



## Learning from journalism history

Journalism history has much that it can teach us about where we are now — this is why some scholars spend their entire careers studying it. Sometimes the very specific instances and cases from our past can say a lot about our future. Yet their work doesn't fill this Wikipedia [“History of journalism”](#) page, which is more of a country-by-country approach. Other timelines do [a bit better](#).

### Class activities on three levels:

**Flashlight:** Notice how slowly technology progressed in the past and how quickly it progresses now. Consider: Are there any other trends you see in how journalism has progressed? What is it progressing toward? What do you think journalism will look like in another 100 years? Create a collage of images that make your point.

**Spotlight:** How would you explain digital technology to a person from the industrial 19<sup>th</sup> century or the agricultural 18<sup>th</sup> century? Consider that words and ideas you take for granted now didn't exist in those eras. How would you justify the functionality and pervasiveness of the media technologies we now have? Choose a historical figure, like Frederick Douglass or Tom Paine, and write them a letter telling how we live today.

**Searchlight:** Mass media have created shared social narratives. The classic examples are during times of war or great national tragedy, such as World War II or the Kennedy assassinations. But today, some have suggested mass communication no longer exists (see [“The End of Mass Communications” by Steven H. Chaffee and Miriam J. Metzger](#)). Do fragmented media consumption habits and the “demassification” of media affect the shared social narratives and histories that society has experienced for such a long time? To what end?

**Extra credit:** Journalists focus on the present. Their history often doesn't receive the attention it should. Myths abound. How many errors or incomplete items can you spot in the University of North Carolina capsule history listed above? Show your sources. (Here's a starter: [The first press in the Americas was in Mexico City](#), more than a century before a printing press came to New England.)

