

# HOW TO USE THE MEDIA

AUMA 2009  
Calgary

with Michael Clarkson



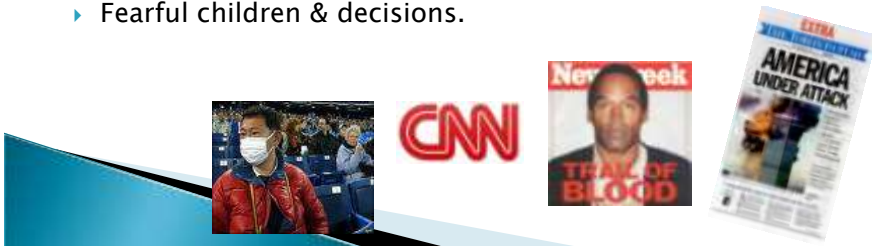
## We are living in the Golden Age of Communications

It is not the Golden Age of *Journalism* because journalism has slipped in the past 15 years. But there are more communications outlets now than ever before, connecting practically everyone in North America. If you have a story to tell, you can get it out there.



## The mainstream media has become more tabloid

- ▶ Due to a number of factors, most importantly the emergence of corporate people and conglomerates into media ownership, mainstream media such as CNN and the Toronto Star have drifted slightly away from in-depth, responsible reporting to more superficial, sensational reporting.
- ▶ O. J. Simpson turning point. CNN/SARS. Makes us more fearful than we ought to be. Crime reporting/Toronto.
- ▶ Fearful children & decisions.



## GET TO KNOW THE MEDIA AND WHAT THEY WANT

- ▶ If you think like them, you have more chance to get what you want. Tailor your message or your stories to fit the media's likes and needs.

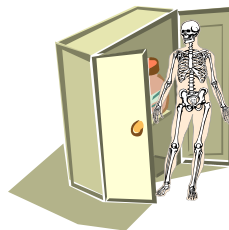


# TODAY'S SESSION

1. Things you must know about the media
2. Strategies
3. What stories the media wants
4. Interviews and speaking
5. TV, Radio and other outlets
6. When things go bad

## Section 1 – THINGS YOU MUST KNOW ABOUT THE MEDIA

- ▶ **The media is likely more powerful than your organization.** They can bring down governments and change public opinion.
- ▶ Watergate. John Kerry Swift Boat. My investigations.
- ▶ You can challenge them and keep them accountable, but remember newspapers will always get the last word as long as they have barrels of ink.
- ▶ The media can change public opinion for or against your municipality. It can affect the financial grants or support you receive, your image in the community & to potential developers.



## You know more about your organization and its issues than the media does

- ▶ The majority of journalists are *general assignment* with little specific knowledge. In council meetings, ever notice blank faces among reporters when it comes to complex topics.
- ▶ They welcome your knowledge because it makes it easier for them to do their story.



## The media does not have as many resources as it once did

- ▶ Economy/cutbacks. Also, in general terms, the media have become owned by bean-counters, who look a little more to the bottom line than community service than they once did. If you're smart, you can do their work for them and get your message across.



## Warning: Some journalists have ulterior motives



## Warning: Some journalists have ulterior motives

- ▶ Many journalists are attracted to their profession initially because it gives them chance to *express themselves*. Some may be more interested in seeing their byline than your issues.
- ▶ Many of these journalists do not communicate well with other people. Writing or broadcasting are often the way they communicate.
- ▶ Many journalists in small publications and small TV and radio stations are out to make a name for themselves to move up the ladder. Be wary of this for contentious stories, or stories which could be embellished or sensationalized.
- ▶ Drive-by journalism



## The media is used to having power and thus a sense of entitlement.

- ▶ They are rarely challenged in the courts because of freedom of speech and they get used to winning contentious issues with organizations, or having the last word.
- ▶ I have never been sued.



## Most journalists are leftwing in their attitudes.

- ▶ This is a double-edged sword: they tend to go out of their way to show more than one side to a story, and yet they often lean left in their politics.



## Keith vs. Bill



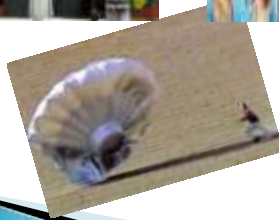
- ▶ With the popularity of cable television, the U.S. media has become more political, entertaining and polarizing. (i.e. Bill O'Reilly, Keith Olbermann, Glenn Beck)
- ▶ In Canada: CBC "At Issue" panel, Rex Murphy, David Frum.



## The Sensationals

- ▶ Increasingly so, the media loves scandals, murders and spectacular stories.

EHealth scandal a \$1B waste:  
auditor



Canada Shaken by Massive  
Political Scandal Implicating  
Former PM Mulroney





## Developing Networks:

The more connected you feel to groups, the less vulnerable you feel.

1. **To Work & Organizations:** The more connected you feel to your work the better job you will do and you will get satisfaction.
2. **Historical.** Research your country's history, your region's and your own...know you belong to a movement greater than your own life.
3. **Spiritual.** Develop a connectedness beyond the physical ... learn to love more.
4. **Family & Friends.** Spend time together, listen to each other. Realize we all have the same needs and fears.
5. **Information and ideas.** Read books, magazines and the Internet: get reassurance that the world of information and ideas is their to help not hurt you.



## There is lots to be thankful for

- ▶ Most people in the media are like us, with basically the same drives, sensitivities and compassion.
- ▶ The media still embraces human interest stories and will listen to those from your organization.



## Section 2 – Strategies YOUR MEDIA REP

- ▶ Find a good media rep in your municipality, perhaps more than one person.
- ▶ Maybe that person is you! Show leadership and take initiative if you think you are up to the task.
- ▶ It does not have to be an everyday job, but he/she should monitor the local and perhaps even provincial and national media every day to stay on top of events to see how you can tap into issues and events to promote you.
- ▶ He/she does not have to be a good writer. Information and ideas are more important. The person must be: good with deadlines, not gullible, a loyal company player and non-confrontational unless the situation requires it. The person must be able to clearly define your company's issues and goals.
- ▶ The goal of the media rep should be to develop a relationship with the local media and to understand what the media is looking for.
- ▶ Hold media meetings with members of your municipality, especially when a key issue is at hand, or in the near future.

You absolutely must work your ideas and stories to fit the news media's format.

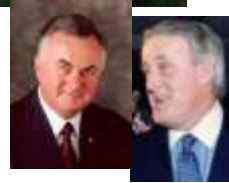
## GET THE MEDIA TO LIKE YOU

- ▶ It is human nature for people to react well to others who treat them well. (Marathon)
- ▶ Butter them up
- ▶ Compliment their stories (S-Sgt. Davidson)
- ▶ Wine and dine them, if necessary. Professional sports teams have done this better than anyone. No wonder we call sports reporters partisan jock-sniffers.
- ▶ Al Duerr/Ralph Klein...for much of their career, the media liked them. They thrived.



# HUMAN NATURE 101

## ▶ The Queen at the Palliser



# DEFINE YOUR GOALS

- ▶ Why does your municipality need publicity? To plan a conference? To publicize an issue or product? To get better profile in the community? To challenge a misconception about you?
- ▶ Or, as a councilor, are you simply there to represent your constituents and municipality?
- ▶ Remember that you, or whoever is the media rep, may not be the only one in your municipality to deal with the media. Different issues sometimes involve different people in your municipality. Try not to overstep your bounds.



## BUILD A RELATIONSHIP

- ▶ Tap reporters, columnists and broadcasters with your ideas, or just make yourself available as a resource person. Talk with them after council.
- ▶ If they are columnists or TV or radio personalities, study their angles for stories, their pet peeves and their political leanings.
- ▶ Invite them to events in your municipality. Take them for lunch occasionally. (Isaiah Thomas, Ralph Klein examples)
- ▶ Be wary that columnists often focus on their opinions and not on a balanced story. But many readers and viewers are not aware of that, in fact they often get confused between personal opinion and news.
- ▶ Consider feeding tips to trusted reporters when you think it is for the public good. (example, Dr. Fisher/Dr. David)
- ▶ Let media know about changes or cancellations of events in your municipality (annual city parade example).



## THE NEWS RELEASE

- ▶ One of the most popular forms of communication between organizations and the media, and one of the most mishandled.
- ▶ Most organizations do press releases POORLY. Most of them end up in the rubbish bin or in the trash bin of the computer. The reason? They are overwritten or the meat of the story is buried.
- ▶ Have a strong logo for your municipality or the issue at hand. By snail mail, use coloured paper so that it sticks out from the black-and-white of your competitors in the pile of news releases.
- ▶ Make the story as local as possible.
- ▶ Write in the newspaper style of Inverted Pyramid with the most important information up front and lesser important trailing. Remember that editors always cut a story from the bottom up. Make sure you get in the Who, What, When, Where and Why of the story (the five Ws.)



## GETTING ATTENTION OF THE EDITORS/PRODUCERS

- ▶ Whether through letter, FAX or email, you've got less than 10 seconds to seduce him/her with your release.
- ▶ You must sell yourself or your idea.
- ▶ Have a snappy headline in 10 words or less. Spend a lot of time thinking about the headline or the EMAIL tag-line....and nearly as much time thinking about the lede. Boil them down! Less is more.
- ▶ Text must be short and to the point and perhaps entertaining, even sexy. Have action and emotions when appropriate.
- ▶ Tailor the message to fit the type of media. Remember to be visual for TV and newspaper photographers, especially for emotional stories and issues. Pictures underscore emotions. And have audio opportunities for radio.



## GETTING ATTENTION OF THE EDITORS/PRODUCERS (...2)

- ▶ Throw in a few statistics. Media love statistics to put in headlines or in graphic boxes. These can go in a fact page at the bottom of your release.
- ▶ Use quotes from your executives or experts on the subject with the contact information. This makes it easier for the news outlet to make a short story out of your press release or for them to reach the expert.
- ▶ Have your press release two pages or less with 1.5 spaces between lines. Doing your part for Alberta's forests.
- ▶ At the end of the release, promote your municipality with a brief look at its history and what you are about.
- ▶ If you have a media campaign for a particular issue, do not let it drag on for more than two or three months. The media will tire of it.



## ATTACH YOURSELF TO AN ISSUE OR EVENT

- ▶ Keep abreast of issues and events in your area and seek ways to get positive publicity.



## FOLLOWING UP

- ▶ Follow up your press release with a phone call or email the next day.
- ▶ This is a neglected part of the equation.
- ▶ The follow-up has two purposes: It is to establish that the media actually got your news release and/or that you are serious about it.
- ▶ Remember to pick and choose which subjects you will give to the media. Do not flood them with every idea you have; they will turn you off.



# THE NEWS CONFERENCE

- ▶ Ta Da ....Your own news conference is a big deal!
- ▶ Before setting one up, ask yourself is your subject matter worthy of a news conference, or can it be handled through a news release or an interview?
- ▶ There is nothing more negative to a news organization than to attend a news conference and realize it was not worth its while to send a reporter and a cameraman. From then on, they might view your organization and its judgment with skepticism.
- ▶ Schedule it for a midweek morning; there is usually not much else going on at that time. Have it during mid-afternoon so that TV crews have ample time to put their story together for the evening news.



## THE NEWS CONFERENCE (...2)

- ▶ Make it as easy for them as possible. They are giving you their time when they could be off chasing fire trucks.
- ▶ Have a Media Kit available to those media reps who attend.
- ▶ Provide a sign-in table with a registrar with a good personality.
- ▶ Have outlets for laptops and telephones.
- ▶ Make sure the signs and banners for your company are large and visible to the cameras. Have your own video camera tape the event.



## THE NEWS CONFERENCE (...3)

- ▶ Make sure you get their contact information for future reference.
- ▶ Provide good parking spaces close to the locale. Give them a free meal, or at least free beverages. Working for the media can be a great job, but it doesn't pay terrifically well, unless you are....Geraldo Rivera. On a related note, consider giving them pens and notepads. If you are on a limited budget, Dollar Store will suffice.
- ▶ Pin their stories up on a board.
- ▶ If you have people speaking on your behalf, have easy microphone placement. Try to keep speeches to 30 minutes or less.
- ▶ Have pertinent people available for interviews.
- ▶ Tofield hiking Q&A.



## Section3 – WHAT IS A STORY?

This differs from person to person, but there is some universal agreement on what makes something interesting enough for the media to want.

- ▶ THE BIG ISSUE is easiest to identify. (Calgary and Edmonton fight over possession of Red Deer)
- ▶ SOMETHING NEW (Red Deer fights over possession of Calgary and Edmonton)
- ▶ SOMETHING INVOLVING A PUBLIC FIGURE OR CELEBRITY. (overexposure burns out many politicians in public eye)
- ▶ A HUMAN INTEREST ANGLE
- ▶ A TOUCHING STORY PEOPLE CAN RELATE TO
- ▶ AN UNDERDOG STORY OR RAGS TO RICHES (Eskimos win Grey Cup)



## WHAT IS A STORY? (...2)

- ▶ SOMETHING WHICH HIGHLIGHTS AN EVENT
- ▶ SOMETHING AFFECTING MANY PEOPLE
- ▶ SOMETHING FUNNY OR IRONIC (Man bites dog)
- ▶ SOMETHING INVOLVING ANIMALS OR PETS (Dr. David)



Remember that the media may see something as a story which you do not – and they are the ones who publish or broadcast the stories. And sometimes media can sell something which seems small and the public will buy into it.

Readers relate to other people before issues or events. For big issues, find a person to highlight who is affected by the issue and the rest flows into the story.

Example: Need more money for arts and culture? Feature a struggling local artist. Short on funds for senior housing? Find a couple married 50 years.

## ANNIVERSARIES OR HISTORIC TIE-INS

- ▶ At one time, I made a career of this. (Calgary 100, Logans, GG)
- ▶ Any interesting date your can connect to your municipality...
- ▶ Labour Day, National Secretary Day.
- ▶ Historic dates using descendents as human interest angle.



# CELEBRITIES

- ▶ Do not underestimate the power of celebrities and public figures to attract media attention. We are living in the Age of Celebrity. MORE
- ▶ Ed Greenspan.
- ▶ For opening of your new arena, get a local made good NHL star. Hockey players will do these things for free.



# THE FOLLOW UP STORY

- ▶ If there is a general weakness of reporting in the media, it is the follow-up story, the whatever-happened-to story.
- ▶ Life is so fast these days, with so many stories and issues, important stories of a week or month ago often become forgotten. But there are often interesting updates. Perhaps the success of your sports park or work project.
- ▶ Be sure to have the original story / background available for the reporter.



# ELECTIONS

- ▶ Most of the previous strategies apply, except you and your opponents are competing for attention.
- ▶ Press conferences for serious issues.
- ▶ If you have a sensitive personal issue that has not come out be prepared for October Surprise.
- ▶ Dave's Strategies:



## Section 4 – GIVING INTERVIEWS

- ▶ A very important part of dealing with the media. It could set the stage for your relationship with the media for years to come.
- ▶ If time permits, try to do as many interviews as you can in-person, or at least over the phone. This is particularly important for a long or crucial issue. If you simply correspond with a reporter via email, your emotions for the issue will not come across.
- ▶ Prepare for an interview, even if it is not about a crucial issue. Many people think they know their organization, but you can react differently under the pressure of an interview and act differently than you normally would. You might even forget obvious facts!
- ▶ If your interview comes as a request from the media, make sure you know in advance what the interview is about. You don't want to get caught flat-footed. And make sure you know whether the interview is about a specific subject or part of a larger investigative piece (figure skating example).



## GIVING INTERVIEWS(...2)

- ▶ Bring background information to a sit-down interview. If it is to be on the telephone, have background materials at your desk for reference. Email interviews are OK, but only if necessary. There is less chance for give and take and quick follow-ups to questions in an email interview.
- ▶ Be prepared to clearly state your message to the interviewer and to prove or justify your message. Be ready with answers for potential follow-up questions by the interviewer. Be prepared for disagreement and how you might respond.
- ▶ Remember that you are representing your municipality, not yourself. Try not to give personal opinions or jokes which might be misconstrued and end up in a quote. Remember we are living in a politically-correct society.
- ▶ Do not give off the record statements unless you know and trust the interviewer and are looking to establish a relationship.



## GIVING INTERVIEWS(...3)

- ▶ Do not give yes or no answers to complex questions. You may end up getting misquoted!
- ▶ As a follow-up, don't be afraid to call the journalist back to clarify comments you made.
- ▶ Be wary that what might seem a small local story to you might be broadened by the media into a provincial or even a national issue through wire services (Mel Lastman, Niagara Falls example).



## Fear 101 – The Stress of Speaking

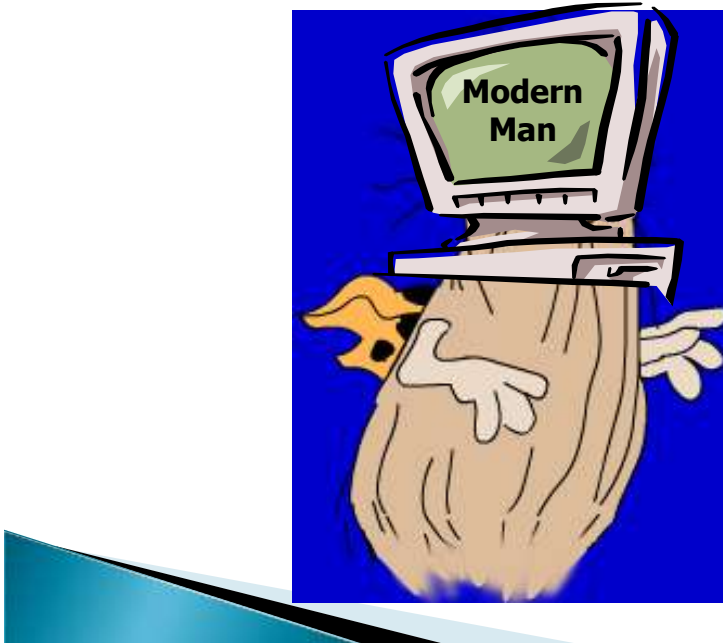
- ▶ Fear of speaking (Seinfeld quote)
- ▶ It's all about arousal.
- ▶ Our fear reaction has changed mastodon / social fears.
- ▶ We have more threats than ever (Quick Fixes).
- ▶ Allodoxaphobia #1 threat. Mind / body can't differentiate.
- ▶ Most people perform worse under pressure (even Tiger).



## The Stress of Speaking

- All stress is fear energy
- When your fingers shake it is to fight or to run away
- The average person has 66,000 thoughts/day; 2/3 of them are negative
- Fear is our #1 resource (the zone, emotional drive)
- We're all different on our fear response (worry gene)
- The #1 fear we have today is what others think of us





## TIPS ON PERFORMING UNDER PRESSURE

- Put your nervousness into your preparation, then trust yourself.
- Get experience by speaking to groups, even just a few co-workers.
- Look on it as information-giving session, not a performance. Don't let your ego-defence come into play.
- The people you are speaking to (a group, TV audience) don't care if you stumble; they just want the information.
- If you have dry mouth, drink water or put your tongue on the roof of your mouth.
- Imagine audience as naked.
- Don't be afraid to take a speaking course.



Illustration: Copyright © 1998 by David S. White, Inc. All rights reserved.

## Section 5 – DEALING WITH TELEVISION

- ▶ **You need a visual component to the story, not a talking head.** TV is about pictures, not a thousand words. Years ago, U.S. President Ronald Reagan escaped criticism of cutting funds for disability services by appearing in a Photo-Op. That evening, national news networks ran stories criticizing Reagan, but the cameras showed the president shaking hands with disabled people. That image wiped out the bad press to the point that Reagan's press secretary telephoned the networks, thanking them for their coverage of the issue.
- ▶ **As in other forms of media, keep your news short and to the point.** More often than not, TV does not have a lot of time for stories, even local stories. Lots of time is already reserved for sports, entertainment, weather, even traffic reports.



## DEALING WITH TELEVISION (...2)

- ▶ **TV stations are always looking for funny, offbeat stories**, especially those in which their reporters can take part. Invite them to take part in hot-dog eating contests or mock rescues in which they can do first-person reports. (example, me in Calgary).
- ▶ **Local Cable TV is always on the lookout for local stories, personalities and events.** Contact the area manager to see what you can access. In some cases, local groups can instruct you how to design programming so you can actually use the station's equipment at low cost.
- ▶ To appear on camera, make sure you are having a good hair day.



# RADIO

- ▶ It is sometimes more difficult to get a story on radio than television because newscasts are usually very brief. As well, radio often has a narrow audience, compared to the broader, more diverse audiences of newspapers and television.
- ▶ Always check the genre of the radio station. Some stations cater largely to older listeners, some to community-oriented issues.
- ▶ Good sound is a must. Live on the scene report with background noise. Drill hammer for construction of your new arena.



# PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS

- ▶ These are often available in your community on radio and television to promote events and gain publicity for your organization. And they are free!
- ▶ Be sure to keep tabs on their deadlines for submission and their format (they often have 30 or 60-second segments).
- ▶ To get attention, send them brief news releases, highlighting one or two points of your story.
- ▶ You can often use your own speaker for the broadcast. Make sure he or she has a clear, distinctive voice and engaging style.



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

- ▶ Studies show that people actually read them, particularly during a lively, on-going issue.
- ▶ They are often a place for lively discussion.
- ▶ They are often a good way to respond to criticism.
- ▶ Make sure you pick and choose your issues. Too many letters over too many issues can over-expose you and limit your credibility with the paper and the public. Behind your back they'll start calling you Ann Landers or Dr. Phil.



## EDITORIALS/OP-ED PAGES

- ▶ Newspapers are always looking for trendy, provocative issues and opinions. But make sure you have good knowledge of the topic.
- ▶ Send your ideas to the newspaper, accompanied with back stories and your background on the issues.
- ▶ Newspapers are often looking for dissenting opinions. If you have one, do not be bashful.



## EMAIL LISTS

- ▶ Check out and tap into email lists of other municipalities, interest groups and community organizations, particularly those who have similar issues as your municipality.
- ▶ People are members of these email lists because they are interested in the same type of news the emails lets them know about. Should your story or issue fit with others, make this known on your email newsletter.
- ▶ Use GOOGLE to find the relevant organizations, then call or email the secretary of their organization so that you can get your story/issue into their email newsletter.
- ▶ Access to some email lists is available through:
  - ▶ [www.freelists.org](http://www.freelists.org)
  - ▶ [www.emailaddresses.com](http://www.emailaddresses.com)
- ▶ Use GOOGLE ALERTS to keep yourself abreast of the media stories about your municipality and issues important to you. (my examples)



## WEBSITES

- ▶ Keep your website as updated and professional as possible. A great communications resource when building campaigns with other stakeholders, such as education, health and oil.
- ▶ Your image on the website and in other media is all important to attract other stakeholders, growth in your community & creations of jobs.
- ▶ Have important contact information on your website for media consumption.
- ▶ Many websites have "links" pages. This is a quick way to share your causes with other municipalities or groups involved in your issues.



## Section 6 – WHEN THINGS GO BAD

- ▶ Hide in the backroom and let the Mayor handle it.
- ▶ Shoot the messenger.



## WHEN THINGS GO BAD

- ▶ Bad news travels at the speed of light.
- ▶ Be truthful. Damage control usually is not as effective in the long run as The Truth. If you don't come clean ASAP, the media could drag your story into a long-running soap opera, especially if the reporter has an axe to grind.
- ▶ If you are worried about handling serious issues yourself, get your higher-ups involved.
- ▶ Be wary of leaks in your organization. Often someone will have an axe to grind, or an ego. Try to trace the source ASAP and deal with it. It can be poisonous.
- ▶ For simple mistakes or misquotes, gently let the media know about it. They'll generally run a correction the next day. (Creek?)
- ▶ If there is a serious error in a media report, go first to the reporter, then to his higher ups to make sure it is corrected. Sometimes it doesn't matter if the story does not have the truth – public perception is all-important!



## Update Media Lists

Regularly update your media contacts and email lists. Media outlets can be revolving doors, especially smaller ones. Keep lists of writers, editors and producers in your area.

## Media Directories

- ▶ Mondo Times (basic information free; detailed contact info \$80)  
[www.mondotimes.com](http://www.mondotimes.com)
- ▶ Yahoo (limited contacts for free)...[www.yahoo.com/news\\_and\\_media](http://www.yahoo.com/news_and_media)
- ▶ Alberta Media Directory (254 pages in a binder): \$150.  
(available through [www.mediamag.ca](http://www.mediamag.ca))



## COMPLAINTS AGAINST MEDIA

- ▶ Against the print media: Alberta Press Council, Medicine Hat,  
[abpress@telus.net](mailto:abpress@telus.net) 1-888-580-4104
- ▶ Against broadcasters: Canadian Broadcast Standards Council,  
Ottawa, [complaints@cbsc.ca](mailto:complaints@cbsc.ca) 1-866-696-4718
- ▶ *Also, check if your local paper has an ombudsman. In most occasions, complaints you hold against media can be resolved by contacting the editors or broadcasters themselves.*

