



ESL Podcast 541 – Reporting the News

GLOSSARY

news reporter – a person whose job is to research and describe important current events for a newspaper, magazine, TV news program, radio news program, or a news website

* Which news reporter is covering the story about the earthquake?

to publish – to print and distribute something for other people to read

* They published 10,000 copies of her first book.

(one's) first taste of (something) – one's first experience with something; the first time one has had, used, or done something

* He got his first taste of snow when his parents took him to the mountains for the weekend as a child, and he has been skiing and snowboarding ever since.

press – media; all newspapers, magazines, television stations, radio stations, and websites that report on news

* How do famous musicians decide which members of the press they'll allow in for interviews?

copy editor – a person who's job is to review, correct, and improve what other people have written, especially for a newspaper or magazine

* At most newspapers, reporters write their stories during the day and copy editors work late at night, reviewing what they've written so that it can be printed early in the morning.

to edit – to review, correct, and improve written text, often focusing on spelling, grammar, word choice, sentence structure, and organization

* Could you please edit my paper before I give it to the professor?

headline – the title of a news article

* Do you read everything in the newspaper, or just the articles with interesting headlines?

to cover – to research and describe something; to focus on a particular topic

* This book doesn't cover John F. Kennedy's entire life, only the years of his presidency.

byline – the line of text below a title or headline that says who wrote something

* Angie was so happy to see her first byline in a national newspaper that she bought many copies of the newspaper and sent it to all her relatives and friends.



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in print – included in a published document that is shared with many people

* It must be exciting to see your words in print and know that other people are reading them.

obituary – a short article included in a newspaper when someone dies, describing his or her life

* When I read the obituaries this morning, I was shocked to learn that my high school history teacher had died.

news brief – a very short description of something that has happened, usually just a few sentences

* There was a fascinating news brief about biotechnology in this morning's paper. I wish they'd made it into a full story.

beat – the geographic area or general topic that a reporter is assigned to

* Michelle works the political beat, reporting on what's happening in the Senate.

feature – a feature article; a main story; a special report

* How can we get the local newspaper to write a feature article about our organization's work in the community?

investigative – involving a lot of research to learn something that is a secret

* A team of reporters spent months on an investigative report about corruption in the mayor's office

editorial – a special kind of article in a newspaper that gives an individual's opinion instead of just the facts (things that can be proven to be true)

* The editorial about gun rights made Alberto really angry, so he wrote a letter to the editor in response, expressing his own opinions.

to shoot for – to try to do, get, or have something that is difficult but not impossible

* Denise is studying all the time, because she's shooting for a score of 800 on the medical entrance exam.

Pulitzer – a Pulitzer Prize; an award for excellence in newspaper reporting

* Fourteen graduates of the university's journalism program have won Pulitzer Prizes.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Which of these activities might you expect to win a Pulitzer for?
 - a) Editing a story.
 - b) Writing a headline.
 - c) Writing a feature story.
2. What does he mean when he says, “I got a regular beat”?
 - a) He started reporting about music.
 - b) He started reporting once a week.
 - c) He started reporting on a specific topic.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

press

The word “press,” in this podcast, means the media, or all newspapers, magazines, television stations, radio stations, and websites that report on the news: “If you want to see news stories about your conference, don’t forget to invite the local press.” The phrase “to have/get good/bad press” means to be praised or criticized in a news report: “The company gets a lot of good press for encouraging its employees to volunteer in the community.” The phrase “to go to press” means to begin to be printed: “When the newspaper went to press, we still didn’t know how many people had been killed in the flooding.” As a verb, “to press” means to gently push something: “For technical support, please press 1. For sales or ordering assistance, please press 2.”

in print

In this podcast, the phrase “in print” means included in a published document that is shared with many people: “It didn’t seem real that we were getting married until we saw our wedding announcement in print.” The phrase “out of print” is used to describe a book that is no longer being printed, without any new copies for sale: “This bookstore specializes in helping people find used copies of rare books that have been out of print for years.” The phrase “the fine print” is used to describe the very detailed information that is often printed in small letters at the bottom of a legal contract: “Be sure to read all the fine print before you sign a new lease agreement.”



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CULTURE NOTE

Many American newspapers are “local,” primarily reporting on local events with a little bit of national and/or international coverage. But some newspapers are read “nation-wide” (by people living in many parts of the country).

For example, USA Today is a national paper that doesn’t focus on any particular city. It has the largest “circulation” (the number of people who read a particular newspaper) of any U.S. newspaper, with more than 2.1 million copies each weekday. It isn’t published on weekends. It has a “distinct” (unique; different from others) “layout” (the way materials are organized and presented) that uses a lot of colors and large photographs.

The Wall Street Journal is another national and international newspaper, named for Wall Street, which is the center of the “financial district” (an area where a lot of financial business occurs) in New York City. It focuses mostly on news in international and “domestic” (within the U.S.) business and finance. It looks much different than USA Today, because it uses very few photographs or colors.

The New York Times focuses on local news in New York City, as well as national and international news, and it is read by people across the country – not only in New York. The New York Times “tends to have” (usually has) a lot of cultural information, with stories about the arts, theater, books, fashion, and travel.

Finally, the Washington Post is a newspaper that focuses on local news in Washington, D.C., as well as national and international news. It has a “national distribution,” meaning that people all over the country read it. People who read the Washington Post tend to be very interested in national politics.

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – c; 2 – c



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 541: Reporting the News.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 541. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in the beautiful City of Los Angeles, California.

Visit our website at eslpod.com. Go there to download a Learning Guide for this episode that will help you improve your English even faster.

This episode is called "Reporting the News." It's going to talk about some common vocabulary when dealing with the newspaper. We thought we would do something about newspapers before they all disappear. Let's get started.

[start of story]

I have always wanted to be a news reporter. When I was about 10 years old, I would write my own news stories and publish them in my own newspaper. In reality, the newspaper was just a piece of paper on which I'd written my stories and drew my pictures, but it was my first taste of the power of the press.

When I got to college, I worked on the university newspaper and started out as a copy editor, editing stories and writing headlines. Then, I began to cover news events, getting my first bylines. I can't tell you how excited I was to see my name in print for the first time!

Since then, I've worked at several newspapers. I started out at the bottom, writing obituaries and news briefs. Then, I got a regular beat and wrote some features and investigative reports. I've even written the occasional editorial.

What next? You never know in the newspaper business, but I'm shooting for a Pulitzer!

[end of story]

Our story begins with me saying, "I have always wanted to be a news reporter." A "news reporter" is a person whose job is to research and describe things that are going on in the world for a newspaper, a magazine, perhaps a television news program or a radio news program, and of course nowadays, for a news website. This is not a true story, I should point out. I did actually work as a news



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reporter when I was in college very briefly, and I was the editor of my high school newspaper, but that doesn't really count as being a real news reporter. But I did consider in college; I decided against it.

"When I was about 10 years old," according to the story, "I would write my own news stories and publish them in my own newspaper." "To publish" means to print and distribute something for other people to read. "In reality, the newspaper was just a piece of paper on which I'd written my stories and drew my pictures, but it was my first taste of the power of the press." When we talk about your "first taste of (something)" we mean your first experience with something, the first time that you have done something. I had my first taste of the power of the press. The word "press" here is used the same as what we would now call the "media." Newspapers, magazines, TV and radio stations, and websites that report on the news would all be part of the press. "Press" has other meanings, however. For those, take a look at our Learning Guide for this episode.

My story continues: "When I got to college, I worked on the university newspaper and started out as a copy editor, editing stories and writing headlines." A "copy editor" on a newspaper is the person whose job is to review what other people have written, correct what they've written, maybe improve it by making small changes. "Copy" is another word for text, something that you write. We used to talk about newspapers having good copy, meaning interesting stories.

I continue by saying that as a copy editor, I edited stories and wrote headlines. "To edit" means to review, to correct, to improve. Hence, "copy editor" is someone who reviews, corrects, and improves other people's copy – other people's writing. "Headlines" are the title of the news articles, usually printed in a larger font – in a bigger size. I continue: "Then, I began to cover news events." "To cover," when we're talking about news, means to research, investigate, and describe something – one particular topic. Some newspapers have certain reporters who always cover the economic news or who always cover the sports news. You might watch a TV newscast and ask your friend about a story; he may say, "Oh, the newscast I watched didn't cover that story," they didn't describe it, didn't talk about it. A "newscast," I should add, is just a news broadcast – a news show.

So, I began to cover news events, getting my first bylines. A "byline" (byline) is the line in the newspaper that says who wrote the story: "This was written by John Smith; this was written by Carl Bernstein." That's a byline; it's a little line below the headline that tells you who wrote this story. Often, news stories have several reporters working on it; sometimes at the end of the news story it will say, "The following people also contributed," or helped write this story.



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“I can’t tell you how excited I was to see my name in print for the first time!” I say. “To be in print” means to be published, something that is in a published document, such as a newspaper, a magazine, a book – things that other people can look at. We call that being in print. “Print,” however, has other meanings in English. You know where to find those, in our Learning Guide.

I continue by saying that since then (since I was in college), I’ve worked at several newspapers. I started out at the bottom (meaning in the lowest position of the newspaper), writing obituaries and news briefs. When you go to work for a newspaper, the reporters with the least amount of experience, typically the youngest ones – the ones that just started working there, are given the job of writing obituaries of famous people – even before they die! The newspaper starts preparing the obituary because, of course, when a person dies you want to report it in the next edition – the next day, typically, of a daily newspaper, and so you need to have that information prepared. So for example, when a famous actor or politician dies, the newspaper already has in its files – it already has written – the basic obituary. They may add a few things, change a few things to make sure it is up to date. “Obituaries” are descriptions of people who have died; sometimes we call them “obits” (obit). An obit is the same as an obituary. A “news briefs” is a very short, usually one paragraph article about something. Sometimes in newspapers they want to report news that isn’t necessarily that important, so they put little one paragraph descriptions of these news items inside the newspapers somewhere, and that’s what a news brief is. “To be brief” means to be short, so a news brief is a short – very short news article. That’s what a, again, new reporter would start working on in a newspaper.

“Then,” I say, “I got a regular beat.” A “beat” is either a general topic that you are always assigned to. So, I mentioned earlier about those who write for the sports section, well, some reporters will always write about baseball, some reporters will always write about football, others about tennis, and so forth, depending on how big the newspaper is. A “beat” can also refer to a geographic area. In a city like Los Angeles, there might be one person that covers the news on the West Side – on the west part of the city, someone else who covers the downtown news, someone else who covers the San Fernando Valley, and so forth. These would all be beats.

I say that I also wrote some features and investigative reports. A “feature” is short for a feature article; it’s a main story, usually a longer story about some news topic or about some person. I say also that I’ve written investigative reports. “Investigative reports” are those that require usually a lot of research, sometimes months of research, often related to something that is secret,



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something perhaps that the government is doing. Usually only the more experienced news reporters work on investigative pieces, or stories. I say also I've even written the occasional editorial. An "editorial" is an opinion piece; it's an article in the newspaper that gives your opinion. It's not focused on giving just the facts. We hope that most newspapers give us, in the regular news section, the facts and interpretation, not opinion. That doesn't always happen, however. Notice here I say "the occasional," meaning not very often, every once in a while. I visit the occasional beach here in Southern California; that means I go to a few beaches, but not very many and not that often.

Finally I say, "What next? You never know in the newspaper business, but I'm shooting for a Pulitzer!" "To shoot for (something)" is a phrasal verb meaning to try to do, to try to get, to try to have something that is difficult but not impossible. "Denise is studying all time because she's shooting for a high score in her medical entrance exam." She wants to become a doctor, so she's shooting for – she's aiming at – her goal is to get this high score. I say that I'm aiming, or shooting for a Pulitzer Prize. The Pulitzer Prize is the award given to news reporting in the United States for those that have very the best news reporters – the very best stories. These are usually newspapers, at least they have been traditionally. The best stories are given prizes in different categories; so it may be the best sports story, it may be the best investigative story, and so forth. Typically, these awards are won by the large newspapers such as the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, the Boston Globe, the Chicago Tribune, the San Francisco Chronicle, even the St. Paul Pioneer Press Dispatch. The Pulitzer is the most prestigious, most sought-after, we could say, award in journalism. It's like winning an Oscar if you're a movie actor. I'm not sure what the best award would be for a podcaster; I'll have to look into that!

Now let's listen to the story, this time at a normal speed.

[start of story]

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[end of story]

The script for this episode was written by Dr. Lucy Tse.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us next time on ESL Podcast.

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