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**ALLAMA IQBAL OPEN UNIVERSITY, ISLAMABAD**

**Course: Language Skills and Communicative Abilities (964/9266) • Level: MSc/BS**

**Semester: Autumn 2026**

**Assignment No. 2 (Units 5–9)**

**Total Marks: 100 • Pass Marks: 40/50**

**SOLVED ASSIGNMENT GUIDE**

**(For Study & Reference)**

*Note: This guide is prepared for study and reference purposes. Students are advised to read the relevant units of the course book, understand the concepts, and write their assignments in their own words.*

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## Question 1: Guidelines and Ethics for Reporting High-Frequency News Stories (20 Marks)

*Discuss the major guidelines and ethical considerations for reporting high-frequency news stories.*

### Introduction

High-frequency news stories are the fast-moving, repeatedly updated stories of the twenty-four-hour news cycle: a terrorist attack, a major accident, a flood emergency, a general election count, a high-profile court verdict, a market crash or a developing political crisis. Such stories are not reported once and finished; they are reported dozens of times a day as new facts arrive, old facts collapse and rumours multiply. This speed creates the most dangerous conditions in

journalism. The pressure to be first competes directly with the duty to be right, the audience's hunger for updates competes with the victims' right to dignity, and the reporter's live camera can even endanger the very operations it is covering. For these reasons, professional codes around the world, including the code of ethics applied to electronic media in Pakistan under PEMRA, lay down specific guidelines and ethical considerations for such coverage. This answer discusses the major ones.

## Guideline One: Verification Before Speed

The first and most important guideline is that accuracy outranks speed, however intense the competition. In a developing story the newsroom must apply the discipline of verification: a fact should be confirmed by at least two independent and reliable sources before it is broadcast as fact, and official confirmation should be sought for casualties, arrests, deaths and causes. Information that is not yet confirmed must be labelled honestly as such — "unconfirmed reports suggest" — rather than dressed up as certainty. Names of the dead and injured carry a special rule: they are never announced until the family has been informed through official channels; more than one family in Pakistan and abroad has learned of a death from a television ticker, an act of cruelty that no competitive advantage can justify. Newsrooms should also maintain a clear chain of approval during big stories, so that a desk editor, not merely the reporter under pressure, decides what goes on air.

## Guideline Two: Attribution, Updating and Correction

Because a high-frequency story changes by the hour, every significant claim should carry its source: "according to the rescue services", "the hospital administration states", "eyewitnesses

report". Attribution does two ethical jobs at once — it tells the audience how much confidence to place in the claim, and it keeps responsibility with the source rather than the channel when a claim later proves wrong. Updates must be visibly managed: when new information contradicts an earlier report, the correction should be given the same prominence as the original error, and earlier versions on the website and social media accounts should be corrected or clearly marked, not silently rewritten. A news organisation that corrects openly during a crisis builds long-term credibility; one that quietly deletes its mistakes teaches the audience to distrust everything it says.

### Guideline Three: Avoid Speculation, Sensationalism and Repetition of Rumour

In the gaps of a developing story, speculation rushes in, and ethical reporting must resist it. Anchors and experts invited to fill airtime should distinguish clearly between what is known, what is probable and what is merely being guessed; questions such as "who could be behind this attack?" asked within the first hour tempt panels into accusations that may ruin innocent reputations and inflame public feeling. Casualty figures, in particular, must never be inflated for effect, and dramatic language — "carnage", "doomsday", "the nation weeps" — should not substitute for verified fact. Equally, unverified social media material, forwarded videos and old images presented as current scenes are a recurring scandal of high-frequency coverage; every visual must be checked for date, place and authenticity before broadcast. Repeating a rumour in order to "deny" it is also discouraged, because repetition itself spreads the rumour to audiences who had never heard it.

## Ethical Consideration One: Safety of Victims, Public and Operations

Live coverage creates physical risks that print journalism never faced. During terrorist attacks and hostage situations — the coverage of the Mumbai attacks of 2008 is the standard international lesson, and Pakistani channels have faced the same criticism during attacks at home — live pictures of security forces' positions, entry points and movements can be watched by the attackers' handlers and can cost lives. The ethical rule is therefore restraint: delay or avoid live telecast of tactical operations, never reveal the location of trapped persons, and follow the guidance of authorities on operational details while retaining editorial independence on everything else. A related duty covers the public itself: coverage of epidemics, disasters and emergencies must avoid creating panic, must carry verified public-safety information (helplines, evacuation routes, hospital arrangements), and must not broadcast rumours about shortages or dangers that trigger stampedes and hoarding.

## Ethical Consideration Two: Dignity, Privacy and Sensitivity

Victims of violence and disaster are not raw material. Ethical guidelines prohibit graphic close-ups of dead bodies, the wounded in agony and grieving relatives, except where an overriding public interest can be demonstrated; the standard practice is to film the scene with restraint and to warn viewers before any disturbing footage. Interviewing the bereaved demands informed consent and gentleness: the microphone thrust at a mother outside a hospital mortuary is a recognised symbol of unethical practice. Children require extra protection — their identities in cases of crime, abuse and tragedy must be concealed, as must the identities of victims of sexual violence, both as a matter of ethics and, in Pakistan, of law. Reporters should

also respect cultural and religious sensitivities in showing funerals, places of worship and rituals during emotional events.

## Ethical Consideration Three: Fairness, Balance and Non-Partisanship

High-frequency political stories — elections, verdicts, protests, dismissals of governments — test fairness most severely. Election coverage must report results only from authorised sources, must label projections as projections, and must not declare winners before the position is clear; premature declarations in past election transmissions in Pakistan have repeatedly had to be withdrawn, damaging both credibility and public calm. During protests and conflicts between parties or communities, the reporter must give the principal sides an opportunity to state their position, must not adopt the vocabulary of one side (calling one group "miscreants" and another "activists" in the same clash), and must keep personal political opinion out of news reporting altogether, reserving it — clearly labelled — for analysis and commentary. Communal, sectarian and ethnic angles require particular care: casualty and blame must never be assigned by identity without verified fact, because careless high-frequency reporting has the demonstrated power to ignite violence.

## Ethical Consideration Four: Independence and Responsibility of the Platform

Finally, the ethics of high-frequency reporting include the newsroom's own conduct: no accepting of official or commercial pressure on what to show or suppress beyond legitimate safety limits; no staging, re-enactment or "recreation" presented as real footage; clear separation of confirmed news from the scrolling opinions of social media; and responsible use of the channel's digital accounts, where a careless tweet travels further than the broadcast

itself. Reporters sent into danger also have a claim on their organisation — safety training, protective equipment and insurance are ethical obligations of the employer, not favours. In Pakistan, PEMRA's code and the codes of professional bodies together provide the framework, but a code works only when editors enforce it during the very hours when breaking it would be most profitable.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the guidelines for high-frequency news can be summarised as a hierarchy of duties: verify before broadcasting; attribute, update and correct openly; refuse speculation and sensationalism; protect life by restraining live operational detail; protect dignity by restraining images and intrusions, and protect democracy by fairness, balance and independence. Speed wins a news cycle, but ethics win the audience's trust across years. The channels and reporters remembered with respect after great national emergencies are not always those that were first — they are those that were right, humane and calm while everyone else was shouting.

## Question 2: Journalistic Writing, Public Opinion and Media Credibility (20 Marks)

*Critically examine the role of journalistic writing in shaping public opinion and media credibility.*

### Introduction

Public opinion does not form in a vacuum. Citizens cannot personally witness most of the events that affect them — a cabinet decision, a war, an epidemic, a budget — so they

experience public life largely through the accounts of journalists. The political scientist Bernard Cohen captured this in a famous observation: the press may not be successful in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling them what to think about. Journalistic writing is the instrument of this influence, and it is a double-edged one: the same craft that informs and empowers a public can, when corrupted by haste, bias or commerce, mislead and polarise it. This answer critically examines how journalistic writing shapes public opinion — through selection, framing, language and repetition — and how, in turn, the quality of that writing builds or destroys media credibility.

## How Journalistic Writing Shapes Public Opinion

### Agenda-Setting: Deciding What the Public Thinks About

The first power of journalistic writing is selection. From the thousands of events of a day, editors choose a handful for the front page and the headlines, and this choice itself instructs the public about what is important. When newspapers and channels write continuously about load-shedding, corruption or terrorism, those issues climb in the public's ranking of national problems; when housing, water quality or local government receive no coverage, they effectively do not exist as public issues. The written prominence of a story — its page, its headline size, its position in the bulletin — is a silent editorial argument about its importance, and research on agenda-setting has repeatedly shown that the media's ranking of issues becomes, over time, the public's ranking.

## Framing and Language: Deciding How the Public Thinks About It

The second power is framing: the angle, context and vocabulary in which a story is written. The same increase in fuel prices can be written as "the government's courageous step to save the economy" or as "another petrol bomb dropped on the poor"; the facts are identical, but the frame assigns blame and suggests the conclusion. Word choice is the smallest unit of framing: "regime" or "government", "martyr" or "casualty", "tax relief for business" or "concessions to the elite". Headlines, which many citizens read without the story, frame most powerfully of all. Opinion writing — editorials and columns — performs this function openly and legitimately, but framing also operates invisibly inside news writing through the order of facts, the sources quoted first and most, the voices never quoted, and the background included or omitted. A report on a protest that begins with traffic disruption frames the protesters as a nuisance; one that begins with their demand frames them as citizens with a grievance.

## Interpretation, Repetition and Emotional Tone

Third, journalistic writing interprets as well as reports. Analysis pieces, explainers and talk-show scripts connect events into narratives — decline, conspiracy, reform, betrayal — and publics remember narratives long after they forget individual facts. Repetition across outlets then converts a narrative into "common sense": when every channel describes an institution or a politician in the same terms for months, doubting the description begins to feel eccentric. Emotional tone completes the process; writing saturated with outrage produces an outraged public, while measured writing permits measured judgement. Investigative journalism shows the constructive side of this power at its best: sustained, documented reporting on corruption,

unsafe medicines or abused public money has repeatedly forced resignations, court action and policy change, in Pakistan notably through court reporting and investigative stories later taken up by the judiciary and the public together.

## The Critical Side: Distortion and Its Causes

A critical examination must record how often this power is abused or distorted. Commercial pressure rewards sensation over significance, so crime, scandal and celebrity are written large while slow structural issues go unreported; ownership interests silence or promote stories, turning news columns into instruments of business and political bargaining; political parallelism leads outlets to write as party organs, so that the same event appears as triumph on one channel and treason on another — a fragmentation familiar to every viewer of Pakistani current-affairs media. The digital economy adds speed and virality: headlines are written for clicks rather than comprehension, and false stories, once written in convincing journalistic style, travel faster than corrections. The result, documented in trust surveys across many countries, is declining confidence in media as an institution. It is important, however, not to exaggerate media power: audiences are not empty vessels. People select outlets that agree with them, discuss news within family and community, and test media claims against their own experience of prices, safety and services. Journalistic writing shapes opinion most strongly on distant issues the public cannot verify personally, and least where daily life contradicts it.

## Journalistic Writing and Media Credibility

Credibility — the belief that a medium is accurate, fair and independent — is built, or destroyed, in the writing itself. Accuracy is the foundation: names, figures, dates and

quotations correct in detail signal that the unseen parts of the reporting were also done honestly. Fairness is the second pillar: stories that quote the accused as well as the accuser, and that separate news from comment, teach the audience that the writer is a referee rather than a player. Language discipline is the visible surface of both: restrained, precise, non-abusive writing is experienced by readers as professionalism, while exaggerated, partisan or error-ridden prose announces that entertainment or advocacy, not journalism, is being practised. Transparency strengthens credibility further — naming sources, admitting uncertainty, publishing corrections and right-of-reply — while its opposite, the anonymous smear and the silently deleted story, corrodes it. In the Pakistani market, the practical consequence is visible in audience behaviour: during national crises, viewers migrate to the few outlets they consider sober and reliable, whatever their usual entertainment preferences, because credibility accumulated through years of careful writing becomes decisive exactly when the news matters most.

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## Conclusion

To conclude, journalistic writing shapes public opinion through agenda-setting, framing, interpretive narrative and emotional tone; it is one of the principal ways a society decides what its problems are and what they mean. This power carries a corresponding responsibility, because the credibility of the media — their licence to perform this role at all — depends on the accuracy, fairness, transparency and restraint of the same writing. Where journalists write carefully and honestly, media become the public's trusted eyes; where they write carelessly, partially or commercially, opinion is still shaped, but trust drains away and the field is left open

to rumour and propaganda. The craft of journalistic writing is therefore not a private skill of reporters; it is a public institution, and its standards are a matter of democratic health.

## Question 3: Précis Writing — Definition and Principles (20 Marks)

*Define précis writing and explain the major principles involved in writing an effective précis.*

### Introduction

Among the language skills taught to students of mass communication, précis writing occupies a special place, because it tests comprehension, judgement and expression at the same time. A journalist summarises documents for an editor, an officer summarises files for a minister, and a researcher summarises literature for a reader — all are, in effect, writing a précis. The word précis is French and means "precise" or "exact": a précis is an exact, condensed restatement of a passage that preserves its essential meaning in far fewer words. This answer defines précis writing, explains its major principles and the steps by which an effective précis is produced, illustrates the process with a short worked example, and notes the common faults that spoil it.

### Definition of Précis Writing

A précis is a brief, clear and coherent summary of a given passage, written in one's own words, which contains all the essential ideas of the original in their proper order and proportion, and nothing else. Three features of this definition deserve emphasis. First, a précis is a summary of substance, not of sentences: it reproduces the writer's argument, not his wording. Second, it is complete in miniature: a reader who never sees the original should understand exactly what

the original said, though not how it said it. Third, it is impersonal and faithful: the précis writer adds nothing — no opinion, no explanation, no example of his own — and omits nothing essential. A précis is conventionally about one-third the length of the original passage, though the proportion is a guide rather than a law. It differs from a paraphrase, which restates a text at roughly the same length, and from an abstract or gist, which may be far shorter and less exact.

## Major Principles of an Effective Précis

- **Complete comprehension first:** The passage must be read carefully, usually two or three times, until its main theme, its supporting points and its conclusion are fully clear. Writing before understanding is the root of nearly every bad précis, because a writer who has not grasped the whole will summarise sentences instead of ideas.
- **Brevity with completeness:** Every inessential element must go — examples, illustrations, repetitions, quotations, statistics of minor importance and decorative description — while every essential idea must stay. The test of each sentence is: would the original argument be damaged if this were removed? If not, it does not belong in the précis.
- **Clarity:** The précis must be immediately intelligible to a reader who has not seen the original. Short sentences, plain words and unambiguous references are essential; a summary that itself needs explanation has failed at its purpose.
- **Coherence and unity:** The ideas must be connected in a logical flow, not listed as disconnected fragments. Linking words and careful ordering should make the précis read as one continuous piece of writing, with a beginning, a development and an end.

- **Own words and own sentence structure:** The précis must be genuinely re-expressed, not stitched together from copied phrases of the original. Occasional unavoidable technical terms may be retained, but wholesale borrowing of the author's language defeats the exercise and misrepresents the writer's understanding.
- **Fidelity and proportion:** The relative importance of ideas in the précis must match the original. A minor point of the passage must not swell into the centre of the summary, and the author's emphasis, tone and intention must be preserved without distortion.
- **Indirect speech, third person and past tense:** By convention, the précis reports the author's views rather than addressing the reader, so direct speech, questions, exclamations and the first and second persons are converted into reported form, unless the passage itself requires otherwise.
- **No additions or comments:** The précis writer must not praise, criticise, explain or extend the passage, must not supply examples of his own, and must not import knowledge from outside the given text, however true it may be.
- **A suitable title:** The précis should carry a short title that expresses the central theme of the passage. The title is often the first test of comprehension: a writer who cannot title a passage has usually not found its main idea.

## Steps in Writing a Précis

In practice, the principles are applied through a regular method. First, read the passage once for its general sense and once or twice more, underlining the essential points and noting the central theme. Second, prepare a rough draft that covers all the points in the original order, in

one's own words, without worrying yet about length. Third, count the words, compare the draft with the original point by point to confirm that nothing essential is missing and nothing foreign has entered, and then shorten the draft towards the one-third proportion by compressing sentences and removing surviving redundancies. Fourth, revise for coherence, grammar and clarity, supply a title, and present the fair copy, stating the word count where required.

## A Worked Example

The following brief passage (142 words) illustrates the method. Original: "Libraries are among the most valuable institutions of any society, although their value is often recognised only when they begin to disappear. A good library is far more than a storehouse of books. It is a place where a poor student can obtain, free of cost, the same knowledge that wealth buys elsewhere; where a researcher can trace the record of human thought across centuries; and where an ordinary citizen can spend an hour in the company of minds far greater than his own. Societies that neglect their libraries should not be surprised if ignorance grows within them, for a community without books is like a traveller without a map: it may move energetically, but it cannot know where it is going, nor learn from the journeys of those who went before."

Précis (about 48 words) — Title: The Value of Libraries. "Libraries are among society's most valuable institutions, though their worth is often realised only when they vanish. A library is more than a store of books: it gives the poor student free access to knowledge, preserves the record of human thought for researchers, and enriches ordinary readers. A society that neglects its libraries invites ignorance." The example shows the principles at work: the comparison of the traveller and the map has been dropped as illustration, the three functions of the library are

retained but compressed, the wording is new, and the length is close to one-third of the original.

## Common Faults to Avoid

The faults that most often ruin a précis follow directly from the principles. Copying whole sentences from the passage produces a patchwork that is neither brief nor evidence of understanding. Including examples and figures inflates the length while adding no substance. The opposite fault — cutting essential points in the chase for brevity — produces a summary that is short but unfaithful. Adding personal opinion ("the author rightly says...") breaks impersonality. Disorder, in which the conclusion appears before the argument, destroys coherence. Finally, a missing or misleading title signals to the examiner, before a line is read, that the central theme was missed.

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## Conclusion

In conclusion, précis writing is the disciplined art of saying everything essential in a passage in about a third of its length, in one's own words, with clarity, coherence and complete fidelity. Its principles — comprehension before writing, brevity with completeness, clarity, unity, original expression, proportion, reported form, no additions, and an apt title — convert a mechanical exercise into genuine training of the mind. For students of media and communication the skill is directly professional: the news summary, the briefing note and the research abstract are all forms of the précis, and the person who can compress without distorting possesses one of the most useful abilities in intellectual and professional life.

# Question 4: Journalistic Language versus Ordinary Academic Writing (20 Marks)

*How is journalistic language different from ordinary academic writing? Discuss.*

## Introduction

Language changes its shape according to its purpose and its audience. The language of a newspaper report and the language of a university research paper may deal with the very same event — an election, an epidemic, a new economic policy — yet they will look, sound and behave so differently that a single paragraph is enough to identify which is which. Journalistic language is written for the general public under pressure of time and competition; academic writing is written for specialists and students under the discipline of evidence and review. This answer compares the two forms across their purpose, audience, vocabulary, sentence structure, organisation, tone and use of evidence, summarises the contrast in a table, and notes the ground they share.

## Purpose and Audience

The first and most fundamental difference is purpose. Journalistic writing aims to inform a mass audience quickly about what has happened, and to attract and hold that audience in competition with every other call on its attention. Its reader is the ordinary citizen — busy, varied in education, reading on a bus or a phone screen — and its success is measured in comprehension at first reading and, commercially, in circulation and ratings. Academic writing aims to advance, test and record knowledge for a restricted audience of scholars, examiners

and students. Its reader is patient and trained, expects to re-read, and measures the writing by the quality of its evidence and argument rather than by its speed or attraction. From this difference of purpose and audience, almost all the other differences flow.

## Language, Vocabulary and Sentences

Journalistic vocabulary is deliberately common: short, concrete, everyday words are preferred, technical terms are explained or avoided, and colourful verbs and concrete nouns carry the story — "the dam burst", "prices soared", "the minister quit". Where a term of art is unavoidable, the journalist immediately translates it: inflation becomes "the rising cost of living". Academic vocabulary moves in the opposite direction towards precision through specialisation: terms such as hegemony, marginal utility or communicative competence are used without apology because the specialist audience commands them, and abstract nouns and defined concepts are the working tools of the discipline. Sentence structure follows the same law. Journalistic sentences are short — news style guides traditionally aim at an average well below twenty-five words — and paragraphs are often a single sentence, because the ear and the eye of a hurried reader must never be lost. Academic sentences are longer and heavily subordinated, packing qualifications, conditions and references into complex structures that a trained reader is expected to unpack slowly. Voice differs too: journalism prefers the active voice and named actors ("the committee rejected the proposal"), while academic writing has traditionally favoured the passive and impersonal construction ("it was observed that..."), though modern academic style increasingly accepts the active voice.

## Organisation and Structure

The architecture of the two forms is almost a mirror image. A news story is built as an inverted pyramid: the most important facts — who, what, when, where, why — are placed in the first sentence or two (the lead), followed by details in descending order of importance, so that the story can be cut from the bottom at any point and still make sense. The reader is given the conclusion first and may stop at any line fully informed of the essentials. An academic text is built as a pyramid standing on its base: introduction and literature review first, then method, then results, and the conclusion — the real destination — at the very end, after the evidence has been laid out. A reader who stops halfway through a research paper has not yet been told what it proves. Journalistic features and analysis relax the pyramid somewhat, and academic abstracts borrow the journalist's habit of announcing results early, but the governing structures remain opposite, and for good reason: one serves a reader who may leave, the other a reader who must be convinced.

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**Table 1: Journalistic language compared with academic writing**

| Feature | Journalistic language | Academic writing |
|---|---|---|
| Audience | General public, mixed education | Specialists, examiners, students |
| Purpose | Inform quickly; attract and hold attention | Advance and test knowledge; prove an argument |
| Vocabulary | Simple, concrete, everyday; technical terms explained | Technical, abstract, discipline-specific terminology |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Sentences | Short, simple, mostly active voice | Longer, complex, qualified; passive traditionally common |
| Structure | Inverted pyramid: lead first, details in descending importance | Introduction → body/evidence → conclusion at the end |
| Evidence | Attributed to named sources and eyewitnesses | Citations, references, data and method formally documented |
| Tone | Engaging, direct, human; urgency permitted | Formal, cautious, impersonal; hedging common |
| Time pressure | Written in minutes or hours for immediate publication | Written over weeks or months, reviewed before publication |

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## Evidence, Tone and Time

The treatment of evidence marks another clear contrast. Journalism attributes: its facts arrive wearing the names of their sources — "the finance minister told reporters", "hospital sources said" — and balance between rival sources substitutes for proof. Academic writing cites: claims are tied to a formal apparatus of references, footnotes and bibliographies, data and method are described so that others can repeat the work, and unattributed assertion is a fault. Tone follows from this. Journalistic tone is direct, vivid and permitted urgency and human interest; academic tone is cautious and hedged — "the evidence suggests", "it may be argued" — because scholarship must mark the boundary between the proven and the probable. Finally, the two

forms live in different time worlds. Journalistic language is produced in minutes under deadline, is corrected in public if wrong, and is replaced by tomorrow's story; academic language is produced slowly, reviewed before publication, and written to remain valid for years. The journalist's characteristic errors are therefore haste and simplification; the academic's are obscurity and delay.

## Common Ground

It would be wrong to leave the comparison as a simple opposition, because the two forms share a foundation and increasingly borrow from each other. Both are bound by accuracy, logical order and grammatical correctness; both fail completely if they cannot be understood. Good academic writers have learned from journalism to write plainly — the plain-language movement in universities and government is precisely academic prose adopting journalistic clarity. Good journalists, in long-form and explanatory reporting, have learned from academics to document sources, acknowledge complexity and qualify claims. The difference, finally, is not of quality or intelligence but of contract with the reader: journalism promises, "here is what happened, now, in words you already know"; academic writing promises, "here is what can be established, carefully, in words whose meanings we have fixed." A mass communication student must be bilingual in both, writing the bulletin in the morning and the research paper in the evening, without confusing the rules of either.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, journalistic language differs from academic writing in audience, purpose, vocabulary, sentence structure, organisation, evidence, tone and time: it is popular where the

other is specialist, immediate where the other is deliberate, concrete where the other is abstract, and structured conclusion-first where the other builds to its conclusion last. Neither form is superior; each is the correct instrument for its task, and each becomes faulty when it imitates the other — the newspaper that writes like a thesis loses its readers, and the thesis that argues like a headline loses its credibility. Understanding the difference is a basic professional competence for anyone who works with the written word.

## Question 5: Communicative Competence in Media Presentation, Reporting and Professional Interaction (20 Marks)

*Discuss how communicative competence contributes to effective media presentation, reporting, and professional interaction.*

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### Introduction

Knowing a language and being able to use it successfully in real life are two different achievements. A person may command grammar perfectly and still fail to conduct an interview, calm an angry caller, present a bulletin or negotiate with an official, because success in these situations depends on more than correctness: it depends on knowing what to say, to whom, when, in what manner and through which channel. The sociolinguist Dell Hymes named this larger ability communicative competence, and later scholars, notably Canale and Swain, analysed it into components that can be taught and assessed. For media professionals — whose entire occupation consists of communication under public scrutiny — communicative competence is not an academic concept but the substance of their craft. This answer explains

the concept and its components, and then discusses its contribution to media presentation, to reporting and to professional interaction.

## The Concept and Its Components

Communicative competence is the ability to use language effectively and appropriately in real social situations. Canale and Swain's widely used model divides it into four components. Grammatical competence is mastery of the code itself: vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and spelling — the ability to produce correct sentences. Sociolinguistic competence is appropriateness: adjusting language to the listener, the setting and the relationship — knowing that a condolence visit, a courtroom and a comedy show each demand a different register, and that Urdu, English and regional languages, and formal and informal styles within them, must be selected with social intelligence. Discourse competence is the ability to build connected, coherent wholes — a story that flows, an argument that develops, a bulletin whose items are ordered and linked — rather than isolated correct sentences. Strategic competence is the ability to keep communication alive when something goes wrong: rephrasing when not understood, asking for clarification, using gesture and example, recovering from a slip on live television, or switching languages mid-interview when a source struggles. A communicator strong in all four is effective even under pressure; weakness in any one produces a recognisable professional failure.

## Communicative Competence in Media Presentation

Presentation is where communicative competence is most publicly visible. The news presenter must combine grammatical accuracy with sociolinguistic judgement: pronunciation and diction

that the audience experiences as standard and trustworthy; a pace, volume and tone fitted to the nature of the story — measured in a tragedy, brisk in sport, neutral in politics; and discourse skill in linking items so that the bulletin feels like one intelligible account of the day rather than a pile of fragments. Strategic competence appears precisely when presentation is hardest: when the prompter fails, when a live link collapses, when breaking news arrives mid-bulletin, the competent presenter fills, summarises and reassures without panic, while the merely grammatical presenter falls silent. Talk-show hosting raises the demand further: the host must question a minister firmly without abuse, protect a shy guest from a loud one, move the discussion forward and close it on time — an orchestration of turn-taking, register and face-saving that is sociolinguistic and strategic competence in continuous action. Audiences may not know the term, but they recognise the thing instantly, and they give their loyalty to presenters who have it.

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## Communicative Competence in Reporting

Reporting is communication in the field, with sources rather than audiences, and each component earns its keep. Grammatical competence ensures that questions are precise — the difference between "Did you approve the payment?" and "Were you aware of the payment?" is a grammatical difference with legal consequences. Sociolinguistic competence governs access: a reporter who greets a village elder in his own language and register, dresses and behaves appropriately at a religious gathering, and knows when a question must be softened to be answered at all, will bring back stories that an insensitive reporter never hears. In Pakistan's multilingual field this includes moving between Urdu, English and the regional languages as

sources require. Discourse competence shapes the interview as a whole — opening, probing, following up contradictions, and closing with confirmation — and then shapes the written story, where quotation, paraphrase and background must be woven into a coherent account. Strategic competence rescues reporting daily: rephrasing a question a source has evaded without giving offence, verifying a confused figure through a second channel, or continuing an interview through an interpreter. The reporter's notebook, in short, fills in proportion to his communicative competence.

## Communicative Competence in Professional Interaction

Media work is also organisational work, and communicative competence governs the professional interactions on which careers and stories depend: with editors, officials, public relations officers, fellow journalists, lawyers and the public itself. The competent professional writes the email that gets an answer — clear subject, polite register, exact request — conducts the phone call that secures the document, negotiates access without surrendering independence, and handles a complaint or a legal notice about a story with language that is firm, factual and courteous. Conflict in newsrooms, between media houses and institutions, and between journalists and an angry public is usually managed or inflamed by language before it is decided by anything else; the strategically competent professional de-escalates, summarises positions, proposes formulations and preserves relationships for the next story. In public-facing interaction the stakes include the institution's reputation: a courteous, competent reply by a channel's representative to a viewer's complaint can convert a critic into a loyal audience member, while an arrogant one becomes a screenshot. Communicative competence

is therefore also an ethical asset, since respectful, appropriate language is the practical form that professional ethics takes in daily dealings.

## Developing Communicative Competence

Unlike raw talent, communicative competence can be systematically developed, which is why it belongs in the curriculum of mass communication. Wide reading builds grammatical range and vocabulary; listening to accomplished broadcasters and analysing their handling of interviews builds sociolinguistic judgement; practice in summarising, story-structuring and live simulation builds discourse and strategic skill; and supervised field experience with feedback converts classroom knowledge into professional instinct. Media organisations contribute through mentoring, copy-desk correction and post-broadcast review. The digital environment adds a new arena — the professional's own social media presence — where competence in register, timing and restraint is tested before an audience of millions without any editor's protection.

## Conclusion

To conclude, communicative competence — grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic — is the integrated ability that turns language knowledge into professional success. In presentation it produces the clear, appropriately toned, unflappable performance audiences trust; in reporting it produces access, precision and stories competitors miss; and in professional interaction it produces the cooperation, reputation and relationships on which a media career is built. For the media professional, it is not one skill among many but the master skill in which all others become effective, and for students of mass communication it is the most practical goal their language courses can set before them.