Public memory is central to the relationship between journalism and memorialization. At the outset, both journalism and memorialization are intended for a mass audience. Journalism at its core seeks to provide individuals with information about what is new, the news of the day. Memorialization at its core seeks to provide a process through which to remember something, a person, place, or event. To remember is to be necessarily selective, at least in most cases. While one could record every detail of her or his life through technological means (and there are a few examples of this practice in action, such as Gordon Bell’s impressive and ambitious project), recording every detail of one’s life is not yet the norm in 2014. Currently, memorialization remains a selective process.

In the process of memorialization, the aspects that must be selected usually consist of (at least) three categories (see Table 4.1). Broadly speaking, these three categories are form, content, and context. The form of memorialization is perhaps the most important aspect, because this determines the material of which the memorial will consist. At the most basic level of form, there are physical memorials, which exist in the real world, and virtual memorials, which exist in the virtual world. The content of the memorials, whether physical or virtual, usually consists of some combination of text, images, sound, and video. In the physical world, the content may be either handwritten or
machine generated or both. In the virtual world, the content is uploaded in some form or fashion to a website, server, or social networking site. The context of a physical memorial usually reveals additional information about both the individual or group being memorialized and (in some cases) the individuals who are participating in the process of memorialization. In a physical memorial to a car accident victim, for example, a physical cross may stand along the roadside near the crash site. The context of a virtual memorial is at least to some extent dependent on the particular characteristics of the virtual space (i.e., the qualities of Facebook or Twitter or YouTube) and it may (at least in certain cases) have a broader reach than a physical memorial. Virtual memorials also tend to provide a more interactive context for communication than do physical memorials.

At the broadest level, I assert that the goal of memorialization is message construction. The outcome of the three aspects (form, content, and context) is a message that is constructed for (or at least available to) a mass audience.

Consider, as one example of a physical memorial, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. It is constructed in physical form, contains primarily text, and is placed in a location of honor in the capital city of the United States. The message constructed