

### **Synopsis**

Chapter 11 describes beats and professional relationships with sources on the beat. Three beats are featured: education, crime and business.

### **Activities**

The first three exercises in the textbook ask students to explore, compare and contrast beats from one or more news outlets. The fourth exercise asks students to choose a specific beat reporter and to analyze five stories by that reporter to gain insight into how to cover a beat.

One of the online exercises asks students to consider the potential for a conflict of interest, or the appearance of one, in cultivating professional relationships on the beat. Two others ask students to prepare to cover a beat by studying a news organization's archives.

**1. Beats** (Exercises 11-2 and 11-3 in the textbook are similar, but this activity is geared to in-class work.)

Select and project the home page of a major newspaper and show students where on the site they can find the beats. Identify several of the beats common to most newspapers, such as local news, crime and courts, arts and sports. Then, going around the room, ask students to select one of the nation's 50 states—only one state per person. Have students pull up the website of a newspaper in the state they selected and then ask them to,

- a. identify three beats common to the ones you've described above
- b. identify a couple of beats that are uncommon, perhaps some that are specific to the city or region
- c. try to localize one of the beats above
- d. describe their findings to the class

For example, the [\*Alaska Dispatch News\*](#) has common beats such as News, Culture and Sports, but it also has one called "Fishing" and another called "Arctic."

In our town, a fishing beat might work locally because the river running through Durango has "Gold Medal" fishing—and it also has a history of pollution from old mines upstream in Silverton, Colorado. An Arctic beat would not make sense, but drawing on the idea of specifying a region to cover, a Southwest beat would.

## 2. Campus news beats

Mimic Activity 1, but instead of having students look at a professional news site, have them select a student news organization from one of the colleges or universities in the state they chose.

## 3. Professional relationships

So far in the textbook, students have learned about conflict of interest (or the appearance of one), research, interview preparation, and interviewing. For this activity, provide a link to the website of a local news organization and specify a beat. Create pairs or small groups of students and ask them to,

- a. research the beat
- b. identify one or two sources on the beat they'd interview early on
- c. create an introduction script about themselves and their purpose to have ready when they set up the interview appointment
- d. create a short question list for the meet-and-greet interview

## Quiz/exam questions bank

**True/False instructions:** Please circle the correct answer.

1. A journalist's *beat* is an area of news coverage that involves a set of regular checks with key, relevant sources. (True or False) Answer: True
2. One criticism of crime reporting is that it fails to reflect a community accurately because it doesn't take into account the big picture: Crime stories may imply that crime is increasing when in fact it's on the decline. (True or False) Answer: True
3. Beginning journalists can fall into one of two traps: They immediately approach sources as adversaries or they are overly friendly with sources. Neither is the best way to interact with sources. (True or False) Answer: True
4. The major components of covering business in small- or medium-sized communities are attending Rotary Club meetings, getting to know the Chamber of Commerce and writing stories about new businesses. (True or False) Answer: False

**Multiple choice instructions:** Please circle the correct answer.

5. Which of the following are responsibilities connected with a journalist's beat?  
Answer: D

- a. A journalist is expected to serve as watchdog, making sure that those who are responsible to the public are fulfilling their responsibilities.
  - b. A journalist is expected to report newsworthy events in a timely manner.
  - c. A journalist is expected to learn the issues and trends for that beat and keep up with the related field in general.
  - d. All of the above.
6. Which of the following best defines *enterprise reporting*? Answer: C
- a. This is business reporting that emphasizes entrepreneurs. This type of reporting has been emphasized in the wake of the success of Silicon Valley and other tech entrepreneurs.
  - b. This is another term for *mojos*, the mobile journalists who combine reporting, photojournalism, editing and dissemination of information through the social media.
  - c. This means finding a story through talking with various people or investigating, rather than just attending regular meetings or checking blotters or press releases.
  - d. All of the above.
7. Which of the following is a good way to go about learning the police beat? Answer: D
- a. Visit all the police stations and sheriff's offices, introduce yourself to as many people as possible and ask for a tour.
  - b. Ask for a copy of standard operating procedures and study it. Ask a police officer to tell you about local arrest procedures.
  - c. Cultivate sources other than public officials—talk with probation officers, social workers, and representatives of victims' associations.
  - d. All of the above.
8. Which of the following best defines a journalist's *tickler file*? Answer: B
- a. This is a file of personal career goals the journalist should keep checking in order to stay motivated to make timely progress in promotions and raises.
  - b. This is a file of issues to keep checking on, such as an upcoming hearing on a court case, a follow-up report or a meeting that deals with an issue the journalist has been covering.
  - c. This is a file where a journalist keeps humorous quotes and cartoons.
  - d. None of the above.

**Short answer instructions:** In three or four sentences, please answer the following questions.

9. What is a beat? Please a.) define the term, and b.) provide an example to illustrate.

Answer: A beat is an area of news coverage that involves a set of regular checks with key, relevant sources. Examples will vary.

10. Establishing and maintaining professional relationships with sources on a beat you cover can bring up issues of conflict of interest, or just the appearance of a conflict of interest. Please describe one way this might happen, using a specific example to illustrate.

Answers will vary, but students should indicate that they recognize the importance of maintaining professional distance, even as they cultivate sources.

11. Suggest a new beat for your campus, describe it, and provide your justification for it.

Answer: Beats will vary, but students should include news values and perhaps principles such as justice and stewardship. Beats should steer clear of free advertising or public relations and conflict of interest.

**Long answer instructions:** In 10 to 12 sentences, please answer the following question.

12. You have been assigned the education beat at your school. Describe the first five steps you'd take and why.

Answer: Specifics will vary, but students could include checking the archives of their news organization and other local news outlets; looking for trends in past coverage and what the big stories have been; identifying terms and processes with which they need to become familiar; and identifying human sources and setting up meet-and-greet interviews.