

TIPS FOR STUDENT JOURNALISTS

While still in school

- Learn how to use your AP Stylebook. Keep it within arm's reach, and refer to it often.
- Obey deadlines. Avoid stress by submitting your copy early. Many feature stories, for example, can be submitted to your editor days ahead of time. But a government meeting report or sports story might require you to work right up to the deadline.
- Learn the type of environment you work best in. Many reporters are now working from home. Does that work for you? Can you work in a newsroom where there might be a lot of conversation? Do you need silence to write? How can you block out distractions, if necessary?
- Learn to submit stories from the field, such as from a sports venue, government meeting or polling place.
- Learn how to take notes. Develop your own shorthand. Do not overrely on your voice recorder. Transcribing recordings consume a lot of time.
- If your editor hands back your copy with repeated errors and changes, learn why these mistakes keep coming up. It might be your editor who is wrong.
- Work on a variety of stories: serious, in-depth, features, sports, technical, government, etc. You might discover a hidden interest or talent.
- Pursue internships, even those that don't pay, if necessary. Ask your hometown newspaper or radio station for a short-term one- or two-week internship if there is no pay. And state in writing exactly what you are willing to do if there is no pay. Be sure your services are appreciated and not abused.
- Pursue internships that require working in more than one media platform.
- Learn the level of support you'll receive from editors and reporters while serving in that internship. And be sure to value the freedom to pursue good stories independently without burdensome oversight.



TIPS FOR STUDENT JOURNALISTS

When seeking a journalism job

- What kind of work culture are you looking for in your first journalism job?
- Identify in your interview the talents or experiences you can bring to the job that might not already exist there. It's important to explain how you might benefit your prospective employer.
- Don't hesitate to ask about evening and weekend duties, and how many stories are expected from you each week.
- Be prepared to hear how your duties might change between the time you first notice the ad and your first day on the job. Today, everything in journalism is in flux, and restructuring can take place in a newsroom on a moment's notice.
- Solid reporting skills are a must, but what is your speciality: writing for the web and print on deadline, shooting and editing videos, or a combination of the two?
- In smaller newsrooms, expect exposure in many areas, including layout, online posting, photography, reporting, social media sourcing and interaction with the public that comes to the news office for a variety of reasons.
- Be prepared to be lonely at times in your first job out of school. It takes time to get to know people in a small town where you are new.
- Dress appropriately for the environment or occasion. The clothes you wear to a city council meeting might not be the same as those you wear to a construction site.
- Get involved in activities in your new community. Build relationships outside of work. Talk with your editor about those activities/interests to be sure there is no conflict.
- Know that you represent your newspaper/media outlet even when you are not on duty. This includes when you grocery shop, play recreation volleyball, attend worship services, or go out with friends after a long day at work.
- Cultivate sources and explain to them how you might use what they say. Don't expect everyone to know what "off the record" means. Don't use a quote in a story if it was stated to you casually at a social event. If you think it's a quote that's important, talk with your source about what was just said and let her or him know that you might use whatever else is said during your conversation.
- Be judicious about honoring "off the record" remarks. Some newspapers follow a rule that nothing is "off the record." Regardless, if you allow sources too many "off the record" comments, you might later have trouble remembering which comments are "off the record" and which ones aren't. And your sources might abuse that privilege. Consider using a recorder during interviews to ensure you are collecting information accurately.
- Know your newsroom's policy regarding showing a story or parts of a story to a source before the story is published. Many editors, for good reason, don't want their reporters showing stories to sources before publication. Know that you are always in control of the story until you submit it to your editor.
- Know that the first rule of being an editor is "do no harm." If your editor harms your story, be prepared to discuss it.
- Be prepared to work many evenings and weekends. If you are the newest reporter, be prepared to work all summer long, without much time off.
- Daily access to a vehicle is critical. Without it, you will struggle to meet the requirements of the job.
- Know how much of your time might be devoted to special section writing.
- Understand what federal law says, and what your employers' rules are, regarding overtime hours.