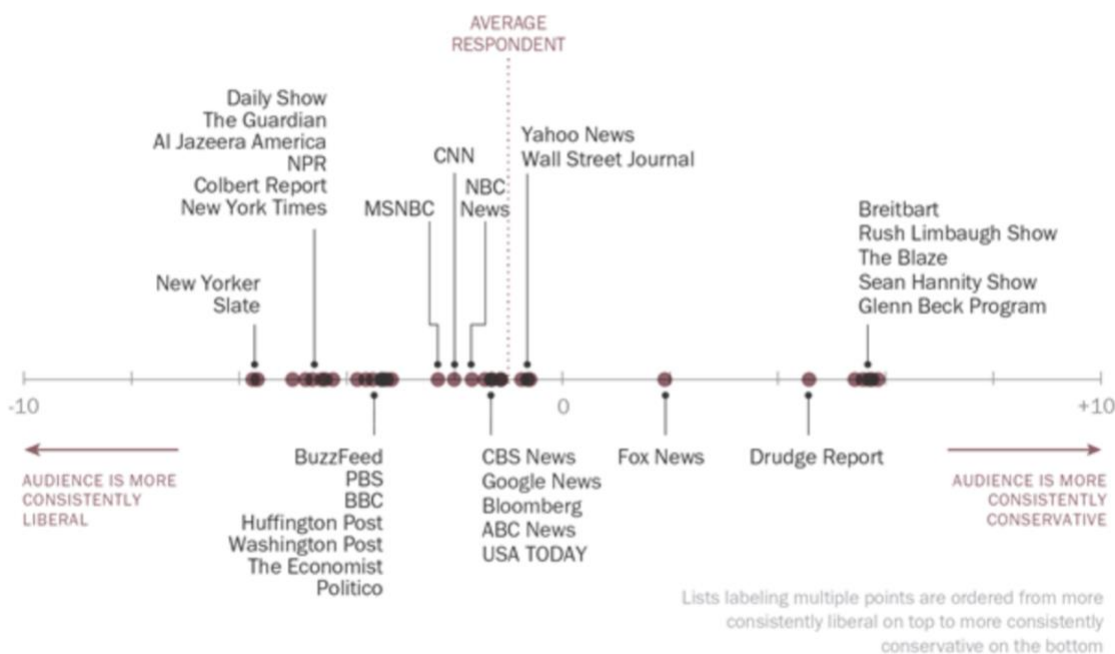
## *Partisan Slant in News Reporting*

Media outlets always claim to print the truth, but each outlet portrays a slightly different version of or way to view the “truth.” It is not uncommon for news organizations to have a political slant. Even the most reputable newspapers like The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times have a certain degree of bias. Of course, some news organizations have a more pronounced bias than others. On the bottom of this page, you’ll find a diagram from a Pew Research Center survey that exhibits the big names in US media and their audiences’ ideological bias.

## Ideological Placement of Each Source’s Audience

### Ideological Placement of Each Source’s Audience

*Average ideological placement on a 10-point scale of ideological consistency of those who got news from each source in the past week...*



American Trends Panel (wave 1). Survey conducted March 19-April 29, 2014. Q22. Based on all web respondents. Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions (see About the Survey for more details.) ThinkProgress, DailyKos, Mother Jones, and The Ed Schultz Show are not included in this graphic because audience sample sizes are too small to analyze.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Blogs are often more upfront about their bias or partisanship, but one blog's article is often indistinguishable from another's. Different writers are bound to emphasize different facts and sources, thus changing the thrust of an article. Professional reporters rarely sit down and consciously write a slanted story: this is not only unprofessional, but

it also defeats the purpose of journalism. However, a reporter for a particular paper with a particular readership will ask different questions and use different material than a reporter with another readership.

It is important to note, however, that in writing a “liberal” or “conservative” article, a reporter does not achieve a particular slant by expressing his or her own opinions. News articles are for reporting the facts, not editorializing. This does not refer only to sentences or stories that state the reporter’s views on the topic of the article. It could simply refer to letting one’s own opinions subtly interfere with the phrasing of a sentence or the selection of certain words.

### *Opinions, Editorials, and Differences from News Reporting*

Observing a committee session all day and being unable to speak can be a frustrating assignment. Sometimes, the debate will not make sense to you; at other times, you will feel the delegates are ignoring a major point that is obvious to you from the sidelines. This makes it all the more challenging to write an article as objectively as possible. While the general public must not know your individual opinions, you will have your chance to share your thoughts about issues with other reporters in editorial meetings.

The HMC Media website will leave room for staff editorials and opinion pieces. In writing such a piece, you are encouraged to be opinionated and write about any subject you feel passionate about. These pieces will be publicly distinguished as opinion articles, as opposed to news reporting. Therefore, readers will have the clear understanding that you are discussing your own personal perspectives rather than presenting an objective analysis.

### *Writing Your Article*

Since you will often have to produce a story in a short amount of time, it is essential that you master the rules of good writing. Although the content of your article is most important, it is often the packaging of the article, or the “style,” that is essential for reaching your readers. Newspaper writing differs greatly from traditional essay writing, and blog writing perhaps differs even further. Both, however, are actually quite straightforward. A few simple basics about writing an article will take you a long way toward becoming a successful reporter. During the conference, you will be drafting articles at a fast pace, and you will not have a lot of time to edit and re-edit your stories.

#### When—and What—to Write

Not every article in the paper has to be hard news or an editorial. In fact, our HMC Media website will include features and news analysis as well.

There are several good, creative ways to go beyond breaking news at HMC. One is to write about the perspective of constituents on the actions of Congress. In this case, your fellow students, thinking and acting as students, not congressmen, are your source of information. You can do selected interviews with students from different regions or take a poll on certain issues.

Another possibility is to tell a story behind a bill or a court case. Is a particular Senator or Representative pushing for a bill for a particular reason? What are the broader

issues involved? What event triggered the court cases being heard in the Supreme and District Courts? Stories that discuss the issues as well as the specifics involved can be a lot more interesting than the facts about bill passage. This type of story gives reporters the opportunity to write additional stories not dependent on how current the news is, but instead, how relevant the story is.

The material you gather merits a full story if it meets the following minimum criteria: 1) an event has occurred: a passage or failure bill, an interesting debate, etc.; 2) the event has broad significance or implications; and 3) the facts of the event distinguish it from past events. However, even events that do not meet the above criteria, such as the passage of an insignificant bill or a standstill in committee debate, need to be reported. Thus, a reporter will often write a short 'brief' that includes, at minimum, the full name of the act, the committee, the sponsoring senator or representative and the vote tally with the party breakdown, if possible. The briefs will be run together each day in order to most fully cover the conference.

### Interviewing

You are encouraged to conduct interviews to fellow delegates during the conference. Interviewing other delegates is a strategy that you can use to write effective blog posts, and including primary sources like interviews will give even more credibility to your piece. Including quotes from your interviews will make your blog posts more interesting and dynamic, and your reader will appreciate it. Before starting your interview, think about what you want to get out of it. This will help you stay focused on what you want to write about. Finally, always remember to take into account the biases that your interviewees may have, striving to write from a balanced perspective.

### Checking Your Facts

As you assemble your notes and begin writing your story, it is crucial that you double-check all of your facts: your reputation as well as that of the entire newspaper is at stake. It is also critical that you are precise in your reporting. Given that the same role is often played by multiple people at HMC, it is easy for the reader to get confused if you do not attribute facts in the correct manner. Be careful, be consistent, and be creative!

### Keys to Success

Do not use 'flowery' language: articles must be concise and lucid. Your HMC Media staffers will revise verbose writing. The facts of the story—rather than the writing style of the reporter—should take precedence.

Attribute facts: declarative statements are different from facts: facts are not self-evident, so always cite a source of information. For example, rather than saying, "The Democrats are losing the race for the Senate," you should say, "According to a poll conducted by MSNBC, the Democrats are behind in the race for control of the Senate." Without attributing your information to a source, you can lose credibility as a writer and hurt the publication's legitimacy.

Use quotations: the most common and effective way to support your statements is the use of quotations. Comments, predictions or opinions of political analysts, politicians, lobbyists, and so on, will bolster the credibility of your writing as well as make it more enjoyable to read. Almost every other paragraph, if not every single paragraph, should

contain a quotation in which you cite the source of the quotation and frame the quotation in some sort of context.

Keep paragraphs short: newspaper articles generally consist of short, two- to three-sentence paragraphs. This packages the information in the article into smaller chunks that the reader can more easily understand. Any time you use a quotation, you should start a new paragraph.

### *The Major Components of a News Article*

#### The Lede

Every second we spend chasing down facts, writing stories, and publishing the paper would be wasted if no one were to read it. The best way to catch the reader's attention is with an informative and interesting opening, or "lede." The lede should be at most one or two sentences and should state the facts simply: who, what, when, where, why, and how. Your aim is to give the reader enough information to convey what the story is about, and at the same time, convince him or her to keep reading.

The lede should also convey action, and avoid using passive verbs or complex sentences:

- (Wrong) "A major environmental bill was passed by Congress today after it was debated for several hours."
- (Better) "Congress today passed a major environmental bill after hours of intense debate."

Always remember to put the most important information in the lede; the reader should not have to read several paragraphs into your story to find out whether or not a bill passed, for example.

In addition, an effective lede frames events in a present-day context. Readers and viewers want to know what is currently happening, not what has already happened. It should answer the question: "How is this affecting people now?"

- (Bad) "A massive fire destroyed countless houses in the Hamptons yesterday."
- (Good) "Many Hamptons residents are left homeless after a fire destroyed countless homes yesterday."

#### The Body

The outline of the standard newspaper article is an inverted pyramid, with the essential facts at the top, and less important paragraphs toward the bottom. This format enables the editor to cut the final paragraphs for the story to fit in a specific space if he or she needs to without losing important material.

For example, suppose you have assembled the following facts: a bill passed the Energy and Commerce Committee; it was sponsored by Representative Jones from the fifth district of Indiana; the vote was 11-3; the bill regulates the scrambling of television

broadcast signals; the television industry opposes it. There is no way you can put all that information in the lede in an informative way, so you might write it like this:

“A bill to prevent television broadcasters from scrambling their signals took an important step forward today, despite opposition from the television industry, as a House committee approved it for further action.”

Following the inverted pyramid model, subsequent paragraphs could introduce quotations from the industry representatives and members of Congress who are for and against the bill. You could also put the bill into historical context, or include text of sections of the bill that were most controversial. You might find out whether similar bills have ever been introduced and what happened to them.

Stylistically, remember to keep sentences short and simple. Try to convey just the facts, without superfluous words. There will be many busy and tired readers at the conference who will not bother to read poorly written articles.

## WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

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Being in HMC Media gives you the opportunity to experience HMC in a fun, unique, and meaningful way. You will have the chance to interact with lots of the other students in different scenarios, whether you are conducting an interview or critically observing them in Congress for an opinion piece. You will get to see all sides of HMC and meet fascinating and passionate people along the way. You will be reporting and presenting the need-to-know facts. Your opinions will influence debate. Your presence will be feared and respected. Your skills will be admired and tested. You will experience what it is like to report on issues, hold interviews, offer opinions, record videos, and more, all under the thrilling pressure of a looming deadline. As your HMC staffers, we hope that you walk away from this experience with a greater knowledge and interest in the field of media, complete with all of the basic skills you need to be a journalist of the future.