



## Information Cycles

Knowing where to look for information on a topic is a lot easier if you have some idea of how information is produced. Follow the lifecycle of an event to see how and when information about it is created and published.

### As an event happens, initial information appears in the news

On December 21, 1988 Pan Am Flight 103 blew up in mid-air over Lockerbie, Scotland killing all 259 people aboard as well as a number of people on the ground below. The disaster was caused by a terrorist bomb.

Almost immediately reports appear in the news media.

These reports may include:

- ✓ news wire reports
- ✓ first attempts at who, what, when and where
- ✓ not much on why

### Day(s) later reports appear in newspapers, on TV, radio and on the Internet

A general news database lists dozens of articles about the Lockerbie disaster between December 22 and December 31, 1988 - *just a few days after it happened*. For example:

"The Crash of Flight 103". Craig R. Whitney. *The New York Times*, late city edition. Dec. 23, 1988. p. A1.

#### Characteristics of a newspaper article

Depending on the significance of the event, coverage may be prolific or sparse.

- ✓ aimed at general public
- ✓ covers subjects of interest, current events
- ✓ articles written by professional journalists
- ✓ coverage is up to date (daily or weekly)
- ✓ content includes facts - may include statistics, photographs, analysis, editorial opinion
- ✓ Slant tends to be mainstream/neutral

### Week(s) later articles appear in popular magazines

"Diabolically Well-Planned, (the Flight 103 Disaster)". *Time Magazine*. January 9, 1989. pp. 26-28.

#### Characteristics of popular magazine article

- ✓ readers are the general public or a knowledgeable layperson
- ✓ covers popular subjects, current affairs
- ✓ writers range from professional journalists to fiction writers and essayists
- ✓ strong emphasis on reporting facts, usually reflects editorial bias of magazine
- ✓ no bibliography or list of sources

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## A month to 6 months later articles appear in scholarly and academic journals

Specialists in various academic fields have their original research accepted for publication by various peer-reviewed journals. For example:

Meeta, Sheetal. "How Lockerbie Is Healing Its Psychological Scars." *The New Scientist*. vol. 132. November 2, 1991. p.13.

This is also when conferences and symposia may be held on the topic. If it is of national significance, congressional hearings may be held at this point.

### Characteristics of scholarly journals and conference papers

- ✓ audience is peers, specialists in the field, and university students
- ✓ covers research results, articles usually theoretical in nature
- ✓ written by scholars and specialists, usually with Ph.Ds
- ✓ contains detailed examination of subject, statistical analysis
- ✓ written in technical language
- ✓ includes detailed bibliography or list of sources

## A year to several years later books about the subject are published

Over time, books treating the topic are published. The speed at which they reach the public depends on the subject and the market.

Goddard, Donald. *Trail of the Octopus: From Beirut to Lockerbie, Inside the DIA (defense intelligence agency)*. London: Bloomsbury Press, 1993.

Books may start appearing the year of an event, and continue being published for years to come.

### Characteristics of books

- ✓ audience ranges from scholars to general public
- ✓ in-depth coverage of a topic
- ✓ compilation of scholarly articles and essays
- ✓ written by scholars and specialists
- ✓ currency varies, usually about two years
- ✓ content ranges from general discussion to detailed analysis
- ✓ includes bibliography or list of sources
- ✓ perspective or slant is entirely dependent on the author; may be sponsored by a professional association or political group

## Five to Ten years later the subject is included in reference books

As time goes by, knowledge about a subject becomes established and it appears in reference books. These include dictionaries, encyclopedias, and handbooks. An example of once such encyclopedia follows:

"December 21 Mid-air Explosion". in *The Encyclopedia of American Facts and Dates*, 10th edition. ed. Gordon Carruth. NY: HarperCollins, 1997. p. 814.

### Characteristics of reference books

- ✓ audience ranges from scholars to general public
- ✓ factual information, overviews, summaries, definitions
- ✓ written by scholars and specialists
- ✓ currency varies, usually takes 4-10 years for encyclopedia articles to appear
- ✓ content includes summaries and analysis
- ✓ may include statistics and bibliographies
- ✓ perspective or slant should be neutral but book may be sponsored by a professional association or political group

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### Summary of Timeline

<b>Documentation and dissemination of event</b>	<b>Time Frame</b>
Radio/TV/Internet News Services	Seconds/Minutes
Newspapers (print)	Day(s)
Magazines (print)	Week(s)
Journals (print & electronic)	6 months +
Books	2 + years
Reference Sources : e.g. Encyclopedia; Handbook (print & electronic)	Average 10 years