

Chapter 1

The Written Press

I Introduction

a. The British press

- The British press became truly independent in the eighteenth century when official censorship ceased to exert a heavy hand. Censorship remained a feature of British culture, however, until 1968 when the Theatres Act abolished it. It must be added that all newspapers exert a form of self-censorship, either to avoid libel suits or to remain within their editorial line or chosen house style.
- The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw the creation of press outlets such as *The London Magazine* (1732), *The Times* (1785), *The Observer* (1791), *The Guardian* (1821) and *the Economist* (1843), *The Daily Telegraph* (1855) which are still active today.
- The heyday of newspaper circulation was the decade of the 1970s, but the British are still among the greatest newspaper readers in the world. Mostly because of the digital/information revolution, newspaper circulation has dropped by half in the last decade in England and other Western countries.
- There are three types of newspaper: quality papers (aka the qualities, upper-market papers, the heavies), mid-market papers, and tabloids (aka the gutter press, the yellow press, down-market papers, the populars).
- Tabloids / Populars tend to cater for a less educated working class readership. They have a tendency towards somewhat unsophisticated / unsubtle / blatant patriotism. Tabloids have a penchant for openly biased / slanted opinion pieces and somewhat superficial (occasionally shoddy) reportage. They avail of highly coloured, gaudy pictures and resort to big, catchy, punning headlines. The writing style is often informal or even slang-oriented. The articles featured opt for lurid / sensational story-telling. Leading tabloids include *The Daily Mirror*, *The Daily Star* and *The Sun*.
- Quality newspapers offer extensive, in-depth analysis and commentary of almost every aspect of social life, but tend to focus primarily on politics, economics and high / highbrow culture. Leading nationwide qualities include *The Guardian*, *The Times*, *The Independent*, *New Statesman*, *The Spectator*, *The Financial Times*, *The Observer*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Economist*.
- Mid-market / middle market newspapers tend to cater for middle-brow readers or readers who expect both news coverage and light entertainment. Newspapers in this category include *The Daily Express* and *The Daily Mail*, but some might argue that papers like *The Observer* are really mid-market.
- Up to the 1990s, most newspapers in Britain were conservative. With the advent of New Labour, there was a nationwide swing towards centrism.

- Ownership of British newspapers is dominated by conservative press magnates who own *News International* and the *Mirror Group*, but opinion in many papers can vary across the political spectrum and is arguably rather fluid, especially when the editorial board is ideologically mixed or when guest writers are invited to share their opinions within the pages of the paper.
- In recent times, a number of papers have been accused and found guilty of inappropriate reporting practices such as cell phone hacking and paparazzi stalking. Created in 1843 (the same year as the quality paper *The Economist*) the world's best-selling tabloid *News of the World* ceased publication in 2011 over a phone-hacking scandal. Its fondness for revealing sex scandals gave it the nickname *Screws of the World*. Other papers have been accused of misogyny for not including enough female contributors. In response to accusations of sexism, papers such as *The London Review of Books* have proclaimed their wish to include a greater number of articles written by women, claiming that they receive fewer pitches from female writers.
- *The Times* is known as an establishment paper because it tends to support the political party in power. Historically, its political allegiance was to the conservatives but it remained neutral in some elections, refusing to endorse any party. Its contributors nowadays come from both sides of the spectrum but the perceived bias / slant of the newspaper is that it remains somewhat conservative / right-wing, even though it is not officially the press organ of the Conservative party. It tends to be read mostly by politicians, lawyers, businessmen and the upper echelons of professional people.
- *The Guardian's* perceived bias / slant is left-wing / left-of-center. It is considered to be liberal / progressive / reformist in its views, positioning itself as a bastion / bulwark / defense against predatory capitalism, the downgrading of education, the erosion of health care. It also has an anti-monarchic stance / standpoint / viewpoint and tends to defend worthy causes such as gay marriage, gun control and the protection of the environment. In 2018, it changed its format to tabloid size, retaining its quality newspaper status.
- *The Economist's* mission statement favours progress and innovation in all areas. It advocates civil liberties and economic freedom. It is economically liberal, supporting free markets / free trade, free immigration / freedom of movement, globalization, cultural liberalism, governmental regulation of health. It tends to support liberal causes and describes itself as a centrist paper. Although individual columnists take diverse views, the articles featured in *The Economist* are unsigned, thus preserving editorial anonymity. *The Guardian* once criticized it for endorsing / advocating privatization, deregulation and liberalization.
- *The Observer's* political allegiance is center-left. It is widely perceived as a moderate paper.
- The official aim of *The London Review of Books* is to challenge orthodoxy. Its articles are typically lengthy and opinionative. Contributors generally express strong opinions with an overt / explicit bias.
- *The Daily Telegraph* is perceived / viewed as being frankly conservative. It has been nicknamed the Torygraph in reference to the Tory / Conservative party.
- *The Spectator* has been described as having a "purple-faced rightwing worldview", despite its wittiness and erudition. A reviewer in *The Guardian* described it as "pro-fox-hunting, climate-change-denying, insidiously Islamophobic".
- *The New Statesman's* media bias is patently / overtly Labour-leaning, but it has been cited as resisting Corbynmania.

- *The Independent* prides itself on freedom from political allegiance and other power structures, though it is regarded as being center-left on the political spectrum. It once accused *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph* of reflecting the views of its owners Rupert Murdoch and Conrad Black. It ceased printing in 2016 but its online version is still active. It was launched in 1986 but quickly became a rival to *The Guardian*. It has a more pro-market stance than *The Guardian*.
- There are regular concerns about media plurality (the diversity of available viewpoints) and ownership in both the UK and the US. It is sometimes feared that too much media power is concentrated in the hands of a few owners.
- As resources for investigative journalism dwindle / diminish in the digital age, there are also concerns / fears that automated journalism (generated by computers) will start to replace it, endangering the notion of media plurality and in-depth news coverage.
- Online news is freely available in both the UK and the US, thus ensuring the concept of 'net neutrality' (the absence of governmental interference in the web). The only censorship of the Internet in these countries is brought to bear on news sites that advocate / promote terrorist violence and other criminal activities.

b. The American press

- As in Britain, America possesses media outlets of every political colour but its main papers sold nationwide remain center-right / somewhat / slightly conservative. This being said, it is important to remember that a journalist's political colour / affiliation is not necessarily determined by the newspaper in which s/he writes. An increasing number of newspaper and magazine editors commission articles / opinion pieces from journalists on both sides of the political divide.
- Unlike Britain, there are very few national / nationwide newspapers in America. 95% of all papers in the US are local / regional / city-based. As elsewhere in the world, newspaper circulation has dropped dramatically since the 1970s.
- Weekend newspapers fare better than other kinds of papers as Americans tend to read news reportage mostly at the weekends. Sunday editions have actually increased their circulation since the 1970s.
- The four most widely available current affairs magazines in the US are *Newsweek*, *Time*, *The Atlantic* and *US News & World Report*. The latter is now mostly reduced to being a ranking organ that establishes lists of the best institutions currently functioning in the US. Its ranking system is as widely known and followed within the US as rankings established by *Forbes* and *Washington Monthly*.
- *The Atlantic* was originally published as *The Atlantic Monthly*. The magazine was founded and sponsored in 1857 by writers of the American Renaissance such as Harriet Beecher Stowe and Ralph Waldo Emerson. It was originally focused exclusively on cultural issues but now also covers politics, economics, health, science and technology. It has no official electoral stance / standpoint / bias, but tends to endorse liberal / center-left presidential candidates.
- Both *Time* and *Newsweek* are published on a weekly basis. Founded in 1923, *Time magazine* has the world's largest circulation for a weekly magazine. Circulation has dropped since the 1990s, but it still maintains high sales worldwide. According to the Nolan chart, *Time* is a centrist magazine with a slight authoritarian bias. It has been argued that it has a slightly Republican slant / bias; others claim that a number of its articles place it slightly

left-of-center or exactly in the center, like most mainstream American papers. *Newsweek* is perceived as having a slightly more Democratic slant, but is also considered a centrist magazine by many.

- At a circulation of over two million copies, *The Wall Street Journal* is the mostly widely sold daily newspaper, followed closely by *USA Today* and *The New York Times*. Renowned papers such as *The Los Angeles Times*, *New York Post*, *Chicago Tribune* and *The Washington Post* all have a circulation figure of around half a million.
- *USA Today* is a mid-market daily in both style and content. It is often referred to derisively by the intelligentsia as McPaper. It offers news in condensed, easy and quick to read articles. It rose to prominence by imitating the way news is presented on television. The opinion section of the paper provides divergent views to those held by the members of the editorial team. It is often introduced by a guest contributor, in order to provide a diversity of opinion. The paper tends not to endorse party candidates in order to remain independent. Members of its editorial team come from all sides of the ideological spectrum.
- Founded in 1851, *The New York Times* is one of the oldest newspapers still in circulation in the US. It is considered to be a moderate / liberal paper with a slight Blue-state / Democrat bias. Although it regularly criticizes both Democrats and Republicans, its conflict with Donald Trump has given the public the impression that it has decidedly Democrat sympathies.
- Founded in 1877, *The Washington Post* is one of the most conservative mainstream papers. This is perceptible in its call for heightened immigration restriction. Although previously quite liberal, it has in recent years become neocon. This being said, a few of its contributors hold left-wing views. It has endorsed presidential candidates from both sides of the political spectrum.
- Founded in 1889, *The Wall Street Journal* is a business-focused daily broadsheet. Its mantra is "free markets and free people". Its open border policy on immigration is largely motivated by its pro-business stance. Its advocacy of lower taxes and limited governmental regulation and climate change denial makes it a clearly right-wing journal. Since Rupert Murdoch purchased it, it has been argued that the newspaper has become more conservative in its approach.
- First published in 1963, *The New York Review of Books* is an eclectic newspaper, focusing on a broad range of areas that include literature, culture, economics, science and current affairs. Like *The London Review of Books* which it founded, the *NY Review* features thoughtful, probing, long-form articles.

II Entraînement à la synthèse de documents

- **EXERCISE 1.** Write a comparative summary of the two following texts and give your summary a title. (70 words)

Méthode : Évitez de citer les mots employés dans l'article car le jury souhaite évaluer votre capacité à reformuler et à synthétiser. Vous devez aussi vous garder d'ajouter votre propre opinion ou d'apporter des informations extérieures au document dans ce genre d'exercice. Dégagez les enjeux principaux en comparant les deux textes sans en favoriser un en particulier.

Text 1. Does the British Conservative Party vet the press?

A senior political commentator has accused Theresa May of refusing to take questions from journalists unless they have prior approval to speak. [...] He also claimed another reporter had been told journalists' questions were being prevetted. A Conservative party spokesperson claims that this was entirely false and that pre-selection of journalists was only carried out in order to ensure each outlet –irrespective of political leaning– had a fair chance to question the Prime Minister.

[Adapted from "Theresa May 'refusing to take press questions she hasn't pre-approved', claims Michael Crick" by Lucy Pacha-Robinson, *The Independent*, 9 May 2017]

Text 2. Donald Trump and his animus against the press

During his campaign, Donald Trump railed against what he called the "dishonest media", promising to expand libel laws. It was not a great surprise, then, that only 32 percent of people surveyed said they had a "great deal" or a "fair amount" of trust in the mainstream media –an all-time low for the survey, down eight points from the previous year. Republicans in particular had an extremely negative view, with a mere 14 percent expressing trust in the media, a drop of more than half in just over a year. Since Trump's election, his pathological dislike for the media has only deepened. The president has attempted to further undermine trust in the press over the past several months by calling into question every story that fails to please him, while labelling some of the most reputable publications "fake news", branding members of the press "enemies of the people".

[Adapted from "Donald Trump is losing his war with the press –but the media still has a massive credibility problem" by Conor Lynch, *Salon*, 21 May 2017]

Questions

1. Why does President Trump wish to open up libel laws?
2. If Trump extends libel laws, what amendment to the Constitution will he be in breach of?
3. What effect have Trump's assaults on the press had on public opinion according to this article excerpt / extract?
4. Why is it ironic that Trump tends to rail against the perils of fake news?
5. What does the journalist think of Trump's stance / standpoint / attitude?
6. When was the last time there was such a major conflict between a US president and the press?
7. How recent is the phenomenon of fake news / false news / disinformation / misinformation?
8. What do you think of the idea according to which it's not facts that win elections, but emotion?
9. Is fake news / disinformation as prevalent / widespread in France?

III Synthétiser et contextualiser

- **EXERCISE 2.** Summarize the following article in English and use the previous articles to contextualize it. In your view, how harmful is Trump's attempt to delegitimize the press, presenting journalists as purveyors of untruths? (250 words)

Méthode : Ce genre d'exercice (un texte en français) est retenu pour l'épreuve orale de certaines écoles de commerce. À l'examen, veillez à prendre des notes directement en anglais dès la première lecture.

Text 3. Trump's Fake News Awards

Donald Trump imagine des prix ironiques pour la presse mensongère. Côté *fake news*, il n'est pourtant pas en reste. Et dans des proportions impressionnantes. Selon le *Washington Post*, il a proféré 2001 mensonges sur toute l'année 2017. Soit 40 par semaine. Exemple parmi d'autres : à 55 reprises, il a affirmé être à l'origine des plus importantes réductions d'impôts de l'histoire des Etats-Unis. Le quotidien américain a démontré que la baisse des taxes lancée par Ronald Reagan en 1981 avait été plus forte. De quoi lui valoir un prix d'interprétation à ses propres *Fake News Awards*.

[Adapted from "Donald Trump invente les 'fake news awards' et distribue ses prix aux médias", *L'Express*]

IV Rédiger un court essai

► EXERCISE 3. Write an essay on one of the topics below. (250 words)

Méthode : Ce genre d'essai fait appel à vos connaissances personnelles. Il vous est demandé en l'occurrence de formuler une opinion, mais vous êtes libre de peser le pour et le contre avant de trancher, en évitant de paraître vous contredire. Veuillez à donner des exemples concrets afin d'éviter de rester dans des généralités floues ou abstraites.

1. Just after his election, Donald Trump stated the opinion / opined that it was the media that was really "the opposition party in many ways". Comment on this quotation.
2. How important do you think the press is in maintaining the system of checks and balances / the separation of powers? (Use words like watchdog, whistleblower, silence-breaker.)
3. Can the press still be considered as 'the fourth estate' (a counterpower to government)?
4. In 1972, Richard Nixon opined/claimed that "the press is the enemy". Comment on this quotation.
5. Should there be any limits on freedom of the press in your view? (Use words like to muckrake (to report on / reveal scandalous news), muckraking, a muckraker, slander (oral or gestural defamation), libel (printed defamation), to defame (to injure someone's reputation / good name), to utter / circulate slander, a slanderous / injurious / libellous statement, defamatory language, character assassination, to sue somebody for libel.)
6. The following satirical statement was made by the American novelist Gore Vidal a few decades ago. To what extent would you say it still holds true today? "The American press exists for one purpose only, and that is to convince Americans that they are living in the greatest and most envied country in the history of the world. The Press tells the American people how awful every other country is and how wonderful the United States is and how evil communism is and how happy they should be to have freedom to buy seven different sorts of detergent."
7. Comment on the following statement by the French novelist Amin Malouf: "People sometimes imagine that just because they have access to so many newspapers, radio and TV channels, they will get an infinity of different opinions. Then they discover that things are just the opposite: the power of these loudspeakers only amplifies the opinion prevalent at a certain time, to the point where it covers any other opinion."
8. Comment on the following statement made by the American journalist A.J. Liebling: "Freedom of the press is limited to those who own one."
9. In his play *An Ideal Husband*, Oscar Wilde has one of his characters say that "In the old days men had the rack. Now they have the Press." How true is this of contemporary Anglo-Saxon newspapers in your view?

10. Culture critic Suzy Kassem claims that you should "never judge someone's character based on the words of another. Instead, study the motives behind the words of the person casting the bad judgment." How wary should you be of the motives of journalists and reviewers?
11. Political activist Malcolm X claimed that "the media is the most powerful entity on Earth, because they control the minds of the masses." Do you agree with this statement?

v CELSA Concours 2014: entraînement à l'écrit

- **EXERCISE 4.** Complete the following CELSA entrance exam in no more than 1 hour and 30 minutes.

PART ONE – Fill in each of the blanks using the most appropriate term. You may write on the document, but in the exam you must use the attached answer sheet to provide your final responses, using CAPITAL LETTERS (A, B, C, D, E). Only one answer is possible for each space.

Méthode : Les textes à trous de ce type évaluent les connaissances grammaticales du candidat, mais également les connaissances idiomatiques ainsi que la compréhension fine du texte. Pensez toujours à la logique du propos général, mais aussi à la logique dictée par le contexte immédiat de la phrase.

When Jamaican journalist Andrea Downer spotted a little boy washing her car windscreen at the traffic lights in Kingston, she found he belonged to a family network of beggars. It led to extensive investigations into children's homes in the capital and ultimately an award for journalism that influences policy. "I wanted to do something to help people. It made me feel like I (1) more than filling space in the paper," she says.

Another sort of journalism runs as follows: reporters from the developed world take the first plane (2) an earthquake in Kashmir, a drought in Niger, or a hurricane in the Caribbean, looking at the disaster and helpless misery that results. So where in the (3) between these two styles of reporting comes development journalism? Is it more than investigative journalism in a poor country?

Liz Ford is editor of the Katine website, the site for *the Guardian's* Ugandan development project, which has (4) for two years. Ford considers that development journalism means getting behind the clichés of starving children and getting people to tell their own stories: "We are looking at big policies affecting developing countries and looking at how this relates on the ground to those who expect to be benefiting." So the Ugandan government may have a poverty-reduction strategy in place –but what does that actually mean for the people living in Katine?