The Flow of Information*

BEFORE SOMETHING HAPPENS OR DEVELOPS...
Those involved with an event may share or record their ideas, theories, or plans alone in a lab or personal journal, with friends or colleagues. This sharing of information is called the "invisible college."
- Personal communications, letters, e-mail, listserv messages, memoranda, telephone calls
- Personal documentation, such as diaries, lab data sheets, other personal notes and records, and early drafts of publications
- Formal discussions or informal conversations
- Conference presentations or papers, some published and some not
- Newsletters distributed in print, via e-mail, or on the Web
Information may be found on the web, in discussion lists, through pre-print servers, or conference minutes posted by societies. Usually, the ideas generated by the "invisible college" are simply not available to the public and don't exist as a form of information today, especially for things in the distant past.

WHEN SOMETHING HAPPENS OR DEVELOPS...
Early news releases may appear on TV or radio, in newspapers, over newswires, and on the Web.
INITIAL INFORMATION: FOR EVENTS (News reporting):
- First attempts at: "who", "what", "where" and "when"
- May not have much on "why"
- Quick information, sketchy reports

INITIAL INFORMATION: FOR SOCIAL OR CULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS
News reports appear throughout the entire time period when a social or cultural movement is developing (e.g., a report of a visit, lecture, or speech of someone within the movement).

ONE OR MORE DAYS AFTER...
- Something happens, articles appear in newspapers/newswires; information is disseminated on TV, radio, and the Web.
- Depending on what happened, the information may be prolific or sparse.

NEWSPAPERS, TV AND RADIO TRANSCRIPTS, NEWS SOURCES ON THE WEB
Audience: General public.
Coverage: Any subject of interest, newsworthy events, local coverage.
Written By: Professional journalists, some articles or presentations are contributed by specialists.
Timelines: Up-to-date coverage (one-half day to a week)
Length: 50 - 2,000 words.
Content: Dependent upon the type of article or presentation: analysis, statistics, graphics, photographs, editorial opinion; no bibliography or list of sources.
Slant: Tends to be mainstream/neutral.

A WEEK OR WEEKS AFTER...
- Articles may appear in general or subject-focused popular magazines.

MAGAZINES
Audience: General public and knowledgeable layperson.
Coverage: Popular topics, current affairs.
Written By: Professional journalists, rarely specialists, poets, fiction writers, essayists.
Timelines: Very current coverage (one week to several months).
Length: 250 - 5,000 words.
Content: As in newspapers, strong emphasis on reporting: who, what, where, when and why; general discussion; editorial opinion; graphics; photos; ads; usually no list of sources.
Slant: Articles may reflect the editorial bias/slant of the magazine.
A MONTH OR MONTHS AFTER...

- Articles appear in scholarly journals. This is also when scholars and researchers may start holding conferences on the topic and eventually, conference papers will be published.

JOURNALS AND CONFERENCE PAPERS

Audience: Scholars, specialists, and students.
Coverage: Research results, frequently theoretical in nature, may include data from studies.
Written By: Specialists in the field; usually scholars with PhDs.
Timelines: Current coverage (6 months - 3 years).
Length: >2,500 - 10,000 words.
Content: Detailed examination, statistical analysis, graphics, bibliography usually included.
Slant: Objective/neutral viewpoint, may be difficult for a layperson to understand because of technical language or jargon, often sponsored by professional associations.

ONE TO THREE YEARS LATER...

- Books treating the subject or incident are published, often within one to three years. Some topics may generate books for decades to come. This is particularly true for researching social or cultural developments. Published conference proceedings begin to appear.

BOOKS

Audience: Ranges from the general public to specialists.
Coverage: In-depth coverage of a topic, compilation of scholarly articles on a topic.
Written By: Specialists/scholars.
Timelines: varies (1 - 3 years plus).
Length: 150+ pages.
Content: varies from general discussion to detailed analysis; usually includes extensive bibliography.
Slant: Perspective dependent on author, may be sponsored or published by professional associations.

FIVE TO TEN OR MORE YEARS LATER...

- As time passes (2 - 10 years), the knowledge and understanding of a topic or event becomes "established." It then appears in reference sources, such as encyclopedias, handbooks, statistical compilations.

REFERENCE SOURCES

Audience: Ranges from general public to specialists.
Coverage: Factual information, the "Big Picture," overviews, and summaries.
Written By: Specialists/scholars.
Timelines: Depends -- articles typically appear in encyclopedias four to ten years later.
Content: convenient summaries of knowledge to date; data, statistics, directories, bibliographies.
Slant: objective/neutral viewpoint; may be sponsored or published by professional associations.

* Adapted from Sharon Hogan's original 1980 "Flow of Information" conceptual approach to library instruction, by Diane Zwemer, Instructional Services Coordinator College Library, the UCLA Library and used with permission.