



So...You want to be a Journalist?



Contents

Preface	3
Journalism and democracy	3
Starting out in journalism	4
Do you have what it takes?	4-6
Routes into journalism	7
Newspapers:	7
Magazines and Periodicals:	8
Online	9
Radio and Television:	10
Freelancing:	11
Photo-journalism	11
Sports journalism	11
More information	12
Finding that first job	12-14
Glossary of journalistic terms	15
Contact details	16
About the Chartered Institute of Journalists	17
The CloJ	17

First Steps to a Career in Journalism

INTRODUCTORY BOOKLET

Written by:

Janice Shillum Bhend

Published by:

The Chartered Institute of Journalists

2 Dock Offices

Surrey Quays Road

London SE16 2XU

© CloJ 2007-2012

Tel: +44 (0)20 7252 1187

Fax: +44 (0)20 7232 2302

Web: www.cioj.co.uk



Journalism and democracy

Few people consider journalists to be heroes, yet the professional journalist can be a powerful champion of freedom, justice, democracy.. and above all truth – the key to them all. Indeed, the free Press is one of the most important institutions in this country: it provides a vital defence of our traditional liberties against the machinations of power-hungry politicians, unscrupulous business tycoons, and crooks of all kinds.

Throughout modern history, journalists have been responsible for rooting out corruption and dishonesty in high places, thwarting attempts by governments and multinational corporations to gain yet more control over our lives, warning of the dangers posed by foreign despots, and drawing the attention of the British public to human rights violations, conflicts and humanitarian crises the world over. Indeed, Britain's journalists are 'the eyes and ears' of the nation.

Whether it's TV, radio, national or local newspapers or magazines, we look to our media to give us the facts and allow us to form our own opinions on what is happening in our communities and the wider world.

For over 100 years the Chartered Institute of Journalists has worked on behalf of the journalistic profession and the cause of Press freedom. It is fitting, therefore, that the Institute offers this booklet on "FIRST STEPS TO A CAREER IN JOURNALISM", highlighting the opportunities open to students seeking to enter this challenging, exciting and highly fulfilling profession.

Andy Smith
Editor, The Journal of The Chartered Institute of Journalists

Do you have what it takes?

“If you don’t want to change the world, don’t be a journalist.”

That quote from Jane Reed CBE, a former magazine editor, publisher and Director of Corporate Affairs at News International, is all the more relevant today. Even though our modern media seems so trivia-driven – it is still possible to bring about change for the better in society by getting your thoughts and beliefs published in newspapers, magazines and websites or broadcast on TV and radio.

So obviously you’d need to be a great writer then? Not necessarily. You do of course need a firm grasp on the ‘tools’ of your trade – grammar, punctuation, spelling – but in many situations, like fashion or beauty writing, the ability to write a hard hitting headline or a catchy caption is what’s required rather than prose for posterity.

There are other equally important must-have qualities that journalists need:

Integrity: Never forget that you owe your readers a fair and unbiased version of the truth and that means retaining your editorial independence at all times.

An ability to work under pressure: You might get only five minutes to do that all-important interview or have the editor breathing down your neck while you write up your story – it’s essential to keep cool and do the best that you can do when the going gets rough.

Self-reliance: Deadlines alter, circumstances change, scheduled interviewees may go AWOL. You’ll always need to be able to think on your feet and have Plan B ready to roll.

Determination and persistence: You’ll need both of these in abundance to find the job of your dreams. Then when you’ve got it you’ll need these qualities all over again to ensure you always get the story, the interview or the scoop of a lifetime.

A liking for people: Great interviews rely on getting someone to like and trust you almost instantly. Interviewing is a knack you can learn through experience but a genuine care for and sympathy with people in all their human frailty and variety is something you need to be born with.

A love of hard work: You'll stay at the office until your deadline is reached however late that is. You must be prepared to work long, unsocial hours and still turn up on time next day. You'll probably work weekends at least sometimes and all for a not-very-big salary.

A healthy disregard for wealth: Unless you plan to become a famous columnist or edit a glossy, don't expect to earn a fortune as a journalist especially if you take the traditional route of working on a local newspaper. But who cares about getting rich when you're doing something you love every day?

Discipline: However tired or ill you are, in the media the show must go on and the deadline is paramount. Meeting your word count and brief are also vital. If you don't want the subs re-writing your piece, get the style and content of your piece right for the publication and the target audience. Get all three right first time and editors will always come back to you for more.

Ace research skills: Know where to look for the facts and figures you'll need to write a piece – never simply rely on the Internet, the information there is readily available to millions of people. Cultivate experts in the business you're in, PRs, local counsellors, designers, scientists, they're the ones who can give you the necessary inside information. There is no substitute for talking to people and networking is the name of the game.

Knowledge of the zeitgeist: A magazine lead-in time can be as long as three months so you'll need to know what the 'next big thing' in fashion, sport or whatever your chosen field is in advance. In all media you'll always need to be able to spot embryo trends well before they become fully fledged crazes.

Reader Awareness: All magazines and newspapers are aimed at a target readership. Before writing a word you should be aware of who they are, what they like, their age, gender and socio-economic position. And you must be able to adapt your writing style accordingly and change it instantly when the magazine is re-launched or re-positioned or if you swap jobs.

Ideas, ideas, ideas: In journalism there's no such thing as a new one, it's all been done many times before. The knack is always to be able to come up with a fresh slant on an old subject however many times you've written about it and to make it topical and appropriate for your readership with the right spin and angle.

An eye for the visual: Especially in magazines, a 'good eye' is essential for visualising finished features on the page and understanding the way words and pictures work together to make a harmonious whole. It's not just pictures though, text has to look good too – knowing where to put a sub-head or a pull quote to break up a big page of type is an equally useful skill for subs and writers alike.

An enquiring mind: If you're the kind of person who likes to peek into the windows of lighted rooms as you go past on the bus you're half way to becoming a journalist. Seeking out truth, finding out more, becoming the 'instant expert' in a subject we're currently researching and writing about is what we do every day and it's what you can do too if you've got what it takes...

Routes into journalism

There's no getting away from it, you'll need qualifications to fulfil your ambition – it's almost impossible to become a working journalist without them.

Unless of course you aim to become what many TV stations are beginning to call a 'citizen journalist', in which case you probably won't be paid anything, you'll waive all your rights to the story/picture you're sending them so they can syndicate them worldwide without paying you a penny, plus you could be held responsible for any inaccuracies or infringements of media law.

To become a real journalist you'll need to demonstrate enthusiasm for your chosen career by getting some work experience in your chosen field even before you apply for a job, or a place at university or college.

Newspaper Journalism

The traditional way is to start in local newspapers, gain experience and training then, if you want to, work your way up to the nationals (Direct Entry). Pay is pretty low on most local papers but many offer training while you're on the job with the first three to six months as a probationary period, then either NCTJ (National Council for the Training of Journalists) distance learning or a 12-week block release course at an NCTJ-accredited college. Some larger newspaper groups operate their own NCTJ-approved training schemes.

There is a possibility that, with a minimum of five GCSE passes, including English, at grades A-C you'll be accepted by an editor but it's more likely they will require two A levels at the very least. There are year-long Pre-Entry post-A-level courses accredited by the NCTJ. Their Preliminary Certificate is recognised as a professional qualification for newspaper journalism as most editors have trained in this way and recognise and require the standards set.

An even better way also enables you to keep your options open as long as possible: Get a degree in a 'pure' subject like history (great for research skills) or English, then obtain the Preliminary Certificate through a fast-track, post-graduate, NCTJ accredited journalism course that includes: law, PA (public administration, local and national government), newspaper journalism,

shorthand (to a minimum 100 wpm) plus subbing, work experience in the 'real' world and a portfolio. Then 18 months into your first job you can take the NCTJ NCE (National Certificate Examination) to become fully qualified. A subbing NCE will be available soon.

Magazine Journalism

Some magazines, especially those who use 'true life' stories, advertise for journalists with newspaper experience but traditionally it hasn't been so easy to swap in the opposite direction. But times are changing, now many local and national newspaper companies publish supplements and even stand-alone magazines, so the two products are becoming ever more interchangeable.

There are many different types of magazines and while there is sure to be one that is exactly right for you they will all usually expect you to have a degree and some formal training before you apply for a job.

The magazine industry body is the PPA (Periodical Publishers' Association) and their training arm is the PTC (Periodical Training Council) that accredits post-graduate and post A-level courses of varying lengths nationwide, the NCTJ also accredits magazine courses. These should give you the basic skills you'll need: Media law, PA (national government), news and feature writing, subbing, design and layout (a working knowledge of publishing software like In-Design) and shorthand to 80 wpm – the latter isn't an essential for magazine employment but it's invaluable for interviews – you'll never regret learning it. Most courses include mandatory work placements and portfolios.

A degree in a specific subject (like one of the sciences) will always give you a useful specialism that you can exploit by working for a magazine about that subject (New Scientist for instance). Follow that with a fast-track journalism course culminating in a professionally recognised certificate (courses are usually PTC and/or NCTJ accredited) then, once employed, it's also possible to gain a further PTC qualification on the job.

Consumer magazines; both general interest (Company) and specialist (Crafty Carper), are the ones everyone wants to work on so they are always oversubscribed and could have up to a six-month waiting list for work placements. To improve your chances, show you understand and love the publication and have an in-depth knowledge of its readership when applying and be persistent.

Customer magazines; (like M & S Magazine) are an ever-growing sector of the publishing industry. They pay better but you'll be working for two masters, in this example, the editor who works for the publishing company and the client who represents Marks & Spencer.

B2B (Business to Business) magazines; or 'trade' magazines as they used to be called (i.e. The Grocer) don't have the cachet of the glossies but pay best and usually have good training schemes for employees and excellent career progression. They are well worth considering, especially for a first job.

There are of course also journalism degrees but no qualification is a guarantee of a job at the end of the course. Those posts advertised in The Guardian's media section have hundreds of applicants and are often filled before publication. The very best way of securing employment is through work experience that gives you the opportunity to show what you can do and become indispensable. You may have to take several unpaid work placements before securing that all-important first step on the employment ladder. Once you've done that, switching between magazines becomes much easier.

Online Journalism

Most magazines and newspapers have their own websites, some only exist in cyberspace. Online journalism broadly requires the same qualifications as described above, you'll need a firm grasp of current affairs and a real talent in the news writing department because reports and features that are going to be read on screen need to be short, pithy and to the point. The NCTJ are offering a new online Preliminary Certificate.

Get full details of journalism courses currently available from the NCTJ and PTC websites: www.NCTJ.co.uk and www.PPA.co.uk

Or contact them at the following addresses:

NCTJ, The New Granary, Station Road, Newport, Saffron Walden, Essex CB11 3PL, Tel: 01799 544014

PTC, Queens House, 55/56 Lincoln's Inn Fields, London WC2A 3LJ, Tel: 020 7404 4168

Broadcast Journalism

Developments in radio and TV have brought many more opportunities for journalists in recent years. Among those at the top of the tree are the reporters following world events on a satellite link, interviewing politicians and celebrities, or presenting the news in a studio. But to reach this pinnacle they have invariably had years – sometimes decades – of hard training and experience.

While some colleges offer a one-year Pre-Entry training course in broadcast journalism, after which entrants find their own jobs, there are several Direct Entry schemes. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the largest single training organisation for broadcast journalism is the BBC itself. Its training is much sought-after, very thorough, and above all highly competitive.

BBC vacancies open to external applicants are widely advertised in regional and national newspapers – for example, in the media section of *The Guardian* every Monday. The Corporation is always keen to attract new recruits. As the BBC's website says: "It's our goal to become the most creative organisation in the world. But in order to make it a reality, we need to keep on attracting the brightest, most creative and talented people. People just like you."

The BBC recruits some of its journalists directly from other sectors of the media, especially when it needs to find reporters with a particular specialisation – so there is always the possibility for an experienced journalist to make the move from the printed media to broadcasting, especially as the Corporation has such a plethora of local, regional, national and even international TV and radio stations. The BBC has various Direct Entry training schemes, with fierce competition for places.

Training schemes include a two-year course in London for radio and TV news reporting, a one-year course in Bristol for regional work, and a two-year local radio reporting course which includes experience on local stations. The BBC offers some bursaries to promising students, and is keen to broaden the base of its recruitment to include, for example, more reporters from ethnic minorities.

Would-be entrants to broadcasting should not, however, fix their sights solely on the BBC. Commercial radio and TV stations should also be approached for vacancies in their newsrooms.

Post-graduate courses in radio journalism are offered by:

Cornwall College, Falmouth, Cornwall.

Highbury College, Portsmouth.

University of Central Lancashire, Preston.

London College of Communication.

University College, Cardiff.

City University, London.

The two-year journalism course offered by Napier University, Edinburgh, includes specific training in broadcasting.

Freelance Journalism

If you want to freelance (and as staffers are few, many journalists do) you'll need to be highly self-motivated and organised – willing and able to get ahead with your work before you go on holiday and tackle the mountain that has accumulated while you're away the moment you get home. For freelancers, commissions come in only two ways: 'feast' or 'famine' and you're only as good as the last piece you got published.

You'll also need to be well connected. Editors tend to use people they know they can rely on and bring their favourites with them when coming to a new title. It's extremely difficult to get an 'in' without contacts and so you should consider working as a staffer for a few years first to get your portfolio of work into shape and those vital names and addresses into your contacts book.

Photojournalism

There's an increasing requirement for reporters to provide pictures to accompany their stories and of course the technology now exists to send those pictures instantly to the picture editor, news desk, etc. Some journalism courses include an element of photojournalism; there are also courses dedicated to the subject, specifically at Sheffield and Darlington Colleges. You'll need to check websites to find out what's available.

Sports Journalism

Again there are dedicated courses and some sports agencies like www.sportsbeat.co.uk offer their own but the same rules apply, you'll need all of the afore-mentioned qualities plus an in-depth knowledge of sport to succeed in this highly competitive field.

Finding that first job

You might have to compromise here – jobs on the glossies don't come up that often and when they do they're not always as glamorous as you'd expect. Think carefully about your strengths and weaknesses – if you've done a post-grad, fast-track journalism course that will have helped concentrate your mind on the kind of position and publication that will be right for you.

The glory of journalism is that it allows you to tailor your own career path. Genned up on gun dogs, relish racing bikes, passionate about pottery? There'll be a specialist magazine out there somewhere all about your favourite subject. Take a look in W. H. Smith, get a copy of The Writers' and Artists' Year Book or The Guardian Media Guide and they will tell you all you need to know about publishing companies and the publications they produce.

You may have to think laterally too. If you've an eye for detail and a good knowledge of the English Language in all her subtleties, subbing is an excellent route into magazines and newspapers. A good sub editor is an expert writer who is able to correct and prune someone else's copy into something that reflects the publication's style and attitude. He or she will be able to conjure up arresting headlines and revealing captions in the 'blink of an eye' (while avoiding clichés at all costs) – forever striving for something new that will catch the readers' jaded attention. Subs often write copy too and sometimes also have their own pages or columns and as there is usually a shortage of good ones it follows that there should be more jobs available.

Other publishing jobs to consider or aspire to include:

Ad sales: you'll see lots of these jobs advertised but they can be rather a cul-de-sac for aspiring journalists unless you want to be a publisher (see next page) in which case it could be quite a step in the right direction.

Art Director: You'll have gone down a very different, design-led route to arrive at this particular destination.

Assistant Editor: Exactly what it says on the tin. The Ed's little helper, usually responsible for the boring bits like chasing and checking copy, liaising with section editors etc. etc. Essential qualities include diplomacy and patience.

Deputy Editor: One step up from above and down from below: You stand in for the editor when he/she is at the Oscars or the Olympics but earn less and take the rap if you made the wrong decision in his/her absence.

Editor: The big cheese, responsible for budgets, staffing, keeping up circulation, content and getting the newspaper/magazine out on time. A bit like being a football manager, stop winning and you're out.

Editorial Assistant: A realistic first job with a variety of descriptions. Gofer, PA, secretary, booker, photocopy supremo, tea and coffee provider, sender back of borrowed items from shoots, proper up of fragile journalistic egos, you name it. But it's fun and it's varied – at least you'll never be bored...

Feature/News Writer: It will be a while before you can aspire to this. But maybe a bit of moonlighting as a freelance while toiling away as a junior will get you a portfolio of published work that might eventually impress – beware though many publishing companies make you sign a contract to the effect that you won't work for anyone else before employing you.

Layout Artist/Designer: Again you'll need a graphic design course if this is your ultimate ambition.

Picture Editor: Understands the balance between words and pictures, has great contacts at all the picture agencies, knows what's needed to make the page work, great job if you can get it.

Production Editor/Assistant: Pulls all the different elements in a magazine or newspaper together, ensuring they work against the flat plan then getting them all to the printers on time. A large circulation publication will need a printing slot and if you miss it, it costs a lot. These days it's all done digitally so you'll need to understand the processes too.

Publisher: Responsible for budgets, distribution, circulation, a publisher is different things to different companies but he/she wields a great deal of power.

Section/Department Editor: News, fashion, style etc., all responsible for their own part of the magazine or newspaper and all reporting to the assistant and deputy eds and the editor.

Sub Editor/Chief Sub: Proof reads all magazine and newspaper pages, corrects, cuts and changes to style, adds headlines, captions etc., where necessary. Keepers of dummy and flat plan.

Glossary of journalistic terms

Coverlines: The succinct 'come hither' information on a magazine cover about what's inside that makes you desperate to buy that issue

DPS: Double Page Spread i.e. two pages facing each other, containing one feature

Dummy: Sometimes called 'the book' – a mock-up of a magazine issue to check all is correct before publication

Flat plan: Literally that, a plan of all a magazine's pages and how they fall, dictated by how the magazine is put together at the printers (saddle stitched/perfect bound), the amount of advertising in that issue and space required for features.

Head/headline/title: The few attention grabbing words (usually in capitals) at the top of a feature

Lower case: Not capital letters

Proof: A page that needs checking before publication

Pull quote: A short quote taken from a feature and placed in a box in larger type to break up large areas of text

Sell/standfirst/subhead: The two lines or so under the headline that sum up what the reader is about to read and makes them want to read it.

Sidebar: Extra information on the subject a feature is written about – often done as bullet points. Also called an information panel.

Strapline: A running headline, usually along the top or bottom of a page or cover

Typeface: The shape, style and size of type being used for text

Upper case: Capital letter

Widow: (see examples above!) A word left on its own at the end of a paragraph, looks ugly and should be dealt with by cutting the line above to take it back or filling the empty line it's in

More information

If you would like to know more about how to get on to a Pre-Entry course in newspaper journalism, or for any general information about journalism training, you should contact:

The National Council for the Training of Journalists
The New Granary
Station Road
Newport
Saffron Walden
Essex CB11 3PL
www.nctj.com



For information on training and career opportunities in broadcasting:

Broadcast Journalism Training Council
18 Miller's Close
Rippingale
Nr Bourne
Lincolnshire PE10 0TH
www.bjtc.org.uk



General advice on all careers at the BBC is available from:

BBC Recruitment
PO Box 48305
London W12 6YE
www.bbc.co.uk/jobs



For those interested in magazines and periodicals, the Periodical Publishers' Association has a specialist training arm:

Periodicals Training Council
Queens House
55/56 Lincoln's Inn Fields
London WC2A 3LJ

The CloJ

The Chartered Institute of Journalists is the world's oldest professional body for journalists. It was founded – as the National Association of Journalists – in 1884 and six years later was granted its Royal Charter by Queen Victoria. It is one of only two trade unions in the United Kingdom that can boast a Royal Charter, the other being the Royal College of Nursing.



The Institute combines the role of professional association with that of a trade union – known as the IoJ(TU). The Institute's union section protects its members' interests in the workplace and campaigns for better conditions for working journalists.

The Institute's professional wing is concerned with the standards and ethics of the profession and the protection of Press freedom, as well as administering the Institute's charities and working closely with other like-minded professional bodies.

Journalists who belong to the Institute include many who have reached the top of the profession, including editors and senior staff of national daily newspapers, but also reporters and press photographers in the early stages of their careers.

All members have access to a wide range of benefits, including legal advice and representation in employment disputes, and the services of the Institute's charities. Full members are also entitled to use the letters MCIJ after their names (or FCIJ in the case of Fellows) as confirmation of their professional status.

For details of membership, including our reduced-rate subscriptions for student members, please contact:

Chartered Institute of Journalists
2 Dock Offices
Surrey Quays Road
London SE16 2XU
Tel:+44 (0)20 7252 1187
Fax: +44 (0)20 7232 2302
Email: memberservices@cioj.co.uk
Website: www.cioj.co.uk

Janice Shillum Bhend MCIJ

Janice Shillum Bhend MCIJ is an experienced writer, publisher, editor and media professional with a strong background in national magazines – including her own title, YES! which she published for five years. She has made many TV and radio appearances and contributed to several books.

Passionate about promoting good journalism, she co-wrote a new magazine course for the NCTJ and taught the next generation of journalists for seven years at degree and post-graduate level. She has a lifetime's love for and an in-depth knowledge of the magazine industry.

Essential reading

As a journalist there are two main reasons why you need to learn about the law. The first is that there are legal rules which affect what you can and cannot publish, and clearly, you need to know what these are. The second is that the law and legal proceedings will often form part of the subject matter of the stories you write. This is most obviously the case on local papers, where reporting the local courts is an important part of the news coverage, but legal issues and court cases are also covered by national papers, women's magazines and the trade press, even, if not always to the same extent. For that reason, you need to have a basic knowledge of the legal system, and how it works.

Law for Journalists by Frances Quinn, published by Pearson Education Ltd., £18.99.
ISBN No: 9780582823112