

## Summary

**Reporting and Writing I is an introduction to the essential skills of covering a patch, writing engaging copy and understanding how journalists work.**

During this module you will learn how to find *diary* and *off-diary* stories, develop contacts, carry out interviews, use public opinion, find news angles in official reports and figures, and turn your own original ideas into publishable copy.

You will also learn the structure and style of news writing for print and the web, how to stay on top of running stories with a constant flow of new information, be introduced to style guides, and learn how to produce publishable copy quickly and accurately.

Journalists must understand the news agenda to be able to spot the potential in breaking stories, or to prioritise work when a deadline is approaching. This module,

along with your daily news conferences, will show you how and why editorial decisions are made, why some stories are more important than others, and what that means both for reporters and their readers.

You will also use your new shorthand skills to take quick and accurate notes, and learn why a permanent record of what was said is so important to journalists whose work is challenged.

You will also learn the basics of the laws of contempt and defamation, which define what reporters can and cannot write, during this module. Journalism law will be explored in more depth in another module next year. Journalism ethics are also considered and assessed in this module.

All students are expected to attend lectures, workshops and seminars each week.

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Module code	JN301
Course/year	BA Journalism and the News Industry/1
ECTS credits	45
Length of module	24 weeks
Contact hours	5 hours per week
Course convenor	Sarah Lonsdale
Lecturers	Rob Bailey
	Ron Green

## Draft timetable

Autumn		Spring	
Week	Summary	Week	Summary
1	What makes a story?	1	News writing refresher
2	Interviews and vox pops	2	Timed news writing mock
3	Key principles of news writing	3	Defamation & privilege
4	Angles, intros and story structure	4	Contempt & crime
5	Covering a patch	5	Assessed news writing 1
6	“Go out and find a story”	6	Covering Parliament
7	Rolling news stories	7	Proposed Parliament trip date
8	Covering local government	8	Assessed news writing 2
9	Making stories out of numbers	9	Introduction to feature writing
10	“Churnalism” and PR	10	District challenge
11	Christmas feature challenge	11	Work experience prep
12	Journalism ethics	12	Writing week for portfolios

## Teaching methods

This module is taught with a combination of lectures, seminars and workshops.

The two-hour Tuesday lecture will be used most weeks to discuss new themes or introduce new skills, which will be developed in the workshops on Thursdays and Fridays.

Workshop sessions are held jointly by Rob and Ron, to ensure every student has access to one-to-one guidance and good quality feedback.

Non-assessed work will be marked by either Rob or Ron. All assessed work is marked in the first instance by Rob, who is responsible for the content of the module, to ensure consistency and fairness. Assessed work is moderated by another member of staff with reporting experience.

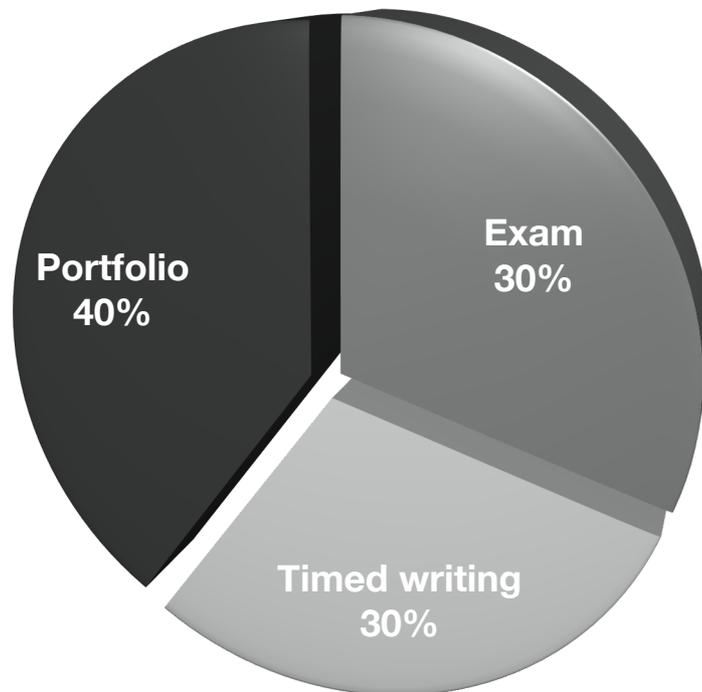
It is not possible to learn all the skills of a journalist vicariously in the newsroom. Good journalists read newspapers voraciously, take every opportunity to conduct interviews and ask questions, and produce original journalism every day. We will offer feedback on any work you produce - the more you write, the more support you will get.

## Assessment

### Two timed news writing tests

Proposed dates: Tuesday, February 18 and Tuesday, March 11.

- One based on raw information supplied on paper.
- You must pick out key facts, a strong angle and good quotes to tell a compelling story.
- Further questions ask you to identify sources to develop the story further, and identify any legal or ethical dangers in a story scenario.
- The other is based on information in writing and a verbal statement read at 60 words per minute.
- You must take accurate shorthand notes and transcribe a quote into your story effectively.



### Portfolio

Eight stories, due Friday, April 11.

- Two 500 word leads, two 300 word leads, and four 200 word downpapers.
- The portfolio is marked on writing ability, journalism skills and originality.
- The stories should be suitable for a quality regional newspaper. Stories must be produced during the first year, and some in-class exercises will be designed to contribute material for the portfolio. Others must be sourced by you independently.

### Exam

A two-hour paper sat in the summer term. Including:

- A reflective essay showing your understanding of how journalists work, using examples from your own experience or stories you have read. There is no academic referencing and it does not have to include memorised quotes from set texts.
- Knowledge of the news agenda, by making and justifying decisions about story placement or treatment in a specific type of newspaper.
- Knowledge of the law and ethics, by explaining the potential problems in a real-world scenario and suggesting how the story could be covered safely and to a professional standard.

## Marking

News writing is marked according to the criteria set by the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ). However, the marking scheme is adapted in the first year to acknowledge students' relative inexperience and to incorporate rewards for original and resourceful journalism in the portfolio.

For in class newswriting:

### Content and accuracy

All facts should be explained clearly within the story and all names, ages, addresses and other important details should be accurate.

Any inaccuracy or omission that affects the reader's understanding or alters the meaning of the story will be penalised.

In the case of errors that would require an apology or correction, no more than 49% of the marks for content and accuracy will be awarded.

### Intro, structure and language

The story should have a strong angle that will capture the reader's attention, and other key facts should be presented in a logical, coherent order. Priority must be given to the key details of the story.

Stories with a top line that suffers from poor grammar or a weak choice of angle will be penalised. Stories with a structure that makes key details unclear or which lack coherence will also be penalised. This includes poor spelling, poor punctuation and clumsy sentence construction.

### Quotes

For longer stories, which require quotes to be used, marks will be awarded for accurate and effective use of direct and indirect speech. Failure to attribute quotes properly will be penalised. Inaccuracies which alter the meaning of a quote or would require a correction or apology will lead to a maximum of 49% of the available mark for quotes being awarded. In assessments which involve shorthand note-taking, there will be a key quote that must be accurately transcribed in order to get an overall pass mark.

## Module aims and objectives

- i. To understand the key processes, principles and skills involved in writing for publication in print and online.
- ii. To understand what a news story is and why different providers treat them in different ways.
- iii. Apply news reporting skills within editorial deadlines.
- iv. To understand the concepts of bias and spin and apply the skills required to produce fair, comprehensive and balanced news reporting.
- v. Read widely within the genre of news in recent and contemporary newspapers and online.
- vi. Acquire writing, research and shorthand note-taking skills and experiment in deploying them in the coverage of news stories.
- vii. Learn to make every word count in the writing of tight, accurate copy to deadline.
- viii. Understand how to apply different research and writing techniques and how to evaluate their applicability.
- ix. Understand the law concerning privilege and the importance of accurate, contemporaneous note-taking.

**Marking continued**

For original journalism:

**Journalism skills**

Key details must have been collected thoroughly, including the names, ages and addresses of interviewees. The story must clearly answer who, what, where, when and, if possible, why and how.

Sources used must be relevant and authoritative, and balance must be sought on any contentious issues. The use of case studies to make issue-based stories more compelling will be rewarded.

Any inaccuracy or omission that affects the reader's understanding, alters the meaning of the story or slants the story unfairly will be penalised.

Errors that would require an apology or correction will lead to a maximum of 49% of the marks for journalism skills being awarded.

**Structure & readability**

The story should have a strong angle and should delivery details in a vibrant, coherent and logical way. Weak angles and incoherent narrative will be penalised.

**Use of quotes**

Quotes should be chosen well and attributed clearly. Appropriate use of direct and indirect speech will be rewarded.

Any inaccuracy which would require an apology or correction will lead to a maximum mark of 49% for quotes being awarded.

**Originality**

You will be rewarded for stories you have found yourself, based on original interviews and research. Resourcefulness in the pursuit of distinctive and original angles will also be rewarded.

Stories that are based on widely reported events are allowed, but should add a new angle to what has gone before. The use of old angles and predictable sources will be penalised, as will stories which are heavily based on agency copy or press releases.

**Grammar**

Stories must be written in clear, good English. Hard news stories should be in the past tense, using active sentences and vivid language. Stories must be punctuated correctly.

## National Council for the Training of Journalists

Reporting and Writing I teaches you the core skills needed to pass the NCTJ Reporting exam and builds material that can be used in the NCTJ Portfolio. The module also contributes to the NCTJ ethics syllabus.

However, the NCTJ exams are sat in the second year.

## Work Experience

Students will complete two weeks of work experience with the Kent Messenger Group at the end of the Spring term. The placements are decided by random ballot and details will be given out during the Spring term. If there is a problem with the dates or location offered you should contact Rob Bailey in the first instance, although there is no guarantee that placements will be altered. You should keep the entire Easter break free for your placement.

During your placement you will work as a trainee reporter on one of the KM Group's multimedia newsdesks. You will be expected to contribute story ideas, attend media events, and contribute to all aspects of the daily news routine.

Key tips:

- Most placements are 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday, but this will be confirmed by individual editors.
- Dress smart. Journalists are advised always to dress as if they might have to interview the Prime Minister. You never know when you might be called to attend court or shadow an important interview.
- Be prepared. Before you start your placement, read recent editions of the paper you will be working for, get familiar with any running issues or campaigns, and make an effort to know a little bit about the area.

One session in the Spring term will be dedicated to preparing for work experience.

## Reading list

Tony Harcup, *Journalism: Principles and Practice*, Sage, 2009

David Randall, *The Universal Journalist*, Pluto Press, 2011

David Randall, *The Great Reporters*, Pluto Press, 2005

Jon Smith, *Essential Reporting*, NCTJ, 2008

Harold Evans, *Essential English for Journalists*, Pimlico, 2000

Mark Hanna, *McNae's Essential Law for Journalists* (latest edition)

Jack Cappon, *The Associated Press Guide to News Writing*, Arco, 1999

Nick Davies, *Flat Earth News*, Vintage, 2009

Plus a broad selection of newspapers, supplements, magazines and news websites throughout the year.