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Batty, Craig and Cain, Sandra *- Media Writing: A Practical Introduction (2nd edition)*, Basingstoke, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 296 ISBN: 9781137529541

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In the introduction of Craig Batty and Sandra Cain's book *Media Writing: A Practical Edition*, they make a very valid point: "A story is still a story" (15-16). They point out that it is the story that is paramount in media, regardless of the platform. With that start, it is refreshing to read a book that is about storytelling in the media, although, as the authors point out, the different platforms, including digital platforms, do play a role.

Batty and Cain have written a book that brings together several different forms of media writing into one publication: journalism (or newswriting as they call it), public relations, advertising and screenwriting. According to the authors, this was done to counteract the typically narrow format of books about media writing that focuses on either one type of media (e.g. journalism or public relations or screenwriting) or one type of platform (e.g. print or web). The authors suggest, "media writing can be understood as a discipline in its own right that has great potential for shared concepts and the transferability of skills" (1). And that theme echoes throughout the book.

This book is the second edition of a book that was originally released in 2010 and the changes in media delivery platforms since 2010 is a good reason for the update. In a similar way to the last edition, this book provides tasks and career advice and some case studies, which makes it a valuable textbook for introductory media writing courses that have the task of introducing students to a broad range of media writing. It is clear, well written and very easy to read. What is important, however, is that the authors have included key theories and concepts that underpin the different forms of writing. It is, therefore, not merely a how-to manual but a text that provides a solid foundation for students in the practice of writing. Thus, the authors have provided a text, at an introductory level, that neatly synthesises theory and practice.

The Introduction firmly embeds media writing in communication studies by providing definitions of communication and tying storytelling, in all its forms, into those definitions. We are also introduced to aspects of digital storytelling, and the changes it has wrought to the different forms of writing. Each chapter takes these ideas and we are given examples of how technology has changed writing. However, the authors are careful to point out that "the message" really hasn't changed: "Public relations is still public relations, and screenwriting is still screenwriting. Their stories are the same as they always have been no matter how they are presented" (16). This is a crucial point throughout the book: "The technology of storytelling should not be confused with the art of storytelling" (50). In other words, while there may be more bells and whistles to tell a story, and the authors note interactive content, multimedia and archives as important elements of digital storytelling, the basics of good storytelling remains.

Furthermore, one of the final comments in the Introduction is that there are remarkable similarities between the different writing forms and that, again, is a theme that can be seen throughout the book: good storytelling, accuracy, well-written, audience-aware.

After the introduction, Chapters 2, 3 and 4 discuss what we typically understand as journalism – newswriting for online and print (Chapter 2), broadcast (Chapter 3), and writing for magazines (Chapter 4). Chapters 5 and 6 examine what could be considered the writing of persuasion – public relations (Chapter 5) and advertising (Chapter 6), although it should be remembered, and the authors point this out, that PR is not advertising is not PR. The final two chapters investigate screenwriting, both fictional (Chapter 7) and factual (Chapter 8).

Each of the chapters embeds practice within social, cultural and historical contexts. For example, in Chapter 2 (Print and Online newswriting), there are discussions around standard journalistic tools including who, what, when, where, how and why, finding the news angle, and information about copyright and libel, to name a few. But these discussions are embedded in the context of newswriting – the landscape, the history, the print/online journalists' role in a society. The three newswriting chapters are structured in a way that recognises the similarities between each form: the environments journalists work in; their qualities; ethical and legal considerations; news values; sources and sourcing information; interviewing; structure and language; and, different forms of writing in each of the genres. However, each chapter also provides key differences. For example, in Chapter 3 (Broadcast) are included such things as "news mix", contributions from citizen journalists (user-generated content), writing for the *spoken* word, and using visuals effectively. In this chapter, as well, there is a discussion around convergence to "create a 'better' experience for their audiences" (82). In the next iteration of this book, I wouldn't be surprised if chapters two and three themselves are converged; increasingly our students are required to have writing, audio, visual and online skills.

The main addition to this edition, as could be expected, is a discussion around digital platforms and the possibilities and limitations of technology for newswriting, public relations, advertising and screenwriting. The authors note blogging and vlogging, social media, online news publications and ezines, content streaming, podcasting, writing interactive narratives, writing for web pages and the synthesis of text and visual elements, writing digital copy, and writing for multimedia as newer platforms and tools that writers are using. And while some of these are mentioned in specific chapters, for example vlogging is noted in the PR chapter, it is easy to see that media practitioners in each of the forms can, and do, use each of these digital platforms in "creating and sending messages" (5).

Interestingly, there is no conclusion. In the previous edition (2010), the authors included a final chapter called 'Media Writing and Digital Technology', which signposted what may happen but also offered thoughts on crossovers between the different forms. A conclusion in this book would have provided the opportunity for the authors to summarise what they have said but also to discuss ideas such as convergence more deeply, particularly as the boundaries between each of the different media writing genres become more blurred. On that note, the conclusion could also have explored transmedia storytelling, which, although it is not specifically about writing, would again have demonstrated the blurring of the boundaries and demonstrated how crucial it is for media writers to have multiple skills across the different forms.

One of the strengths of the book is that it gives students a gentle introduction to theoretical concepts such as gatekeeping, narrative theory and narrative structure, news values, convergence, PR theories such as Grunig and Hunt's four models of PR, the importance of audiences (and/or publics) and the different terminologies in the different writing genres. A criticism I do have is that references should have been updated. For example, Randall's *The Universal Journalist* has had several editions since the 2000 book cited in Chapter 2 – the 4th edition was released in 2011. (There is also a 2016 edition but that, of course, was published too late for this book.) I also note that at one stage the authors dipped into technological determinism by stating that "the medium is the message" (182) in Chapter 6 (Advertising). This jarred slightly as the authors insist throughout the book that digital platforms, while having some effect on practice, are a tool and the story itself is the message.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book and intend to recommend it for our introductory media writing course. The case studies are interesting and the tasks provide excellent classroom activities. And, as a colleague said when I showed her the book, it is a text that students can use and refer to throughout their degrees. There is a quote in the Introduction that summarises nicely what the authors have set out to do:

> Media writing is constantly evolving. No sooner do we have new ways of sending messages, they are replaced by newer ways, and for updated and expanded platforms. In short, advances in digital technology change the way that media writing is both produced and consumed – from Twitter as a news source, to online advertising campaigns for products, to webcasting for screen drama. That said, there are a greater number of writing skills and practices that transcend the platform on which they appear. A story is still a story, and purpose is still purpose. Perhaps digital technology is offering more variations in narrative technique than it is new ways of understanding the core aspects of writing (15-16).

Media Writing is available in paperback and as an ebook.

Batty, C. & Cain, S. (2010) *Media Writing: A Practical Introduction.* Basingstoke, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan.

About the reviewer

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