

Dear Reader,

When we talk about and around journalism, we talk about our commitment to the truth so much, yet it's hard to see practical examples of truth in the polarized media today, as news broadcasting channels fight for viewership, and so much of journalism's good work lies behind ads or paywalls. Paired with *Disciplinary Techne*'s habits of the mind, the habit of engagement caught my attention because it encompasses every aspect of a story, from beginning to end. At the beginning, journalists must be engaged in the subject matter, engaged with their sources, engaged with body of work itself, and engaged in marketing themselves and their content to garner an audience for the truth. I chose my articles in a similar chronology, from the beginning, a course syllabus and the AP Stylebook, to the end, a published story from *The Wall Street Journal*. This involved evaluating each of these articles to find their common threads of engaging habits and honest storytelling.

In our class writing groups, I appreciated hearing other perspectives from other students in this field of journalism, and how they incorporated their habits into the values they chose. One of my partners also chose engagement as a habit of the mind, but as a broadcast major, his sources were more script-focused than my story-focused articles. Additionally, reviewing style and editing in class changed my perspective about the revision process, and encouraged me to persevere in drafting multiple editions of this essay.

As a Christian scholar, this facilitated a space for me to process Christian values within journalism that my previous journalism classes have introduced. Hopefully, my essay's conclusion will provoke you to think about the pervasive nature of the Gospel truth in our Christian faith, and how it translates to your own disciplinary field. In journalism specifically, this essay has led me to see how it engages with our rationality as both readers and writers, wrestling with the truth and testing it for its accuracy or falsity. It has led me to evaluate Christian truths that I've accepted since I was saved, and understand them personally as convictions.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Hope Li". The letters are fluid and connected, with a prominent loop on the "H" and a long tail on the "i".

Hope Li

**Journalism: Engaged in a Proposal for Truth**

Hope Li

Department of English, Biola University

ENGL 313: Writing in the Disciplines

Dr. Katie Grothe

September 7, 2023

Not only has the discipline of journalism covered polarizing topics in the past decade, but the field and practice itself has become more polarizing than the content it presents. Originally, the intention behind journalism was simple: Find the truth, and spread the word. Today, “journalism” has become “the media,” and the definition of truth changes every second. Although its execution today does not always reveal journalism’s intentions clearly, this discipline’s values remain grounded in truth, and in its dissemination. Regardless of party lines or controversial topics, journalism is still as committed to the truth as it was before. This commitment does not end between a reporter and a source, but it continues—providing access to an audience, in hopes that they would know the truth. Simply asking questions engages an audience. Engaging writing styles and tone captivates an audience. Sincere stories are ones to remember, and rightly engage the memory. Such attentiveness to engagement within and around the discipline of journalism only highlights its commitment to the truth all the more.

Honest inquiry in response to a journalistic work naturally provokes engagement, because the truth demands a proper audience. In an August 30 *Wall Street Journal* article titled “The Moonshot Heard Round the World: What are the lessons of India’s frugal moon landing for any business on Earth?” columnist Ben Cohen’s quotes seem effortlessly woven into the narrative, concealing the time commitment he dedicated to the five sources he includes.

So it wasn’t long after the lander named Vikram arrived on the moon that reporters asked the head of the country’s space agency how India did it.

“I don’t want to explain all the secrets,” said S. Somanath, the Indian Space Research Organisation’s chairman, “because if I tell the secrets, others will learn and they will become very cost-effective.”

That only made me more curious about the secrets of India’s space program—and what others can learn from its moonshot.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Ben Cohen, “The Moonshot Heard Round the World,” *The Wall Street Journal*, September 1, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/science/space-astronomy/india-moon-landing-chandrayaan-3-budget-dda2e71>.

In this case, this story facilitates engagement between a writer and his sources, establishing inquiry as a required element of gathering reliable and credible information straight from the source. Biola University journalism department's JOUR 120 Writing Across Media prepares future journalists for just that. As it introduces journalistic writing across multimedia mediums, the syllabus for this lower-level undergraduate class asks rhetorical questions of its readers, and discussion assignments in the course calendar prepare students to answer direct questions. This encourages students to ask their own questions, of writers and sources alike, and join the conversation of truth-seeking furthermore. This develops a habit of comfortable engagement with a diverse range of people and professions, which allows young journalists to exercise accountability in their hunts for truth. Engaging with sources and other readers spark curious questions, and naturally builds credibility over time with an audience who learns to recognize the unadulterated truth when they see it.

Secondly, journalism's diverse communication mediums promote prolonged engagement, which ultimately expands accessibility to the truth. Well-known to any journalist from an NBC broadcaster to a high school cub reporter is the Bible of the field: the AP Stylebook. Physically a spiral-bound book, the handbook is durable and easy to carry or flip through on deadline. Developed by the Associated Press as a guideline within this discipline for consistent spelling and punctuation rules, the content's presentation alone encourages reporters to carry it with them, whether mentally or physically, to ensure their readers can easily understand the valuable truth they present. *The Wall Street Journal* has presented itself similarly. Historically, papers like *The WSJ* have presented content in physical newspapers that readers can easily pick up, drop off, fold into a pocket, and take home. Currently, newspapers have recapitulated that tangible print edition

into the digital sphere. Design elements within this discipline, of white space and big graphics like images or graphs that break up long sections of text, highlight the subtle methods journalists engage and sustain readership. In *The Wall Street Journal's* article specifically, the story begins with a looming image first, with a headline and subheading summarizing, introducing, and hooking the reader the main content before it's even begun.

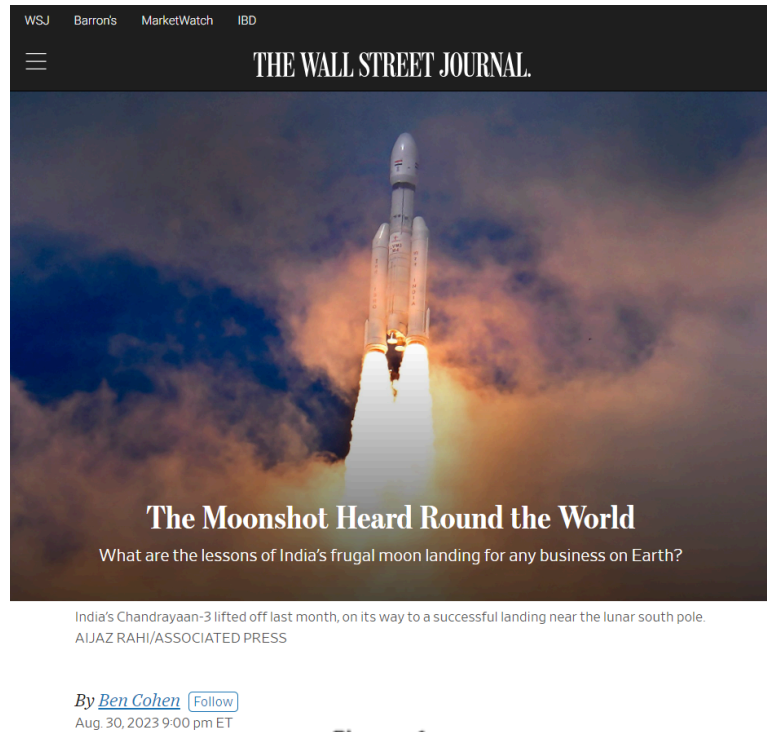


Figure 1

That journalism seeks to tell the truth merits remembrance. And brevity engages memory. The AP Stylebook, for example, offers helpful memory aids for its own content in its guidelines for state names: “Memory Aid: Spell out the names of the two states that are not part of the continental United States and of the continental states that are five letters or fewer.”<sup>2</sup> Easy-to-remember tricks like this quicken the memorization process for journalists, which in turn assists them under deadline when they must tell the truth in a timely, concise manner that remains true to the AP Style. Instead of drawing back to the AP Stylebook again and again, experienced journalists engage their memory of the style guidelines, and it becomes second nature. Concise sentence structure, not only in memory aids, keeps readers engaged in the stories they read. Cohen’s *Wall Street Journal* article starts with a 10-word sentence that stands alone as

---

<sup>2</sup> Associated Press Stylebook.

its own paragraph: “You can’t make a giant leap without taking small steps.”<sup>3</sup> This nuanced use of a cliché in this first paragraph acts as a hook, engaging the reader’s curiosity to find truth in these words. Succinct sentences like this one throughout the story stand in contrast with lengthier paragraphs, providing a mental and visual break in dispensing truth. All together, such sentence structure aims at engaging the reader’s memory as they read, drawing interest for the content and ultimately dispensing truth.

Asking questions to find truth, diversifying the methods of dispensing truth, and condensing the truth into bite-sized pieces cumulates to engage the reader’s curiosity and attention to ultimately remember what is true. Although not all journalists have a commitment to the same truth, including the truth of the Gospel, the intention of truth-seeking and truth-telling in the discipline of journalism is inherently Christian. Paul exhorts the Philippians to seek truth, “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, ... if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”<sup>4</sup> Christians should be the first to recognize truth, and remember it for its value in the sight of God. Subsequently, Christians are invited to join a certain type of journalism, of honest inquiry that sparks curious questions in their conversations with others, of creativity to attract people to the truth, and the tact to discern when a more concise sentence can carry more weight than an extrapolated one.

---

<sup>3</sup> Ben Cohen, “The Moonshot Heard Round the World,” *The Wall Street Journal*, September 1, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/science/space-astronomy/india-moon-landing-chandrayaan-3-budget-dda2e71>.

<sup>4</sup> Phil. 4:8, ESV.

## References

Associated Press Stylebook.

Cohen, B. (2023, September 1). The Moonshot Heard Round the World. *The Wall Street Journal*.

<https://www.wsj.com/science/space-astronomy/india-moon-landing-chandrayaan-3-budget-dda2e71>.

ESV Bible. (2016). Crossway. (Original work published 2001).

Longinow, M. & Oleson, S. (2022). *Writing Across Media: Journalism 120*. Biola University.