

# Synopsis – Freelance Journalism Course

## **Module 1: Introduction**

Your first and most important steps to becoming a published freelance journalist – how to enjoy your course – how to proceed with your assignments – about your tutors and how they will help you – a six-point plan to make your course a complete success.

## **Module 2: Making A Freelance Journalist Out Of You**

An important truth for all freelance journalists – deciding where and when to write – avoid overworking – how to start writing – writers' block, how to overcome it – basic equipment – keeping a cuttings file – how to organise yourself – using a trained eye – what you should write about – start with what you know – how to use rejections to improve your writing – your educational background – qualities that are necessary to be a successful freelance journalist.

## **Module 3: The Role Of The Journalist**

An introduction to the newspaper office – the changing face of journalism – the job of the journalist explained – what is news? – how news is changing – what makes a hardhitting news story – where news comes from – how to gather news and generate stories – hard news and soft news explained – the difference between features and general interest articles.

## **Module 4: The World Of The Freelance**

The role of the freelance journalist explained – how to beat the competition. Hard news or soft news, which is the right one for you? Using your specialist knowledge – how to survive as a freelance journalist – the pros and cons of freelancing explored – cultivating a professional attitude – what pay you can expect – making sure you get paid. Opportunities for the freelance journalist.

## **Module 5: Understanding the Newspaper Market**

The importance of knowing your market – a potted guide to weekly papers, evening and regional morning papers, the nationals and trade press. Analysing papers as part of your market research – tailoring your writing to different publications – why timing is essential – when to contact the newsdesk – exploiting opportunities – taking advantage of the editors' slow periods.

## **Module 6: Material for The Freelance To Target**

What the freelance should avoid. Tip offs – how to make them profitable – getting paid. Getting started – best categories for the freelance to tackle – sports reporting – a subject not to overlook – local history, how to research and bring dull facts to life – advertising features.

## **Module 7: Setting Up Seriously As A Freelance**

Finding a regular supply of work – getting inside information on newspaper and TV organisations. Making contact and talking to editors. Breaking into the magazine market – the importance of market research – analysing the contents of magazines – article analysis – tailoring your work to their requirements. Equipment needed by the freelance: car, phone, answer machine, word processor, personal computer, camera, tape-recorder, fax, filing cabinet and reference books. The need for an office/study. How to organise yourself – how to keep records – the importance of keeping your finances in order – joining the NUJ or the Institute of Journalists.

## **Module 8: Tracking Down Stories And Finding Facts**

Developing your news gathering skills – the telephone calls you should make – which stories to look for – developing your story – covering all your markets – the importance of contacts – how to cultivate and use them – who makes a good contact – your contacts book – useful tips for running a contacts network – the importance of acting quickly. A good source for information and story ideas – monitor other media – make the most of advertisements. Researching your story or feature – the importance of current information – who to speak to – a list of useful contacts – how to use cuttings – always check quotes – using the Internet.

## **Module 9: Putting Together A Story**

Writing an effective news story – information to include – helpful guidelines – the 5 Ws – the journalist’s mantra. How to structure your story – the news story pyramid – an example – analysis of a news story – getting your introduction right – ensure accuracy – facts not opinions – using quotes – avoiding hype. Tips to help develop your writing style. Putting together a feature – the introduction – the main body – the sign off. Planning your writing – the importance of revision.

## **Module 10: Selling Your Work**

Step-by-step guide to selling your writing including finding an angle, writing your story and devising your sales pitch. Multiple angles – turning editorial competition to your advantage – selling hard news and soft news – using your initiative – follow up stories – spotting and exploiting story opportunities – using photographs – timing is critical – speed writing and the 5 Ws. Selling features and articles – how to write your query letter – a typical query letter – outlines explained and illustrated – how to submit your copy – layout of your manuscript – learning from re-writes – pen names. Selling to the world – how to find markets outside the UK – market research is essential.

## **Module 11: How To Write Readers’ Letters and Fillers**

A wide open market – opportunities for a regular income – who publishes readers’ letters – turning your experiences into cash – personal anecdote letters, further comment letters and controversial letters explained – how to start – the value of market research and how to tackle it – assessing the competition – tips on writing a successful reader’s letter – developing your writing style – how long to wait for publication – tips on increasing your chances of publication. What makes a filler – targeting your subjects – quizzes, brain teasers, crosswords and questionnaires – the importance of humour – Reader’s Digest and how to approach it – other good markets – good sources for ideas – how to submit fillers – your copyright – multiple submissions – payment.

## **Module 12: Writing Reviews**

A good place to start – the reviewer’s role and responsibilities – what you should include in your review – your attitude – how much you can expect to be paid – building your portfolio – a word of warning. How to review and write up stage shows including: plays, musicals, concerts, opera, ballet and comedy. Reviewing amateur dramatics – a danger to avoid. Reviewing books – who to sell to – a checklist of what to include in your review. Tips on reviewing CDs, films, TV and computer games. Eating out reviews – the pitfalls – key points to include – an example of a fact file. Reviewing cars – what to include – example of an auto file – a useful reminder.

## **Module 13: Articles For Women’s & Men’s Magazines**

**Section 1: Writing for Women** – Opportunities for the freelance – market research is vital – what editors want – the changing face of women’s magazines – front page teasers – men writing for women’s titles. How to tackle the triumph over tragedy article – how to write the confessional article – celebrity profiles and the freelance – who to interview – how to contact celebrities – the interview, how to approach it and what questions to ask – the importance of preparation – how to get an original quote. What makes a ‘Happy Days’ article – health articles, who can write them – the personalised piece – the role of photographs. Articles for the feminist press – subjects to cover – a structure to follow. Writing your preliminary letter – who to send it to and what to say – packaged magazines explained.

**Section 2: Writing for Men** – the new contents of magazines for men – speaking the lingo – market research is essential – the big six – what editors will pay for – who should write for men’s magazines.

## **Module 14: How To Write General Interest Articles**

The market – important differences between articles and features – subjects to avoid – opportunities for the freelance – sources for ideas. Researching your market – important facts to include. How to begin your article – using the same idea for a variety of markets – finding a ‘peg’ – when to submit articles – the value of careful planning – using topicality – keeping one step ahead of the competition – being in the right place at the right time. Seasonal articles – when to submit them – be organised – how to look for different angles for different markets – more sources for ideas – making your hobby or pastime pay. Writing for the colour supplements – writing from your own experience – keep on writing.

## **Module 15: Travel Writing**

The reality uncovered – huge opportunities for freelancers – what a travel editor is looking for – what to avoid. The secret of a good travel piece – tips on finding a fresh angle – the importance of knowing your market – getting free or reduced travel – the value of preparation before travelling – how to gather your information on location and how to use it – tips on how to sell to more than one market – the importance of taking your own photographs – a danger to avoid. How to write the travel article – what to include and what to leave out – gripping introductions – sidebars – an example. Using your locality to your advantage – where to find information. Contacting and writing for the top travel markets. Opportunities in the overseas markets and in-flight magazines – subjects to write about and those to avoid. What rewards to expect from travel writing.

## **Module 16: Writing For The Trade Press**

Another huge market – the importance of market research – the stories editors are looking for – the importance of in-depth research and accuracy – your writing style – avoid jargon. Expanding into features – how to break into the trade press market – becoming a local correspondent – making your contacts – where to find ideas – how to cash in on trade fairs – some practice projects – in-house magazines – sponsored magazines.

## **Module 17: Writing For Children’s & Teenage Publications**

What children read – why write for youngsters – what to write about – language matters – style and presentation – the value of talking to children – selling your work – what not to write – what to include in activity articles. The teenage market and opportunities for the freelance – youth culture – subjects for the freelance – old favourites discussed – using humour – the boy/girl divide – true confession stories, when to use them and how they should be written – some taboos in writing for the teen market.

## **Module 18: How To Write Humorous Articles**

Where to find humour – using humour in your writing – using humour effectively – finding your niche. Different types of humorous writing including personal experiences, irony, satire, strange but true stories and general interest. Using humour in fillers and readers’ letters – how to find humorous ideas and use them in your writing – your humour file. Funny quizzes – subjects to avoid – an important piece of advice.

## **Module 19: Religious & Inspirational Writing**

Who can write for this market – faith and facts – understanding the market is vital – be sincere. Subjects to cover – news – people – places – practical advice – humour – anniversaries – devotional/spiritual – personal opinion – reviews – personal experiences. Readers’ pages – homes/gardens/cookery – writing for children – payment. Inspirational articles – the New Age market – dos and don’ts. The American market – finding markets – list of UK publications.

## **Module 20: Ethics**

The moral maze journalists face every day – advice on overcoming ethical problems – the journalist's first responsibility – handling the 'no comment' statement – what your editor will expect – when you can ethically use 'unavailable for comment' – avoiding libel – investigating claims – where to place the denial in your story. The industry's two main codes of conduct listed and discussed. When a story is in the public interest – the invasion of privacy debate – a list of don'ts – what is good taste – avoiding bias – a reminder of where your loyalties lie.

## **Module 21: Essential Law**

Libel, why you should avoid it – what is libellous – defamation, identification and publication examined. Defences against libel – justification – fair comment – accord and satisfaction – offer to make amends – absolute and qualified privilege – a last word on libel. Handling complaints – who should handle them – your attitude – a danger to avoid. Copyright – how it protects others' work – protecting your own work – on the Internet – borrowing photos. Protecting your sources. Court reporting – British law – criminal law and civil law explained – the journalist's role in court reporting – types of offences – where different offences will be tried – the Crown Prosecution Services. Reporting remands – ten things journalists can safely report – when restrictions don't apply. How a trial is conducted when a defendant pleads guilty or not guilty – punishments. Contempt of court – guidelines on avoiding contempt of court – crime reporting, before, during and after the trial. The Criminal Justice Act 1925 – when you can take photographs. Identification of juveniles – jigsaw identification. Coroner's courts – reporting inquests – treasure trove.

## **Module 22: Local Government**

Why you need to understand local government – council responsibilities explained: protection and safety, the environment, housing, welfare and education, sports and culture. Different types of councils – two tier – single tier – parish councils – who's responsible for what. Greater London – how the GLA works. The changing face of local government. How councils operate – the difference between councillors and officials, mayors and leaders of the council. Items for discussion and their sources – debate – declaring an interest – journalists' access to meetings – qualified privilege explained and when it applies. Local government finance – local government ombudsman. Devolution – the wider scene.

## **Module 23: Behind the Scenes At A Newspaper**

The people who make up a newspaper's staff – who's who on the board of directors – who's really in charge – the editor's position discussed. The roles of the different departments are examined – production – circulation – promotions – advertising – accounts. How they keep the paper running smoothly.

## **Module 24: Inside The Editorial Department**

How the newsroom is organised – the chain of command illustrated – the roles of the editor, deputy editor, associate editors, the news editor, chief sub-editor, sports editor, features editor and the picture editor examined. The daily editorial conference and its function – the news list. Copyflow – how a news item goes from an original idea to a printed story.

## **Module 25: Life As A Staff Reporter**

How a staff reporter is expected to work – the discipline of news gathering – the role of the newsroom diary – how the newsroom is organised – the importance of gathering background information – night work and unsocial hours – the role of the specialist and district reporters – the benefits of working at a branch office. Responsibilities of a reporter – dress code – your behaviour and attitude – punctuality – keeping your cool – determination – reporting fairly and accurately. How to cover events – checklist for preliminary stories – questions to ask and who to talk to – on the day – the follow-up story – keeping a positive attitude – finding a new angle. How to cover meetings – be prepared – who to talk to – tips on how to remember who's who – where to place yourself – an important warning. Reporting speeches – finding the best news angle – the importance of accurate quotes and how to achieve them.

## **Module 26: The Role Of The Sub-Editor**

The importance of the sub-editor's job – what the sub-editor does. How a sub-editor judges copy – placement of a story – the sub-editor's responsibilities – being held to account – protecting the paper's reputation. The sub's department – the role of the chief sub-editor, junior subs and copytasters – copy subbing explained. Writing headlines – avoiding ambiguity – news/advertising ratio – the influence of advertising – 'the book' explained – planning. The importance of timing – localised pages. The theory of design – visual appeal, logical layout and design definitions. Bill posters. A health warning!

## **Module 27: TV & Radio News**

The rapid pace of changing technology – a guide to the main TV broadcasters – a guide to radio broadcasters – the styles of the BBC and commercial stations examined. Opportunities for the freelance – giving tip-offs – when to contact the newsdesk. Working as a radio reporter – what makes a radio story – how sound is used to create atmosphere and effect. How a TV newsroom is organised. Working as a TV reporter – how to maximise the impact. TV, radio and print reporting compared – video journalists – what the future holds.

## **Module 28: Going For A Staff Job**

You're now one step ahead – the competition – what editors are looking for and how to provide it – finding a job – where to look – taking the initiative – how to contact editors. Your early days on staff – what to expect – further training – the role of the NCTJ – unconventional ways to break into journalism. Opportunities in TV and radio – initial contact – pre-entry courses – the BBC's News Training Scheme – independent local radio – commercial TV. Looking ahead – time to specialise – best wishes for the future.

## **SUPPLEMENTS**

**Spelling, Punctuation & Style by Diana Nadin**

**Getting the Most From Interviews by Ian Pattison**

**Profit From Your Photography by Hugh Graham**