

Covering News Events

Here's a glimpse of a typical reporter's day:

It starts with a news meeting or a conversation with the assignment editor about the day's stories. Then, there are dozens of phone calls to track down people for interviews. Each day offers a host of events that reporters can cover in search of timely and interesting stories.

To help you get the story you are looking for, here are a few pointers on three types of news events: **News Conferences, Scrums and Public Meetings.**

News Conferences

When you turn on the television news this evening, you will be sure to see a news conference in action. It looks something like this:

1. The main player can be a politician, the leader of an environmental group or the lawyer for an accused murderer.
2. He or she sits at the front of the room, usually behind a table or lectern and makes an announcement or issues a statement on a current issue or some aspect of their work.
3. Reporters from newspapers, news services, television outlets and radio stations sit in the audience, waiting for the chance to ask their own specific questions.
4. Reporters get advance warning of these events through a news release or media advisory that tells them when and where the news conference will held and what will be discussed.

Suggestions on how to get the most out of a news conference:

- 1 **Make a list.**
 - . Make a list of questions that you need answered before the news conference starts. What do you need to know in order to write a story about this issue? You can add to that list as the speaker makes the announcement.
- 2 **Listen carefully.**
 - . Listen carefully and take notes as other reporters ask questions. That will save you from asking the same questions later. And you may glean important information and get answers to questions that you had not even considered
- 3 **Phrase questions clearly and briefly.**
 - . You will not get much time to ask questions in a news conference so keep it short and to the point.

- 4 **One question at a time.**
 - . Resist the urge to ask several questions at once (See the notes on double-barreled questions in the Interview section.) The person giving the news conference is likely to answer just one and it may not be the information you needed.
- 5 **Confirm names, etc.**
 - . Make sure you check with the public relations staff or the speaker after the news conference to confirm names, titles and other details that may not have come out during the event.

Scrums

Sometimes a new event isn't quite as organized and orderly as a news conference. That's what you will find the first time you encounter a scrum! If you know anything about the game of rugby, you may know the term. In journalism, it has a similar meaning. Journalists flock to a newsmaker in a public place (think of the prime minister leaving the House of Commons or a sports star emerging from a big game) and start asking questions one after another. Getting information out of a scrum can be a real challenge.

Here are some tips you can use:

1. **Record the scrum.**

It may be difficult for you to take notes in a scrum because the reporters and camera operators are jockeying for the best spot and crowding around the person being interviewed. That's when a tape recorder can come in handy. That way, you can be sure to catch what the source is saying even if you can't get very close to the person.
2. **Questions.**

Keep your questions short and simple. It is more important in a scrum that it is in any other interviewing situation. You need to get the attention of your source, express your question quickly and clearly, and try to ask a follow-up question.
3. **Asking Questions.**

State your question in a loud, clear voice and keep eye contact with the source while he or she answers. That makes it's easier to keep their attention if you want to ask another question
4. **Other reporter questions.**

Sometimes a reporter may throw out a question that seems off-topic. Listen closely to the question and notice how the source reacts and responds to the question. The question may have nothing to do with your story but it could reveal information that will help you with another story. Or it could create a whole new story, depending on what the source has to say.

5. **Additional Information.**

If you have a chance, try to get a moment alone with the source. After the scrum is over and the other reporters are packing up their gear. That way, you can ask some of your own questions and perhaps get some additional information for your story.

Public Meetings

Most levels of government hold regular public meetings -- whether it's a community council that governs a village of 80 people or the city council in a major metropolis. That's where reporters find out about the key issues and concerns in the local community.

Meanwhile, community groups, special committees and neighborhood associations are also likely to hold public meetings to discuss a current issue.

Questions to ask yourself before covering a meeting:

1. Has it been in the news?
2. Have you checked out the agenda ahead of time to find out what will be discussed at the meeting?
3. Are you familiar with the topic?
4. Can you get the background on what's been happening with this issue before the meeting?
5. Who are the key players?

Tips on covering public meetings:

- At the meeting, arrive a little early to find a good seat with a clear view of the room. Make sure you have a few pens, lots of notebook paper and if possible, a tape recorder.
- If you don't know who's who on the council or involved with the community group, find out before the meeting starts and make sure you record who says what during the meeting.
- Write down important details as fast as you can and record the discussion if possible. Public meetings are on the record, which means you can quote what people say there. However, some people may get up to speak and tell reporters that they don't want to be identified.
- If you have questions, be sure to talk to the right people after the meeting and get extra details or clarifications.

Source: www.snn-rdr.ca/snn/nr_reporterstoolbox/covering-news.html