

You are going to read an article about media coverage of the weather. Seven paragraphs have been removed from the extract. Choose from the paragraphs A-H the one which fits each gap (37-43). There is one extra paragraph you do not need to use. Mark your answers on the separate answer sheet.

How popular are weather reports?

Getting up early on the morning of January 24th, I thought the city seemed oddly quiet, but it wasn't until I looked out the window that I saw the snow. The "Surprise Storm" that had hit the East Coast of the United States that morning was making earnest headway, having dumped as much as twenty inches of snow on Raleigh, eight and a half on Philadelphia, and six on New York. This was a big shock considering the unusually mild weather that had been settled over New York as recently as just a day ago.

37

Forecasters had seen a low-pressure system moving toward the southeast on the National Weather Service's satellite pictures, but all the major computer models indicated the storm would head back out to sea. As Elliot Abrams, the chief forecaster and senior vice-president of the State College, Pennsylvania, forecasting company Accu-Weather, told me later, "Who am I to say the numerical guidance is wrong?"

38

Ever since widespread weather-data collection began, shortly after the invention of the telegraph, in the 1840s, accurate forecasting has been the goal of the weather report. But in recent years TV weather has given increasing time and emphasis to live pictures of weather, usually in the viewing area, but sometimes elsewhere if the weather is atrocious and the pictures dramatic enough – and this is transforming the modern-day weather report.

39

The Weather Channel acknowledged this in a recent ad created by Chiat/Day which depicted weather enthusiasts in the guise of sports fanatics, their faces painted like weather maps, rooting for lows and highs in a fictional "weather bar" known as the *Front*. At the same time, the news, which once stuck to human affairs, now includes an ever-growing number of weather-related stories.

40

And the weather's upward climb in the newsworthiness stakes has also coincided with another trend; wild weather is also now a standard component of reality-based programming on Fox and the Discovery Channel. And in book publishing recent best-sellers like *"The Perfect Storm"*, *"Into Thin Air"*, and *"Isaac's Storm"* have helped create a hot market for weather-related disaster stories.

41

This newsier approach to weather, with its focus on weather events to help boost ratings, means certain kinds of weather get overblown while less telegenic but no less significant weather is overlooked. Take heat, for example. Eight out of the ten warmest years on record occurred in the nineteen-nineties, the two others in the eighties. (If the planet continues to warm at the present rate, some climatologists predict an increase in global surface temperatures of between 2.5 and 6 degrees by the year 2100.)

42

This is an old complaint – that ratings-driven, storm-of-the-century-style coverage makes it harder to get accurate information about the weather – and it has been heard here in New York at least as far back as when the over-hyped Hurricane Gloria struck in 1985.

43

However grateful we may be for this lack of danger, through war and bloodshed, it creates a psychological need for some kind of real-life drama on our TV screens. So, when a big storm comes along, you can almost feel the nation girding its loins as people gratefully turn their attention away from "Who Wants to be a Millionaire?"

A

But heat doesn't do particularly well on television. You can track down a blizzard on Doppler radar as it moves up a map of the East coast, but you can't watch heat. And drought, as Robert Henson, a writer at the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research and the author of a book about TV weather-casting, told me recently, "is the ultimate non-event. You usually hear about drought only when some rain event comes along to end it."

B

From 1989 to 1995, according to the Centre for Media and Public Affairs, weather coverage wasn't among the top-ten topics on the nightly network news. In 1996, it was eighth, and in 1998 it was fourth – more than eleven hundred weather-related stories ran altogether.

C

For the previous three weeks, unreasonably balmy conditions had been the topic of small talk everywhere: Why was it so warm? Wasn't it weird that there was no snow? Was it another sign of global warming? Then, wouldn't you know, the first big storm of the season comes along, and the National Weather Service, the federal government's agency, doesn't put out an advisory until ten o'clock the night before. (The N.W.S. had been on the network news just a week earlier, announcing new weather super computers, which are supposed to make forecasts even more accurate.)

D

Opinions concerning the causes of global warming remain highly contentious. But many climatologists now believe that rising temperatures produce more extreme weather - not just more frequent heatwaves and droughts but also more storms and floods.

E

But it's not only the broadcasters' doing: the public's fascination with wild weather is apparently inexhaustible. We live in peaceful, prosperous times, when the only tangible external threat to home and hearth is weather.

F

This is not so much a new market, though, as a revival of one of the oldest genres in publishing. This increased in Mather's 1684 book "*Remarkable Providences*", which includes several chapters on extreme weather around New England and was one of the early thrillers of the New World.

G

In some respects, these broadcasts seem more like news than like "weather" in the traditional sense. Weather "events" are hyped, covered, and analysed, just like politics and sports.

H

I turned on the Weather Channel, as I always do for big storms. The forecast may have been inadequate, but the live coverage was superb. In New York City, the Weather Channel was out in force, filming cars driving through slushy puddles and reporters sticking rulers into the snow in Central Park. I settled in for a little voyeuristic weather-watching, an experience that has become a condition of modern life.