

## INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the last century the job of a journalist was quite simple to define: it was someone – usually male – who earned their living by writing for a newspaper or periodical. No formal qualifications were required and many people agreed with the description of legendary newspaperman of the time H.L. Mencken that journalism was ‘a craft to be mastered in four days and abandoned at the first sign of a better job’ (Delano, 2000: 262).

Since then the job itself has diversified to cover radio, television and online, and as its popularity as a career has grown, its status has changed from a craft to a profession, with a subsequent change in entry requirements. In 1965 only 6 per cent of journalists entering local evening newspapers held a degree. Five years later the first postgraduate qualification in journalism in the UK began at University College, Cardiff. By the mid-1990s, two-thirds of journalists had a university education (Delano, 2000: 267), and in 2004 there were 658 courses on offer at universities in the UK covering every aspect of the profession (UCAS).

Many of the changes in journalism have come about because of changes in technology, from the invention of the telegraph to satellite links that connect different continents at the flick of a switch. The emphasis in the 21st century is on immediacy with live radio and television reports, Internet chats with world leaders, and news flashes delivered to mobile phones. Technological changes have also required changes in the working practices of journalists who are now expected to be multiskilled. Newspaper journalists must also provide material for the online edition of their paper, while broadcast journalists are increasingly expected to supply material for radio, television and online services. But despite these changes, the fundamentals of journalism remain the same: to report events that affect society in an accurate and balanced way so that some understanding of the world we live in can be gained.

The aim of this book is to try to show how journalists in newspapers, radio, television and online do their job, not only by explaining the process but also by hearing from those who do it on a daily basis. Of course, whole libraries are devoted to every aspect of journalism, and this text is not exhaustive, but an introduction to the techniques used and skills required to be a journalist. It is designed for those who have an interest in the production of news but who have

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little or no knowledge of the process. Through the interviews with practitioners in each chapter, it is also hoped that even those already embarked on a career in journalism will find some useful tips.

News is a multi-million pound business, but for all that, it tends to be taken for granted by the consumers of newspapers, radio, television and the Internet. In many ways it is the ultimate consumer product – out of date almost as soon as it is reported, with a constant demand for the ‘latest’ story. But despite the proliferation of news outlets over the past decade, the range of stories covered by mainstream media is surprisingly similar. For this reason Chapter 1 examines news as a commodity, showing where news comes from, and how it is selected and used by different media. The chapter ends with an analysis of the news from a particular day to illustrate the similarities and differences between media.

But no matter which medium news is produced for, the basic approach to researching it is similar, and this is explored in Chapter 2. This chapter examines various news sources in detail and shows how reporters verify sources. Turning to localised research, the chapter discusses local publications, press releases, PR agencies, local PR officers, councillors, local organisations, the police and other emergency services, community media, and how to accrue a network of personal contacts. Further comment and analysis are provided by working journalists from both radio and TV media.

Having identified and sourced a story, the next job is to write it, and Chapter 3 outlines the basics of writing a story starting from the intro – the first paragraph of a news story – through to the type of language that should be used. It also looks at story construction and how student journalists should approach different types of story, including sport and features. It investigates the different ways of writing for newspapers, radio, television and the Internet.

The interview is a key tool for any journalist and Chapter 4 explores the interview and its place in newspaper and broadcast journalism. The chapter explains what steps should be taken in order to conduct a successful interview, from finding the right interviewees to formulating effective questions. It outlines in detail how an interview is best conducted for different media, concentrating on the technical and practical aspects as well as the journalist’s own skills of interacting with an interviewee.

Chapter 5 then takes a look at the skills needed to be a broadcast journalist – from finding the best location for an interview, to recording and editing a news package. This is not a technical manual, but it outlines what needs to be considered at each step of developing a story for broadcast. The chapter ends with an account of the work of an online journalist that shows how the skills of print and broadcast are combined.

Journalists are necessarily constrained by the law, which is designed to protect both those being reported on and journalists themselves. For this reason the next two chapters look at the law and journalism. Chapter 6 provides an introduction to the English legal system, and considers a range of legal sources. It introduces the reader to the difference between civil and criminal law, outlines

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the court structure, and provides a useful list of key legal personnel. In Chapter 7 there is an examination of the range of legal provisions that influence and constrain journalists. A single chapter cannot provide a detailed consideration of the provisions, but by summarising key areas, it supplies a useful snapshot of the subject. The chapter includes an introduction to the laws relating to privacy, reporting elections, protecting sources and copyright. It also explores the complex areas of contempt and defamation law in more detail.

Having provided an introduction to the court system and what can and cannot be reported, the text then in Chapter 8 examines court reporting. This chapter focuses on the basics of what you must have in your story and what you should do before going to court for the first time. It looks at the ways you should approach Magistrates' Court, Crown Court, inquests and tribunals. It investigates the different ways courts are covered by newspaper, radio, television and online journalists.

An equally important source of news for journalists is Government, and Chapter 9 looks at the changing shape of local government from the Department of the Environment to the main parts and roles of the local government system. It outlines what sort of stories should be looked for and how to get them. It investigates how to get the best out of councillors and council officers, plus how to bust the jargon and avoid political bias. It also has an extensive section on how regional journalists should aim to cover Westminster.

The day-to-day activities of working journalists are determined by laws, regulations and the practicalities associated with producing news and attracting an audience. However, the nature of the work also raises a number of moral and ethical considerations with which the journalist must grapple. The final chapter considers the role of regulation, with particular attention given to the conduct of journalists and journalism content. The chapter considers different regulatory bodies and the rationales that support such regulation, and the complex interplay between law, regulation and ethics through the exploration of a number of moral dilemmas that working journalists may face on a regular basis.

The final sections of the book provide a Glossary of Legal Terms followed by a Glossary of Journalism Terms, which it is hoped will prove useful to those new to these areas.