THE 6 MOST IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS OF NEWS

TIMELINESS

If it happened today—rather than yesterday—it just might be news.
Journalists stress current information—stories occurring today or yesterday, not several weeks ago—and try to report it ahead of their competitors. When reporting a story that occurred even hours earlier, journalists look for fresh angles and new details around which to build their stories. If background is necessary, they usually keep it to a minimum and weave it throughout the story.

IMPACT

If it affects readers—physically or emotionally—it just might be news.
Reporters stress important information that has an impact on their audience: stories that affect, involve or interest thousands of readers or viewers. Tax increases that take money from my paycheck matter more than tax increases that don’t.

PROMINENCE

If it happened to a recognizable person, it just might be news.
If a plumber catches a cold, no one cares, except that person’s friends and family. If the U.S. president catches a cold, the stock market could lose 500 points.

PROXIMITY

If it happened in a place that readers feel a connection to—someplace they feel allied with, rather than some “faraway” place—it just might be news.
The closer an event is to home, the more newsworthy it becomes: a hurricane in New Orleans matters more than an earthquake in Pakistan. However, proximity can be psychological: stories in Iraq feel “close to home” because America has troops there, so an explosion there is “local,” while an explosion in, say, Yemen, is not.

SINGULARITY (AKA NOVELTY)

If something has never happened before, it just might be news.
Deviations from the normal—unexpected or unusual events, conflicts or controversies, drama or change—are more newsworthy than the commonplace.

CONFLICT OR CONTROVERSY

If somebody is struggling with a problem, it just might be news.
Two people arguing about a social issue is more newsworthy than two people who agree about that issue. The tension between the subjects creates the conflict that often makes a story dramatic and interesting to read. While conflict between groups can be viewed as negative news, it often provides readers and viewers with different opinions about policies and problems.