

An Analysis of Content in 52 U.S. Daily Newspapers Summary Report

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Highlights

The Readership Institute analyzed the news and advertising content of 52 newspapers participating in the New Readers study

http://www.readership.org/new_readers/paper_list.htm.

They range from 10,000 to about 1,000,000 daily circulation, in small towns and major metropolitan areas, in urban areas with a large African-American population and mid-size, predominantly Hispanic, municipalities

http://www.readership.org/new_readers/sample_selection.pdf. The breakdown of newspapers in the group:

10,000-50,000	(13 newspapers)
50,000-100,000	(13 newspapers)
100,000-300,000	(11 newspapers)
300,000+	(15 newspapers)

Eight randomly selected issues of each newspaper were analyzed (October 1, 4, 5, 7, 10, 12, 13 and 16 of 2003). This report highlights the main results across the entire sample, but data for each of four circulation groups are also included (see tables and definitions at end of the document for further detail).

- An average newspaper is roughly 50% editorial content, one-quarter paid ads and one-quarter classified ads.
- Two topics dominate news content – Politics / Government and Sports. Politics / Government and Sports make up nearly half of all stories in the newspapers. Stories about Ordinary People, Obituaries and Community Announcements combined comprise less than 5%. On Page 1, almost half the stories (about 45%) are about Politics / Government alone.
- Some kind of visual aid – photos, graphics or emphasized text – is a part of less than half of stories on weekdays or Sundays. More attention is paid to visual aspects on Sundays. Front-page stories on average are more likely to have photos, graphics and emphasized text.
- About 45% of all stories, but only about one third of the stories on the front page, come from wire or news services.

- About one-third of all stories are local. On the front page, nearly half the stories are local (45%).
- The most common writing approach is straight news (i.e., inverted pyramid style).
- Most stories do not have go and do information.
- People mentioned in stories and shown in photographs are primarily White, non-Hispanic, older and male.
- Few stories directly address the reader; a large majority is written in the third person.
- About one-fifth provide author contact information.
- A very small number of stories directly solicit content or feedback from readers.
- The two largest display advertising categories are for “places to go and things to do” (with Entertainment ads making up the majority of this category) and “services” (with Medicine / Health making up the majority of this category).
- People shown in ads tend to be younger and more female than in stories. Most are White, non-Hispanic.
- In-paper content promotion is found primarily on the front pages of sections. Generally, it is largely lacking in color, graphics, or photos.
- Most in-paper content promotion is for same day content (indices and refers are included in promotional devices). Upcoming promotion is about 13% of all promotion items.

General findings about New Readers newspapers

Newspaper Composition¹

The average newspaper in the study has about 65 broadsheet pages on weekdays and 137 broadsheet pages on Sundays. Generally, larger circulation translates into more pages.

The average newspaper has an ad / edit ratio of 34:66 on weekdays, which means that, on the average, the space devoted to editorial content is twice as much as the space devoted to ROP advertising. This ratio shifts more toward ads in large-circulation newspapers. On Sundays the average ratio is 44:56, with the largest newspapers carrying more ad than editorial space.

Auto classified advertising comprises by far the largest classified advertising category on weekdays and is neck-to-neck with real estate on Sunday.

The average newspaper has about six pre-printed advertising inserts on a given weekday, and 34 pre-printed advertising inserts on a given Sunday, most of them for retail advertising. The larger the paper, the more pre-printed inserts it contains.

Newspapers have on average between four and six sections on a given weekday and nine sections on Sundays.

Editorial Content

Visuals

More than a third of stories (36.7%) on weekdays have photos, less than a fifth (19.5%) have emphasized text and 12.4% have graphics. On Sunday, 43.1% of the stories have photos, 21.7% have emphasized text and 16.2% have graphics.

About 40% of the photos are in color and about half show action, both weekdays and Sunday. While larger papers typically have more photos, fewer are in color.

Story topics

Nearly half of all stories in the average newspaper are about two topics: Politics / Government (24.4% weekdays and 21.8% Sundays) and Sports (22.1% weekdays and 23.6% Sundays).

Other topics that have a presence in the paper are Entertainment (9.7% weekdays and 11% Sunday), Crime / Legal (8.5% weekdays and 4.2% Sunday) and Business (7.6% weekdays and 8.4% Sunday). Home / Garden / Real Estate has a presence on Sunday (4.8%).

Smaller papers have proportionately more stories about Education, Ordinary People, Community Announcements, Crime / Legal and Accident / Disaster, whereas larger papers have proportionately more stories about Entertainment, Business and Obituaries.

¹ The data for newspaper composition were provided by the newspapers from internal records; they were not derived from the content analysis.

Story source

About 45% of all stories are attributed to wire services and about a third are attributed to staff both weekdays and Sunday. Smaller papers rely on wire stories more than larger papers.

Writing style

Stories in an average weekday paper are written primarily in a straight news style (58%), followed by feature style (19.8%) and commentary / opinion (14.7%). Some topics are dominated by straight news style (e.g., Crime / Legal and Disaster / Accidents), others favor it (Politics / Government, Science / Health and Environment / Weather) and still other topics tend to be more of a mix of styles (Ordinary People, Home / Garden / Real Estate, Food, Entertainment, Auto and Leisure Travel). Typically, there is more variety in writing styles on Sunday than on weekdays.

Stories in an average Sunday are less dominated by the straight news style (43.8%) and include more feature style (26.9%) and commentary / opinion (18%). On the whole, larger papers tend to have proportionately fewer straight news stories.

Geographic focus

Local and national stories are found in the papers in roughly the same proportion (about a third each), with the remainder divided among state / region, international and stories with no geographic focus.

Demographic focus

The majority of stories in newspapers (79.6% on weekdays and 77.9% on Sunday) do not focus on any of the five demographic groups we considered in this study. Of the five, youth / young adults receive the most focus (14.6% on weekdays and 15.4% on Sunday), followed by women (2.7% on weekdays and 3% on Sunday). Smaller papers tend to have proportionately more stories focused on young people than larger papers. Stories focused on African-Americans, people of Hispanic or Latino origin, and Asian and Pacific Islanders are very few.

Additional characteristics

Less than 1% of stories include any Spanish language.

Almost 60% of the stories carry a main headline only; about 40% have a more elaborate headdress. Larger papers tend to have multipart headlines more often than smaller papers.

The average area of a story on weekdays is about 38 square inches (including headlines, photos and graphics) and about 15% of all stories have a jump. On Sunday, the average area of a story is about 48 square inches. The average story package is larger in larger papers.

Most stories (about 85% on weekdays and about 75% on Sunday) are written in the third person.

Who's in stories

About 80% (79.8% on weekdays and 77.3% on Sundays) of all people mentioned in stories are men.

The majority of people mentioned in stories are 35 and over (55.4% on weekdays and 60.1% on Sunday), less than a third are between 19-34 years old (29.1% on weekdays and 29.2% on Sunday), and the rest are 18 and under (15.4% on weekdays and 10.8% on Sunday). Larger papers include proportionately fewer people 18 and under and more people 35 and over.

On average, about 70% of people mentioned in stories are White, Non-Hispanic (70.6% on weekdays and 72.4% on Sunday). Across all 52 newspapers, African-Americans and people of Hispanic or Latino origin each make up about one eighth of all people mentioned, with Asian and Pacific Islanders identified less than 3% of the people. People of color tend to appear in some stories more than others. African-Americans are more likely to appear in stories about Sports, Crime / Legal and Ordinary People, people of Hispanic or Latino origin in stories about Sports, Auto and Ordinary People and Asian and Pacific Islanders in stories about Science / Technology and Ordinary People.

Of all people mentioned in stories, about one third (34.9% on weekdays and 36% on Sunday) are ordinary people, 44% on weekdays and 40.9% on Sunday are officials, and athletes and celebrities make up the remaining 21%-23%. Smaller papers tend to include proportionately more ordinary people in the stories and less officials.

Who's in photos

About 70% (73.4% on weekdays and 69.8% on Sundays) of all people shown in photos that accompany stories are men.

Nearly half of people shown in photos are 35 and over (48% on weekdays and 50.1% on Sunday), about a third are between 19-34 years old (34.5% on weekdays and 33.4% on Sunday), and the rest are 18 and under (17.5% on weekdays and 16.4% on Sunday). Larger papers show proportionately fewer people 18 and under in photos.

On average, about three-quarters of people shown in photos are White, Non-Hispanic (75.1% on weekdays and 74.6% on Sunday). Across all 52 newspapers, African-Americans make up 13.5% and 15% of people shown in photos on weekdays and Sunday, respectively, followed by people of Hispanic or Latino origin and Asian and Pacific Islanders. Larger papers show proportionately more African-Americans and Asian and Pacific Islanders in photos and fewer people of Hispanic or Latino origin. African-Americans are more likely to appear in photos accompanying stories about Education, Sports, and Crime / Legal, people of Hispanic or Latino origin in photos about Environment / Weather, Leisure Travel and Education and Asian and Pacific Islanders in photos about Science / Technology.

Of all people shown in photos, about half (49.6% on weekdays and 50.5% on Sunday) are ordinary people, with officials, athletes and celebrities the next most frequent categories

of people shown in photos. Larger papers show proportionately fewer ordinary people and more officials and celebrities in photos.

Advertising Content

Size

A small proportion of display ads are larger than one-quarter of a page (11.8% on weekdays and 13% on Sunday) and about one-third are above the fold (35.9% on weekdays and 36.7% on Sunday).

Color

A small number of ads have any color (13.6% on weekdays and 16.3% on Sunday).

Content

The majority of ads in newspapers promote a product or a service (86.3% on weekdays and 86.8% on Sunday). The remaining ads promote events (such as public meetings), position statements and personal messages.

The two largest advertising categories are for “places to go and things to do” (26.1% on weekdays and 31.2% on Sunday) with Entertainment ads making up the majority of these ads, and services (23.3% on weekdays and 24.3% on Sunday) with Medicine / Health leading that category. Larger papers have significantly more ads about “places to go and things to do” and fewer ads for services.

Visuals

In addition to text, most ads include a logo (79.5% on weekday and 81.1% on Sunday). Less than half include a photo or illustration of the product (45% on weekdays and 45.5% on Sunday) and about one-third include a photo or illustration of a person (30% on weekdays and 35.4% on Sunday). Larger papers are more likely to include photos or illustrations.

Utility

Less than 40% of ads provide a price (36.2% on weekdays and 39.9% on Sunday).

Most ads provide a local address (76.9% on weekdays and 72.1% on Sunday) and telephone number (76% on weekdays and 71.3% on Sunday), but fewer provide a Web address (44.6% on weekdays and 51.6% on Sunday). Larger papers have proportionately fewer ads with local address or telephone information, but more ads with a Web address.

Selling Techniques

The most common are price reduction or sale (28.2% on weekdays and 25.8% on Sunday) and the limited time offer (24.1% on weekdays and 25% on Sunday). Other techniques include coupons or rebates, free gifts, comparisons and raffles, contests or drawings.

Voice

Slightly more than half of the ads address the reader directly (52.5% on weekdays and 56.5% on Sunday), and a very small proportion of ads include Spanish language (1.4%).

Who's in ad photos

About half (52.6% on weekdays and 49.2% on Sundays) of all people shown in ad photos are men.

The majority of people shown in ad photos are between the ages of 19-34 years old (61.4% on weekdays and 51.3% on Sunday). Other people shown in ads are equally divided among 18 and under and 35 and over.

On average, about two-thirds of people shown in ad photos are White, Non-Hispanic (69.6% on weekdays and 67.8% on Sunday). Across all 52 newspapers, African-Americans make up about 7% of people shown in ad photos, followed by people of Hispanic or Latino origin and Asian and Pacific Islanders. Smaller papers tend to have proportionately more White, non-Hispanic people in ad photos.

Of all people shown in ad photos, less than half are ordinary people (46.4% on weekdays and 48.1% on Sunday). Smaller papers have proportionately more ordinary people and officials in ad photos and fewer celebrities. These results are likely due to proportionately fewer entertainment ads in smaller papers.

In-Paper Content and Self Promotion

On average, newspapers include about 49 content promotion items per day, with almost half (45.7%) on the front pages of sections. More than half can be found above the fold (51.6%). Larger papers are more likely to have promotions on inside pages.

About 30% of the promotions include graphics (29.8%) or color (28.2%), and a smaller percentage includes photos (15.8%). Mid-size and smaller papers tend to use more color in promotions.

Less than a third of the promotions address the reader directly (28.2%), less than a fifth “sell” the content or suggest a benefit or pay-off (18.1%) and 1% of promotions include Spanish language. Smaller papers have proportionately fewer promotion items addressing the reader directly or explaining the pay-off.

Most promotions do not have a demographic focus on any of the five demographic groups we considered in this study.

On average, items promoting same day content make up the largest category (43.7%), followed by general brand promotion (26%), affiliated media promotion – primarily Web site (17%) – and upcoming content promotion (13.3%). Mid-size papers tend to have proportionately more items promoting affiliated media.

There are some significant differences between types of in-paper promotions:

- There are more items promoting same day content than other categories, but they take less space than items promoting the general brand.
- Items promoting upcoming and general brand are more likely than other promotions to be on the bottom half of the page, among paid ads.
- Items promoting same day content are much more likely than other promotions to be in color, but less likely to include graphics, address the reader directly or include a pay-off.
- Items promoting upcoming content are most likely to include photos.

In terms of the editorial topics promoted, almost one quarter of same day items promote Sports (23.7%), 12% promote Politics / Government and 10% promote Entertainment, though larger papers have significantly more same day promotions for Entertainment. About 9% of same day items promote advertising content, most of which is the Classifieds section (81.4%, with larger papers generally more likely to promote Classifieds).

Upcoming promotion plays up Entertainment (15.7%) much more than same day promotions do, with Sports the second largest category of editorial topics (14%). Economics and Politics / Government are next with about 8% of the upcoming promotions. Much more than same day promotions, 38% of upcoming content promotions are for advertising content, most of which, again, is the Classifieds section (91.1%, though here larger papers tend to promote it less).

Page 1

Visuals

Nearly two thirds of Page 1 stories (63.1%) have photos, nearly half (46.7%) have emphasized text and about one quarter (25.5%) have graphics.

About 68% of the photos are in color and about 64% show action. While larger papers typically have more photos, fewer are in color.

Story topics

About 45% of all Page 1 stories in the average newspaper are about Politics / Government (44.8%). No other topic dominates Page 1 – the next most prevalent topics are Crime / Legal (8.6%), Business (6.7%), Health / Fitness / Medicine (5.8%).

Larger papers have proportionately more stories about Politics / Government and Sports and less about Education on the front page. Papers with 10,000-50,000 circulation have at least twice as many Page 1 stories about Ordinary People (6%) than any other size paper.

Story source

Almost two thirds of all Page 1 stories are attributed to staff (64.4%) and about a third are attributed to wire services (33.7%).

Writing style

Stories on an average front page are written primarily in a straight news style (69.4%), followed by feature style (27.8%). On the whole, larger papers tend to have proportionately more feature style stories on Page 1.

Geographic focus

On the average, local stories make up about 45% of all stories on Page 1, with national news next (25.7%) and state / region and international stories with about 14% and 15% of the stories, respectively.

Demographic focus

The majority of stories on the front page (82.6%) do not focus on any of the five demographic groups we considered in this study. Of the five, youth / young adults receive the most focus (10.4%), followed by women (2.9%). Smaller papers tend to have proportionately more Page 1 stories focused on young people than larger papers. Stories focused on African-Americans, people of Hispanic or Latino origin, and Asian and Pacific Islanders are very few.

Additional characteristics

Less than 1% of Page 1 stories include any Spanish language.

Almost 70% of Page 1 stories have a multi-part headline and about 30% have a main headline only.

The average area of a story on Page 1 is about 87 square inches, more than double the average area of stories in general. About 86% of the Page 1 stories have a jump.

An overwhelming majority of the stories (about 97%) are written in the third person.

Who's in stories

About 80% (78.9%) of all people mentioned in Page 1 stories are men.

The majority of people mentioned in Page 1 stories are 35 and over (78.4%), 12.5% are between 19-34 years old, and 9% 18 and under. Larger papers include proportionately fewer people 18 and under and more people 35 and over in stories on the front page.

On average, close to 80% of people mentioned in stories are White, Non-Hispanic (78.6%). People of Hispanic or Latino origin and African-Americans average about 9% of all people mentioned in Page 1 stories, with Asian and Pacific Islanders identified less than 3% of the people.

Of all people mentioned in Page 1 stories, about 38% are ordinary people and more than half (57.3%) are officials. Athletes and celebrities are mentioned very rarely in front-page stories. Smaller papers tend to include proportionately more ordinary people on their front-page stories.

Who's in photos

More than 70% (72.8%) of all people shown in editorial photos on the front page are men.

Sixty percent of people shown in page 1 photos are 35 and over and the rest are split about evenly between 19-34 and 18 and under. Larger papers do better with showing 19-34 year olds in front page photos and have proportionately fewer 18 and under and 35 and over.

On average, more than three-quarters of people shown in Page 1 photos are White, Non-Hispanic (77.2%). On average, African-Americans make up about 10%, people of Hispanic or Latino origin constitute about 8% and Asian and Pacific Islanders about 3% of the people shown on the front page.

Of all people shown in Page 1 photos, nearly two thirds (64%) are ordinary people, about 30% are officials, and very few are athletes and celebrities. Larger papers show proportionately fewer ordinary people and more officials in Page 1 photos.

Promotions

On average, there are close to 10 promotional items on the front page, with an average area of 5.8 square inches each.

About half of the promotions on the front page are above the fold (51.7%) and more than half are in color (52%). Less than 1 in 5 promotions on the front page has a visual other than text, such as graphics or photos. On the whole, smaller papers have proportionately more Page 1 promotions with color, graphics and photos than larger papers.

About 70% of the Page 1 promotions are for same day content (71.2%), 15.5% for general brand (including the main flag, or title, of the newspaper), 10.6% for affiliated media (including the paper's Web site) and 2.7% for upcoming content. Larger papers tend to have more same day content promotion items and less upcoming and general brand promotion.

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