

## **Developing Newspaper Literacy**

Reading an American newspaper is a unique skill, and your mastery of the genre can help you a great deal in your studies.

Most notable when discussing newspaper literacy is your ability to locate useful and/or interesting information. This means you have an understanding of the organizational structure of the American newspaper. Just as native speakers know that the table of contents for a book in English is located on the first few pages (and not at the end as in, for example, books written in Russian), they also know what to expect when they pick up a newspaper. For example:

### **Contents/Organization of a Newspaper**

- 1) A newspaper is divided into sections that may or may not include national, international, local, entertainment, business, features and sports news.
- 2) A newspaper can have more than one edition, each of which may contain different articles or different versions of the same article.
- 3) Articles on the front pages of sections typically contain a jump at which the reader is directed to turn to a different page in the same section in order to finish the story.
- 4) Other sections of the newspaper may include: classifieds, comics, car pages, real estate articles, book reviews, film/television reviews, TV listings, obituaries, shopping guides, real estate listings, letters to the editor, editorials, corrections, contact information, stock prices, weather or advice columns.
- 5) Newspapers contain an index on page 1 or 2 with page numbers of different sections.
- 6) Articles on the upper fold of the front page are considered more important than those on the lower fold.
- 7) Opinion pieces can only be found in one section and are always grouped together.
- 8) The front page can contain stories on any topic, while the inside of the first section typically only contains national and international news.
- 9) Opinion pieces and editorials can be found together, but editorials are never signed and are considered the opinion of the entire newspaper.

### **Contents of Articles**

- 1) Headlines and sub-heads are mini-summaries of articles and are always written in present tense.
- 2) Different types of articles have different structures.
- 3) Articles tend to use quotes more than paraphrases.
- 4) All information that is not considered general knowledge is attributed. For example, shared knowledge of history or daily events do not need to be cited. In general, if you don't need to look it up, you probably don't need to cite it.
- 5) Reporters typically try to include more than one point of view on a topic when possible.
- 6) Articles have a dateline that informs the reader as to where the events in the article take place.
- 7) The name typed above the article is the person who researched and wrote the article.
- 8) The most important information in a news article is usually at the very beginning and almost always before the jump.
- 9) Sources are named using their first and last names upon first mention, and then with only their last names on all subsequent mentions.

- 10) Journalists tend to use quotes more often than paraphrases, but usually paraphrase when they want to shorten a long quote or combine more than one.

### **General Knowledge about Newspapers**

- 1) Newspapers can be known for having a political slant in one direction or another, despite their statements of objectivity.
- 2) Newspapers generally publish new stories on their websites before they are printed.
- 3) Newspaper editors generally have a wide variety of stories from which to choose and must decide every day which articles to include and where to place them.
- 4) Newspapers make the bulk of their money by selling advertisements, not by selling newspapers.

### **Newspaper Reading Strategies**

- 1) Choosing an article to read: A great deal of information about an article can be found by simply reading its headline, lead and photo caption (cutline) and by also looking at its photo(s). This is a good way to get the main idea of an article and also to decide if you want to read more of it.
- 2) Evaluating the reliability of information: Journalists are trained to provide only the most reliable information possible and to give an objective view of the topic or event about which they are writing, but this does not always happen. We can evaluate the reliability of information they provide by asking the following questions about it:
  - a. is the source of the information knowledgeable on the subject matter?
  - b. is the source of the information trustworthy or might he/she have an ulterior motive (i.e. to sway public opinion in a certain direction or to protect himself)?
  - c. are there any opposing pieces of information or opinions presented, or does the reporter only give one side to the story?
  - d. does the article contain any information that presupposes a certain prejudice about a group of people on the part of the reader?
- 3) Skimming/Scanning articles: When we read newspaper articles, it is rarely necessary to read every word. A skilled reader will skim the first few words of every paragraph to get the main idea and also scan portions of the article for key words or phrases that might be interesting or relevant.
- 4) Knowing the basic structure of a newspaper article: While there is no steadfast structure for every newspaper article, there are some elements a skilled reader will know to expect:
  - \**News Articles*: The lead (first sentence) of every news article contains either the main idea of the article or the most important piece of information in the article. What follows is generally an account of relevant information starting with the most relevant and ending with the least.
  - \**Feature Articles*: These articles typically tell the reader a story and tend to have a beginning, middle and end. The lead will generally be written to attract your attention, not provide relevant information.