

0. NEWSFLASH! - Story Preface
1. TITANIC - INSIDE AND OUT
2. TITANIC'S CREW
3. MAIDEN VOYAGE
4. THE PASSENGERS
5. ICEBERGS
6. TITANIC'S WIRELESS
7. ICE WARNINGS IGNORED
8. ICEBERG RIGHT AHEAD
9. A DOOMED SHIP
10. DOOMED PASSENGERS
11. WIRELESS TRANSMISSIONS
12. RESCUE OF THE LIVING
13. RECOVERY OF THE DEAD
- 14. NEWSFLASH!**
15. HEROES
16. A DISINTEGRATING VESSEL
17. THE REST OF THE STORY



Confusion was uppermost when newspapers reported early stories of the *Titanic* disaster. Some headlines proclaimed that everyone was safe. Other headlines were closer to the facts. Images online, courtesy Library of Congress.

In the days before instant news, people learned about tragedies from the newspaper. Journalists, ever eager for a sensational scoop, pressed for the story. But while the survivors were still at sea, no one could be sure what had really happened.

Confusion, caused in large part by conflicting telegrams from ostensibly knowledgeable sources, ruled the day. Three examples make the point.

- The first telegram, at 4:57 a.m. on April 15th, indicates no loss of life. (Note the name of the ship's owner "Ismay.")
- The next, at 5:26 a.m., says that *Titanic* is proceeding to Cape Race (about 400 miles from the place where she rammed the iceberg) and that all passengers were transferred, most likely to the *Virginian*.
- One can only imagine the horror caused by the third telegram - at 10:15 a.m. on April 15th - advising *Titanic* had "foundered" with only "675 souls mostly women and children saved."

Newspapers went to press without full knowledge of what happened. Speculation ruled the day.

Thereafter, Charles Bigham (also known as Lord Mersey) conducted an official "Wreck Commissioner's Inquiry" which lasted 36 days. The final judgment of the court is telling:

The Court, having carefully inquired into the circumstances of the casualty, finds, for the reasons appearing in the annex hereto, that the loss of the said ship was due to collision with an iceberg, brought about by the excessive speed at which the vessel was being navigated.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/NEWSFLASH-Fatal-Voyage-The-Titanic>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/NEWSFLASH-Fatal-Voyage-The-Titanic>

Questions 2 Ponder

Should Journalists Only Report Facts?

What would have motivated *Titanic's* owner Ismay, who was on the ship when *Titanic* hit the iceberg, to send telegrams inaccurately describing events? Is it possible, or not possible, that he didn't have command of the facts?

Assess the likely impact of Ismay's three separate telegrams, variously describing *Titanic's* disaster and aftermath, on the loved ones of the ship's crew and passengers.

Are journalists better-off waiting to confirm facts before publishing a story—or—are reporters right to publish whatever they hear as quickly as they hear it (even if they are totally wrong)?

If you had someone aboard a ship that sank, would you want to hear accurate information (even if that meant waiting for the truth)—or—would you want to hear about things as they developed (even if that meant you first heard your loved one was OK, only to learn that wasn't actually true)?

Is Publishing Inaccurate Information Ever an Acceptable Risk?

Is it an acceptable risk if the published "facts" are not accurate (as was the case for the first reports of *Titanic's* demise)?

Who bears the impact of inaccurate information if the published reports are wrong?

Does it make a difference if inaccuracies are published deliberately or innocently? Why (or why not)? What should happen after the publisher of inaccurate information realizes the mistake(s)?

Do you think that the publisher of inaccurate information might ever have ulterior motives? If so, what might those motives be?

Do you think that truth will ultimately "come out?" Should the deliberate publishing of inaccurate information carry any consequences? What should those consequences be?

Should Consequences Apply in Cases of Inaccurately Reported News?

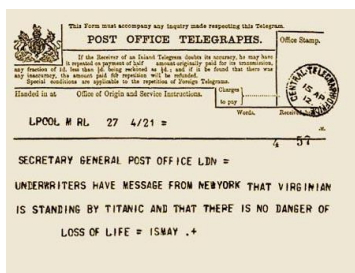
Should there be consequences for publishing inaccurate information about a disaster? Why, or why not?

If there are consequences for publishing inaccurate information, thereby causing family members to experience an even-worse situation, what should those consequences be?

If there are no consequences for publishing wrong information, what would cause journalists to be careful before they publish their reports?

Was the fault for *Titanic's* inaccurate news the responsibility of Ismay, the ship's owner, or the journalists who merely reported what they were told?

Media Stream

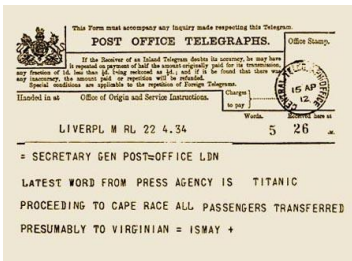


Titanic - First Telegram Reporting Disaster

Telegram, courtesy Royal Mail Streamline. Image online, courtesy U.S. National Postal Museum.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Titanic-First-Telegram-Reporting-Disaster>

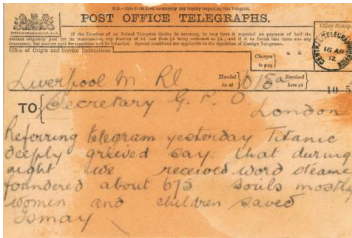


Titanic - Second Telegram Reporting Disaster

Telegram, courtesy Royal Mail Streamline. Image online, courtesy U.S. National Postal Museum.

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Titanic - Telegram Reporting Loss of Ship and Lives

Telegram, courtesy Royal Mail Streamline. Image online, courtesy the British Postal Museum and Archive.

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Lord Mersey - John Charles Bigham

Image online, courtesy Encyclopedia Titanica.

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