



The Sift[®] News Goggles

Covering a newsworthy trial

April 12, 2021

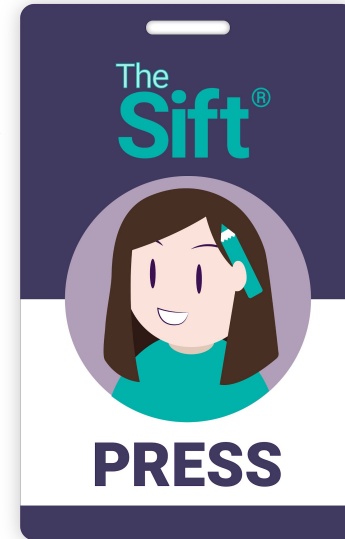
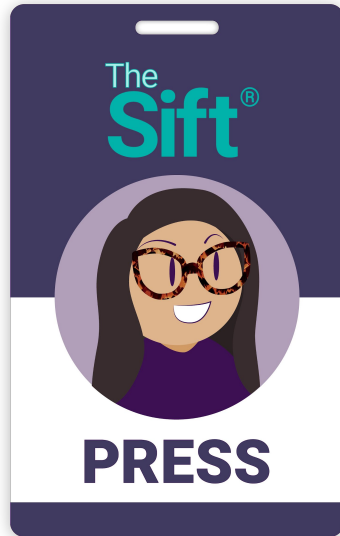
Warning:

This activity includes information related to a fatal encounter with police that some people may find disturbing.



Reminders

- Be sure to view these slides in presentation mode.
- Suzannah and Hannah, former reporters who work at NLP, are going to help you examine this topic through journalists' eyes.



As high-profile court cases unfold, journalists monitor and sort through hours of proceedings in real time. News organizations work to spotlight and explain standout moments for their audiences, who may be aware of a trial but aren't following it gavel-to-gavel.



In this edition of News Goggles, let's look at the ongoing trial of Derek Chauvin, a former Minneapolis police officer charged in the death of George Floyd. In particular, let's compare how local, national and international news organizations handled the April 5 testimony of Medaria Arradondo, the Minneapolis police chief.

Newsrooms may use a narrow or wider lens to frame their coverage, depending on their audience. For example, an international audience may be less familiar with the case and need a broader view, while local audiences may be interested in more detailed coverage. What parts of the trial did different newsrooms feature? Which comments from the police chief did they choose to quote? Grab your news goggles!



Minneapolis
Star Tribune

Here's one local story.

Chauvin used excessive force, unsanctioned technique, police chief testifies

By Chao Xiong, Paul Walsh and Rochelle Olson Star Tribune | APRIL 6, 2021 — 7:38AM



COURT TV/ POOL

Minneapolis Police Chief Medaria Arradondo testified Monday that Derek Chauvin's actions on May 25 were not "part of our training ... ethics or values."

Let's take a closer look at the first few "grafs" (journalist-speak for "paragraphs") of this news report ...

Minneapolis Police Chief Medaria Arradondo testified Monday that fired officer Derek Chauvin used excessive force and defied his own training and the department's mission of compassion when he knelt on George Floyd's neck as Floyd pleaded for his life.

Arradondo's testimony came amid a consistent voice of disapproval from key department leaders that began last week with similar statements from the head of the homicide unit. Testimony wrapped Monday with the department's former head of training, who echoed Arradondo's sentiments.




My old newspaper! I know from working as a Star Tribune reporter (we called it the “Strib,” for short) that the newsroom focuses on stories about Minnesota. Many of its readers live or work in the Twin Cities region, including Minneapolis, where the trial is taking place. This court case is one of the most important news stories for local readers, and the Strib provides more details on the ongoing court proceedings — in the second graf, for instance — than news organizations based elsewhere.



"Once Mr. Floyd had stopped resisting — and certainly once he was in distress and trying to verbalize that — that should have stopped," Arradondo said after recounting department policy on when to use force vs. de-escalation tactics.

"There's an initial reasonableness of trying to just get him under control in the first few seconds," the chief said, "but once there was no longer any resistance, and clearly when Mr. Floyd was no longer responsive and even motionless, to continue to apply that level of force to a person prone out, handcuffed behind their back, that in no way shape or form is anything that is by policy, part of our training and is certainly not part of our ethics or values."



Here's the first quote in the story. After listening to hours of testimony from the police chief, Strib journalists had to decide which remarks to put first. These initial quotes offer information or insights that journalists found especially important or newsworthy. Also notice that the Strib used a fairly extensive quote (rather than a partial quote or paraphrase), likely due to its audience's interest in this case.

Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder

MPD Chief Arradondo: Chauvin didn't respect George Floyd's sanctity of life

April 5, 2021 - by MSR News Online



Minneapolis Police Chief Medaria Arradondo, at the trial of Derek Chauvin, who was charged with killing George Floyd.

Here's another local story.

According to its website, the Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder is the state's "oldest Black-owned newspaper." How might its audience impact coverage choices? How does this headline, for instance, compare with the Strib's?

MPD Chief Arradondo: Chauvin didn't respect George Floyd's sanctity of life

April 5, 2021 - by MSR News Online



Minneapolis Police Chief Medaria Arradondo, at the trial of Derek Chauvin, who was charged with killing George Floyd.




I'm struck by "sanctity of life" in the headline, which was a comment made by the police chief when he testified. It stands out to me that the Spokesman-Recorder chose to feature these words in its headline. This is a humanitarian aspect that I haven't seen highlighted in other news headlines. For example, the headline on the Strib's story that we just looked at was: "Chauvin used excessive force, unsanctioned technique, police chief testifies." Which headline do you like better? Why?

The second week of the Derek Chauvin murder trial kicked off with the much-anticipated testimony of Minneapolis Police Chief Medaria Arradondo who outright condemned former police officer Derek Chauvin in the killing of George Floyd. He said Chauvin's use of force was in violation of Minneapolis Police Department (MPD) policy.

"Once there was no longer any resistance," said Chief Arradondo, "and clearly when Mr. Floyd was no longer responsive and even motionless, to continue to apply that level of force to a person prone out, handcuffed behind their back—that in no way shape or form is anything that is by policy. It is not part of our training, and it is certainly not part of our ethics or our values."

Arradondo, who became the first **Black police chief of Minneapolis in 2017**, spent the first of his more than two-hour testimony fielding questions from prosecutor Steve Schleicher about his 32-year history with the MPD. It was established through his testimony that he's served in every rank within the department.



In the third graf, the Spokesman-Recorder mentions that Arradondo "became the first Black police chief in Minneapolis in 2017," a detail that would be of interest to its audience. (Other news organizations, such as NBC News and BBC News, also mention this.) Do you agree that this is a good detail to include in a story about the police chief's testimony? Why or why not?

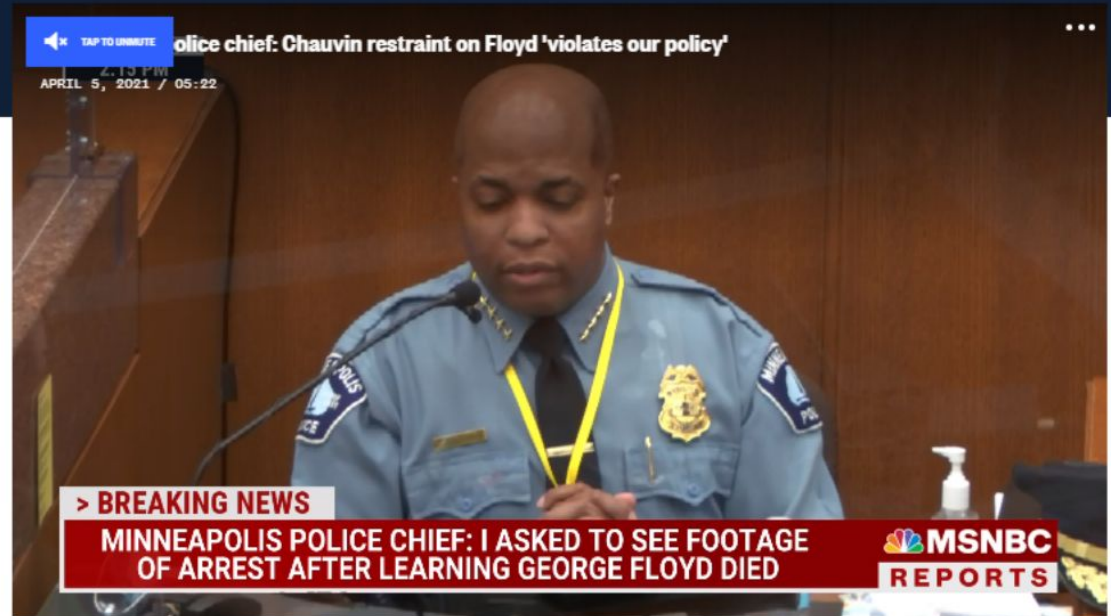
NBC News

Now, here's a story from a national news organization.

Let's take a closer look at the first few paragraphs of this news report to see how it compares to the others ...

Derek Chauvin 'absolutely' violated policy, Minneapolis police chief testifies

"Once Mr. Floyd had stopped resisting, and certainly once he was in distress and trying to verbalize that, that should have stopped," Medaria Arradondo testified.



April 5, 2021, 6:50 PM CDT / Updated April 5, 2021, 7:49 PM CDT

By Janelle Griffith

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Last June, nearly a month after [the death of George Floyd](#), the chief of the Minneapolis Police Department issued a blistering statement about the officers involved in Floyd's arrest.

Chief Medaria Arradondo, the first Black person to hold the position, described Floyd's death as "tragic" and said it "was not due to a lack of training."

"This was murder – it wasn't a lack of training," Arradondo said, adding that that was why he "took swift action" and [fired the four officers involved in the incident](#) a day after Floyd's death.

"The officers knew what was happening – one intentionally caused it, and the others failed to prevent it," Arradondo said in June.


On Monday – this time from the witness stand – Arradondo again rebuked [Derek Chauvin](#), the former officer [who prosecutors said knelt on Floyd's neck for 9 minutes, 29 seconds](#). It marked a rare instance of a police chief's testifying against a police officer. (Arradondo also testified in the trial of Mohamed Noor, [a former police officer who was convicted of killing Justine Damond in 2017](#).)



On competitive, high-profile stories, news organizations look for ways to set their coverage apart. NBC made its news report distinct by taking a different approach to begin the story. It flashes back in time and leads with a powerful past quote from the police chief. What do you think of this approach?

"Once Mr. Floyd had stopped resisting, and certainly once he was in distress and trying to verbalize that, that should have stopped," Arradondo responded.

"There's an initial reasonableness in trying to just get him under control in the first few seconds," Arradondo said. "But once there was no longer any resistance, and clearly when Mr. Floyd was no longer responsive and even motionless, to continue to apply that level of force to a person prone out, handcuffed behind their back, that in no way, shape or form is anything that is by policy. It is not part of our training, and it is certainly not part of our ethics or values."



NBC also includes the same part of the police chief's testimony that is quoted in the Strib and Spokesman-Recorder; it just appears later in the story. It is interesting that several news organizations selected this quote as especially important. Why do you think that is?

BBC News

George Floyd: Derek Chauvin violated policy, Minneapolis police chief says

19 hours ago



George Floyd death



Finally, here's a story from an international news organization.


Let's take a closer look at the first few graphs to see how this report compares to the others ...

The police chief of Minneapolis has testified that ex-officer Derek Chauvin violated the agency's policy on force during the arrest of George Floyd.

Chief Medaria Arradondo said the way Mr Chauvin restrained Mr Floyd was not in line with training and "certainly not part of our ethics and our values".

The chief fired Mr Chauvin and the three other officers involved days after Mr Floyd's death last May.

Mr Chauvin, who is on trial for murder, has denied the charges against him.




For its international audience, BBC takes a wider-lens approach. Its story recaps the police chief's testimony in a more general way and includes basic details of the case sooner. In contrast with certain local and national news organizations, BBC also used a partial quote rather than a full quote. Do you prefer a broader or more detailed approach to this news story?

The police chief of Minneapolis has testified that ex-officer Derek Chauvin violated the agency's policy on force during the arrest of George Floyd.

Chief Medaria Arradondo said the way Mr Chauvin restrained Mr Floyd was not in line with training and "certainly not part of our ethics and our values".

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Here's a behind-the-scenes look at how one journalist (me!) covered a high-profile murder trial for Reuters of an ex-Chicago police officer. Reuters, like the BBC, has a global audience. I covered the trial remotely, like many journalists who are covering Chauvin's case. I had quite the set-up at my desk: I watched live local trial coverage on a small TV. I recorded the audio of testimony and opening and closing statements on a cellphone so I could double (or quadruple!) check quotes later. On a second cell phone, I texted a colleague who was in the courtroom as well as sources to verify and clarify information. I also had double computer screens: On one screen, I monitored tweets of journalists and news organizations also covering the trial. On the second, I wrote stories. My landline was reserved for calls with Reuters colleagues located outside of the Chicago bureau. It was a lot to juggle, but for a good cause — providing as fair and accurate coverage as possible!

News Goggles: Next steps

Related:

- [“The trial of Derek Chauvin, and the debate about cameras in court”](#) (Jon Allsop, Columbia Journalism Review).
- [“How A Minnesota Paper Is Covering The Chauvin Trial From The Black Perspective”](#) (Ari Shapiro, NPR).

Discuss: Have you followed news coverage of Chauvin’s trial? If so, how? How do news organizations tailor coverage for their audiences? Whose coverage of the trial do you like best? Why?

Idea: Pick two news reports related to the police chief’s testimony. Using a Venn diagram, take notes on similarities and differences, focusing on how the stories begin, quotes and other details. Share your findings with the class.



This exercise originated in the April 12, 2021, issue of The Sift® newsletter from the News Literacy Project. You can read archives of the newsletter and subscribe [here](#).



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