



UNIVERSITY  
OF WOLLONGONG  
AUSTRALIA

1-1-2010

# The development reporting outline

Warief Djajanto Basorie  
*Indonesia*

---

### Recommended Citation

Basorie, Warief Djajanto, The development reporting outline, *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, 20, 2010, 239-246.

Available at:<http://ro.uow.edu.au/apme/vol1/iss20/24>

# The development reporting outline



**Warief Djajanto Basorie**

*Indonesia*

wariefd@yahoo.com

Reporters are commonly criticized for their incomplete reporting. One way to produce a comprehensive report is to approach an assignment with a methodical plan. The reporting outline is such a plan whereby for journalists to think through six components: the theme, the topic, reference material, sources, angles, and questions.

The Jakarta-based Dr. Soetomo Press Institute (*Lembaga Pers Dr. Soetomo*, LPDS) has conducted numerous journalism workshops throughout Indonesia. A common observation from these workshops is that often news stories in the local press are not comprehensive. A tell-tale sign of inadequate reporting effort is the questions readers ask about the substance after reading the report. Not only are major facts missing, but essential details are missing as well. In covering a local fire, for instance, it is insufficient to report where and when it took place, what damage it caused and who were the victims. The report is still incomplete even after learning how the fire started. Beyond the dry and humdrum basic facts, the reporter must be proactively curious and socially sensitive to pursue also the human side of the story. How has the fire affected individual victims and the community as a whole? Have people lost livelihoods and not just living space? What help are the victims getting? Why was the fire not preventable? How well did the local fire department extinguish the fire?

All the above questions concern the present. However, the story is still incomplete. The reporter digs deeper. He or she must also seek the story's past and future and not just cover the present events of the day. The past is background. How many fires have occurred in the past year in the community and the city as a whole? What were the damages and how many deaths occurred? What caused the fires? Is there a common pattern?

Meanwhile, the future is a projection. How can future fires be checked? What lessons were learned from the fire for future use? What fire prevention guidelines should residents follow? Should a community-based early prevention and warning system be developed? Who should take the lead for all these initiatives?

Reporters strive for the complete news report. What is key to covering a topic as comprehensive and as detailed as possible? How do you embrace all relevant sources and angles, touching the three time-related angles -- past, present and future -- in a

meaningful way, and still make the report readable? The reporter must think and use a methodology. The key here is to prepare a reporting outline.

The reporting outline is a cerebral exercise in organization. It is a well-thought-out plan the reporter develops before setting out in the field to cover the subject of the news. It embodies terms of reference that plots the stages of coverage of the topic under assignment. Because of the detailed preparation and the size and scope of information it attempts to collect, the reporting outline with allowances for time is best suited for in-depth reporting. Because a team of reporters may be engaged in such reporting, the outline is best done by an editor in charge with feed from the reporters in the field.

With daily news items for immediate release, reporters do not need to make an elaborate outline. They can sketch a quick mental outline by thinking through the relevant angles and sources. The reporting outline is just one planning tool in reporting. Course participants should develop their own outlining method they feel comfortable with in preparing an assignment. However, the goal is common: Produce a comprehensive news story. (For comparison, a different opening approach is used in investigative reporting. It starts with a hypothesis that a wrong-doing like misuse of public funds has been committed. Journalists gather information from numerous sources, particularly public records and interviews, to prove or disprove the hypothesis. The reporter develops the story components as required).

The reporting outline has six components: the theme, the topic, reference material, sources, angles, questions. A critical and systems thinking approach integrates the six components as follows:

1. The theme is the broad line of the subject covered. For instance, sustainable development is one theme. AIDS is another.
2. The topic is a more narrowly defined subject matter derived from the theme. One example for a topic is learning sustainable development in schools. Another topic is AIDS education for children.
3. Reference material is background material on the topic. It is found in news clippings, documents, books, and other archival literature.
4. Sources are individuals, institutions, companies or other organizations contacted for information.
5. The angles are subtopics of the subject matter that require further digging and research. For the topic on AIDS education for children, two angles are the vulnerability of children to HIV infection and AIDS learning in school.
6. The questions are the offshoots of an angle that seek specific information from the source believed to hold that information. The good questions often incorporate reference material.

### **Theme**

The theme and its related topic are the concern of the public the media's reporter serves. The theme the reporter covers bears high relevance to the public's interest. The information the reporter provides on the theme must be meaningful for the

public to know. A rule of thumb for what subjects count is what matters to people. Is it health issues, such as HIV and AIDS, that which concern many people? Is it about jobs and the education needed to get employment? Is it about the environment and how to keep the Earth a safe place to live for people today and tomorrow? Is it about the impact a natural or man-made disaster has on present and future lives and the environment?

A useful thematic guide to current issues is to report on the issues put forward in international forums. For example, a long-term concern for today's and future generations is sustainable development. A UNESCO workshop in Bangkok on a regional strategy for the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) presented a list of 11 core themes for Asia and the Pacific. These themes are highly suitable for media coverage of sustainable development. These 11 themes are:

- 1) Information and Awareness (eco-media, media literacy, ICT).
- 2) Knowledge Systems (learning from local and indigenous knowledge; integrating traditional and modern technology).
- 3) Environmental Protection and Management (biodiversity, climate change, natural resources, conservation).
- 4) Peace and Equity (conflict resolution, peace, equity, appropriate development, democracy).
- 5) Local Context (community development, empowerment).
- 6) Transformation (rural transformation, urbanization, sustainable habitat, water, sanitation and other public infrastructure).
- 7) Culture (diversity and intercultural understanding).
- 8) Cross Cutting Issues and Themes (human rights, citizenship, gender equality, sustainable futures, holistic approach, innovation, partnerships, sustainable production and consumption, governance).
- 9) Health (HIV and AIDS, malaria).
- 10) Environmental Education.
- 11) Engagement of Leaders (in changing mindsets to realize public commitment to sustainable development).

### **Topic**

The topic stems from the theme. It is more focused than the theme. Like in the above-mentioned example, if the theme is HIV and AIDS, a topic is HIV prevention among youth as a vulnerable group. On the theme of environmental protection, a topic is the role of a satellite-based tsunami early-warning mechanism to alert people to immediately evacuate. On the theme of empowerment, a topic is helping poor women start a small business through micro-credit.

### **Reference Material**

To develop and put substance in historical perspective, the reporter must prepare relevant reference material. A good news archive of past publications from the reporter's own media, better still from a multitude of media, serves this purpose. A general data bank is also a valuable help. Reporters must develop their own personal library that includes reference material of the subjects they cover. Reference material has three uses:

- It provides background information for the reporter to get to know the subject matter covered.
- It helps the reporter to develop effective questions that incorporate the background information.
- It enriches the news report with the choice background.

### **Sources**

The sources are the individuals and the institutions the reporter goes to seek information. In determining what sources to contact, the reporter identifies all the relevant sources relevant to the topic. The topic of preventing HIV infection among school-age children may have sources that include school heads and teachers, children and their parents, health and education officials, and activists. Public statements and policy quotes and explanations are required but are not enough. In practice, only one source is identified in one reporting outline sheet. Other sources are placed on separate reporting outline sheets because of the different reference material, angles, and questions an individual source entails. Thus multiple sources in-depth reporting requires separate reporting outlines for each of the sources. The human interest element must be sought too from these sources to make the story appealing. Although the primary source identified in a reporting outline is a person or an institution, reporters are aware they must also seek information from research and observation other than from interviewing.

### **Angles**

The angles are a crucial component. In gathering facts for the news report, an inadequate common practice of the reporter is to narrowly focus only on the present: facts on the here and now. This makes the reporting fall short of all necessary facts. To make the report comprehensive, it must encompass reporting that relates to the past, present and future. To gather information relating to these three periods in time, the angles the reporter determines must touch all three periods. Thus a past period angle in the fire story would be previous fires in the area. A present period angle is loss due to the fire. A future period angle means to prevent any future fire. The reporter must also be mindful that the angles have high relevance to the topic and are meaningful to the public. If the topic focuses on a problem, say the search for an AIDS vaccine, solution-linked angles factor in. One angle, for instance, is the problems and promises of vaccine research to date. For environment issues, impact-related angles are highly relevant. On a nuclear plant leak story, for instance, one angle is the impact radioactivity has on the physical and human environment. On the tsunami early warning system topic, meanwhile, angles are the hardware and technology used, the cost, and the politics involved, if any.

### **Questions**

In interviewing sources, the reporter must have well-prepared questions that produce newsworthy answers. Questions come in two kinds: the common sense question and the informed question. A common sense question logically relates to the subject matter but does not require background help. Example: How many houses did the fire destroy? How many people died and how many were injured? Meanwhile an informed question inserts background facts to fortify the question. Example: According to a city ordinance, communities must have a fire warning mechanism. Did such a system work in this community? How well did it function?

In conducting these interviews, the reporter must be certain he or she has engaged the relevant and competent sources. For the fire story, such sources include community leaders, victims, fire fighters, police officers, city officials, first aid volunteers, social workers for post-fire recovery. If the reporting requires team work, each reporter may have one reporting outline to interview one source.

The following two specimen reporting outlines in the appendix demonstrate show how each of the six components work.

In conclusion, the reporting outline makes the difference between a fine news report and a deficient one. That difference is in the reporter's ability to think in an organized structure. The thinking journalist delivers the better account, the quality piece, the readable and meaningful story, the reader-relevant report. Short of preparing a detailed reporting outline, however, reporters should at least draw a list of relevant three-period angles and the appropriate source attached to each angle. Preparing this list along with reading reference material is the minimum starting point for reporters to do their job well.

## Model 1 Reporting Outline

**Theme:** HIV and AIDS

**Topic:** Stopping HIV infection among junior high schoolers

**Reference material:**

1. A March 2005 study on youth sexual behavior in four Indonesian cities found that more than half of sexually active youth reported that their first sex act occurred by the age of 18, with 16% reporting their first sex act between the ages of 13 and 15. The study, conducted by DKT Indonesia, interviewed 474 respondents age 15 to 24 in Jakarta, Bandung, Surabaya and Medan. DKT is an international organization dedicated to stop HIV infection with the use of condoms.
2. Although their awareness of HIV and AIDS is high, most youth report they are not using contraception because sex is mostly unplanned and they are not prepared, the study also concludes. (*Visit [www.dktindonesia.org](http://www.dktindonesia.org)*)
3. The Ministry of National Education has conducted a baseline study on the risk and vulnerability of young people (13-15 years). Contracting a university-based research team, MNE and UNICEF have developed a manual on life skills

education focusing on HIV prevention. It is used in a pilot project for junior high schools in Sentani, Papua, since 2004.

4. The mode of HIV transmission in Indonesia was heterosexual (51.8%), injecting drug use (23.8%), homosexual acts (10.3%), according to a May 2003 country progress report of the National AIDS Commission (KPA).
5. According to AIDS prevention activist, Joyce Djaelani Gordon, in 2005 more than half of new cases of HIV infection in the world, including Indonesia, occurred within the 15-25 year old age group. (*Jakarta Post*, 1 Dec 2005)

**Source:** Head of local junior high school

**Angles:**

- A. Definition of HIV/AIDS, cause, mode of transmission
- B. Overview of HIV/AIDS situation in Indonesia
- C. Vulnerability of school children
- D. HIV/AIDS education in the school
- E. Challenges and future action

**Questions:**

1. (Under angle C): The Ministry of National Education is concerned that children 13-15 years old are vulnerable to HIV infection. Further, more than half of new cases of HIV infection in 2005 occurred within the 15-25 age group. How concerned are you that HIV infects junior high school children age 13 to 15?
2. (Under angle D): A 2005 study found that 16% of children age 13-15 reported having sex for the first time. The study also found most youth did not use contraception. Their sex act was unplanned. Does your school provide sex education? If so what does it emphasize?
3. (Under angle D): A pilot project on HIV prevention education has been underway in junior high schools in Papua. Has your school done any HIV prevention teaching? If so, what lessons do you teach the children and how do you teach them?
4. (Under angle E): Looking ahead to the next five years, what challenges will you encounter and what future action will you take in making your school children highly aware about HIV and AIDS?

**Notes:**

1. The angles can be grouped in the three periods of the past, present, and future. A and B are past time angles. C and D are present time angles. Angle E is a future time angle. A comprehensive story should have all three time angles.

2. Questions 1, 2, and 3 use reference material. An effective question uses reference material. This engages your interviewees to think. A good question with reference material results in an answer fit for print.
3. This reporting outline has only one source. Other sources require separate outlines given the different reference material, angles and questions that must be prepared for a different source. Thus multi-sourcing calls for X number of reporting outlines for X number of sources.

## Model 2

### Reporting Outline

**Theme:** ESD (Education for Sustainable Development)

**Topic:** Implementing ESD nationally

**Reference material:**

1. Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (*Our Common Future*, 1987 report of the World Commission of the Environment and Development).
2. ESD is the effort to make people aware about the importance of sustainable development. It concerns bringing about changes in our attitudes, behavior, habits, and lifestyle to transform society positively. Environmental education is but one component of ESD that includes many other themes such as education for poverty alleviation, human rights, good governance, gender equality, democracy.
4. On 1 March 2005 UNESCO Director General Koichiro Matsuura launched the United Nations Decade of ESD in New York. He said ESD must “promise a sustainable planet and a safer world to our children, our grandchildren and their descendents.” UNESCO is the lead agency for the Decade.
5. In June 2005 UNESCO’s Bangkok office launched the Asia-Pacific Regional Strategy for the Decade of ESD. It lists 11 core issues in which DESD activities in the region can move forward. These are information and awareness; knowledge systems; environmental protection and management; peace and equity; local context (community development); transformation (rural and urban change); culture; cross cutting issues (human rights, innovation); health (HIV and AIDS, malaria); environmental education; engagement of leaders.

**Source:** Minister of National Education

**Angles:**

- A. Initial awareness on ESD
- B. Implementation
- C. Prospects



**Questions:**

1. (Under angle A): In March 2005 UNESCO launched the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. How did you first learn about it?
2. (Under angle A): In learning about ESD, to what extent does your ministry attach importance to it?
3. (Under angle B): What ESD-related activities has your ministry started?
4. ESD seeks change in people's behaviour and lifestyle to transform society positively. How do you see this change take place?
5. UNESCO has issued an Asia-Pacific regional strategy for the Decade of ESD. To what extent has the government adopted it?
6. The DESD strategy cites 11 core issues. One is cross cutting issues like human rights and innovation. How significant an issue is this for the nation?
7. Has ESD been integrated into the school curriculum? If so, how?
8. (Under angle C): Looking to the future, how do you make children become aware they must act to be able to live in a sustainable planet and a safer world for their children and descendants?

**Notes:**

1. The angles can be grouped in the three periods of the past, present, and future. Angle A is a past time angle. B is a present time angle. C is a future time angle. A comprehensive story should have all three time angles.
2. Questions 1, 4, 5, 6, and 8 use reference material. An effective question uses reference material. This engages the source you interview to think. A good question with reference material results in a good answer for print.
3. The reporting outline has only one source. Separate outlines are needed for separate sources.

---

WARIEF DJAJANTO has been a journalism instructor since 1991 at the Dr. Soetomo Press Institute (Lembaga Pers Dr. Soetomo, LPDS) in Jakarta. He was a reporter and editor at the KNI News Service (1971-91) and concurrently past Jakarta correspondent for the Manila-based DEPTHnews that served Asia-wide media outlets (1974-91). In 1987 he won a public information award from the World Health Organization for a story on free primary health services such as vaccination for Indonesian mothers and children under five years old. He was a 1978 Stanford Professional Journalism Fellow. He holds a bachelor's degree in Communication from the Jakarta Institute of Social and Political Sciences (IISIP). The author thanks for following for commenting on the draft of this article: Ken Friedman, Lehigh University, Pennsylvania; Sheila Coronel, Columbia University, New York; and Atmakusumah Astraatmadja, the Dr. Soetomo Press Institute, Jakarta.