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Across the Genres:
How journalism is changing in the 1990s

By Lani Guerke & Martin Hirst

The blurring of genres in journalism today.

Thinking writers not cogs in a machine

We are living in the information age and writing is at the heart of the dissemination of information. No matter what the delivery mechanism is, the internet, multimedia, print journalism, broadcast journalism, literature and so on, writing is the fundamental element in the information revolution that we find ourselves within and converging production and delivery technologies are blurring the line between ‘print’ and ‘broadcast’ media. This has several consequences for the teaching of writing to journalism students. Content is king is the catchcry of much of the talk in the multimedia and internet industries, and this puts writers and authors in a very interesting position. Journalists of the future should take advantage of this new opportunity to become the information providers for the next generation.

In many instances the skills and abilities of university educated journalists are marginalised when they enter the workforce. The value placed on their ability is measured more by their immediate output, rather than their potential for complex research and writing tasks. In many workplaces there is a sense of only knowing how to do the job, by learning through trial and error. Many senior journalists and editors still hold the opinion that experience is the only thing that can teach you the ropes. There is of course an element of truth in this, there are some things which can only be learnt by experiencing them. However, a well trained, and tertiary prepared, thinking journalist will almost certainly be able to do a better job than their cadetship counterpart, because they will have the necessary skills to build a critical framework from which to construct their writing.

In discussions with a variety of editors and publishers around Australia, it was suggested that the primary skills needed for journalist’s are the ability to tell a story well, and the ability to write accurately, objectively and to research thoroughly. There was very little mention of abilities such as thinking or contextualising.

While the skills these editors outlined are necessary for any good writing, the ability to be critical and to have complex interpretive and analytical skills are also paramount. In the 1990s we are experiencing an explosion of information and it is no longer enough for journalists to present us with the bare facts. In the new journalism of the 1990s and beyond, interpretation and contextualising of information by the journalist is necessary before the digestion of that information can take place. There is just too much information for the average reader to consume and therefore this model of interpreted fact is becoming more and more prevalent. Just look at the daily newspapers as an example. There is far more interpretive and opinion-oriented writing than there was even, five years ago. There is also a lot more organisation of the information into sections and editorial chunks so that the reader can find it and consume it more easily.

Mike Dobbie, editor of *The Australian Way*, (the Qantas in-flight magazine, which has a monthly readership of 1.6 million people) says “a sound general knowledge of the political structure, social structure, health, justice and education systems is crucial to the practice of good journalism” (Dobbie 1996). He also believes that the art of story telling is essential and suggests that without good “yarn spinning” skills a journalist may as well give up. He says “I read about 600 story submissions per month for the magazine, and if the story doesn’t grab me in the first few sentences, I don’t even read on” (Dobbie 1996). On the other hand, if a story does grab him, Dobbie says it usually follows that it is also well written and well researched; the skills go hand in hand.

As journalism educators we try very hard to impart an interest in all things, and to instil the students with a genuine curiosity about our society and environment. Without this curiosity there cannot be a foundation for good story telling or good writing. A journalist should be consumed with a passionate need to know. As educators we try very hard to inspire students to feel this way and to give them all the skills for maintaining that enthusiasm.

Jeff Trounce, publishing director of the magazine division at Text Media, (one of Australia’s largest contract publishers) believes anybody can be a journalist. “All you need are literary inclinations, and the practice of reading and writing a lot” (Trounce 1996). However he agrees that a tertiary background, giving a strong understanding of the complex structures of society and an ability to look at issues in a wider context, are important attributes for a journalist to possess.

While Jeff Trounce believes that you can teach someone the technical
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skills of writing, he says “the important bit is to get to the humanity of the story, using irony, wit, style and character” (Trounce 1996). He suggests that a good piece of journalism will reflect the personality of the writer and that it probably can’t be taught; you either have it or you don’t. The primary skill for a journalist is to be able to “feel-out a good story.” He says that some good journalists still turn in stories that need a lot of work on the writing, from sub editors and the like, but it doesn’t detract from the fact that the essence of the story is good (Trounce 1996).

Sonia Harford chief of staff for The Age’s daily Metro section believes many tertiary educated journalists lack tenacity. “They don’t appear to have the zeal,” she says “if they don’t find the story straight away, they don’t think it’s there, they give up too easily” (Harford 1996).

At the same time as making this complaint about journalists from universities, Harford also says that a journalist can be taught a lot of what is needed in the way of skills; things like news sense, structure, good writing, story telling and elegant style. However, without the hunger and motivation to ferret out the story it’s all useless.

Many editors continue to believe that training journalists is only about teaching practical and often technical skills and formulas that enable stories to be written quickly and effectively. Often these editors will look for a journalist who will follow instructions and write a good tight news story but one who is unlikely to explore an issue, argue a point over an ethical concern, or spot a change of angle on a story and argue the case halfway through the research process. Editors are often more concerned with getting the product out at the end of the day, week or month, than they are with the critical, ethical or analytical quality of the work.

Teaching thinking writing

Teaching journalism at a university level is a relatively new discipline and despite its now general acceptance as the primary entry point into the industry, the traditional and more historic methods of training journalists, (through cadetships and on-the-job experience) are still quite prevalent. It’s due to this dichotomy that the validity and credibility of the newer university-educated journalists is sometimes still called into question, even though there have been 15 to 20 cohorts of university-educated journalists going into the workplace.

In our opinion, the beauty and validity of tertiary education for journalists is to enable graduates to have a broader contextual base which allows them to see the true parameters of their profession before they meet the pragmatic concerns of employment within it. A cadet journalist, or someone learning on-the-job, may not have the time or be given
the opportunity to find out about things like politics, sociology, psychology or history. Also these cadets will be unlikely to have the opportunity to gain an understanding of complex ethical concerns. Many of them will be guided, through example, towards the ethical practices of their peers, which may or may not be satisfactory.

One of the benefits a university education provides to both journalists and the industry is a solid understanding of the communications industry and Australian society as a whole. This enables the production of complex critical and analytical pieces and allows the journalists to make responsible contributions to media discourse on matters of public importance. This is especially important in the media's role as political watchdog, but also in its role as creator and reflector of society and its attitudes.

What we are trying to achieve as journalism educators is a twofold approach to teaching. The first is to provide a set of immediately useful technical skills in a range of styles of writing, such as newswriting and feature writing. At the same time, we are also trying to equip graduates with a set of less tangible skills and knowledge in critical thinking, deep learning, analysis and legal and ethical issues.

Graduate journalists typically have the skills to do the job set for them from day one in the industry but more importantly, with the addition of critical and analytical skills learned in undergraduate courses, they are also able to develop a journalistic style which encompasses a contemplative and reflective element. Hopefully, over time they will develop a personal style of informative journalism which has integrity and is creative.

This paper outlines a number of problems we have encountered in the development of our approach to teaching 'thinking writing' to undergraduate journalism students in the School of Communication at Charles Sturt University. It outlines our response to the challenge of producing graduates who are competent writers for the print and broadcast media. The paper covers a number of issues critical to shaping our responses to the changing demands of industry. We have summarised them as follows:

- Teaching writing is not just about repetition of mechanical skills or formulas (such as the 'inverted pyramid'). Critical thinking skills are also required.
- Professional writing skills learned in a university course must be continually updated and refined throughout a graduate's professional life. This requires a 'deep learning' approach at the under-
graduate level to prepare students to become 'life-long' learners.

- Entry level subjects must cater for a range of existing and potential skill levels, usually in the context of large class groups and resource constraints.

- Second and third year subjects aim to consolidate basic writing and teach advanced skills. Graduates need a variety of writing skills that they can apply in a professional environment, where writing objectives, technologies and employment patterns are changing.

One of the disadvantages of teaching journalism in today's fast-paced environment is that it is hard to give students strategies for adapting to rapid change. Lyn Murray, a lecturer in the department of Communication at the University of Western Sydney, has a model for dealing with this. She suggests that 'mindfulness' is a quality that should be taught alongside ordinary communications skills:

In order to adapt to rapid and continual change, students of communication skills will increasingly need to develop qualities such as contextual responsiveness, process orientation, the ability to formulate new mental categories, and an increasingly differentiated perceptual base.

Mindfulness is a construct that encompasses these fundamental executive processes. The inclusion of a mindfulness perspective in communication skills training may empower students to identify the instability of experience as it differs across a range of communicative events and over a period of time, and to accept and accommodate the resulting uncertainty (Murray 1996:104).

That there is a level of uncertainty in the world of the media and journalism is an understatement. Cutbacks at commercial print and broadcast media organisations are more than matched by the funding cuts imposed on the ABC by the federal government in the 1996 budget. At the same time there is a blurring and shifting of genres in the broadcast media, especially with the narrative form of 'infotainment'. A new blend of interviewing, writing and editing styles is emerging in both the print and broadcast media, aimed at a wide variety of audiences, constructed as both consumers and citizens (Bell & van Leeuwen 1994; Pumis 1994). We briefly summarise these developments here and suggest a number of questions for both professional practice and the learning/teaching process.

**What is 'journalism' today?**

It can be argued that journalism is just another model, form or style
of communicating; like the short story, the novel, the poem and so on. However, it's gained a fairly tarnished reputation over the past century and in particular over the past 20-30 years. Many people think of journalism as a poor cousin to other more literary modes of expression. The journalist is seen as the journeymen rather than the professional, a craftsman rather than an artist. However, journalism, if taught properly and practiced professionally, can be as legitimate a form of creative expression as any other written medium.

The general public often sees journalism as being entirely concerned with the reporting of news. People see reporting as a fairly menial task, and one that doesn't require much skill or intelligence. They also see both good and bad reporting, but poor reporting seems to be what sticks in the mind. The sensationalism of tabloids lasts longer in the memory than a concise analysis of an event of national importance. For instance, royal toe sucking often has more impact than something like the republican debate. And therefore people often form a less than favourable opinion of journalists and journalism in general, based on an assessment of daily reporting.

Now while reporting is a very important part of journalism, it is by no means the whole of it. Opinion pieces, educational pieces, documentaries and quality feature writing represent a role that is just as important as reporting, and it is in these styles of writing that we believe journalism begins to move across the genres. In our opinion, journalism is moving towards a more literary and creative style, and that good writing, be it journalism or fiction is in demand. People are proving through reading and purchasing trends, that they are as happy to be entertained by good quality journalistic writing as they are to be entertained by traditional fiction. We can suggest a new more creative style of journalism is emerging. As Hartley (1996) argues this is a public space where the notion of reading for entertainment is not secondary to the absorption of the information, but rather shares the emphasis.

Our hypothesis about a new style of more creative journalism emerging, that crosses genres and is more literary, is supported by an article in the Australian Review Of Books (Borghino 1996). Journalist Jose Borghino in his book review 'Magic in the realism' says:

Like many Latin American writers, Llosa and Marquez began their careers as journalists and they continue to contribute to newspapers around the world. It's accepted in Latin America, as it is in Europe and North America, that good writers write journalism, literature and even essays. By contrast, in Australia the interde-
pendent worlds of the press, Academe and the garret have often represented themselves as mutually exclusive, if not openly hostile to each other (1996:5).

Borghini also says that:

Things are changing. The weakening of the traditional position of English departments as arbiters of literary taste, the move from journalism to literary fiction by important writers such as Frank Moorhouse and Robert Drewe and Helen Garner's recent, highly successful move to nonfiction with *The First Stone* and *True Stories* are all symptomatic of a shift in the literary culture that offers greater opportunities for a younger generation of writers to range across several different genres, audiences, speaking positions and careers (1996:5).

We believe that Borghino's observations are supported by recent trends in the way newspapers are marketed (Lipski 1993) and the editor in chief of *The Australian*, Paul Kelly (1994), has described the modern newspaper as being in transition to a more life-style oriented publication. Newspapers are no longer fast enough to convey the most dramatic news, their role is to be more analytical and to provide more background and a greater variety of reading/entertainment for their audiences. This has a number of implications for the way both news and feature stories are structured and their placement in newspapers. For example marketing-driven lifestyle features are now regularly presented as front page news in a series format.

This strategic shift is also evident in television news and current affairs programing. Prominent television journalist Kerry O'Brien says the format of the ABC's *7:30 Report* can be read (visually) like a newspaper (text).

That is, going for a strong, well-focused coverage of the big story or stories of the day, followed by say, a film piece on a fairly strong issue onto a gentler or essay-type piece. You would almost move to the back as you would with a newspaper (McIntosh 1996).

The only problem with this analogy is that most newspapers don't always operate that way any more. It is no longer the case that only the most newsworthy stories of the day make the front page and page 3. How will the next generation of journalists cope if they are not able to deal with this shift in strategic thinking about their profession? As journalism educators we also need to engage with the changing context in which writing is practiced. (Comments will be confined to impact of this new emphasis on teaching 'thinking writing').
The 'inverted pyramid' newswriting formula is much used and occasionally abused by journalists and journalism academics. However, it provides a useful starting point for a discussion of news values and the structure of news stories. Tiffen writes that the main purpose of this style is “to crystallise an event from the flux of the action or the flow of experience” (1989:65). The story begins with a strong 'lead' identifying the main element, precise attribution avoids unnecessary interpretation by the reporter and the narrative style observes the “conventions of objective presentation” (Tiffen 1989:65).

However, some recent empirical and qualitative work on the 1996 federal election coverage (Hirst 1996 unpublished) suggests that news formulas are changing to catch up with the new strategic mix of news and reportage. The line between straight news and commentary is no longer distinct, particularly in political journalism. The evidence so far suggests that the ‘inverted pyramid’ has ceased to be relevant to newswriting, a more literary style does appear to be emerging. The basic unit of analysis is still the paragraph, however several new functions and types are now standard in the journalist’s kit.

In a news story a paragraph can provide new information (the lead) or contain several types of supporting material; such as quotes, examples, anecdotes, paraphrasing and interpretation. Direct quotes usually support a proposition and new information is frequently introduced by a statement from the journalist, or through paraphrased comments. Traditionally an ‘inverted pyramid’ news story begins with the main facts and could be cut from the bottom, thus relegating less important details to the ‘point’ of a triangle balanced on one point.

Hirst’s study of news stories from the March 1996 federal election campaign suggests that they tended to be more narrative in style, allowing for a greater variety of interpretive material and the ordering of ‘new’ information. A closer examination indicated that both news stories and comment pieces seemed to repeat a limited number of factual elements and interpretive patterns. If the ‘inverted pyramid’ is no longer the most relevant model for newswriting, perhaps a new ‘template’ might be devised for analysing both the form and content of newspaper writing. The following outline suggests that a new model for teaching writing might follow from a discussion of some new paragraph typologies.

Our analysis suggests two possible templates for news stories defined by the relationship between the opening lead and any new information or interpretive material introduced into the body of the story. We have labelled these categories the 'incidental' and 'composite' news
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templates. An incidental news story usually covers one event or issue, though occasionally it might incorporate a few closely related items of new information around a central event, issue or theme. A composite story attempts to link a number of significant developments, usually locked together by a summary lead, or closing statement. Individual paragraphs in both incidental and composite stories can be identified within a limited number of variations.

The paragraph 'type' is defined by its purpose within the story; to present new information, to quote or paraphrase sources, to add a variety of supportive 'evidence', inferred conclusions and the writer's own interpretation. A list of template paragraphs is given below (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New information</th>
<th>Recent Example</th>
<th>Historical Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anecdote</td>
<td>Amplification</td>
<td>Background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist’s opinion</td>
<td>Direct quotes</td>
<td>Paraphrasing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect or implied Sources</td>
<td>Inference</td>
<td>Conjecture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Within this framework a journalist can manipulate the incidental or composite story formula using these key paragraphs. This is a more complex process than simply sequencing a series of facts in order of importance and requires more active and creative thinking by the writer.

These options are summarised in the model template (Table 2). The important modification to the ‘inverted pyramid’ is the addition of several choices for each paragraph. The choices are still sequential, however the relationships between the paragraphs are more intricate and indeed ‘literary’. Our list is only illustrative of the point, further variations are always possible.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary lead (primary proposition)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anecdote</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subsidiary leads (secondary propositions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct quotes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inference</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Paraphrasing                           |
| Conjecture                              |
| Implied Sources                        |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Return to main story (secondary propositions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct quotes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anecdote</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Paraphrasings                           |
| Implied sources                         |
| Background                              |

| Direct Comment                         |
| Amplification                          |
| Inference                               |

cont’ over
This new template borrows from a number of genres and is perhaps more 'essayist' than journalistic in style, though the inclusion of news values ensures it retains its 'news' essence. In order for us to teach and students to learn a more complex writing style, we think it is important to incorporate a more critical approach to news 'events' that draws on wider social knowledge and learning. According to Brian Toohey:

> Journalists can tell ordinary people what those in power – be they in government, business or unions – don’t want them to know. [by] Giving some small glimpse of what happens, of what goes on, of what is, [journalism] can both support democratic values and help keep the political process honest (1990:172).

The role of community or national watchdog is a very important one for journalism, and while it continues to develop this aspect of itself, there is also another and perhaps inevitable role; that of interpreter and entertainer (Hartley 1995, 1996). Journalists can now legitimately entertain, reflect, provide information, be recorders of public process, make money for owners or provide a sense of power or a sense of being close to power (Toohey 1990). Though not yet formally adopted by the journalists’ union, the proposed Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance code explicitly refers to the entertainment function of journalism (Hirst forthcoming).

As Hartley (1996) notes, journalists are now drawing much more from popular culture and contemporary journalistic 'product' is now marketed to multiple audiences which diverge and intersect at different times, around different interests. While it has always contained an element of entertainment value to 'leaven' the news and current affairs mix, the new journalism of the 1990s is developing a more creative and critical model that lends itself to a blurring of boundaries between genres of writing such as fiction, news and instructional writing. Some, like
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John Hartley (1996), welcome this development and emphasise the existence of diverse audiences as a positive and progressive postmodernism in journalism.

**Pulp Fiction and Postmodern News**

In *Popular Reality: Journalism, Modernity, Popular Culture*, John Hartley discusses the development of a new style, 'postmodern' journalism. We cannot engage fully with this debate here, however it does deserve serious attention. One important feature of postmodern style that should be of concern to journalists is the tendency to chop up chronological (historical) narratives and edit them back together 'out of sequence'. The Quentin Tarantino movie *Pulp Fiction* is the best known example from popular culture, though many authors of fiction and writers in other fields are quickly taking to this postmodern style of writing.

English academic Angela McRobbie defines postmodernism as:

an aesthetic/cultural movement whose impetus derives from the break it marks out with modernism and the avant-garde, and whose impact lies in its turning away from linearity and teleological progress towards pastiche, quotation, parody and pluralism of style, with post modernity as a more general condition (1994: 24).

Alex Callinicos (1989) suggests postmodernism is an aesthetic pose based on the refusal to seek either to comprehend or to transform existing social reality. The recent appearance of postmodernism in many forms of media is, according to Callinicos, the product of a socially mobile *middle class* intelligentsia (journalists, producers, script-writers, filmmakers, broadcasters and columnists) drifting in a time of decline in working class organisations and the ageing of many former adherents of a 'left' political ideology. Attempts by self-identified postmodernists to 'theorise' the collapse of the 'left' as a celebration of difference and pluralism (McRobbie 1994) articulates the political disillusionment of the 'Sixties' generation and its aspiration to a consumption-oriented lifestyle. Callinicos suggests postmodernism says less about the real world and more about a particular generation's sense of an ending, characterised by obligatory references to *fin de siècle* (Callinicos 1989).

Callinicos (1995) argues that as a theoretical framework, postmodernism fails to distinguish between historical events as verifiable 'reality' and history as many-sided narrative, or text. We argue that journalists, as pivotal producers of texts need to be critically aware of such 'abstract' discourses, as much as they need the technical skills to cope with the demands of new multimedia production values.

The recent heated debate about the 'factional' writing of Helen
Demidenko-Darville neatly encapsulates this argument for journalists and other writers. Demidenko’s work was celebrated by a large section of the literary establishment when it was believed that her award-winning book was in some ways an authentic and journalistic account of real events and of real people; even though the author had indicated all along it was primarily a work of fiction. Demidenko’s double ‘story’ was believed for sometime, despite the many inconsistencies that began to emerge after her Miles Franklin win was announced. It was not until Helen Darville’s own history caught up with her that her literary patrons gleefully drove her away from the party. Darville’s defenders (belatedly) point out that her work is fiction (Oakley 1995:21) while her accusers argue that both Darville’s deception and historical inaccuracies in the book render it worthless (Indyk 1995:21).

Alex Callinicos (1995) cites a lovely precedent for Helen Darville’s ruse (not to mention such modernist heroes as ‘Ern Malley’ and so on) in the writing of historian Simon Schama. Callinicos cites the publication of two volumes of Schama’s work that followed the “discursive conventions of [historical writing], but which Schama said were historical novellas, since some passages...are pure inventions” (see Dead Certainties (1992) and Landscape and Memory (1995), both published by Knopf). Callinicos suggests that postmodernism believes in the text, as a representation of the past, rather than the truth of grounded historical facts articulated through a materialist account (1995:3). As Keith Windschuttle suggests (The Media 1984, The Killing of History 1994) if journalism is to have any validity at all, like historical writing, it must be grounded in reality, in the facts of what happened and why. However, this is not to suggest that wider interpretive and ideological frameworks in which journalists are enmeshed don’t play an important role in their reportage.

The debate about imaginative and ‘literary’ writing versus accurate ‘historical’ writing surfaced in the Australian media in 1995. David Samuels’ review of Simon Schama and other ‘literary’ historians was reprinted in the Higher Education supplement of The Australian (Samuels 1995:30-31). As Samuels argues:

If history is narrative, then what business do historians have ‘writing’ history at all? Why not leave writing, if that’s what history is, to people who can write? (Samuels 1995:30).

This discussion was continued at the 1995 Melbourne writer’s festival, where Helen Darville was again attacked for her lack of historical truth and “different versions” of the history of the war in Bosnia were
debated (Robinson 1995). While Samuels doesn’t attempt to answer his rhetorical question about who should write history, we would argue (along with conventional wisdom) that journalism is indeed the first draft of history and therefore it is important to offer some response, particularly in the context of Hartley’s attempt (1996) to develop a theory of postmodern journalism. As journalism educators we are concerned with issues of truth and representation in the work of our students and graduates. Attention to the facts, accuracy and commitment to truth are still necessarily important principles of media reportage. For us it raises the question of where do we draw the line between truthful representations of ‘reality’ and a creative writing context for journalism and other fields of professional communication.

**Tabloid writing and ‘Perv’ TV**

While this paper has concentrated on what might still be described as the dominant ‘mainstream’ form of print journalism, we feel it is necessary to make a few comments about other forms of media writing that challenge the existing formats and assumptions that underline our teaching. In this brief section we deal with two interesting and recent media phenomena that seem to have a potentially huge audience appeal and a strong impact on journalistic style.

It is well established that magazines like *Who Weekly*, *New Weekly*, and *Woman’s Day*, rely on hearsay and gossip, plus rewrites of publicity blurbs and arranged interviews with celebrities. Several current and former editors of what are loosely described as women’s magazines have acknowledged the important role of chequebook journalism in their drive for circulation and advertising. On television *Who Dares Wins* and the many ‘home video’ shows encourage people to perform often dangerous stunts and become ‘stars’. Plenty of people are prepared to compromise and bargain their 15 minutes of fame down to a handful of precious seconds and the chance to win cash or prizes. This has implications for writers on these publications and programs. However, as writers and producers an even more interesting case study is the relatively new practice of paying members of the public for their stories and experiences.

In the print media, ‘supermarket checkout’ magazines such as *That’s Life* advertise that the publisher will pay readers for stories. *That’s Life* even prints a coupon that you can fill in with the essential ‘facts’ of your story, if you’re having trouble writing it yourself.

In the broadcast media this trend is most clearly evident in the increasingly popular so-called tabloid TV or ‘reality’ TV (Lumby 1993).
The new infotainment genre varies from talk shows, such as *Donohoe*, *Oprah Winfrey* and *David Letterman* to *Where are they now, This is your life* and on to the more entertaining fluid styles and narrative conventions that have come to dominate Australian current affairs television over the past 15 years (Albert & Spencley 1982; Breen 1983; Langer 1989; Weaver 1990; O’Neill & Lumby 1994). This is clearly evident in the use of re-enactments, scripted pieces, dramatic music and editing in popular current affairs programs (Bell & van Leeuwen 1994; Hirst, White, Chaplin & Wilson 1995).

In late 1996 Channel 7 screened *Police Camera Action* a ‘reality’ series based on an American model in which police cars carry cameras and crews to crime and accident scenes for ‘live’ style coverage. Browne (1996) reports that during the taping of the new ‘reality’ shows, such as *RPA* (about a Sydney hospital) the relationship between TV crew and ‘subject’ can become so close that the crew and producers come to replace close friends and family. Browne cites the example of the woman who rang producers of *RPA* on her way to the hospital to give birth, before she contacted members of her own family. Fiona Baker, the executive producer of Channel 9’s *RPAH* told Browne, “I feel you have to draw the line somewhere (between perv ing and respect). It’s a fine line, but I’m very aware of not treading over it” (Browne 1996:6). John Luscombe producer of 7’s *Emergency 000* agrees that at least the ethical thinking about ‘infotainment’ television is definitely changing:

> Obviously we wanted the emergency crews to clear the way so we could film, but at the same time we didn’t want to get under their feet.... The hardest part was asking victims for permission to use the footage. If they said no, we just got out of there (Browne 1996:6).

Wherever this “line” might be placed, Baker and Luscombe appear confident they don’t go too far. However, the scripting of these personal narratives, relies on both journalistic convention (the ‘truth of the camera’) and a more stylised dramatic look. This trend is not confined to commercial television, according to a report in the *Sun-Herald* TV guide (Browne 1996) 20 families have videotaped their lives for the ABC series *Home Truths*, which will screen in 1997, SBS is continuing with *Front Up*, where people tell their stories after being bailed up on the street. Is this the future of journalism, perhaps we are redundant?

**Conclusions**

In both print and broadcast journalism there is a blurring and merging of genres. Notions of truth, narrative and opinion are blending to
produce 'infotainment' and news is becoming more liberally 'laced' with reporters' interpretations of the events or data. In our view these developments across the genres are both beneficial and problematic for journalists. From the point of view of our comments about 'postmodern journalism' and the more immediate question of how do we prepare graduates to deal with the implications, there are questions for our teaching practice and critical frameworks.

We believe that this notion of crossing genres and borrowing styles and literary devices is a trend that is here to stay. Journalism will always need to satisfy some basic parameters such as providing information and being accurate, but the time has come for it to spread its wings in an endeavour to develop into a more complex form of communication.

Good feature writing, for instance, demonstrates all the signs of good journalism, but is also beginning to take on a far more literary role. This is a very enjoyable development for the reader as well as being a creative emancipation for the journalist. We believe the next decade or so will see a wave of creative journalists emerging. These writers will challenge all the notions of what journalism is for, how it is constructed and how it competes with other literary genres.

In summary, clear and informative journalistic writing, performed with integrity and an understanding of social and political contexts is the journalism of the future. There will be scope for a range of models within the genre, but creativity, style and a deep concern for critical reflection will be its defining attributes. Both journalism and journalism education are coming of age in the 1990's. Journalism is finally maturing into an information medium that has practical as well as creative aspects, and journalism education is responding to the needs of the times by providing socially and politically aware journalists.

However, despite this maturity, both the practice of journalism and the teaching of it could benefit greatly from a more interactive relationship between the professional and educational sectors. Editors, publishers, journalists and lecturers need to be improving their participation in an ongoing dialogue about the changing demands of the profession. In our view journalism educators need to draw their students' attention to contemporary debates about journalism and writing through critical reflection on their own writing habits.

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