



Wire Editing

"... We do little to no editing here on wire copy, which kind of sucks! In fact, we even created some sort of time-saving "rule" recently that we shouldn't read wire stories at all. . . ." (From a discussion at an online American Press Institute seminar)

By [Kenn Finkel](#)

I have to say that's one of the most depressing postings that I've ever seen in these classes — but, unfortunately, it's not all that unusual.

I feel bad for [the seminar member] but she's probably expressing the sentiments of a lot of editors and managing editors — who have short-sighted bean-counters breathing down their necks. Is it any wonder that readers are losing confidence in newspapers?

In fact, in an earlier go-round of this same class, I found *this* statement in a posting, which is almost exactly the same thing that [the seminar member] said:

. . . the wire stories tend to get shipped through first and the local stories held up

I hear this a lot — in these courses as well as newspapers that I visit for seminars. I have never understood it. It's a philosophy that guarantees a loss of *credibility*. Why should wire copy get *less* editing than staff copy?

Let's face it: With staff copy, you know your source. You know the strengths and weaknesses of your people. You usually know what you're getting. With wire copy, you have no idea. You rarely know who the reporters are or how good they are at what they do.

I have a lot of friends at the Associated Press, and I don't want to imply that they don't do a good job. They do, and it's often unappreciated and anonymous. But editing material in our newspapers is *our* job — not the job of wire services.

When we allow wire services to edit our newspaper, we're abdicating our responsibility.

Three of the six problems in Exercise 1 involve wire stories. I have no doubt that they appeared in the newspapers in which I found them exactly as they moved on the wire. Sort of, "Oh well. It's the AP. It

must be OK. We'll assume that the big questions have been answered — and we'll just slap them in."

One participant in another previous class reported something like, "We pay the AP to get it right. Our management doesn't feel that we have to question AP copy."

To which I replied something like:

It's *your* newspaper. *Your* credibility is at stake. Take copies of your paper into a restaurant in your city and ask people sitting at the tables there if they can identify staff copy and differentiate it from wire copy. Guess what? Most readers don't know the difference.

More important, they don't *care*.

And they shouldn't. Most readers don't even *understand* terms such as "*wire copy*" and "*staff copy*." And they shouldn't have to. It's *your* paper. Produce it for your readers.

Newspapers that forget the readers lose credibility fast. But that's not *your* fault; it's the fault of the people who control the purse strings. When readers question the *credibility* of your paper, those profits that the bean-counters like to point to will diminish very soon.

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