



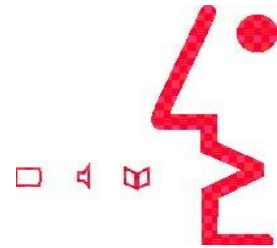
A REPORTER'S GLOSSARY

Journalistic Terms of Art

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Ed Barks is available to speak at your next meeting, conference, or retreat, in person or via video link. Visit www.barkscomm.com/speaker or call (703) 533-0403 to reserve an appearance.

You'll find Ed's books written expressly for communications and public affairs professionals and the executives they counsel at <https://www.barkscomm.com/eds-books>. Group purchase information can be found at www.barkscomm.com/special-group-orders.

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Ed likes to hear from his readers. [Email him](#), call (703) 533-0403, and follow his [C-suite Blueprint blog](#).

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Every profession has its own jargon and terms of art. Reporters are no different. Communications executives need to understand newsroom lingo. Further, they need to be capable of translating it for their C-suite and other spokespeople.

Former reporters who have talked the talk day in and day out have an edge here. Indeed, if your communications shop lacks the presence of an ex-reporter, you are operating at a distinct disadvantage.

In the interest of consistency, you would be wise to adopt these definitions for key journalistic words and phrases.

Above the fold: Literally, this refers to a newspaper article that appears on the top half of the front page. Figuratively, it connotes a big news story.

Actuality: Radio sound bites that generally last only a few seconds, though they can run longer when warranted.

Anchor: The big kahuna who delivers the day's news on television or radio, and is responsible — along with producers — for maintaining the flow of the newscast. They often put questions to guests on the air, so should be skilled interviewers.

Assignment editor: These behind the scenes individuals are the heart of the newsroom. They decide which reporters, videographers, and photographers cover which stories.

B-roll: Background footage used for cutaways in a video package. If a camera crew comes to you, they may ask you to do things like work at your desk or walk along a hallway or sidewalk while trying to look natural (good luck with that; it's not easy to look unaffected when under orders to do so). They need this footage for editing purposes to create a seamless package.

Beat: The topic covered by particular reporters. For instance, they may be assigned the Capitol Hill beat, the environmental beat, or the business beat.

Bumper: A short snippet of video used in TV newscasts that leads into and out of commercial breaks. It's sometimes used as a teaser to keep viewers tuned in.

Byline: Simply put, it's the name of the journalist who reported the story.

Clarification: This occurs when a media outlet needs to clear up confusion in one of its reports even if the facts are technically correct. It's an acknowledgment that they missed a detail or mischaracterized something, and allows them to better explain the original story or add new perspective. Note that most publications have corrections policies that place them prominently in print and online, but not all apply the same process to clarifications.

Clip: A news story that you have — physically or electronically — snipped from a publication for distribution to your C-suite executives and others. Clips also come in audio, video, and web form.

Copy: The verbiage turned in by reporters. Editors have been known to scream — either verbally or electronically — “Get me that copy, now!”

Correction: An admission by a news outlet that “We blew it.” You have the right to ask for a clarification or correction if you believe you’ve been wronged. Be aware that some media outfits don’t like to admit their mistakes, so be prepared with the evidence when you ask.



Crawl: That annoying banner incessantly running along the bottom of your TV screen during newscasts.

Crosstalk: This occurs when more than one anchor (sometimes accompanied by a weathercaster) engage in meaningless banter. It’s an attempt to humanize them in the audience’s eyes. When too frequent and banal, it can backfire, leading viewers (at least yours truly) to reach for the remote to change the channel or mute the drivel.

Cutline: Often called a caption, this text below a photo describes the scene.

Dateline: This indicates the city and, in many cases, the state or country where the story originates.

Daybook: One of a reporter’s most precious tools, wire services like the Associated Press and Reuters issue daily daybooks that tell where and when newsy events are scheduled to take place.

Deadline: Note well that these are sacrosanct to reporters and their editors. If you miss a reporter’s deadline, you are out of the story. Plus, you’ve led that reporter to question your value for future articles.

Editor: The boss of a newsroom. Reporters have been known to tremble at the mere mention of their editor’s name.

Editorial: A column advocating a newspaper’s position on important matters of the day. In most major news operations, there is an inviolable firewall between the editorial board and the newsroom. When that firewall is present, reporters do not know the contents of the day’s editorials before they are published.

Embargo: When you and the reporter explicitly agree to hold a story for publication until a date and time certain. You should use this technique only with scribes you trust implicitly.

Evergreen: A timeless news story that can be aired or published at any time.

Exclusive: When you agree to give one reporter a story before the rest of the pack. Use caution here for you can easily alienate journalists by giving an exclusive to a competitor.

Feature: A human interest story that usually lacks significant hard news value.

First amendment: The part of the U.S. constitution that assures a free press. It reads, in toto, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

Freelancer: A reporter who contributes to a variety of publications, not employed solely by one. Freelancers may be highly knowledgeable about your issues or may know nothing whatsoever, so make it a point to look into their portfolio before you engage with them. TV camera crews may also be freelancers.

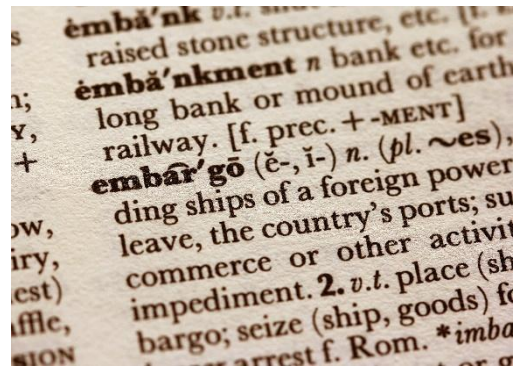
Front page news: The biggest stories with the boldest headlines go here. This term is used both literally and figuratively.

Green room: Backstage at a TV studio, you’ll find a room for upcoming guests to cool their heels and, more importantly, to prepare for their appearance. When you visit the green room, avoid the food spread; you’re there to be part of a news story, not to nosh (besides, who needs poppy seeds from that bagel between your teeth when you appear on camera?).

Grip and grin: This staged photo is the classic handshake shot, often used by politicians and celebrities when they deign to interact with riff raff like you and me. I typically eschew these clichéd looking poses in favor of more real world shots.

Head shot: A formal photo that shows you in business attire from the shoulders up. All executives should have a head shot taken by a professional photographer at the ready. Avoid casual poses or pictures of you with your kids or dogs. You are aiming for a professional image, not that of a best buddy.

Headline (also called header): This appears at the top of an article or news release. It is essential for attracting a reader and should, in as few words as possible, highlight the main



point of the story. News release headlines should concisely highlight a newsworthy angle of your message.

IFB: The earpiece you wear when participating in a satellite media tour or TV network guest appearance when multiple guests are piped in from several locations. It stands for interruptible foldback. This is the same device you see in the ears of TV anchors and reporters in the field.

Journalist: A person who reports for any media outlet — print, broadcast, or online. Reporters, editors, photographers, and videographers all fall into this classification.



Jump: When a newspaper leads with a story on page one then continues it inside, that continuation is the jump page. It's a longstanding clever means of putting more content on the front page.

Kicker: An often amusing or syrupy story at the end of a newscast.

Lede: The first sentence or idea of a news article. And no, it's not a misspelling. The word originated in the 19th Century when newspapers used hot lead type. The typesetters would get confused whether their editors meant the hot "lead" type or the "lead" of the article. Some clever soul decided to change the spelling of the article's beginning. Now you can regale friends with this bit of trivia at your next soiree.

Letter to the editor: Itching to get something off your chest? Write a letter to the editor. Your odds are pretty good in smaller publications. If you're aiming for the likes of *The New York Times*, however, you'll need luck on your side.

Lower third: Literally, the bottom third of your TV screen identifying the individual by name and affiliation as well as any other pertinent information.

Media relations: The practice of dealing with the press. This function is ideally carried out by former reporters turned corporate, association, or non-profit communications experts who know how reporters think and what they need. Sadly, not all organizations employ such experienced hands.

Media training: A strategic professional development program that shows executives and other spokespeople how to deal with the press. [Media training](#) should at a minimum cover messaging and communications skills enhancement, and offer simulated practice interviews. Conscientious consultants also include a means of [sustaining improvement over time](#).

News advisory: When you want to notify the press of a forthcoming event, you issue a news advisory that includes its date, time, and place.



News conference: Also called a press conference, businesses hold these when they want to announce news to all reporters at the same time in the same place.

News director: They run radio and TV newsrooms. Assignment editors, editors, camera crews, producers, and reporters all answer to them. Title creep being what it is, some local TV news departments now have vice presidents of news; same thing.

News hole: Print publications only have so many pages. TV and radio news broadcasts only have so much time. That's called the news hole.

News release (also called press release): A brief written document issued to the press announcing your latest news. Keep these brief — two pages, tops (and no cheating with tiny fonts or reduced margins) — regardless of how much regulatory verbiage you may have to regurgitate; long news releases tend to go straight into most reporters' circular files. Pro tip: If your muckety-mucks insist on including the kitchen sink (as sometimes happens), place the overflow in an addendum.

Not for attribution: The reporter may publish information provided by sources. The source can be quoted, though not by name. The reporter and communications expert must negotiate how the source will be identified (e.g., a company vice president, a source familiar with the negotiations).

Nut graf: This optional paragraph usually follows the lede. It presents the essence of an article in an attempt both to give the reader context and to lure them in to reading more.

Off the record: Nothing provided [off the record](#) can be used in print or broadcast. This is most frequently used to steer reporters in a particular direction while attempting to leave no fingerprints. Only experienced communicators should go off the record, and then only if they know and trust the reporter and media outlet.

On background: The reporter can use freely any information a source provides, either orally or in writing. However, the reporter cannot quote the source either by name or by other

identification. Going on background is useful for individuals on the front lines of media relations who prefer that quotes come from others in the company.

On the record: Anything a source says can be quoted and any information supplied can be used with no restrictions. Note well that this is the default option for all media exchanges. Documents, wall hangings, overheard conversations, and [nonverbal signals](#) are also fair game. Unless there is a compelling reason arguing against it, on the record interviews are the safest way to proceed.



Op-ed: Literally, opposite the editorial page. This is where guest writers can air their grievances and where the newspaper's regular columnists are found. Guest slots go most frequently to those with name recognition or with large organizations that lend them some legitimacy.

Package: The entirety of a video news piece, as in, "Let's run that package on the 11:00 broadcast."

Pitch: When you try to get a reporter interested in your story, you are making a pitch. Be selective with your pitches, lest you get a reputation as an ignorant time-waster.

Podcast: Prepare for these downloadable interview programs much as you would a radio talk show appearance.

Press conference (*see news conference*)

Press kit: The assemblage of materials designed to give reporters fundamental information about your business generally or about your specific issues. It can include news releases, fact sheets, executive bios, B-roll video, and a host of other items.

Press release (*see news release*)

Producer: The individual who actually makes decisions about and puts together a broadcast news piece. While the reporter gets all the face time, the producer actually does much of the heavy lifting. You would be wise to establish solid relationships with producers.

Pronouncer: A phonetic spelling intended to help broadcast reporters avoid embarrassing blunders (e.g., former Speaker of the House John Boehner (bay' ner)). Use these in your news releases when warranted.

Public affairs: This encompasses such fields as government relations, public policy, and lobbying.

Public relations: An attempt to influence the public with non-paid tactics (though that line has been blurred in recent years). Author's note: I tend to avoid this term as "PR" has a pejorative connotation in some quarters.

Pull quote: Where a publication highlights a particularly juicy quotation by putting it in a box alongside the body of the article.

Radio media tour (RMT): This takes place when your spokesperson talks remotely with a bunch of radio stations, one after the other. RMT's can be done either by telephone or in a broadcast studio.

Retraction: When a media outlet really blows it, they'll issue a retraction, in effect saying the story should never have been printed or broadcast.

Satellite media tour (SMT): You sit in a studio (or a room that has been converted to a temporary studio) and are interviewed remotely by TV stations from across the country. You'll stare into a camera while listening to your interviewer through an earpiece (see IFB above). Note that SMT's can be quite taxing both mentally and physically, so get sufficient rest and hydrate well *the day before*.

Scoop: Reporters live for scoops. Being the first to get a big story puts them and their outlet in a bright, shiny light.

Scrum: Occurs when a pack of reporters swarms a source, usually jostling and shouting questions with cameras whirring.

Sidebar: An adjunct to the main article, usually placed in a box next to the major story.



Sound bite: The juiciest of juicy quotes on audio or video. Sound bite lengths have been shrinking in recent decades, so work to ensure yours are tight and message-driven.

Source: That's you, the individual a reporter turns to in order to gain information.

Spin: Trying to pull the wool over a reporter's eyes by spinning them rarely works. Spin is a sin, so avoid it at all costs.

Standup: A television reporter delivering news on air from the field. It can be a live feed or a segment of a package.

Step and repeat: A flexible backdrop used during media interviews and photo shoots. It typically consists of a pattern of two logos replicated over the entirety. If your company does a lot of media, ordering one may be worth the investment to heighten your reputation.

Stringer: Most often a part-time or freelance reporter in a city removed from the home base. For instance, a local newspaper might employ a stringer to follow its Congressional delegation in Washington, D.C.

TelePrompter: Although TV news anchors look like they are gazing directly at you when reading the news, they are in reality reading from a [TelePrompter](#) located just above, below, or alongside the camera. It offers the illusion of eye contact while keeping them on script. TelePrompters can also be used when [speaking in public](#) in large halls.

Video news release (VNR): You already know what a news release is. A VNR is done in video form.

Videographer: Formerly known as a cameraman (yes, back in the day it was always a man). Now they are known as videographers, another example of title creep.

Wire service: These services deliver news to media outlets. They offer local, national, and international feeds, and include such other features as sports, weather, and lifestyle. The leading U.S. wire services are the Associated Press (AP) and Reuters.

I encourage you to use “A Reporter’s Glossary” when interacting with the press. You’ll not only be able to cut through some of the clutter, you’ll also appear more informed and, in the reporter’s eyes, more capable.

You may have other journalistic terms of art to suggest. By all means, [contact me with your ideas](#). This is intended to be a dynamic resource, so your submissions may appear in a future edition. Thank you in advance for your contribution.

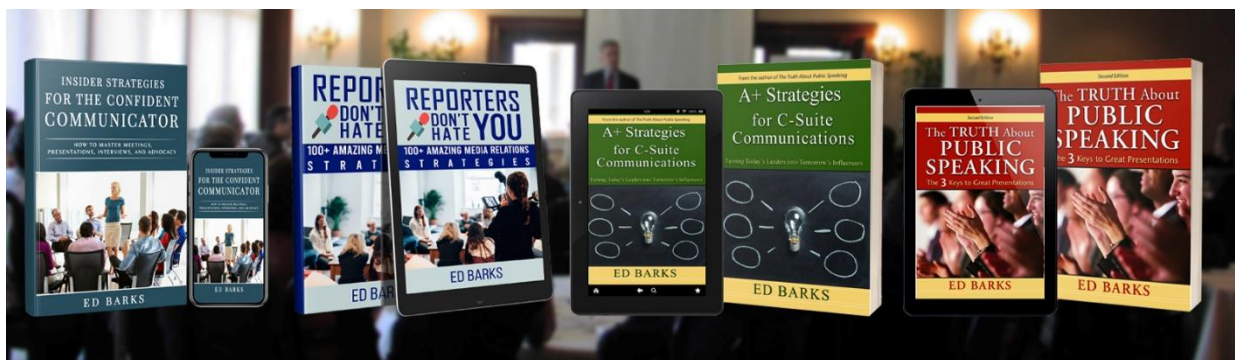


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About the Author

Author and communications strategy consultant **Ed Barks** works with communications and government relations executives who counsel their C-suite leaders, and with businesses and associations that need their communications strategy and messaging to deliver bottom line results. They gain an enhanced reputation, greater confidence, more opportunities for career advancement, and achievement of long-term business and public policy goals.

He is the **author of [four business books](#)**:

- *Insider Strategies for the Confident Communicator: How to Master Meetings, Presentations, Interviews, and Advocacy*
- *Reporters Don't Hate You: 100+ Amazing Media Relations Strategies*
- *A+ Strategies for C-Suite Communications*
- *The Truth About Public Speaking: The Three Keys to Great Presentations*



Ed has contributed to a variety of publications and is the former “Speaking Sense” columnist for the *Washington Business Journal*. He has also published [numerous research reports and position papers](#), including “A Buyer’s Guide To Communications Strategy Consultants.”

More than 5700 business leaders, association executives, scientists, government officials, entertainers, and other thought leaders thank Ed for sharpening their communications edge.

According to his clients, he “knows how to elicit peak performance.” They call him “a master at connecting with his audience” and “an effective educator,” and give his communications training workshops “two thumbs up!”

He has served as President of Barks Communications since founding it in 1997. He served a nine-year tenure on the Board of Governors of the **National Press Club** and joined the faculty of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Institute for Organization Management. He is a former member of the board of directors of the Institute of Management Consultants National Capital Region, and the Consultants Section Council of the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE).

An inside-the-Beltway veteran, Ed has spent more than three decades in Washington, D.C. He brings another critical perspective to his clients’ communications needs — that of a broadcaster and journalist. He knows firsthand the traits and techniques of the reporting trade, thanks to a decade of experience in radio broadcasting.

Ed also publishes the **C-suite Blueprint blog**. [Follow him there](#) to receive notification of each post.