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<th><strong>Title</strong></th>
<th>Writing assignments and agenda and handouts.</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Author(s)</strong></td>
<td>Massey, Brian.</td>
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Paper No. 7
AMIC Training for Journalists: Management of Environmental Information Resources
9-14 November 1998, Singapore

Writing Assignment 1

9 November 1998
Assignment Editor > Dr Brian Massey

**Deadline > 12 November, Session 3 (2 p.m.) > or before**

One goal of this AMIC training workshop is to develop a World Wide Web site for environmental journalists in Southeast Asia. But our Web site needs content. And some of the content can come from the workshop's presentations.

You and your fellow workshop participants are the workshop's reporters. (Yes, we are putting you to work straight away!)

Your assignment is to report on selected workshop presentations and your stories will be published on our Web site. We will divide up into reporting teams. Each team will be assigned a presentation to report on. See the attached reporting schedule for your assignment.

Take notes during the presentations, just like you do back home at work. Compare notes with your teammate and write the story together. Please use a summary lead and the inverted-pyramid format, with relevant quotations from the presenter -- the standard news-story writing process.

Computers will be available at the workshop venue for writing your story. Or, you may want to hand-write your story on paper and type it into the computer later. Please save your story on a floppy disk that will be provided. And do not forget your by-line!

You should turn in your story to Dr Massey at the start of Session 3 on 12 November. Or, you may turn it in earlier, if you like.
### Reporting Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reporting Team</th>
<th>Assigned Presentation</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>9 November: Day 1</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms Supaporn Asadamongkoln (Thai Rath Daily)</td>
<td>9-10 a.m. Opening Remarks, Vijay Menon, Prof. Eddie Kuo and Ivan Lim</td>
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<td>Mr Alex Rey V. Pal (Visayan Daily Star)</td>
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<td>Mr Norazlan Othman (Borneo Bulletin)</td>
<td>10-10:30 a.m. Keynote Address, Dr. Kazi Jalal</td>
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<td>Mr Nguyen Nhat Anh (Lao Dong)</td>
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<td>Ms Esther Tan Wee Cheng (New Straits Times)</td>
<td>2-3:30 p.m. &quot;Publicizing Environmental Issues,&quot; David Lazarus</td>
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<td>Mr Chea Sotheacheath (Phnom Penh Post)</td>
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<td>Ms Hoang Ming Huong (Vietnam News Agency)</td>
<td>4-5:30 p.m. &quot;Urban Pollution,&quot; Dr. Wimala Ponniah</td>
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<td>Mr Sugianto Tandra (Jakarta Post)</td>
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<td>Mr Ivan Lim (Asian Fed. of Environmental Journalists)</td>
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<td><strong>10 November: Day 2</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms Kanittha Inchukul (Bangkok Post)</td>
<td>9-10 a.m. &quot;Coastal and Marine Environment,&quot; Dr. Wimala Ponniah</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Somboune Phomdouangdy (National Media Training Centre, Laos)</td>
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<td>Mr Ebi Azly Abdullah (Berita Harian)</td>
<td>11 a.m.-12:30 p.m. &quot;Role of UNEP/ESCAP in Environmental Issues,&quot; David Lazarus</td>
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<td>Ms Mary Ann L. Reyes (UNICEF Philippines)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Siang Sothea (Rasmei Kampuchea Daily)</td>
<td>2-3:30 p.m. &quot;Inland Waters,&quot; Dr. Wimala Ponniah</td>
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<td>Mr David Koh (Straits Times)</td>
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<td><strong>11 November: Day 3</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms Phonesavanh Tlilkeo (Vientiane Times Weekly)</td>
<td>9-10 a.m. &quot;Developing Environmental Resources,&quot; Dr. Sankaran Ramanathan</td>
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<td>Mr Abd Rahim Ismail (Borneo Bulletin)</td>
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<td>Ms Poonkothai (Tamil Murasu)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Biqwanto Situmorang (Antara News Agency)</td>
<td>11 a.m.-12:30 p.m. &quot;Land Degradation,&quot; Dr. Wimala Ponniah</td>
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<td>Ms. Yap Lay Hong (Lianhe Zaobao)</td>
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Writing Assignment 2

10 November 1998
Assignment Editor > Dr Brian Massey

**Deadline > 12 November, Session 3 (2 p.m.)**

Please write a short "case study" of an environmental issue, problem or concern in your country that you have reported on for your newspaper or news agency. Suggestions about how to write a case study are attached.

You may want to hand-write your case study first on paper and type it into the computer later. When you do type it into the computer, save it on a floppy disk.

You also may want to print a copy of your case study -- or at least keep your notes. That is because you will be sharing your study with your workshop colleagues on 12 November, during the day's last two sessions.

Your case study also could be published on the World Wide Web site you will be developing later in this workshop. That way, other environmental journalists in Southeast Asia may benefit from your experience.
Suggestions for Writing a Case Study

1- **Topic of Article.** In a general way, summarize the topic of your story. (What was it about, generally speaking?) One to two sentences perhaps are all you should need.

2- **Importance.** Tell us why it was important that you report this particular environmental issue, problem or concern. Again, just a few sentences may be all you will need for this part.

3- **How Story Was Reported.** Tell us how you reported this story. Here are some examples of questions you could ask yourself for this part:
   - How did you learn about the environmental issue, problem or concern that you reported about? How did you know it was worth a news story?
   - Did you interview people? Who were they? Why was it important to interview them?
   - Did you use any government documents, reports, and the like? What were they about? What departments or agencies prepared them?
   - Did you search the Web for information for your story? What Web sites did you use?
   - Did you travel to the site of the environmental issue, problem or concern you were reporting about?

4- **Difficulties/Solutions.** Tells us about any difficulties you faced while gathering information for this story -- and how you solved them. Here are some examples of questions you could ask yourself for this part:
   - Did you lack any information or reporting resources? What where they? How did you solve this difficulty?
   - What difficulties did you encounter in preparing for, scheduling and conducting your interviews? How did you solve that?
   - Did people try to persuade you to not write the kind of story you believed needed to be written? How did you solve this?

5- **Wish List.** If you could report this story over again, what would you want to do differently and why?
Objective of Session: To develop techniques for looking more deeply at the environmental concerns in the home countries of workshop participants.

To report fully on an environmental concern, a journalist often must first define it. In other words, an environmental journalist might find it useful to identify -- or map out -- the specifics of the issue or problem. That could help the journalist see new parts of the issue or problem to report on. In turn, the journalist can bring a deeper understanding of the environmental concern to his or her readers.

We will begin practising this process by:

- Making a list of the major environmental issues and problems in our home countries.
- Defining those issues and problems briefly, in terms of their importance or newsworthiness, and in terms of the "players". By "players" (sometimes called "social actors") I mean those people, companies, government and non-governmental agencies involved with the issue or problem.

We will end this session by briefly discussing how to do Writing Assignment 2: Case Study of an Environmental Issue, Problem or Concern You Have Reported On.
Objective of Session: To impart to participants an understanding of the dynamics of how journalists actually "construct" a reality of a news event for their readers, and how environmental journalists could use this process to influence government policymaking on the environment.

We all know very well the routines of reporting a news story. But we may not know exactly how our reporting influences our readers. In this session, we will discuss what researchers of journalism have found out about the process of newsmaking and how it may be able to influence our readers.

This is important for environmental journalists: our ultimate goal -- and we should be honest with ourselves about this -- is not just to give our readers information. We also want to persuade people to stop doing things that hurt the environment and to start doing things that help it. Yes, we still give fair, balanced and objective reports: good journalism still is important. But we do have a purpose for our environmental reporting, whether or not we are aware of that.

Look at it this way: We report on an environmental issue, problem or concern. As a result of our reporting, that issue, problem or concern is now "out there." That means people are talking about it -- and the information they are talking about came from our environmental stories. As a result of this talk, things may start to change for the better.

And environmental journalists can do certain things in their news-gathering and news writing that could help put the environment on the "public agenda" and "political agenda."
Giving a lot of news coverage over time to one issue, problem or concern can have a powerful effect. It can help make things change for the better. Sometimes the change is small, sometimes it is big.

Here is one example. This newspaper reported a lot on children, but its technique — how it used journalism to help change things — easily can be used to good effect by environmental journalists.

Newspaper
San Antonio Light, in the city of San Antonio, in the US State of Texas.

Issue, Problem or Concern
Low public awareness in the city of San Antonio of social issues that affect children. The newspaper’s goal was to increase public awareness.

How the Newspaper Did It
In January 1992, the newspaper published a full-page editorial that gave details of its “1992 Agenda — For the Children.” The editorial said that people needed to pay more attention to eight problems: child abuse and neglect, childcare for working parents, educating children in general, educating them to be tomorrow’s leaders and workers, drugs and violence, healthcare, poverty, and young mothers. The newspaper followed up throughout the year with sustained news coverage of anything that related to those problems. It also asked community leaders to help focus its “media agenda” on children’s issues.

What Happened
- People learned about the problem and talked about children’s issues more often.
- The San Antonio city government increased its spending on children’s programs that were aimed at improving children’s health, giving them with good things to do in their spare time (like sports), training them for jobs, and teaching them that crime is bad.
Possible Agenda-Setting Effect

- The media agenda was focused on one broad topic: children's issues. That means the newspaper gave a lot of news coverage over time to this topic.
- That possibly helped influence the public agenda. The newspaper's many stories got people's attention and kept their attention on the problem. People talked about children's issues more frequently.
- The media and public agendas possibly helped influence the political agenda. The city government took action.
- Because the public and government policymakers were talking about and taking action on the problem, that gave the newspaper more stories to report.

What Did Not Work Very Well

- Just two of the eight issues got the most news coverage. They were education and crime. That could be because education and crime fit well with traditional definitions of what is "news." Education and crime get a lot of coverage because that kind of information is easy to get from government agencies.

Lesson: Try to expand coverage beyond information that is easy to get. This helps give readers the BIG PICTURE view—the larger story.

- The newspaper reported most on events. It did very little “enterprise” reporting—it did not think up its own stories but instead reported on things that already were happening.

Lesson: Try to not limit yourself to just things that already are happening. Think up your own story ideas. This helps give you control over the larger story, rather than having events control it.

- The newspaper did not report a lot on actions to change things for the better for children. For example, it described government plans to help youth, but did not tell people how those plans were supposed to be put into action.

Lesson: Do not just report on events—also ask “what action will be needed” or “what action is to be taken.” People need to know about a problem AND they need to know what is being done to solve it.

This handout was adapted from research by Marcus Brewer and Maxwell McCombs, “Setting the Community Agenda,” Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly 73 (spring 1996), 7-16.
Giving a lot of news coverage to one issue, problem or concern by writing a series of stories for one week's newspapers may not be enough to help change things for the better. But making that series available over time to many "opinion leaders" — key people in the community and government — can have a powerful effect.

Here is one example. This newspaper published a lot of stories in a short time about the high death rate for babies. After that, it made a mini-newspaper of just those stories and handed it out freely to opinion leaders. This technique could be very useful to environmental journalists.

Newspaper

Issue, Problem or Concern
In 1987, Alabama had the worst death rate for babies of all the 50 states that are part of the United States of America.

How the Newspaper Did It
The newspaper assigned four reporters to write a series of stories on the high death rate for babies ("infant mortality rate"). The stories were published from 14-18 September 1987 under the main title of "A Death in the Family."

The reporters did the usual thing: they talked to government officials about the problem. But they also interviewed families whose babies had died. That way, they put a human face on the government's statistics about the death rate. (It is more interesting to read about how other people feel; numbers -- statistics -- are important but boring.) Also, they also put a financial face on the problem by writing about how much the problem was costing in terms of tax dollars. Editorials about how the problem needed to be solved were published with the stories.

After the series was published, the newspaper reprinted just those stories and handed out the package for free to "opinion leaders," or important people whose opinions are listened to.
closely. These included school principals, doctors, public-health officials, and members of the state Legislature (which is like Parliament). These people used the reprints in presentations to citizens’ groups. The newspaper continued to report on the problem and on efforts to solve it.

What Happened

- Several citizens’ groups and professional organizations used the reprints to lobby (or request) the state government to fix the problem. The reprints gave them information -- evidence -- that the problem was real and serious.
- Two years after the series was published, the state government approved and started many programs to fix the problem.

Possible Agenda-Setting Effect

- The media agenda focused in a short period of time on one topic: the high infant mortality rate. More than that, it helped make sure something good would happen by freely distributing reprints of those stories to key, important people.
- That possibly helped influence the public agenda. The important people (“opinion leaders”) who got the reprints passed the information to others in the community.
- The media and public agendas possibly helped influence the political agenda. The government took action.
- Because the public and government policymakers were talking about — and taking action on — the problem, that gave the newspaper more stories to report.

What Helped the Agenda-Setting Effect

- The problem — a high death rate for babies — is hard to argue with. Once people knew about it, they easily agreed it was a serious problem.

  *Lesson: It is easier to help make things change when the problem, issue or concern is one that everyone easily can agree on.*

- The newspaper’s stories were helped a lot by the fact that so many private and public groups became involved and supported efforts to solve the problem. The newspaper got these groups involved by freely handing out the reprints.

  *Lesson: Getting private citizens’ groups and public officials involved can help make things change for the better.*

- The newspaper followed up on its series by writing stories and editorials about things people were suggesting and doing to solve the problem — or to say that the problem was not serious.

  *Lesson: Sustained coverage of a single problem, issue or concern helps keep the public and policymaking agendas focused on the problem, issue or concern.*

This handout was adapted from research by Kim Walsh-Childers, “‘A Death in the Family’ — A Case Study of Newspaper Influence on Health Policy Development,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 71 (winter 1994), 820-829.
How can environmental journalists use framing to help convince people that they need to take action on an environmental problem? Here is what researcher Joel L. Davis has found out.

First, journalism researchers say that there could be three ways to frame an environmental problem, issue or concern.

1. **Frame the Problem: Gains and Losses.** Write about the bad and good things that could happen if different solutions are tried. For example, what may be gained (positive outcome) by Solutions A, B and C? What could be lost (negative outcome) by trying them?

   "Researchers think stories about the bad things that could happen if nothing is done are best at convincing people to take action."

2. **Frame the Target (the people who will be affected): Current Generation versus Future Generations.** Write about how people will be affected in a bad way if they do nothing to solve the problem AND how they will be affected in a good way if they help solve it. Also, write about how people will be affected now OR how their children or grandchildren will be affected later.

   "Researchers think the best technique is to write about how people will be affected now (current generation)."

3. **Frame the Action: Take Less versus Do More.** People can be asked to do more personally for the environment (recycle, pick up litter). Or they can be asked to take less of some resource for the greater good of all citizens (forest conservation).

   "Researchers think the best technique is to write about solutions that ask people to take less."
Second, Prof. Davis asked a group of university students to read environmental news-story writing that used Frame 1, 2 or 3. Later, he asked the students some questions so that he could see which frame worked best. Here is what he found out:

- How a story about the environment is framed influences how people respond to an environmental problem.

  **Lesson: Framing works — it does influence people’s opinions. So pay close attention to the frame — central organizing theme — you give to your environmental stories.**

- The students responded more when the Target was framed as the current generation (themselves) and when the Problem was framed as the bad things that could happen if they did nothing to solve it. They reacted most when told that their own inaction would hurt them now. These two frames worked best when they worked together.

  **Lesson: Readers are most motivated to take action when environmental stories show how doing nothing now will hurt them now. Also, explain the environmental problem clearly, simply and in everyday words.**

- Framing the problem as doing more OR taking less (Action) had no effect on whether the students acted or not acted on the problem. What mattered most was that recommended actions were simple, clear and understandable.

  **Lesson: What counts is not the solution but rather, how journalists explain it. People do not easily understand complicated solutions that are reported in technical words. Be clear. Translate the technical words into everyday words. Write in a way that makes the recommended action understandable to everyone.**

The kind of environmental story that appears to get the most response from people is one that frames the environmental problem simply -- as a problem that could hurt people now if people do nothing to solve it now.

When people are motivated to do something to solve the problem, the next step is to write about actions they can take. But write about them in ways that everyone can understand them.

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This handout was adapted from research by Joel L. Davis, “The Effects of Message Framing on Response to Environmental Communications,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 72 (summer 1995), 285-299.