
INTRODUCTION: THE NEW JOURNALIST

Journalism is changing – and so are journalists. As someone considering entering the trade, or just taking your first steps in it, you are in an enviable position. Envidable, certainly, to those who have spent some time in the job and are struggling to keep up with the speed at which things are now moving. Envidable because you will take for granted the new realities of journalism. Realities such as that, where once journalists tended to consider themselves as newspaper journalists, or magazine journalists, or broadcasters, the new journalist is likely to work in several media instead of just one.

What has brought about this change? In a word, or rather two: the internet. Because of the internet, the way news is obtained is undergoing a transformation which is nothing short of revolutionary. Increasingly, the internet is the news medium of choice for many people – particularly young people.

Don't give up. I didn't even get an interview at the BBC after university. MARTHA KEARNEY, POLITICAL EDITOR
BBC2 NEWSNIGHT AND PRESENTS RADIO 4 WOMAN'S HOUR

Almost all publishers of newspapers and magazines, and broadcasters of radio and television programmes, now have a web version of their product. And those websites, increasingly, use elements from all the traditional media in order to tell their stories: text and still pictures from the newspapers and magazines, audio and moving images from broadcasting.

So, whereas the old journalist only learned the specific skills required to tell a story in one medium, the new journalist is likely to learn techniques from various media. And, crucially, whereas the traditional journalist is used to simply telling the reader, listener or viewer what the news is, the new journalist understands how the internet has changed all that. The new journalist understands that the audience wants to be part of a dialogue. It wants to take part by posting its comments on a news item, by casting a vote on a burning issue

or by posting views on a bulletin board. (For more on this subject, turn to Section 1, Chapter 4.)

Don't [choose journalism] because you are 'good at English,' or if you baulk at the thought of knocking on the door of bereaved families or asking awkward questions of people who don't want you there, or if you don't like standing out in the cold for long hours. DAVID WOODING, WHITEHALL EDITOR, THE SUN

But, amid all this change, one key thing remains constant, and that is the need for journalists to obtain the fundamental skills of good reporting. Without the ability to compile an accurate, balanced, unbiased report, no one can prosper as a journalist – whether they are trying to make their mark in newspapers, magazines, television, radio or on the internet.

This means that the training a journalist undertakes remains every bit as important as it ever was. Arguably, in the age of the amateur **citizen journalist** who is strong on opinion but weak on objectivity, it is even more important. And this is where the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) comes in.

The NCTJ is second-to-none in its expertise in teaching journalism. Through its examinations, and the university and other courses that carry its accreditation, it equips would-be journalists to find their first job in the profession.

Be absolutely certain you really want to do it. If you are half-hearted about it, you will fail. NEIL DARBYSHIRE, SENIOR NEWS EXECUTIVE, DAILY MAILS.

An NCTJ qualification shows that you have the skills you need to be an effective news reporter. NCTJ training equips you for whatever medium you want to work in – newspapers, magazines, TV and radio, and the internet. Many successful journalists, in all media, are thankful for their NCTJ training. And many others, who didn't have that advantage, recognise that it would have been a huge help if they did.

But what is journalism exactly?

If you are to consider becoming a journalist, you first need to know what journalism is, so let's go through the basics.

Maybe you find the words 'journalist' and 'journalism' off-putting. You may actually be thinking: 'I'd like to be reporting on Premiership football matches for Sky Sports', or editing *Marie Claire*, or interviewing movie stars for *Empire*, producing documentaries for Radio 4, reviewing bands for the *NME*, running a channel on the AOL web site, or writing about politics for *The Times*. All of these tasks are branches of journalism. 'Journalist' is a blanket term, encompassing reporters, photographers, editors and a wide range of people with particular skills and specialisms.

It's the most fun you can have with your clothes on. SIMON BUCKS, ASSOCIATE EDITOR, SKY NEWS

This book is designed to help you decide whether journalism is the career for you and, if you decide that it is, to work out which branch of the media might suit you best. The term 'media', by the way, is the plural of medium. Newspapers are one medium, magazines are another, and television and radio are two more. Online journalism makes up the fifth main medium.

This book explores how the media differ and what they have in common. Today, the traditional distinctions between media are blurring. Once, a media company tended to concentrate on one or two of the media – a newspaper or magazine group stuck to print, a TV network stuck to broadcasting. Today, most media companies operate in several media. Almost all have websites, and many are involved in the other electronic means of disseminating news and entertainment, such as to mobile phones or other electronic devices.

Becoming a bad journalist is easy, becoming a good one is very hard work indeed. BILL MANN, WEEK-END EDITOR, THE GUARDIAN

This has led people in the media to talk of convergence, by which they mean that the barriers between the various media are falling, and the age of multi-media journalism is dawning. Media companies are beginning to want their journalists to be comfortable working in several media. The journalist of the future may well be writing a text report for a print publication, adapting it for a website, doing a voice piece for radio and a piece-to-camera for television.

We will look in some detail at this many-skilled creature later in the book, but for now it is worth mentioning that this convergence is only in its early stages. Currently, the media are still, largely, distinct. Publishers are strong in one or two media, but not in all of them.

The current training and employment structure reflects these traditional divisions. It is still the case that most journalists start on either local newspapers or small specialist magazines, although we shall look at all the entry points to journalism across the rest of the media as well.

We will also look at what academic qualifications you will need, and whether you should take a formal training course before applying for jobs or seek out a position in which you will be trained while being paid to work.

I'm most proud of getting my 100 words per minute shorthand – the toughest exam I've ever done.

ANDREW PORTER, DEPUTY POLITICAL EDITOR, SUNDAY TIMES

There are many other questions that need to be answered. For instance: Do national newspapers take trainees, and if so where do they recruit them from? Do the BBC, ITN and Sky train people? Do local radio stations have schemes? What about websites? This book will answer these questions, and help you decide what training is right for you. It will explain in detail who runs training schemes, and what they are looking for in recruits. It will tell you where, if they don't train young journalists, they recruit newly-qualified people, and what qualifications they expect recruits to have.

It offers a comprehensive guide to good training courses – everything from fast-track courses lasting a few months to undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. Everything listed is accredited by the National Council for the Training of Journalists, which is your guarantee that the course you choose is a practical one that will equip you for the trade, and provide you with the best possible grounding for getting that all-important first job.

I trained on the job, and for many years I felt inferior to trained journalists. BETTY LONG, EDITOR, STAR

SERIES OF FREE NEWSPAPERS, SUNDERLAND

The book also contains an extensive listing of the main newspapers, magazines, news agencies, TV and radio stations, and websites where you might gain work experience, seek a training place, or hope to find your first job. In addition we will run through the different jobs, and career paths, that will be opened up to you once you are a qualified and experienced journalist. In short, this book is designed to tell you everything you need to know about a career in journalism.

Dispelling the myths

If you have mentioned to anyone that you think journalism might be for you, you've probably been told by now how tough you will find it to get in, how much competition you will face just to get on a decent journalism course, and then how much demand there will be for the few jobs that are available to new recruits. You may worry that you don't have the temperament for journalism – that it is only for the hard-nosed and the thick-skinned. You may simply be completely confused about what branch of journalism is right for you.

It is certainly true that journalism is a competitive business – to get in to, to progress in and simply to do every day. But, that said, there are many myths about journalism, and we can start dispelling those myths right now.

My father was editor of the Evening Standard so newspapers were in the blood. Despite that I have never had any formal training and it shows since I have zero shorthand and have to rely on time-consuming tape recorders or PA. PATRICK WINTOUR, CHIEF POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT, THE GUARDIAN

First, although you will need commitment, perseverance and doggedness to get your first job as a journalist, it can be done. Accurate figures are hard to find because no one compiles them but, each year, something like 1,500 new recruits are taken on by (mainly local) newspapers, perhaps 3,000 by (mainly **business-to-business**) magazines, and around 600 by broadcasters.* These recruits get their jobs because they show a number of things. They show that:

- they are really keen to become journalists;
- they have pursued this ambition by gaining relevant work experience;
- often, they have pursued their goal by getting the necessary training before applying for jobs; and that
- they are determined to succeed, whatever it takes.

By no means all of them are ruthless. Not all journalists are hard-bitten, just as not all London cabbies are right-wing blabbermouths who won't so south of the river. Because there are so many publications, and so many different jobs calling for different skills, there is a huge variance in journalists' character. In some journalistic environments, the pace is frenetic. If you are preparing

Estimate from the Broadcast Journalism Training Council (heseaftes BJTC).

half-hourly news bulletins on a TV or radio station, you will have to work fast. On a daily newspaper you work pretty fast too. On a weekly, or a monthly, the pace is slower.

Temperamentally, you may be better-suited for either a fast or a slower pace, but one thing you can be sure of: however fast or slow the pace, however large or small the newspaper, magazine, website or whatever you are working on, it will have a staff and a system of working that fits what has to be done, and when.

Anyone considering a career in journalism should seriously examine the career paths, the financial rewards at each level, how they can combine it with other skills or interests to give themselves a secondary career option. They should also be absolutely honest with themselves about the personality strengths needed to do the job, do they have them? SIMON PIZZEY, SENIOR PHOTOGRAPHER, GLOUCESTER CITIZEN

It is understandable if you have no idea which medium would suit you best. Should you try to join a local newspaper, or a magazine? Should you go for a national newspaper, a radio station, a sports news agency or work on a website? This book will help you decide, by showing you - with the help of quotes, comments, experiences and advice from over 100 journalists - what working in each medium entails, and the skills and abilities you will need to succeed. You will see their thoughts dotted throughout the text.

Given the differences between the five media, and all the very different journalists undertaking such a wide range of tasks within them, you may think that it is impossible to generalise about what a journalist is, and what they need to know to do their job. Well, let's have a go.

One thing all successful journalists have in common is a well-developed understanding of who their reader, listener or viewer is, what they are interested in and how to talk to them. But if that is so, how did all those very different journalists learn to talk to all those very different consumers of news, information and entertainment? That is where formal training comes in.

The one piece of advice I would give to anyone considering journalism is this: Do it! - ANDREW SMITH, EDITOR IN CHIEF, NORTHEAST PRESS WEEKLIES

Who can become a journalist?

There are no longer any bars to entry to journalism that have anything to do with your sex, your race or anything other than whether you've got what it takes. That's not to say that ethnic minorities have not, historically, been generally under represented in the media. This is changing. Many media organisations are striving to make their workforces more diverse. The Journalism Diversity Fund, of which the NCTJ is a supporter, has done much to encourage this. It offers bursaries to a number of student journalists from the ethnic minorities each year. You can find out more at www.journalismdiversityfund.co.uk

The one thing I wish someone had told me when I was younger was your degree does not need to be linked to journalism. The people I work with have studied everything from Chinese and Economics to English. If I could turn back time I would do my degree in something completely unrelated, and I don't think it would change where I'm working now. ASTRA MORTON, REPORTER, NORTH SOMERSET TIMES

Where once journalism was male-dominated, today many women are making successful careers in it, are in senior positions and a significant number are editors. On some publications, and in some broadcast newsrooms, women are now in the majority. Those who have rights under disability discrimination legislation will also find employers receptive to their applications.

Those who appoint and manage journalists generally realise that a diverse workforce is a more effective workforce.

Why the right training is so important

Some journalists pick up their skills along the way. They learn on the job. But these days most journalists undergo some kind of formal training. They may have done so as undergraduates or postgraduates on a full-time course, or as trainees on **block release** at a college. They may have studied via **distance learning**, doing another job at the same time.

Not everyone who has undergone formal training is brilliant at their job, and not everyone who picked things up as they went along is a bad journalist. But what training does is give able people a short-cut. It saves them time by teaching them the basics of journalism quickly, accurately and effectively. It means they don't need to learn by trial and error. They can get it right first

time. It also demonstrates to a potential employer that you are serious about becoming a journalist – serious enough to have done all you can to equip yourself for the job

An NCTJ qualification equips you with the skills you need to be an effective news reporter. It gives you a solid grounding in shorthand, law and how government works, plus enabling you to build up a substantial portfolio of work that shows you can really do the job. With an NCTJ certificate on your CV, a prospective employer knows you have grasped the basics.

The courses at universities and other institutions that the NCTJ accredits are all highly practical. It is vital, if you want to ensure that you do not waste your time studying a course that does not give you the skills you will need to get a job, to make sure your course is accredited.

Behind my mother's back, [aged 16] I sent a speculative letter to the editor-in-chief of the local newspaper group, talked myself into an interview and got a job. She was furious! MARY-ANN BLOOMFIELD, EDITOR, MID-DEVON GAZETTE SERIES

There are many courses with 'media' or 'media studies' in their titles that are not suitable if you wish to become a journalist, and are not accredited by the NCTJ. Such courses may do a very good job at teaching you the history of the media, they may be hugely illuminating if you wish to study the sociology of mass communications or the political implications of press ownership by multinationals, but they won't teach you how to write a news story. Very few, if any, editors will be impressed by an applicant who is a media studies graduate. By all means read media studies if it interests you, but don't expect this to help you get a job as a journalist, any more than a degree in hotel management would.

One key question for you to consider when thinking about training is whether to study journalism at undergraduate or postgraduate level. That really is up to you. It depends in part on the age at which you become convinced that journalism is for you. If you know at 16 to 18, great, you are probably ready to choose an undergraduate course. If you aren't sure, then it's best to get a good, academic first degree in another subject. Even if you are certain, pre-university, that journalism is for you, there is no harm in reading something else. For one thing, having an academic specialism, say in economics or politics, may help when you become a journalist. For another, you'll have three years during which you can pursue journalism as a hobby, just to make sure you like it.

A postgraduate journalism qualification can complement a first degree.

You may decide that you don't want to study journalism in an academic environment at all. If so, that is not a problem. You can take what is known

as a pre-entry qualification – a fast-track course – and look for your first job. You may even be lucky enough to find an employer who will take you on without any journalistic qualification – on the strength of your practical experience and aptitude – and pay you and train you at the same time.

We will examine the different types of training available in more detail in the following chapters.

As you will see, the media are dealt with individually. If TV appeals to you more than newspapers, you are likely to go straight to that chapter. There is nothing wrong with that, but don't dismiss newspapers or magazines out of hand. There are sound reasons for making your start in one of those media, so do at least take a look at those chapters. After all, if you don't, you may not find out what you are missing until it is too late.

