

THE INTRO

THOSE of us lucky enough to work in the media have three main functions: to inform, guide and entertain. The emphasis varies. Serious national newspapers put great weight on their opinion columns; red-top tabloids concentrate on celebrity gossip. It is generally agreed, however, that the media's most important role is to tell the public what is going on in the world and why, whether it be roadworks delaying their journey to work or a declaration of war threatening their lives.

There may be nothing they can do about it, but they need this information to make the choices necessary in a democratic society. It gives newspapers and broadcasters a vital role as the electorate's watchdogs, reporting truths unpalatable to authority, while those elected or appointed to make decisions rely heavily on the media for information and use it to influence local and national government.

None of this would be possible without reporters. It is their job to gather the news, check its accuracy, and present it in a form which interests and can be understood by the public. It is a job to be proud of, and it is vital to those who undertake it, their audience, and society as a whole that they are well-trained. This book, we hope, will help to ensure that they are.

Essential Reporting is a practical guide to what life as a trainee reporter is all about: who does what, why they do it, and how. It was prompted by demands from trainees, trainers and people working in the media for a standard textbook on reporting. As its title suggests, it covers the basics. It cannot possibly deal in depth with everything a trainee reporter needs to know. There is no substitute for practical experience, and it is intended to be used as an introduction and reference book to accompany vocational training on accredited training courses and in the workplace.

It comes in five sections. The first chapters examine what makes a good reporter and what news is all about. The next look at everyday reporting tasks in and out of the office, on and off-diary. Third is a section on writing for print, working online and handling audio and video. Then come specialist areas, including courts, councils, sport, district reporting and features. The final section includes a chapter on training, a round-up of reference sources, guidance on further reading, and a glossary.

Trainee reporters who read it will be entering a fast-changing world. Technology is obliterating the boundaries between newspapers, radio, television and web-based media, and the days of training reporters for one medium alone are over. Editors expect them to be multi-skilled and flexible, producing words, sound and pictures to appear in print, online and on air, capable of switching from one medium to another with



When we embarked on this book, we emailed hundreds of people working in the media asking for their tips, memories and warnings about life as a reporter.

The response was overwhelming, and we have included as many contributions as possible.

You will see them, and quotes from other sources, in this spot on the righthand pages throughout the book. They have been linked where possible to the content of the main text.

Our thanks to all who responded. We hope those whose offerings are missing, because they duplicated others or were reluctantly spiked for lack of space, will forgive us and enjoy the ones that made it.

ESSENTIAL REPORTING



This spot on the lefthand pages has been given over to practical tips relating to the accompanying text. The first, which will be echoed by many of those whose names appear in the acknowledgements, is simple: Never volunteer.

ease and assurance. This book attempts to reflect that demand, recognising that its readers are equally likely to work for newspapers, magazines, websites, radio or television — or for any combination of these simultaneously.

Some things, however, remain unchanged. Whatever the medium, there are core values common to all. Every reporter still needs the ability to recognise news, to gather information, to communicate with people, to produce accurate, balanced and attractive stories. These fundamental attributes are what this book is all about.