

Newspaper Reporters



Occupational Brief Title Codes:

- D.O.T.: 131.262-018
- G.O.E.: 11.08.02
- S.O.C.: 27-3022
- O*NET™: 27-3022.00
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- H.O.C.: ASI

Work Classification Based Related

D.O.T. Occupations:

- Advertising Copywriters
- Humorists
- Playwrights
- Poets
- Radio and Television Newscasters
- Screen Writers
- Technical Writers

Interests Based Related

G.O.E. Occupations:

- Bureau Chiefs
- City Editors
- Columnists
- Editorial Assistants
- News Editors
- News Writers
- Research Assistants

Skills Based Related

O*NET Occupations:

- Broadcast News Analysts
- Creative Writers
- Editors
- Public Address System and Other Announcers
- Radio and Television Announcers
- Technical Writers

Noteworthy Quote:

"Things happen, both in small and large communities, that need to be recorded for the public. A newspaper is a historical record that documents these happenings for the public. As a reporter for a small, community paper, I have the opportunity to share the joys and sorrows of the town with the community, and I help keep locals, as well as those who have moved away, informed on what is going on in our town."

—**Connie White, Reporter, Cortland Democrat, Cortland, New York.**

Newspaper reporters (ˈnews-pap-er reˈport-ers) collect and analyze information about current events through research, interviews, and other methods. They then write accounts or stories about the information they have gathered for publication in newspapers.

Newspapers perform an important service for society. They keep track of people, trends, and events that interest or affect the public. Newspapers monitor the actions of public officials, business leaders, special interest groups, and other top figures. Writeups tell the public about local, state, national, and international events. They discuss American interests at home and abroad.

Reporters gather the facts and write the accounts. General assignment reporters cover all kinds of news stories. Other reporters on large newspapers cover assigned beats such as police stations, courts, sports, businesses, or the arts. Reporters with a background of special knowledge may analyze and write about events in fields such as politics, medicine, law, or education.

Work Performed

Newspaper reporters gather the latest news and write about it. They may get an assignment from an editor, or they may get a line on a story from their own information sources.

To cover an event, reporters may go to the scene of the accident, fire, or other happening. They observe the scene, interview people, and collect facts. To learn what really happened, who did it, where it happened, and how it happened, they must sort out a mass of facts, opinions, and information from participants, witnesses, and others who have something to say.

Reporters may take notes or use a tape recorder while they cover a story. Others may enter information on a laptop computer and then transmit the account to their office using a telephone modem. Reporters may also take photographs or shoot videos at the scene. In some circumstances, reporters phone information about an event or happening to another staff reporter, who then writes the story.

Back at the office, reporters transcribe their notes and organize their material. To complete a story, they may research police records and other public documents. Reporters may also do research in libraries to get background or source material for their writeups.

When they write the report, newspaper reporters do not take sides or present personal opinions in their writeups. They must be unbiased and uninvolved in the events they write about. Their job is to look at events objectively, to report them accurately, and to explain what they mean.

News articles must also meet the standards and editorial style of the newspaper. Editors read and edit all material. If a report needs further facts, rewriting, or cutting, an editor may give it back to the reporter or to a rewrite editor. Editors approve all copy for a newspaper.

Beginning reporters usually work on general assignments. They write up local news such as the actions of the city council, the opening of a new business, human interest stories, and other accounts that do not fall within a specific category.

Daily newspapers often assign reporters to a specific beat. The reporters may cover police stations, city hall, or courthouses to get news from these places.

Some newspaper reporters are assigned to cover news in special fields, such as medicine, politics, foreign affairs, sports, consumer affairs, finance, fashion, social events, religion, business, education, or labor. These experts write columns or opinion pieces on these subjects.

On weeklies and small newspapers, reporters usually have duties in addition to getting the news and writing about it. They may take the photos for their stories. They may write headlines, lay out pages for composition, solicit advertising, sell subscriptions, and do general office work.

Working Conditions

The technologically advanced newsrooms of today are equipped with computers, laser printers, and satellites, all of which aid in the information gathering operations. Some reporters work in noisy newsrooms with other workers. Others work in private offices.

The working pace of reporters tends to be hurried. They are often under pressure to meet deadlines. They may work for hours on leads that are unproductive. Editors may shorten or delete their stories from the paper.

Newspaper reporters deal with all kinds of people. On small-town papers, the reporters are apt to know the people they talk to and write about. At times this fact makes their job easier. At other times, it makes it difficult to write objectively and without personal involvement.

On some assignments, such as fires, accidents, wars, floods, or hurricanes, reporters may face danger. They may travel to a different county, state, or country to complete some assignments.

Hours and Earnings

Reporters on city newspapers work at least eight hours a day, five days a week. The production of a newspaper is often a round-the-clock job. Few papers, however, have a full staff twenty-four hours a day. Since reporters must be on hand to report events whenever they occur, some reporters work nights, Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays.

Most morning papers have a workday that begins in the afternoon and runs past midnight. Workers on afternoon papers work from early morning until early afternoon. Some papers have a night staff to collect local and regional news. All reporters may work any hours in order to cover a late-breaking story or to update an earlier report.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2003, newspaper reporters earned an average of \$31,240 a year. Earnings ranged from a high of more than \$71,520 a year to a low of less than \$17,900 a year. The earnings of reporters vary with their skills and with the size and location of the newspaper. Union contracts often affect earnings. Many daily newspapers have a contract with The

Newspaper Guild. This union negotiates with individual newspaper owners on pay and benefits for the workers.

Newspapers pay overtime. They also offer benefits such as paid vacations, group insurance, and pension plans.

Education and Training

Newspaper employers prefer to hire reporters with a bachelor's degree in journalism. Most newsroom employees with a college background have a journalism major or minor, and a second major or minor in a liberal arts field. Employers also look for candidates with experience on school newspapers and completed internships with news organizations. Some large city newspapers prefer candidates with a degree in a specialty such as political science, economics, or business. Large newspapers also expect job candidates to have from three to five years of experience as a reporter. The ability to write clearly, concisely, and directly is essential.

Journalism majors are available in more than 400 colleges and universities. A typical curriculum consists of about 75 percent liberal arts and the rest journalism courses. Studies cover basic reporting, mass media, copy editing, history of journalism, press law and ethics, feature writing, and graphic arts.

Since reporters must write on many subjects--science, government, business, politics, society, and entertainment, for instance--they should study English, foreign languages, history, political science, sociology, economics, psychology, and the arts. Many newspapers offer summer internships that give college students experience in basic reporting or editing tasks.

Reporters must be skilled in using word processing software. Computer graphics and desktop publishing skills are useful. A knowledge of photography is valuable for entry positions calling for a reporter-photographer. Some reporters use shorthand.

Many two-year colleges offer programs in journalism. Newspaper trade groups that counsel young people, however, advise them to transfer to a four-year college for the final two years of a bachelor's degree program.

High school students should take a college preparatory program. They should focus on English, science, social studies, and a foreign language.

Experience is important. A part-time or summer job, or even work as a "stringer" (a reporter who is paid only for stories printed) is helpful. Work on high school and college newspapers, community papers, and Armed Forces publications is also valuable.

Unions and Professional Societies

Several associations promote the interests of persons in journalism. The Dow Jones Newspaper Fund has information on careers in journalism. It also sponsors

summer internships for college students, who get experience in basic reporting or editing. The Newspaper Guild has information on union wage rates for newspaper reporters. The American Society of Newspaper Editors and the Newspaper Association of America also offer career information.

Personal Qualifications

Newspaper reporters should have an inquiring mind and an interest in people and events. They should have a nose for news and a sense of what makes a story. Accuracy is essential. Statements that are not true may be the cause of lawsuits.

Newspaper reporters must be able to adapt to difficult assignments, pressing deadlines, and often irregular hours. Resourcefulness, initiative, and the ability to work both alone and as part of a team are essential for these workers.

Occupations can be adapted for workers with disabilities. Persons should contact their school or employment counselors, their state office of vocational rehabilitation, or their state department of labor to explore fully their individual needs and requirements as well as the requirements of the occupation.

Where Employed

In the United States there are about 1,600 daily newspapers and more than 7,500 weekly newspapers. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, about 40,000 newspaper reporters worked throughout the United States for large city dailies, suburban, and small town dailies or weeklies in 2003.

Employment Outlook

The employment of reporters is expected to grow slightly through the year 2012. Slow employment growth can be attributed to mergers, consolidations, and closings which all reduce the number of newspapers in print. Declining circulations, higher expenses, and a drop in advertising profits are also forcing cutbacks in staff.

The newspaper business is also sensitive to economic ups and downs. During a recession, few new reporters are hired, and some reporters lose their jobs. There is also a trend to hire stringers or freelancers for part-time newspaper work.

Competition for reporting jobs on large city newspapers is keen. Prospects are best for graduates with a master's degree from an accredited college and a completed internship. Talented writers skilled in a special scientific or technical field have an advantage.

Small town and suburban newspapers will offer better opportunities for beginners. On small newspapers, openings sometimes occur as reporters become editors or leave to take jobs on larger newspapers.

Turnover is fairly high in this work. Many find the work too stressful, or do not like the lifestyle. The difficulty of finding jobs and the low beginning salaries cause some reporters to consider other fields such as public relations or advertising.

Entry Methods

Job seekers may get help from their college placement office. They should prepare a portfolio of material they have written. Those with some experience such as a summer internship at a newspaper office or work on a college newspaper may find permanent work with these employers.

Graduates may also find work through want ads in professional journals. Job seekers may write to editors of papers where they would like to work. The best approach, however, is to visit newspaper companies, fill out an application form, and perhaps take a test to show verbal or writing skills.

Small newspapers are the most likely places for beginners to start. They may find jobs on small dailies and weeklies when more experienced reporters transfer to larger papers.

Newspaper reporters may start with general assignments. They may cover civic and club meetings, write obituaries, interview visitors, and cover court proceedings. New reporters may help with photography and other newspaper work.

A few outstanding college graduates may begin on a large city or suburban daily. As a rule, these papers require reporters with several years of experience on a daily newspaper.

Advancement

Newspaper reporters can advance in many ways. They may move up on a small paper and become the top reporter or editor. They may get experience on a small paper and then leave to take a job on a large city paper. They may become owners or publishers.

With experience, reporters may become columnists, editors, or correspondents. Some become executives or publishers of newspapers. Others may get jobs with newspaper syndicates, public relations firms, or government agencies.

A few reporters transfer to broadcast journalism. They may become newscasters. Others transfer to other fields such as public relations or advertising. In these fields they may advance to management positions.

For Further Research

Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications, Stauffer-Flint Hall, 1435 Jayhawk Blvd., Lawrence, KS 66045-7575. Web site: www.ukans.edu

American Society of Newspaper Editors, 11690B Sunrise Valley Drive, Reston, VA 20191-1409. Web site: www.asne.org

Association of American Publishers, 71 Fifth Avenue, 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10003. Web site: www.publishers.org

The Dow Jones Newspaper Fund, P.O. Box 300, Princeton, NJ 08543-0300. Web site: <http://djnewspaperfund.dowjones.com/fund/default.asp>

International Society of Weekly Newspaper Editors, Institute of International Studies, Missouri Southern State University, 3950 E. Newman Road, Joplin, MO 64801-1595. Web site: www.mssu.edu/iswne/

Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc., National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting, Inc., 138 Neff Annex, Missouri School of Journalism, Columbia, MO 65211. Web site: www.ire.org

Newspaper Association of America, 1921 Gallows Road, Suite 600, Vienna, VA 22182-3900. Web site: www.naa.org

Newspaper Guild, 501 Third Street, NW, Suite 250, Washington, DC 20001. Web site: www.newsguild.org

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