Eng. ~~111A~~ 109A Sr. Anne Denise Brennan

Page 84 deliberately omitted - not essential

Methods of Choosing Material for the Summary

Focus on Bazerman Steps

Method 1: Deleting Less Important Material

Because a summary moves quickly through the main points of the original, you should omit all the less important information. As you go through the original text, cross out all unnecessary words, all repetitions, all digressions, and all minor supporting details. This should leave only the most important ideas and information.

This method often works well where clearly stated major points are immediately followed by extensive discussion, details, or examples. Once you have read the main point, it is easy to cross out all the secondary information that follows.

The following passage is taken from an article by Michael Moss in the *Columbia Journalism Review*. Moss, a reporter for an Atlanta, Georgia, newspaper, evaluates how well the press has reported on poverty problems in the United States. The passage is given in its original form; then the passage is shown with all the secondary and superfluous material crossed out; finally, one possible summary rewrite is presented. You will gain more from the example and its discussion if before you read the sample you choose the material *you* would delete and write *your own* summary of Moss's article. Then you will be able to compare your results with the sample and the comments that follow it.

The Press Reports on the Homeless

The tears hadn't yet dried in the CBS-TV screening room when Edward R. Murrow declared that the final scene was all wrong for his documentary on migrant farmworkers, "Harvest of Shame."

His colleagues were surprised. They had thought the effect of a young woman singing a sorrowful tune extraordinary. It tore at the heart. But Murrow didn't want to leave viewers feeling mere pity. He wanted anger. He wanted lasting concern. And he wanted viewers to understand the economic and political forces that kept migrants sleeping on piles of straw and their school-age children toiling in the fields.

Repeatedly in the film he drew attention to the dearth of laws protecting their welfare. So, in the final frames, Murrow subbed in the question, "Is it possible we think too much in terms of Christmas baskets and not in terms of eliminating poverty?" He then concluded: "The people you have seen have the strength to harvest your fruit and vegetables. They do not have the strength to influence legislation. Maybe we do. Good night, and good luck."

That was nearly three decades ago. The film aired the day after Thanks-

Bazerman Charles The Informed Writer Boston Houghton 3rd ed) c 1989.

giving in 1960, heralding a decade of social consciousness when the poor, among others, would emerge to capture national concern.

Now, in the eighties, we journalists have, once again, discovered the poor—or at least the more visible poor: the homeless, the hungry, those on welfare, and the so-called underclass. But an examination of the media's coverage of the poor shows that we have strayed from the standard set by "Harvest of Shame." A look at many of the thousands of print and broadcast pieces done in the past several years, as well as interviews with nearly two hundred journalists, poverty experts, and poor people, makes it clear that we are far better at simply discovering the poor than we are at explaining the causes of poverty and exploring the solutions.

The rare instances of reporting excellence—and there are some stellar works—stand as proof that we can be doing a whole lot better.

The Homeless: Quick Takes and Close Looks

The build-up of news stories about the homeless in the mid-1980s reached a crescendo in the winter of 1986–87. One reason was that there appeared to be more people on the streets than in previous years. Then, too, a succession of news pegs cropped up: President Reagan's remarks about one homeless family's $37,000 transient-hotel tab; the March 3 "Grate American Sleep-Out," in which Washington politicos and celebrities slept on the ground for a night; the fasts and other forms of protest by Mitch Snyder, the radical advocate for the poor who, for a time, became news himself. And, of course, we covered the homeless-shelter legislation, especially when it got glued to the congressional pay-raise bill. As the weather grew colder, editors throughout the country seem to have felt obliged to order up a homeless story or series. So, on deadline, reporters bent down to interview doorway sleepers, roamed through shelters, even posed as street people for a day or two.

Perhaps the worst of the print-press lot turned up in *USA Today*, which on December 17, 1986, splattered America's homeless across a two-page layout that consisted of fifty mug shots, one from each state in typical *USA Today* style. And, to go with the faces, most of them looking dejected, fifty little quotes: "Just an old hobo who came up to Alaska to say I've been there," Don R. Hughes in Alaska said of himself.

"We tried to [be] different. By that time everybody was doing something," Julia Wallace, a *USA Today* editor, says. The problem was that the spread, like most other homeless stories in most other papers and broadcasts, focused almost exclusively on the people—their personalities, their plight, their fears, and sometimes their hopes.

An accompanying article focused on private initiatives to house the homeless; a mere two sentences were devoted to the issue of declining public housing and the government's role in shoving people out onto the streets in the first place. (That the Gannett flagship can, on occasion, do a story in depth is attested by its week-long series beginning on March 23, 1987, a report on a three-month investigation into truck safety that went far beyond portraits of truckers at the wheel.)

Here is the same passage with all minor information deleted.

~~The tears hadn't yet dried in the CBS-TV screening room when~~ Edward R. Murrow ~~declared that the final scene was all wrong for his~~ documentary on migrant farmworkers, ~~"Harvest of Shame."~~

~~His colleagues were surprised. They had thought the effect of a young woman singing a sorrowful tune extraordinary. It tore at the heart. But Murrow didn't want to leave viewers feeling mere pity. He wanted anger. He wanted lasting concern. And~~ he wanted viewers to understand the economic and political forces that kept migrants sleeping on piles of straw and their school-age children toiling in the fields.

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~~That was nearly~~ three decades ago. ~~The film aired the day after Thanksgiving in 1960, heralding a decade of social consciousness when the poor, among others, would emerge to capture national concern.~~

Now, in the eighties, we journalists have, once again, discovered the poor~~—or at least the more visible poor: the homeless, the hungry, those on welfare, and the so-called underclass. But an examination of the media's coverage of the poor shows that we have strayed from the standard set by "Harvest of Shame." A look at many of the thousands of print and broadcast pieces done in the past several years, as well as interviews with nearly two hundred journalists, poverty experts, and poor people, makes it clear that we are far~~ better at simply discovering the poor than we are at explaining the causes of poverty and exploring the solutions.

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SAMPLE SUMMARY

"The Press Reports on the Homeless,
by Michael Moss

Nearly three decades ago, in his documentary on migrant farmworkers, Edward R. Murrow wanted the viewers to understand the economic and political forces that kept migrant farmworkers poor. Reporters have now rediscovered the poor but have been weak in explaining causes and exploring solutions. News stories about the homeless built up through the decade and peaked in the winter of 1986–87. Reporters regularly interviewed doorway sleepers, roamed through shelters, and posed as street people. USA Today's two-page picture spread focused almost exclusively on the people and nearly ignored the issue of declining public housing and the government's role in shoving people out onto the street in the first place.

Comments on the Summary

The original article opens and closes with descriptions of two news reports. Each description makes one major point in contrast with the other, and each point is located in a few key phrases toward the end of its description. The

rest of the article is devoted to details elaborating the descriptions. Such details are easy to identify and cross out. The main ideas of the middle paragraphs are contained in a few key phrases, either in opening topic sentences or concluding phrases. These too are easy to identify in order to delete the detailed middle section. Minor points, such as the few examples of good reporting or the reasons for the current rediscovery of poverty are deleted because they are not developed and are not necessary for understanding the author's main argument.

Rewriting the material from the key phrases, I was able to combine several sentences into single sentences so as to make the main points more concisely and to show the connections among ideas. For example, the opening sentence of the summary combines the identification, the time, and the main point about the Murrow show from the first four paragraphs of the original. The last sentence brings together key points from three paragraphs about the *USA Today* article. The second summary sentence combines the modern rediscovery of the poor (from the beginning of the original's fifth paragraph) with the shortcomings of the stories (from the end of that paragraph). In each of the four summary sentences, much original wording was used, but at several points rephrasing made the new sentences shorter and more to the point.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT

Using the method of deleting nonessential information, summarize this continuation of Moss's article on the news media's handling of poverty.

The Press Reports on the Homeless
(*continued*)

Probably the worst of the TV coverage was turned in by Pat Harper, anchorwoman for WNBC-TV, New York, who donned tattered clothes and, with hidden cameras in tow, spent almost a week on the streets of Manhattan posing as a bag lady. Harper's commentary about how it felt *pretending* to be homeless, along with bathetic interviews with truly homeless people, ran as a series this past February, a ratings-sweeps month when advertising rates are determined and "news" segments such as "Sexaholics" run.

"This was not done for ratings," the show's managing producer was quoted as saying in response to the ensuing criticism. "We did not exploit the homeless." But the segments did exploit the homeless by not going beyond the pitiful portraits to explore and explain the politics and economics of homelessness.

There was Harper huddled up in the doorway, Harper shuffling down the sidewalk, Harper crying after someone handed her $15. But there was no Harper pointing to the key government documents that shaped our

current public housing or mental-health-care policies. Nor did she thrust a microphone into the appropriate official's face for an explanation.

And, while WNBC-TV was neglecting important elements of the homeless story, the people Harper did talk to on park benches weren't told they were being interviewed. Thus, she violated their privacy and robbed them of their dignity to boot.

A more serious attempt than Harper's or *USA Today*'s but one that also was seriously flawed, was *The Atlanta Journal* and *Constitution*'s November 2, 1986, series on the homeless. The articles cited the wholesale dismissal of the mentally ill from institutions as an important cause of homelessness. But, just as their readers might have begun to get curious about the failure of out-patient-care programs, or how elected officials justify their decisions, or what institutional solutions are at hand and (particularly important today) at what cost, the homeless were dropped like football after the Superbowl.

The point is not that we shouldn't portray and describe the homeless. That kind of reporting is essential. When done well—as in a thoughtful and unsentimental February 2, 1987, *Time* magazine portrait of homeless people on the streets of Philadelphia—it introduces our audience to strangers. Far more was accomplished in the winter's best single treatment of the homeless, a sixteen-page Thanksgiving Day package offered by *The Dallas Morning News*. It broke into the term "homeless"—a crude label—and pulled out the parts, including the elderly, the alcoholics, and the single mothers without homes. One article began: "In the maze of the mental health system, there may be detours through the streets, but all roads lead back to the state hospital. Audie Wheat, 65, knows her way by heart."

Method 2: Selecting More Important Information

Highlighting the central facts and ideas can help you see how the main parts fit together. Underline only key words: those that express substantial information or make major statements. Ask yourself, "What is central here? What is the author's specific point? What statements draw the whole piece together?" Where an underlying idea is expressed only indirectly or implicitly, write a direct or explicit statement of the idea.

This method is often useful when the original is very wordy, digresses often, does not state its main ideas clearly, or otherwise makes the main idea difficult to follow. Such situations sometimes arise when generalizations do not balance details; either the piece confuses many generalizations or presents many details without stating their overall meaning. Then you have to hunt carefully for those few words that signal the underlying ideas and logic of the piece.

The following excerpt from a book by Mort Rosenblum published in 1979 discusses the problems of reporting international news. His comments reflect the international political situation at the time he wrote. You will

benefit more from it if you select material and write your own summary before you read the sample and comments that follow it.

Censorship and Government Pressures

We are pleased to announce, the Nigerian government was pleased to announce, that we are lifting censorship.

Does that mean, asked a correspondent, that we can send a story saying so?

No, replied the officer, because it was never announced that there was censorship.

The measures contrived by authorities to influence news about their countries go far beyond the old-fashioned censor with a pot of black ink and pinking shears. Direct and indirect pressures in scores of countries make it impossible for casual readers and viewers in the West to have a balanced view of world events. Not only are correspondents often prevented from reporting vital information, but also they frequently cannot—or do not—warn their readers that they are providing only a partial picture. Some correspondents practice self-censorship without even realizing it; others are artfully conned by official propaganda and managed news.

In the most extreme case, Cambodia, not a single reporter or traveler was allowed inside the country for a long time after the Khmer Rouge took power, and the few diplomats in Phnom Penh were under severe restrictions. The world's knowledge of Cambodia was limited to official radio broadcasts and accounts of embittered refugees who could speak only of the small areas in which they had lived. Background stories were based on the thinnest of details. In 1977, the French press discussed at length the relative importance of two Cambodian leaders, until someone realized the two leaders were the same person; he just had a long name. North Korea, Albania and several other authoritarian countries allow journalists in only on the rarest of occasions and then under careful surveillance. All but a few countries in the world make at least some effort to convince correspondents to report things in a favorable light—or to prevent them from reporting anything at all.

Some direct measures are casual enough to be circumvented easily. In the late 1960s, when Congolese authorities decreed that all news dispatches had to be sent in French, reporters simply cabled things like, "Les mercenaires sont holed up en Bukavu avec beaucoup recoilless rifles, anti-aircraft guns et Scotch whisky." One British journalist in Nigeria dictated a coup d'état story in Welsh to his wife back home. From Sri Lanka—then Ceylon—reporters covering a rebellion chatted from hotel telephones about the weather and the local curry until the censor hung up, bored with what he considered to be tourist prattle.

But sometimes action against correspondents is brutally direct. Reporters have been beaten bloody; some have been found dead in mysterious circumstances. Many reporters have spent at least a few nights in jails, military barracks or confined to their hotel rooms. Expulsions are almost routine.

The situation is worsened by the general imbalances of the system. One such problem is that some countries are reported more sympathetically than others, despite news organizations' efforts to be evenhanded. If a country has a favorable image in the United States, and its authorities are hospitable and helpful to correspondents, it is usually given the benefit of any doubt. This was illustrated when Lebanon imposed censorship on outgoing dispatches in 1976. When the measure was announced, agencies and newspapers carried long stories about the harsh news restrictions. Most dispatches from Beirut carried editors' notes warning that the contents had been censored. But for years the same organizations have accepted without comment a more subtle but equally effective censorship by Israel. Under the Israeli system, correspondents must submit to the censor all dispatches on specific subjects, including military, oil and nuclear matters. Censors sometimes hit the "garble button" which obliterates outgoing dispatches on sensitive issues. As a result, reporters avoid certain forbidden stories. For a long time, for example, they could not say Israel imported oil from Iran. Until the mid-1970s, news organizations could not even say that a story had been altered by censors. Few correspondents protest, since the censors are usually reasonable and sometimes can be persuaded to change their minds. But readers are often not given the full picture, and they are seldom warned about it.

Here is the same passage with the key words underlined.

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The situation is worsened by the general imbalances of the system. One such problem is that some countries are reported more sympathetically than others, despite news organizations' efforts to be evenhanded. If a country has a favorable image in the United States, and its authorities are hospitable and helpful to correspondents, it is usually given the benefit of any doubt. This was illustrated when Lebanon imposed censorship on outgoing dispatches in 1976. When the measure was announced, agencies and newspapers carried long stories about the harsh news restrictions. Most dispatches from Beirut carried editors' notes warning that the contents had been censored. But for years the same organizations have accepted without comment a more subtle but equally effective censorship by Israel. Under the Israeli system, correspondents must submit to the censor all dispatches on specific subjects, including military, oil and nuclear matters. Censors sometimes hit the "garble button" which obliterates outgoing dispatches on sensitive issues. As a result, reporters avoid certain forbidden stories. For a long time, for example, they could not say Israel imported oil from Iran. Until the mid-1970s, news organizations could not even say that a story had been altered by censors. Few correspondents protest, since the censors are usually reasonable and sometimes can be persuaded to change their minds. But readers are often not given the full picture, and they are seldom warned about it.

SAMPLE SUMMARY

'Censorship and Government Pressures,
by Mort Rosenblum

Countries attempt to influence news by exerting direct and indirect pressures, making a balanced view of world events impossible for

Western readers and viewers. Reporters often cannot warn readers. Sometimes they unconsciously censor themselves or are conned by official propaganda. In the extreme case of Cambodia, news came only from official broadcasts and refugees, who knew what was happening in only a small area.

Most countries make some effort to have events reported in a favorable light, if at all. Some direct measures are easily circumvented, but sometimes action is brutally direct: reporters beaten bloody and killed. If countries have a favorable image and are hospitable and helpful to reporters, they are reported more sympathetically than others, as in the reporting of censorship in Lebanon versus the lack of mention of it in stories from Israel.

Comments on the Summary

The original moves forward through the telling of anecdotes and examples, each of which conveys an important point. The important meaning behind each of the interesting stories has to be brought out by identifying certain key words and concepts. The important material, which I underlined, is almost randomly spaced out over the whole selection—a few words here and a few words there.

Each of the rewritten sentences draws together information from a number of sentences and helps bring out the underlying structure of the piece. For example, the next to last sentence of the summary draws together the contrasting concepts of two paragraphs, and the last sentence of the summary brings out the unified concept of the whole last paragraph of the original.

The summary is also broken into two paragraphs to reflect the structure of the original, which in the first half raises the problem of governmental interference in the news and in the second half begins to discuss specific types. By bringing out the underlying argument of the piece, the summary has lost the dramatic quality of the original with its exciting journalists' stories, but the basic meaning does come across concisely.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT

Using the method of selecting the most important information, summarize the following continuation of Rosenblum's discussion of governmental interference in international reporting

antics attracted attention among the most casual readers, and editors knew it. The slightest reference to Amin got into newspapers around the country. Also, by geographical coincidence, Uganda is next to Kenya, where many correspondents are based. The official radio can be monitored in Nairobi, and telephone calls are often easy. Since Uganda has "news value," reporters seek out refugees, churchmen and defectors for accounts of depredations. Under Amin, newsmen could not move freely in Uganda to report on whether the regime accomplished anything positive, so the picture which emerged for an eager audience was one of unbridled bloodshed. By contrast, Macias has shunned publicity, withdrawing behind his tightly sealed borders. No demand has been created for news about him. A number of exiles live in the Cameroun and in Gabon, but those countries are off the normal itinerary for reporters in Africa. When correspondents do write about Equatorial Guinea, the name rings no bell of recognition, and the stories are soon forgotten.

Some countries become inadvertent victims of their own openness to reporters. One good example is the Philippines under Ferdinand Marcos. The government violates human rights on a grand scale, but it also allows correspondents in to travel with relative freedom to write about what is happening. Reporters can interview victims and conscience-stricken security officers. Marcos himself is accessible to reporters, who can ask do-you-still-beat-your-wife questions. As a result, correspondents are able to write detailed accounts of government abuses, rich in quotes and color. Other governments commit more flagrant violations of basic rights, but they escape public censure by closing their borders to reporters. If they are not of sufficient interest to merit intensive coverage from the outside, they are hardly mentioned at all. This results in the lasting impression that countries like the Philippines are the worst of a bad bunch.

Even if there were no restrictions or pressures on correspondents, some countries would still get more attention than others. But, ideally, correspondents would be able to apply some standard yardstick so that readers could evaluate the actions and the conditions of one government in light of others. The present system, however, gives the reader only scattered fragments of the whole picture.

Method 3: Note Taking

Taking notes on the key ideas for each of the sections of the original reveals the logic of ideas in the whole piece and the connections among them. As you write down the key idea for each paragraph or so of the original, you will be concerned more with large chunks of meaning than with specific details. As you look over your notes, you may notice that each paragraph has its own meaning, which is related to the meaning of the paragraph before or after it. You will become aware of the whole piece as a series of ideas, one following another.

This method may be useful when summarizing a piece that clearly develops an idea in each paragraph but seems to change from paragraph to paragraph, as a more complex idea builds from each of the parts or a large

idea breaks into many subsections. The notes then become an outline of the flow of the author's thought. Before reading the sample and comments, work through the following passage on your own. The passage is an excerpt from Daniel Boorstin's *The Image* which discusses "pseudo-events" or what are now called "media events."

News-Making: The Pseudo-Event

The new kind of synthetic novelty which has flooded our experience I will call "pseudo-events." The common prefix "pseudo" comes from the Greek word meaning false, or intended to deceive. Before I recall the historical forces which have made these pseudo-events possible, have increased the supply of them and the demand for them, I will give a commonplace example.

The owners of a hotel, in an illustration offered by Edward L. Bernays in his pioneer *Crystallizing Public Opinion*, consult a public relations counsel. They ask how to increase their hotel's prestige and so improve their business. In less sophisticated times, the answer might have been to hire a new chef, to improve the plumbing, to paint the rooms, or to install a crystal chandelier in the lobby. The public relations counsel's technique is more indirect. He proposes that the management stage a celebration of the hotel's thirtieth anniversary. A committee is formed, including a prominent banker, a leading society matron, a well-known lawyer, an influential preacher, and an "event" is planned (say a banquet) to call attention to the distinguished service the hotel has been rendering the community. The celebration is held, photographs are taken, the occasion is widely reported, and the object is accomplished. Now this occasion is a pseudo-event, and will illustrate all the essential features of pseudo-events.

This celebration, we can see at the outset, is somewhat—but not entirely—misleading. Presumably the public relations counsel would not have been able to form his committee of prominent citizens if the hotel had not actually been rendering service to the community. On the other hand, if the hotel's services had been all that important, instigation by public relations counsel might not have been necessary. Once the celebration has been held, the celebration itself becomes evidence that the hotel really is a distinguished institution. The occasion actually gives the hotel the prestige to which it is pretending.

It is obvious, too, that the value of such a celebration to the owners depends on its being photographed and reported in newspapers, magazines, newsreels, on radio, and over television. It is the report that gives the event its force in the minds of potential customers. The power to make a reportable event is thus the power to make experience. One is reminded of Napoleon's apocryphal reply to his general, who objected that circumstances were unfavorable to a proposed campaign: "Bah, I make circumstances!" The modern public relations counsel—and he is, of course, only one of many twentieth-century creators of pseudo-events—has come close to fulfilling Napoleon's idle boast. "The counsel on public relations," Mr. Bernays explains, "not only knows what news value is, but knowing it, he is in a position to *make news happen*. He is a creator of events."

The intriguing feature of the modern situation, however, comes precisely from the fact that the modern news-makers are not God. The news they make happen, the events they create, are somehow not quite real. There remains a tantalizing difference between man-made and God-made events.

A pseudo-event, then, is a happening that possesses the following characteristics. (1) It is not spontaneous, but comes about because someone has planned, planted, or incited it. Typically, it is not a train wreck or an earthquake, but an interview. (2) It is planted primarily (not always exclusively) for the immediate purpose of being reported or reproduced. Therefore, its occurrence is arranged for the convenience of the reporting or reproducing media. Its success is measured by how widely it is reported. Time relations in it are commonly fictitious or factitious; the announcement is given out in advance "for future release" and written as if the event had occurred in the past. The question "Is it real?" is less important than "Is it newsworthy?" (3) Its relation to the underlying reality of the situation is ambiguous. Its interest arises largely from this very ambiguity. Concerning a pseudo-event the question, "What does it mean?" has a new dimension. While the news interest in a train wreck is in *what* happened and in the real consequences, the interest in an interview is always, in a sense, in *whether* it really happened and in what might have been the motives. Did the statement really mean what it said? Without some of this ambiguity a pseudo-event cannot be very interesting. (4) Usually it is intended to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. The hotel's thirtieth-anniversary celebration, by saying that the hotel is a distinguished institution, actually makes it one.

NOTES ON THE PASSAGE

Pseudo-events, or false events, are flooding our experience.

Example: Hotel wants to increase prestige and business. Instead of improving facilities, it stages anniversary celebration, with prominent people and press coverage.

Event itself makes it appear that the hotel is distinguished. Report of event in news media makes an impression on potential customers. Making event makes experience.

But event is not quite real.

Characteristics of pseudo-events:

1. Planned, planted, or incited
2. Scheduled for media convenience
3. Ambiguous relationship to reality
4. Self-fulfilling prophecy

SAMPLE SUMMARY

News-Making: The Pseudo-Event,
by Daniel Boorstin

The hotel that, in order to boost its prestige and business, stages an anniversary celebration instead of improving its facilities exemplifies the pseudo-event, or false event, which now floods our experience. The news reports of the event, involving prominent citizens, make the hotel appear distinguished and impresses potential customers. Making the event makes an experience, but the event is not quite real. Pseudo-events like this one have four characteristics: they are planned, planted, or incited; they are scheduled for media convenience; their relationship to reality is ambiguous; and they are self-fulfilling prophecies.

Comments on the Summary

This excerpt develops a definition of the pseudo-event through the discussion of one main example. By developing a set of notes, I discovered how the more general opening and closing paragraphs led into and out of the specific case. In the first sentence of the summary, I was able to show that connection by directly tying the example to the general topic. In the last sentence I was again able to clarify the link to the example with the phrase *like this one.*

The excerpt itself proceeds from a direct description to an analysis to more general conclusions. Again the notes help trace the flow of thought, which I can then recapture in the written summary. Some important details, first described and then analyzed (such as the news reporting and the participation of prominent people), could be combined with the analysis. The contrast of ideas in the next to last sentence of the summary reflects the two levels of analysis in the fourth and fifth paragraphs of the original. Note also that the summary, like the outline, preserves the list structure for presenting the four characteristics of pseudo-events.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT

Using the method of note taking, summarize the next section of Boorstin's discussion of pseudo-events. It probes the historical causes of the rise of these media fictions.

was invented in 1877; the roll film appeared in 1884; Eastman's Kodak No. 1 was produced in 1888; Edison's patent on the radio came in 1891; motion pictures came in and voice was first transmitted by radio around 1900; the first national political convention widely broadcast by radio was that of 1928; television became commercially important in 1941, and color television even more recently.

Verisimilitude took on a new meaning. Not only was it now possible to give the actual voice and gestures of Franklin Delano Roosevelt unprecedented reality and intimacy for a whole nation. Vivid image came to overshadow pale reality. Sound motion pictures in color led a whole generation of pioneering American movie-goers to think of Benjamin Disraeli as an earlier imitation of George Arliss, just as television has led a later generation of television watchers to see the western cowboy as an inferior replica of John Wayne. The Grand Canyon itself became a disappointing reproduction of the Kodachrome original.

The new power to report and portray what had happened was a new temptation leading newsmen to make probable images or to prepare reports in advance of what was expected to happen. As so often, men came to mistake their power for their necessities. Readers and viewers would soon prefer the vividness of the account, the "candidness" of the photograph, to the spontaneity of what was recounted.

Then came round-the-clock media. The news gap soon became so narrow that in order to have additional "news" for each new edition or each new broadcast it was necessary to plan in advance the stages by which any available news would be unveiled. After the weekly and the daily came the "extras" and the numerous regular editions. The *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* soon had seven editions a day. No rest for the newsman. With more space to fill, he had to fill it ever more quickly. In order to justify the numerous editions, it was increasingly necessary that the news constantly change or at least seem to change. With radio on the air continuously during waking hours, the reporters' problems became still more acute. News every hour on the hour, and sometimes on the half hour. Programs interrupted any time for special bulletins. How to avoid deadly repetition, the appearance that nothing was happening, that news-gatherers were asleep, or that competitors were more alert? As the costs of printing and then of broadcasting increased, it became financially necessary to keep the presses always at work and the TV screen always busy. Pressures toward the making of pseudo-events became ever stronger. News-gathering turned into news-making.

Method 4: Miniaturizing

As you read through the original, pay attention to the various parts of the structure: the order of ideas, their relative lengths, and their relationships. Think of a large photograph reduced to wallet size. In a relative sense all the parts remain the same; only the scale has changed. Notice the shape, flow, and overall impression of the original passage so you can create a

miniature version of it in your summary. As in the note-taking method, you should jot down the main ideas and key statements of the original, but you should also try to keep the size of your notes in rough proportion to the size of the original. Follow the logic of one idea flowing from another, and re-create the transitions and structure of the original.

Where the arrangement, logical development, and balance of parts of the original are important, miniaturizing will help you retain the overall meaning and impression. Generally this method is most appropriate for more complex and subtly argued originals, where the parts of the argument fit together in unusual ways or in ways that are difficult to follow. Attempt your own version of the following passage by Michael Schudson before reading the sample and comments.

The Politics of Narrative Form: The Emergence of News Conventions in Print and Television

Generally speaking, people do not see news as it happens; rather, they hear or read about it. Parents do not experience their child's day at school directly, but learn of it as it is narrated, turned into a story by the child. Children learn that the accounts of their experiences, like the stories and legends they are told, must have certain formal qualities. A child I know told his older sister the following story: "Once upon a time there was a small boy who went out into the forest. He heard a sound. A lion jumped at him and ate him but he tore out the lion's stomach, killed the lion, and dragged it home. The end." Then he told the story again: "Once upon a time, a small boy went into the forest and a lion tried to eat him, but he killed the lion. The end." Then once more: "Once upon a time a boy killed a lion in the forest. The end." And at last he said: "Once upon a time. The end."

The child had learned something important about form. Journalists know something similar. They do not offer boys, forests, and lions raw, but cook them into story forms. News is not fictional, but it is conventional. Conventions help make messages readable. They do so in ways that "fit" the social world of readers and writers, for the conventions of one society or time are not those of another. Some of the most familiar news conventions of our day, so obvious they seem timeless, are recent innovations. Like others, these conventions help make culturally consonant messages readable and culturally dissonant messages unsayable. Their function is less to increase or decrease the truth value of the messages they convey than to shape and narrow the range of what kinds of truths can be told. They reinforce certain assumptions about the political world.

I want to examine in detail the emergence of a few of these conventions:

1. That a summary lead and inverted pyramid structure are superior to a chronological account of an event

2. That a president is the most important actor in any event in which he takes part
3. That a news story should focus on a single event rather than a continuous or repeated happening, or that, if the action is repeated, attention should center on novelty, not on pattern
4. That a news story covering an important speech or document should quote or state its highlights
5. That a news story covering a political event should convey the meaning of the political acts in a time frame larger than that of the acts themselves

All are unquestioned and generally unstated conventions of twentieth century American journalism; none were elements in journalism of the mid-nineteenth century, nor would any have been familiar to Horace Greeley, James Gordon Bennett, or Henry Raymond. Unlike reporters today, the nineteenth century reporter was not obliged to summarize highlights in a lead, to recognize the president as chief actor on the American political stage, to seek novelty, to quote speeches he reported, or to identify the political significance of events he covered. How, then, did the convention emerge, and why?

A study of reports of the State of the Union message demonstrates that these conventions, among others, incorporate into the structure of the news story vital assumptions about the nature of politics and the role of the press. They make it plain that American journalists regard themselves, not as partisans of political causes, but as expert analysts of the political world. They make it equally clear that, although as journalists they hold to principles of objective reporting, they nevertheless view their role as involving some fundamental translation and interpretation of political acts to a public ill-equipped to sort out for itself the meaning of events. Further, these conventions institutionalize the journalists' view that meaning is to be found, not in the character of established political institutions, but in the political aims of actors within them. The journalist's responsibility, as they see it, is to discover in the conscious plans of political actors the intentions that create political meaning.

The Constitution of the United States provides that the president shall report to Congress "from time to time" regarding the "state of the Union," and every American president, following the custom inaugurated by Washington, has delivered a message on this subject at the beginning of each winter's congressional session. While the event itself—the way in which the annual message is presented—has changed in some significant respects in the past two centuries, it still provides a reasonably good basis for a comparison of news reporting, having remained more or less constant over the years. Changes in the way the message is reported, therefore, cannot be attributed simply to changes in the event itself, but must be linked to changing precepts in journalism about the nature of politics and what a news story should be.

NOTES ON THE PASSAGE

INTRODUCTION--Anecdote; news generally second-hand through stories "Once upon a time, the end."

Stories have set forms--news conventions help make stories readable, but make other stories untellable.

BODY--Conventions to be examined:

1. Summary lead and inverted pyramid
2. President chief actor
3. Single event, novelty
4. Quotation or highlights of speech or document
5. Background time frame

These conventions not around a century ago.

Conventions assume journalists are nonpartisan, expert analysts, interpreting political aims to public.

TRANSITION--Changes in news reports of the annual State of Union speech help reveal journalistic changes.

SAMPLE SUMMARY

"The Emergence of News Conventions,
by Michael Schudson

People usually receive news secondhand through stories that have set forms; the child who summarized a story by saying, "Once upon a time. The end," understood forms. In news reporting, these set forms or conventions help make stories readable, but they make some stories impossible to tell.

Modern news conventions, not used a century ago in America, include:

1. Summary lead and inverted pyramid structure
2. The chief role of the president
3. News story focusing on a single event or novelty
4. Quoting or highlighting of speeches and documents
5. Background time frame given for political events

These conventions assume that journalists are nonpartisan, expert analysts, whose role is to interpret to the public the political aims of the main political actors.

A study of changes in news reporting of the annual presidential State of the Union speech reveals how these conventions came about.

Comments on the Summary

The original passage breaks down into three sections: introduction of the concepts of form and convention, presentation of current conventions and underlying assumptions, and a lead-in to historical material that appears to follow. In the summary, I tried to preserve these three sections in my paragraphing. I also tried to preserve the relative proportions of the parts—except for the central list, which, because of its prominence visually and structurally, received a larger proportion of space. The visual impact of the list was also preserved.

Because ideas in the original are frequently developed over an entire paragraph, the notes and the summary sentences combine widely separated material and often develop new wording to achieve the combination. Yet the sequence, flow, and structure of the ideas remain fixed.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT

Use the method of miniaturizing to summarize the continuation of Schudson's analysis of news conventions. The following excerpt presents some of the historical development of these conventions.

The Emergence of News Conventions (*continued*)

Reports of the State of the Union message have taken three basic forms: the stenographic record of congressional business, from 1790 to about 1850; a chronology and commentary on congressional ritual, from 1850 to 1900; and the report of the message, with an increasing emphasis on its content and its long-range political implications, from 1900 on. Despite journalism's vaunted objectivity, the reporting of the presidential message in each successive period became more interpretative, more divorced from what an ordinary observer could safely assert the message said or that Congress itself heard. This has not made reporting less truthful, but has widened the scope for the journalist's discretion—indicating that, over time, the journalistic function has served rather different intentions.

Early newspaper reports of the message printed it in its entirety, framed as part of congressional proceedings. The report of Washington's 1791 message by the weekly *Boston Gazette*, for instance, appeared on page two