

## SOURCING TEXT AND PICTURES

The basic rule is that there should be two independent sources for a story but there are exceptions.

### INTERNATIONAL

Typically, the sources would be the main wire services, news copy from a BBC stringer or, in some circumstances, a write-up of a radio or television report supplied by the BBC's monitoring service at Caversham.

However, BBC correspondents are generally taken to be reliable as a single source. The same can be said of an AP report on a White House statement.

Editors should acquire the expertise to make more sophisticated judgements. These might be based on the knowledge that a particular Reuters correspondent is also the trusted BBC stringer, or conversely on a warning from a BBC correspondent about the unreliability of a local wire reporter. It is worth consulting the relevant regional desk, which is likely to have this kind of detailed knowledge.

For breaking news, a single source may be enough so long as there is clear attribution - a word like "reportedly" does NOT do the job - and the story makes clear there is no confirmation.

Some official and semi-official sources like the Chinese Xinhua and Turkish Anatolia news agencies carry quite a high credibility rating, others less so. When in doubt, refer up.

It is also important to consider whether a source has a specific agenda or reason to be partial. When there is, that should be taken into account and made clear. A phrase like "...which normally reflects the official view" may be helpful. And it is worth spelling out that there is no independent confirmation.

In some circumstances, such as natural disasters or bomb explosions, the picture will be partial, or confused. This need not be a problem so long as we acknowledge the fact - and attribute carefully. We should be clear about what we do not know as well as what we do. By all means say "details are sketchy" - such phrases can add to the drama of a breaking news story, as well as honestly reflecting the limits of our knowledge.

With increasing competition and the arrival of rolling news, it is no longer an option to sit around waiting for a second source when a major story breaks - **we must find one.**

Journalists should alert our Intake team to any major new development so that they can seek confirmation and more detail from a BBC correspondent. If it happens outside the hours when our Intake desk is staffed, it is worth talking to World Service intake on or the Newsgathering World Duty Editor at TVC on

But there are plenty of other ways to develop a story - by simply picking up the phone and chasing it, checking local media on the web or enlisting the help of Caversham.

Particular care needs to be taken with other websites. During the conflict in Iraq, Arabic websites published accounts and video clips which were sourced to militant groups. It can be very difficult, if not impossible, to check these original sources, so we must make an attribution.

When a single source turns out to be inaccurate, we should as a matter of policy acknowledge the fact in subsequent stories - at least for a couple of hours.

UK

Again, most of the time we proceed with stories that have been confirmed using BBC material or our own checks. However, there are times when we can proceed with a news story on the basis of information from the Press Association (PA) only. This would be attributed to PA and first checked with a senior editor before publication.

Some additional care is needed on specific issues. For example, in reporting major incidents we need to treat death tolls that have not been reported by BBC sources with caution, as initial reports can be too high.

With breaking UK political news we should take guidance from our own team at Millbank on A story which PA attributes to "sources" and not to a clearly identified organisation or individual, and which is not supported by quotes, also needs to be treated with caution. If a PA story appears to contradict a BBC outlet, we should hold until further checks are made.

PA (and other agencies) often gives numbers for people attending controversial events or rallies. When these are challenged, as they sometimes are by our readers, it is very difficult for us to stand by figures like this because we were not present. We should avoid using agency estimates of crowds and in general we should only attribute such numbers to the police and the organisers. We should use both where we can.

eg. *"The Stop the War Coalition say 15,000 people attended the rally in Trafalgar Square, while police say they believe the number taking part was about 7,000."*

Another area where there is need for caution is when it appears that PA have taken a story from a local newspaper. We should avoid putting up a story on this basis, unless we have been able to confirm the facts, or obtain additional quotes. If the BBC publishes the story it gives it added credibility so we must be sure of our facts.

These are just a few examples of where we might treat a PA story with additional care, but obviously common sense applies and if you have any doubt at all you should refer up.

In the early hours of the morning a call to the News Organiser to get a sense of how the rest of the BBC is treating a story is often a good idea.

## **ANONYMOUS BRIEFINGS**

A named, on-the-record source is always preferred.

Granting anonymity to a source should never be done casually or automatically. However, with an anonymous source the readers must be told why the source is not named and why, in the BBC's view, it is credible.

Acceptable circumstances when anonymity might be granted are when the interviewee feels that their life, welfare or career is at risk. In these circumstances we should seek to confirm the story by another route. If that is not practical or possible we need to be confident that the information given is credible.

There are other circumstances where we are very unlikely to get an on-the-record statement eg. from the security services. In this instance we rely on the credibility of the contact - often these are well known to the relevant BBC correspondent and can be checked via Newsgathering.

If you are not sure about a sourcing issue, refer up to a senior editor. You should also learn more about BBC editorial policy contained in the BBC Producers' Guidelines.

**Protection of confidential sources is a fundamental principle of journalism.**

## **SOURCING STILL PICTURES**

Sourcing of pictures is just as important as sourcing of text. We must be sure of the origins and authenticity of our pictures and be aware that attempts are made to dupe us.

Pictures can be hard to verify, so the risk of being deliberately misled is that much greater.

When the source of a picture is unclear, it should be treated with extreme caution. If in doubt, do not use it - and refer up. There may be occasions when we will want to use a picture of doubtful origin, in which case we should be careful to use a phrase such as "The picture broadcast by ...apparently showing" or "purporting to show".

Most of our pictures are taken from PA, AP and AFP wire services. Where appropriate these should routinely carry an identification tag (except on indexes.) When we use other pictures - screen grabs for instance - their source should be identified in the alt tag. When it is an archive picture, this should also be made clear and great care should be taken with the caption.

Pictures should not be lifted from other web sites without permission and, when this is given, the source should be identified.

There is more information on picture selection in the relevant chapter.

## **VIDEO PICTURE RIGHTS**

Care must be taken when using video on the web - even if the pictures have been broadcast on the BBC. We may not have the rights to use the material outside the UK, or sections of the package may contain library pictures which we are not permitted to use on the web.

There are two types of picture which need extra care - archive black-and-white footage and sports action. If you see these in a package, please check that we have the rights to use them.

You must be sure that we have permission to use the material even if you only want to grab a still picture.

In most instances the AV team will be aware of these restrictions and able to advise.

There are further guidelines on copyright issues on Gateway at <http://home.gateway.bbc.co.uk/rights/legal/legalcopyright.htm>