

JOURNALISM JOBS AND JOURNALIST JOB DESCRIPTION

There are innumerable types of journalists, from the local beat newspaper reporter to the foreign correspondent, from the magazine feature article writer to the professional book reviewer, so it is difficult to pin down the daily routine of the "average" journalist. Journalists interview sources and review records to assemble, collect, and report information and explore the implications of the facts. Journalism informs, educates, chastises: Do not underestimate the power a journalist holds. Remember Watergate, when Robert Woodward and Carl Bernstein, two reporters working for the Washington Post, discovered and published information that led to the resignation of the President of the United States?

Professionals must be able to report quickly and accurately. Over 80 percent of our respondents listed "time pressure" as one of the most distinguishing features of this job. Journalists must remain objective about their subjects, which can be difficult; around half our respondents said that their colleagues sometimes got too involved in the stories. Those with strong interpersonal skills, excellent writing skills, and a reporter's instinct (the ability to accurately assess the significance of obscure and incomplete information) make successful professionals.

The worst part of the job may be the uncertainty of the daily routine, which makes it difficult to incorporate family, hobbies, and any regularly scheduled plans. The hours and consistent time pressure can be significantly negative factors. When an editor calls you in on a breaking story, you have to be prepared to drop everything; when you're on deadline, you can get crazed trying to write a complicated story in half the time you need. This "ball and chain" to the offices leads many to resent, and eventually reject, the reporter's life. Some journalists complain about being "under the thumb of Napoleonic editors who control your every word based on their own taste." Journalists write stories, but editors edit them, and those who are precious about their prose rarely last in this profession. This occupation caters to those with a strong sense of self-worth and a touch of ego: Over 40 million people read newspapers in the United States each day and over 50 million people read magazines each week. The opportunity for your writing to reach a large audience is tempting indeed, and many find the low pay, uncertain and occasionally dangerous conditions, and hard work a fair tradeoff to be allowed to do what they do.

Paying Your Dues

Most journalists have a bachelor's degree in journalism, communications, English, or political science. They often work for their school newspapers and magazines or start out at small neighborhood newspapers. The major resume item that separates one candidate from another is experience in an industry, sphere, or community. Nowadays, many journalists come to the profession later in life, and expertise and connections gained during previous professions are key. Journalism jobs are competitive: Ten applicants exist for each available spot. The copy-boy who gets a break and becomes a famous reporter has all but disappeared. Credentials and experience count more than gumption and hard work. That said, even excellent candidates can find themselves employed for years at small-market tabloids, hungry for greater stories and larger audiences. For those candidates, patience and persistence are keys to success.

Excellent and structured writing skills are a must. Computer word-processing skills are important. Bone up on proofreading skills before applying for any job. Journalists should work well with others under pressured deadlines. Those who specialize in one region of the world should have language skills which complement their choices. Accuracy, persistence, initiative, stamina, emotional stability, and the desire to tell real stories about real events are critical to the survival of the budding journalist.

Associated Careers

Journalists who leave the profession become editors, professors, researchers, and analysts. Many teach high school and run school papers; others take jobs in whatever industry they once covered as a reporter. Those who leave the field usually do so because of the uncertain lifestyle and the long hours.

Past And Future

The first American newspaper was printed in 1690 and quashed four days later. The growth of journalism has been astounding: Since 1776, the number of daily newspapers printed in the United States has risen from 37 to over 1,700, not including weeklies, magazines, and computer newsletters.

Journalism, like most occupations concerned with communication, is becoming more electronic. Online services and electronic publishers deliver expertly written pieces twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week on the internet. But somebody still needs to write those pieces. Competition for jobs will remain fierce, but specialized jobs should increase; those with unique skills, such as technological expertise or foreign language skills, should enjoy a distinct advantage.

Quality of Life

Two Years Out

Many aspiring reporters begin their careers by pitching story ideas to local newspapers and magazines on a piecemeal basis. Often this income stream is so unpredictable that many take more regular paying jobs. People who have clippings from school newspapers or other publications have an advantage. Most aspire to a salaried job at a local newspaper during these scrambling years. As at all levels of this profession, satisfaction is high despite low income.

Five Years Out

Many have numerous publishing credits at local newspapers and weeklies, and some have achieved salaried reporting jobs. Most still seek positions at larger or more widely read publications. A significant number of journalists must be willing to relocate; but at the same time local contacts are crucial. Aggressive journalists try to climb the ladder of success and others consolidate their current positions.

Ten Years Out

Ten-year survivors in journalism still work long hours, but they have established a strong tone and style, enjoy a dedicated readership, and are finally making a wage commensurate with their abilities. The majority (over 60 percent) of those who began as journalists do not make it to the ten-year mark, dissuaded by lack of opportunity and lack of advancement. Many turn to editorial duties as well as reporting duties. A number switch their specialties after ten years in order to keep their jobs interesting and their writing fresh.

Professional Profile

# of people in profession	58,000
% male:	60
% female:	40
average hours per week:	55

Professionals Read

Columbia Journalism Review
American Journalism Review

Books, Films and TV Shows Featuring the Profession

All the President's Men
The Killing Fields
His Girl Friday
Absence of Malice

Major Employers

Time Inc. Time & Life Building Rockefeller Center New York, NY 10020 Tel: 212-522-1212 Fax: 212-522-0077 Contact: Human Resources	Associated Press 50 Rockefeller Plaza New York, NY 10020 Tel: 212-621-1500 Fax: 212-621-5447	The New York Times 229 West 43rd Street New York, NY 10036 Tel: 212-556-1234 Contact: Employment Department
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You'll Have Contact With

Editors
Photographers
Publishers
Researchers

Major Associations

American Society of Journalists and Authors	The Newspaper Guild
1501 Broadway	8611 Second Avenue
New York, NY 10036	Silver Spring, MD 20910
Tel: 212-997-0947	Society of Professional Journalists
Fax: 212-768-7414	Tel: 301-585-2990
	Contact: Contact your local chapter
	Fax: 301-585-0668
	Contact: Research Dept.

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