



Living the Dream

*Freelance Journalism for Newbies,
Career Switchers and Other Enthusiasts*

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Living the Dream: Freelance Journalism for Newbies, Career Switchers and Other Enthusiasts

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Preface

It sounds like a dream job: Traveling the world while reporting on great places and interesting people. But for most of us in the journalism field, reality looks quite different. Many journalists work as part-time freelancers or come from non-traditional backgrounds, and they often lack the requisite experience and professional knowledge to make their dream of a successful journalism career come true. But don't despair: No matter what your professional background looks like, you can turn your dream into reality. All you need is tenacity, an open mind and the right partner at your side.

The path to journalistic success isn't a walk in the park, but you don't have to go it alone. Associations for freelancers, such as the United States Press Agency (USPA) or the International Association of Press Photographers (IAPP), provide excellent support for journalists and press photographers, and this book has all the information you need to get started in this field. Our goal is to help you turn your passion into a prosperous career while giving you the tools to become a more efficient, assertive journalist. Because one thing is clear: It isn't going to happen overnight. Journalism is a popular career, and if you want to make it in this field, you need to be prepared to stand your ground every now and then. We are not trying to be overly dramatic. It simply is the nature of the news business.

In order to become a successful journalist or press photographer, you need to be resilient. Don't let other people get to you, because if you do, you have already lost the game, and the best assignments will be snatched up by your competitors. Courage and independence are critical components of journalistic success. With the right attitude, journalism can be more than just a way for you make a living – it can be a lucrative and highly rewarding career. Isn't that what we all want?

Don't let the fact that you keep running into more experienced journalists intimidate you. That is an unavoidable part of the job. Freelance journalism is on the rise around the globe, and competition within the industry is fierce. This affects assignments as well as the prices you can command for your photos and articles. Once you have made a name for yourself in the field, you may be able to charge what you want. But the path to get there is not only long, it is also full of obstacles. More than likely, you will encounter at least a few colleagues who will try to throw bricks in your way. But that won't keep you from pursuing your goals, will it?

Of course not, because you have a strong partner at your side who will support you every step of the way. So, what can you expect to gain from reading this book? A lot! Journalism is a vast and multifaceted field that requires extensive knowledge and professional insight. Our goal is to open your eyes and make you understand that becoming a top dog in the journalism world isn't something that happens by chance. Most journalists and press photographers must work hard for many years to establish their credibility. Success isn't something that comes easy or fast in the media world.

In this book, we will explain the most important elements of your journalistic toolbox, including the all-important press pass. Does every journalist need press credentials? The answer is just a few pages away.

In addition, we will address the accreditation process and why it is so important. Of course, we also need to cover some basic journalistic concepts. After all, they form the building blocks for your success. Without some fundamental insights and the knowledge how to apply them, your chances of becoming a successful journalist or press photographer are slim.

But this book goes beyond the basics. Take it one page at a time, and you won't regret investing your time in reading this useful guide.

Before we go into too much detail here, let's move on and get to the meat of the subject. We hope you will enjoy reading this book as much as we enjoyed writing it.

Your team from the United Journalists & Photographers Association, Inc. (UJPA)

Everyone is looking for fame and fortune

Breaking a news story or capturing the perfect photo is exciting, but journalism is about much more than that. It's about finding your true passion. By Hollywood standards, journalists are a cut-throat pack, always on the hunt for the latest celebrity or political scandal, engaging in unethical behaviors to get a scoop, or putting themselves in danger to get that million-dollar photo. But that's not the reality. Real-world journalists don't just write about the rich and famous, and most of them are far from being rich and famous themselves. Let's be honest: Life as a journalist or photojournalist can be rough. It starts with the search for assignments or a gig as a regular contributor. Then, once you have a story to cover, you need to find the best way to approach it. And finally, there is the matter of getting paid adequately for your efforts. All of this requires hard work and dedication. Not everyone is cut out for this job.

Like any other field, the news industry experiences crises. During a serious news crisis, working conditions are even more dire than under normal circumstances, and the ramifications can be substantial. For some journalists, this can mean the end of their career. Thus, freelance journalists must always think about the future. Freelancers of all professions tend to get caught up in a feast-and-famine cycle: One month, you are too busy to think of anything but work, and a few weeks later, you may find yourself staring at your empty assignment calendar in panic, wondering if you will be able to continue this freelance lifestyle for much longer. Even stringers who have ongoing relationships with one or more news organizations are not immune to the effect the economy can have on the freelance journalism market. From budget cuts to increased competition, there are many reasons why assignments may dwindle. In this field, you cannot take anything for granted.

Your best defense against these fluctuations is a strong network that will offer support when things are not going well. We will explore the benefits of networking later in this book. First and foremost, you must find your niche and specialize in one area where you know you excel. Being flexible and dedicated to your work with heart and soul is an important prerequisite in this field, but it is not enough to get you to the top. Success is built on a solid foundation. And this foundation includes a strategic approach. Ask yourself what your strengths are. Do you enjoy covering government meetings or court trials, or are you more of a features writer? Do you like to go out and investigate to find your own stories, or do you prefer to write about breaking news? What types of photos do you enjoy taking? With enough planning, you may even find an area of specialization so unique that you face little to no competition from other journalists. Once you have found your niche, you must market your services. As a member of the press, you already know the importance of hooking your audience. Apply this talent to market yourself. Your name must become your trademark. This is certainly not an easy feat. But it is not impossible.

Prospecting - a key factor in your success

Maybe you want to become a household name in the news business, or maybe for you, journalistic success simply means earning enough money to live comfortably while doing what you love. Either way, you will need a strategy to achieve your goals. Haphazard prospecting emails and cold calls won't get you very far – unless, of course,

your goal is to appear desperate for work. Instead, identify the right people to call, then call with purpose. Develop your sales pitch before you pick up the phone to make sure you have convincing arguments at the ready. Show the person on the phone that you are good with words. That's a big part of your job, after all.

Never give up

Occasionally, you may encounter bias against freelance journalists, particularly if you are new to the field or come from a non-traditional background. Or you may have an assignment editor on the phone who shows no interest in your pitch. Should you let this discourage you? Absolutely not! Thank them for their time and try your luck somewhere else. An editor's job can be even more stressful than yours, hard to believe as that may be. Sometimes, an editor may reject an idea because there is simply too much going on at the time, even though the topic might have been a great fit. Another editor may love to hear your pitch and offer to buy your story or photo without hesitation. If not, just try again another time with a different topic.

Build a strong network

Connections can make or break your freelance career. A strong support network allows you to exchange thoughts and ideas with other journalists and provides access to assignments or jobs that aren't otherwise announced. However, joining a network is not enough. To reap the benefits, you must engage with your colleagues. Active participation is important. Social networks are two-way streets. Self-promotion may be acceptable in very small doses, but the primary purpose of these forums is to support each other and build a community. This way, all participants will get the most out of the network. Platforms such as Facebook or LinkedIn are very popular with journalists. The Internet has become an invaluable tool for anyone working with or as a member of the press.

Get support from a professional organization

All media representatives should be able to rely on the help and support from a legitimate, professional news organization. Our partner organizations are a great place to start:

- International Association of Press Photographers (www.ia-pp.com)
- German Daily News (www.germandailynews.com)
- United States Press Agency (www.uspa24.com)
- Press Pass (www.press-pass.us)

These organizations provide various benefits for journalists in general and freelancers in particular, including issuing credentials such as press passes. We have devoted an entire chapter on this subject elsewhere in this book, so keep reading. Unfortunately, not all organizations have your best interests in mind. Many so-called press associations are merely business vendors that sell press passes for their own profit without offering any benefits for journalists. But not every piece of paper with your name and the title "Press" on it will get you access when you need it. Luckily, determining whether an organization is legitimate is relatively easy. Often, all it takes is one look at their website and you know that you are dealing with amateurs. We cannot stress this point enough: Not every organization that promises to issue press passes will

provide you with a legitimate badge that will establish your credibility as a reporter or photojournalist. Finding the right partner requires you to do your due diligence. It is all too easy to fall into a trap that can cause damage to your professional reputation. Imagine trying to enter an event with a phony credential. The organizers are unlikely to grant you admission, and your image as a professional journalist may be seriously tarnished. In the worst case, this may cause you problems when trying to get access to any events organized by the same people in the future – even if you have a genuine press pass by then. Don't make things harder for yourself than they need to be. Place your trust in the right partner and the right network from the very beginning.

Adapt and be flexible

Flexibility is an important element of journalistic success. While choosing your niche is important for your career in the long run, it may not be wise to specialize in a particular area right from the start. Find out where the market is going first. Some subjects are more interesting to readers than others. No matter how well you write, or how great your photos are: If the topic isn't engaging, you will have a hard time finding an editor willing to give you the time of day. On the other hand, working in a popular beat is problematic, too, as it will make it harder for you to sell your work. Therefore, you must assess your own skills and abilities with a critical eye. The same holds true for press photographers. What type of photos do you enjoy taking? And no, the fact that you can take beautiful portraits of your kids doesn't make you a good photojournalist. Remember that as a journalist, you are free to write about any topic. Take advantage of that flexibility. You won't get rich covering local events or writing feature stories for your small-town newspaper. If your goal is to make a name for yourself and live comfortably, you need to set your ambitions higher. Take a hard look at your skills and decide whether your chosen career path is right for you.

Now let's assume that you have made the right choice and possess the required skills. Alas, you still need to remain flexible. It would be foolish to expect that you will sell all your stories and photos to renowned newspapers and magazines. Sometimes, you may even need to turn to non-journalism jobs in order to pay the bills during a famine period. That is why flexibility is key. If you are willing to adapt, you will not only be able to make a living as your own boss, you will improve your skills along the way. Remember that with every assignment, every story and every photo, you turn your name into a brand and get one step closer to success. You will almost certainly go through rough times that will have you wonder whether you made the right decision. But your hard work will pay off in the long run, and you will earn the recognition you deserve.

And that's our segue to the next chapter. In this chapter, we want to help you understand that successful journalists are not born, they are self-made. You will need to overcome many obstacles. You will experience setbacks. But you will learn to accept them and move on. We are human, and we all make mistakes. In order to reach our goals, we need to keep our chin up and keep going.

Great journalists are made, not born

Ah, the life of a journalist. You get to travel, meet famous people, have a front-row seat to important events, and write about interesting topics. It's a glamorous way to make a living. Or is it? Well, unfortunately, all that glitters is not gold. There are many misconceptions about the journalistic profession – and some are more grounded in reality than others. If you enter this field with aspirations of becoming the next Anderson Cooper, be prepared for a rude awakening. For one thing, you would be putting far too much pressure on yourself, which would only stifle your career. To be successful as well as satisfied in this line of work, you must free yourself of expectations. Don't get caught up in a relentless pursuit of clichés, and accept that things may be different than you imagined.

Of course, there are examples of journalists who found fame and fortune seemingly overnight, all thanks to that one story they broke or that one photo they captured. But let's be real: Such cases are the exception, not the rule. Sure, it could happen to you. Just don't count on it. After all, the pool of journalists hoping to catch their big break is endless. Some may get lucky after a few years. But should you wait for it? The answer is no. You need to go on the offensive. Have a strategy in place and a network to back you up, then get to work. Write your own success story.

Learn from your mistakes

It is natural for beginners to make mistakes. So don't worry if you mess up from time to time, because we are all human. Journalism is a path that is full of potential stumbling blocks. The important thing is that you learn from your mistakes and never make the same mistake twice. A misspelled name, a quote out of context – it is easy for errors to sneak into your work. Tight deadlines and stressful working environments don't lend themselves to a thorough QA process. "Publish first, confirm later" seems to be the motto of many news outlets. But beware that even seemingly minor errors can lead to expensive lawsuits. In many cases, the fact that you were unaware of an inaccuracy may be irrelevant. Whether you have committed a slip of the pen or written an entire piece full of misinformation, you must be prepared to accept both the professional and financial ramifications.

Legal considerations for journalists

Whether your medium is the pen or the camera, chances are that in the course of your career, you will run into people who simply dislike journalists. The nature of journalistic work is to gather information, whether that means digging into people's private lives or trying to uncover the deficits of society. People don't like when you step on their toes, and some may retaliate with threats of a lawsuit. Here are a few potential legal issues you should be concerned with:

- Libel
- Copyright infringement
- Trademarks and licensing
- Privacy rights/right of publicity
- Competition regulations
- Data privacy rules

The challenge for journalists lies in trying to avoid legal issues while exercising their right to inform the public. For print journalists, copyright violations in particular are a potential minefield. Always take great care to identify all text passages or quotes taken from other sources with the appropriate citations. In any case, you should consider getting professional liability insurance, which will cover any claims for damages should they arise. Otherwise, the financial consequences of a lawsuit could be devastating for your career and your livelihood. No one is immune to making mistakes – so don't take any chances.

Practice makes perfect

Whether you are straight out of college, a career transfer or just starting your part-time freelance business, you will need to gain experience. In order to catch up to your competitors, you need to work hard and get lots of professional practice. What if you can't find any assignments right away? Simply find a topic you are interested in and write about it for your portfolio. Maybe you can find a side gig as a copywriter or product photographer. Even if a job is not directly related to journalism, it will give you a chance to earn money and, more importantly, experience. Both of these factors are crucial for a successful freelance lifestyle. Over time, you will develop your own routine of how to approach assignments. You don't need to be an expert from day one. It's okay to learn as you go. What you need to start out is passion and perseverance. Add a press pass to the mix, and you have a winning combination for a thriving journalism career. In the next chapter, we will tell you all about the press pass and its importance for your success.

The press pass – Your golden ticket?

In this chapter, we will talk about one of the most important tools for journalists around the globe: the press pass. But before we tell you about the benefits of this credential, we would like to clarify what a press pass is not. Some people may believe that a press pass is a ticket to get into any event without paying admission, a badge to flash to get front-row access to the action, or a way to get freebies and discounts. While it is true that a press pass does provide certain advantages, that is not its primary purpose. A press pass identifies you as a professional journalist, and as such, you should abide by the rules of conduct and ethical standards of the profession. Never abuse your press pass for private purposes. It identifies you as a professional journalist, so act accordingly.

Without a doubt, the most useful aspect of a press pass is the fact that it can open doors for you. Government agencies and other organizations, for example, may be reluctant to provide information unless you can identify yourself as a representative of the press. They may want to see that you have a legitimate reason for your inquiries and are not just wasting their time or trying to satisfy your own curiosity. You also need a press pass to become accredited to cover official functions and large events. Moreover, as a journalist, you are not to be hindered in the execution of your journalistic duties. A press pass is proof of your right to information.

Go where the action is

At some point during their career, most journalists will report on a tragic event, such as an accident, crime scene or natural disaster. To get the story or capture the scene on camera, you need to be close to the action. Political summits, public speeches and other events also require journalists to have special access in order to get interviews or take photos up-close. Without a press pass, you are left on the sidelines. A good story, whether told with words or in pictures, requires you to have a front-row seat. Thus, a press pass is an indispensable tool if you are serious about your career.

When it comes to covering events such as trade fairs or conventions, a press pass may be the only way for you to gain admission. Event organizers may only allow outsiders if they can prove their media status, and your press pass shows that you are a professional journalist. As mentioned earlier, a press pass is also essential during the accreditation process. In addition, it will help you get access to sources who can provide insight into the event you are covering and answer your questions. This means you don't have to waste your precious time trying to hunt down the right person for an interview or background information.

As a press pass holder, you carry a responsibility towards your profession, your sources, and the general public. Part of this responsibility means resisting the temptation to use a press pass for personal gain. Should you be caught, your press pass may be revoked – not to mention that you would be doing a great disservice to your colleagues.

You will find that a press pass is a basic requirement that will significantly facilitate your reporting efforts. Don't think that just because you cover the business beat, you won't need this credential. What if you are writing about a company and would like to tour their facility to get a better feel for the working environment there? Or you want to write about the launch of an important product? In any of those scenarios, a press pass will allow you to establish your credibility and get people to open up to you. After all, business owners have a vested interest in talking to journalists: A news story means free publicity for them. But unless you can prove that you are a journalist with the intention of publishing your story, you are unlikely to get through to the people who matter. Finally, even getting added to a company's media distribution list or gaining access to their online media section may require a press pass. You see: without a press pass, you won't make it very far in this field.

The press pass as professional identification

Getting a press pass has traditionally been a privilege reserved for full-time staff reporters and photographers. However, a growing number of journalists is entering the business as freelancers, and they quickly learn that this press credential is crucial for their success. Fortunately, journalist associations such as the United States Press Agency (USPA) and the International Association of Press Photographers (IAPP) support all journalists, whether they pursue this career as their main profession or as a secondary source of income. They also issue press passes, enabling freelancers to take advantage of the benefits that come with a professional ID. No matter which organization issues it, a press pass needs to be renewed every year and can be revoked in the event of abuse.

Not all press passes are created equal

As mentioned earlier, not all organizations that sell press passes issue credentials that will actually help journalists when push comes to shove. We could go on and on about such frivolous providers, but we don't believe they are worth our – or your – time. Instead, let us tell you about another important media credential: the International Press Pass. Unlike a regular press pass, which is an ID the size of a credit card, the International Press Pass is a 32-page document that resembles a passport. It is available in 50 languages and allows journalists to identify themselves as media representatives anywhere in the world.

A press pass is not a ticket for a free ride

A press pass offers numerous advantages for journalists. For instance, many hotels grant rebates to journalists who can present a press pass when booking accommodations. However, as a professional ID, a press pass may only be used in the line of journalistic work. Even then, journalists must take great care to ensure that any special benefits they might receive do not create bias in their reporting. A press pass comes with responsibility. It should never be abused to get personal discounts or freebies. If you work as a journalist, we guarantee that you will need your press pass at least occasionally. Always carry it with you! Continue reading to find out more.

The press pass – Your key to getting the story

As a journalist, you rely on your press pass. It is the only way for you to prove that you are a professional media representative. If news breaks, you don't want to be caught without it. A press pass shows government officials and first responders that you are there on official business, which will significantly facilitate your reporting efforts. And that's part of your plan, right? After all, your goal is to be successful. Of course, professional appearance and a serious approach to your work are also factors in this equation. Over the course of your career, you will cover live news, trade shows, press conferences and other events. There's no way around it: If you want to make a name for yourself in the news business, you need to have a press pass and carry it with you at all times.

What you should not expect from a press pass

A press pass is not an all-access ticket that will lead to journalistic fame and fortune. It is a tool to help you establish your credibility. Don't expect to receive freebies or VIP treatment just by flashing your press ID. While it is true that being able to identify yourself as a journalist may grant you access to areas that are off-limits to the general public or qualify you for media rates and other press benefits, it does not entitle you to special treatment. Your success also depends on your personal demeanor and being able to showcase published samples of your journalistic work. Alas, if you do get offered special media treatment, by all means, take advantage of it. We will talk more about this later in the book. Just don't look at a press pass as your golden ticket. First and foremost, it is a professional credential. Any additional benefits are a nice bonus, but certainly should not be taken for granted.

You get what you pay for

You may have come across organizations on the Internet that sell press passes for journalists. Let us tell you why this is a bad idea. Many of these organizations offer nothing more than a cheaply made ID card. You send them money, they send you a press pass. And if you are lucky, you may actually gain access to certain events with such a press pass. But don't count on it. Having a press pass is only half the battle. A holistic organization such as USPA or IAPP provides journalists with the necessary tools and support to be successful in this field. You don't buy a press pass, you purchase a membership in a modern, international media association. The press pass is just part of the package. With the backing of a renowned press association, you immediately have a leg up on your competition.

Freelance journalists and press passes

Let's be honest: Independent freelance reporters and photojournalists can be seen as a nuisance by full-time staff journalists, especially if they produce better articles or photos than their salaried colleagues. But that is not your concern. You are doing your job, and you want to do it well. So don't feel like you are somehow less of a journalist than they are – you're not. What counts is the end product, and readers don't care if that was provided by a staff journalist or a freelancer. Freelance journalists are equally entitled to carry a press pass, which, in turn, will make them eligible for the same benefits as a journalist who works for a large newspaper or broadcast station. However, always keep in mind that you do not have a legal right to any special treatment.

Even journalists face restrictions

A press pass is no guarantee that you will be allowed free access to every event you want to cover. Organizers always have the final say, and if they feel that there is nothing to be gained by admitting you, it won't matter whether you show a press pass or not. Sometimes, an event organizer may only want photo coverage. That's bad news for writers, but there is nothing they can do about it. And don't forget the fact that anyone who works in the publishing business can obtain a press pass one way or another, often without needing to submit any evidence of professional qualifications. This means that it is extremely hard for organizers to ascertain who will produce valuable coverage of their event and who is only looking for a free ride. Try to be understanding of this fact, and never get confrontational if you are told "no."

Besides a press pass, there are other ways to identify yourself as a member of the media. A particularly useful credential is the press vehicle ID. We will explain why in the next chapter.

Why do you need a press vehicle ID?

Placing a press vehicle ID inside your car can significantly cut down on parking expenses. But remember: Identifying your car as an official press vehicle doesn't give you the right to park anywhere you want. However, a press vehicle ID can help you while you are on a journalistic assignment. Imagine covering an event in an inner city area, where parking is not just limited but also expensive. Or trying to drive closer to the scene of a breaking news event when the police have blocked off the roads to general traffic. When you are covering a trade fair or a concert, you may want to take advantage of the free parking spots often reserved for members of the press. With a press vehicle ID, you no longer have to stress over the parking situation. Simply place the sign on your dashboard and enjoy one of the small perks of being a media representative.

Ticket-free parking?

In many cities around the world, parking violations may not be prosecuted if a car is marked as a press vehicle. If you are lucky, a parking enforcement officer may look the other way should your meter expire before you return from an official assignment. Of course, there is no guarantee, so we wouldn't advise you to rely on the goodwill of a parking attendant. Journalists may be held in high esteem in some communities, but you should never abuse the image of your profession for your personal benefit. Even with a press vehicle ID, you are not safe from receiving a parking citation.

The press vehicle ID and traffic regulations

A press vehicle ID does not exempt journalists from following local traffic laws. It does not turn your car into an emergency vehicle, even if both may need to get to the scene as fast as possible. Traffic signals, speed restrictions and other traffic regulations still apply to you, and failure to obey traffic rules can have serious consequences. Only display the press vehicle ID if you are out on a journalistic assignment, not if you are running a private errand. Remember that journalists should use all credentials in an ethical and responsible way.

When to use your press vehicle ID

Accident reporters and photojournalists often need to drive to areas that have been blocked off by law enforcement. By clearly displaying your press vehicle ID, you signal to the police, firefighters and other first responders that you are a member of the press and therefore have a legitimate interest in being close to the scene. However, journalists do not have any legal rights when it comes to restricted access. Even with a press vehicle ID in place, you may be kept away from the scene by emergency personnel. Safety always comes first. The right to information is a secondary concern when lives are at stake.

How does a press vehicle ID look?

Press vehicle ID signs must be clearly identifiable as such. Just like for press passes, there are standards regarding size and color. For example, a press vehicle ID must always include the official seal of the news organization, the current year and a signature. It also lists the number of the press pass associated with the vehicle ID.

Other features of a press vehicle ID may include:

- High quality, UV-resistant PVC material
- Forgery-proof design with geometric lathe
- High quality print (size approx. 8 x 4 inches)
- Not a laminated sign!

Every press vehicle ID must include the following or a similar statement:

„This press vehicle ID may only be used for urgent trips in the line of journalistic duty and/or investigation.“

Watch out for fraudulent offers

Unfortunately, there will always be malicious people who try to prey on journalists by selling false press vehicle IDs. Hence, you must do your research. In most cases, it is relatively easy to recognize fraudulent providers by their exorbitant prices or their dubious Internet presence. Beware of organizations that sell press vehicle IDs without requiring a press pass: These signs are only valid in combination with a press pass. Even providers offering to supply both press passes and press vehicle IDs should be carefully examined, because being caught with a fake press pass and/or press vehicle ID can ruin your credibility and reputation as a journalist. As a member of IAPP or USPA, you won't have to worry about this. These associations provide each member with a premium-quality press pass and press vehicle ID. That way, you are always on the safe side.

Now that you are equipped with the basic knowledge about press passes and press vehicle IDs, let's discuss another important topic: accreditation. In the following chapter, we will explain what it is, when you need it, and why journalists should go through the trouble of obtaining it.

Accreditation – A necessary step?

Now, let's talk about an issue you are likely to encounter at some point during your journalistic career: accreditation. It is a fancy word for a process to help journalists do their job without running into unnecessary hurdles. Note that there are different types of accreditation. If you do a search on the Internet, you will find various explanations and examples that have nothing to do with journalism. For the purpose of this book, we are talking about journalistic accreditation, i.e. a process that allows registered journalists to attend specific events in order to provide editorial coverage. The accreditation process is handled differently by each organization. Sometimes, becoming accredited for an event simply means receiving a free ticket. In that case, no further steps are required. However, many accreditation requests involve detailed information about the journalist, the date and time the journalist will visit the event, the type of access the journalist will require, and what the purpose of the coverage will be. The journalist then receives a special pass that allows organizers and staff members to identify representatives of the press more easily. These passes must be worn for the duration of the event, and journalists who ignore this rule may be asked to leave.

Press photographers who want to take pictures for profit at an event almost always need to be accredited. The same is true for media representatives who want to gain access to restricted areas or VIP sections.

What is an accreditation deadline?

This is another term you may encounter during your career. The accreditation deadline is the day by which all accreditation requests must be received. If you want to attend a press conference or other event as a member of the media, you must submit your accreditation request by the specified deadline. Otherwise, you risk being turned away at the door. Organizers look at the accreditation process as a way to protect their interests. They want to avoid press pass abuse by phony journalists who simply want to attend their event for free rather than provide actual coverage. Of course, the final decision whether to report on an event lies with the journalist. Even if you have been accredited for an event, you are under no obligation to publish a report or photos afterwards.

Accreditation is discretionary

Wouldn't it be nice if all accreditation requests were approved! Alas, that is not the case. In order to become accredited, you must prove that you are actively working as a journalist. And that is another good reason why you need a press pass: It will prove that you are a professional journalist and thus eligible for accreditation. Beware, though, that a flimsy press pass is unlikely to help you get accredited for important events. A press pass is meant to reinforce of your journalistic integrity – and what does it say about your work ethic if you don't even go through the trouble of getting a legitimate press ID? Of course, there are other ways to establish your journalistic authenticity. One of them is a letter of assignment, or letter of accreditation, from an editor. Unfortunately, the only way to get your hands on one of those is to work directly for a news organization, either as a staff journalist or as a stringer, with the assignment to report on a specific event. For freelance journalists, a letter of assignment is hard to come by. Work samples can sometimes serve as an alternative option to establish credibility. For beginning journalists without a portfolio, however, that can be just as elusive. It all boils down to this: The best way to identify yourself as a journalist is a press pass.

Different organizers – different accreditation requirements

Of course, accreditation requirements can change. Each event organizer or host has different expectations and can adjust the rules for gaining accreditation accordingly. This means that there is no standard regulation by which you can abide.

Accreditation without notice

Occasionally, you may need to cover an event on short notice, leaving no time to submit an accreditation request in advance. In this case, all you can do is show up at the door, present your press pass, and hope to get in. This approach works sometimes, but it would be unwise to rely on it. Many organizers do not like to admit journalists without prior accreditation. They want to know who is covering their event, and some may even want to talk to the journalist beforehand, either in person or over the phone, to get a better idea of whom to expect. Usually, an invitation will be sent out to all accredited reporters and press photographers. In addition, their names may be added to the list of authorized media representatives, in which case they will not need to submit a new accreditation request to cover future events held by the same organizer.

Accreditation for freelance journalists

Even if journalism is not your main profession, you can and should get accredited for events. However, the process may be more complicated. You may encounter a bias towards full-time journalists, as well as fierce competition. Still, keep trying to get on the list of accredited journalists. You may be surprised to find out that many organizers are quite welcoming towards freelancers. Your success may hinge on how you approach them, so remember to let your personality shine. Sometimes, the name of the news organization you are affiliated with can help you out. Ultimately, the chances of getting publicity will make or break your case. If an organizer has to choose between a staff journalist with a large newspaper, where reports often end up getting cut because of limited space, and a freelancer who can guarantee publication through his own website, blog or online portfolio, the freelancer might actually be preferable. This is why you need to sell yourself and convince the organizer that you are a safe bet. You don't need to mention whether your journalistic work is a full-time gig or a part-time hobby. What matters is that you produce quality work. A membership in a press association such as IAPP or USPA provides you with the support you need to increase your confidence inside and out.

General guidelines

The organizer always has the last word and can decide whether or not to grant media access to an event. To make sure that you are on the list, you should inquire with the organizer at least four weeks before an event. That way, you will have sufficient time to find out accreditation requirements and submit your request. Your press pass is usually all you need to identify yourself as a media representative. The deciding factor for many organizers will be whether or not they can count on getting publicity from you. If you can assure them that you will publish a report or photos from the event, your accreditation request has a good chance of getting approved.

Accreditation from the organizer's perspective

The accreditation process protects organizers from pseudo-journalists, but it has another important function as well. For organizers, it is a way to gauge media interest ahead of time and to help their staff members prepare for press inquiries at the scene. It tells them how many representatives from each media category to expect and facilitates the organizational aspect, including how many journalists may be admitted within each media category. Journalists who have been accredited beforehand do not need to worry about being turned away at the door.

The accreditation request

Are you looking to become accredited? The first thing you will need to do is fill out a questionnaire. Answer all questions truthfully. Typical questions include:

- Name
- Media organization or agency
- Media category
- Your position (staff employee or freelancer)
- Do you require a press parking permit?
- Do you require technical equipment such as phone access?

The questionnaire will also list the accreditation deadline by which the request must be received. Note that filling out an application does not guarantee accreditation. Your information will be reviewed by the event staff. Always be available for questions, either by phone or email. It would be too bad if your application was denied just because you could not be reached for a quick clarification. Once your request has been reviewed and approved, you will be sent a confirmation. However, your request may be denied for various reasons, e.g. if too many accreditation requests were received. In this case, it may be worth calling the organizer to ask if you may attend as an observer rather than as part of the official media entourage.

Organizers may identify members of various media categories by issuing press badges, which may or may not include a photo of the journalist. Rules can vary drastically depending on the event.

A note about media contact lists

Media contact lists are very important if you want to stay informed about what is happening in your area. Your name should be included in as many of these mailing lists as possible. That way, you will automatically receive important invitations and information; all you need to do is check your inbox. You can also find information on various events by visiting the organizers' websites. While you are there, make sure to register in their online media sections to increase your chances of becoming accredited for future events.

What are "mixed zones"?

This is a term you may encounter while covering certain events. It describes spaces where media representatives can briefly interact with stars, players, coaches, etc., during an event. The purpose is to encourage a conversation with these VIPs. The concept of mixed zones is becoming increasingly popular with event organizers, and for good reason. As you know, press conferences tend to be very structured settings, which is not conducive to more personal exchanges. With several hundred journalists in the room, you may be hard pressed to get your questions in. Mixed zones create a relaxed yet controlled environment where journalists and stars can mingle safely. Each celebrity gets to decide for him- or herself whether to join in the conversation. Of course, there are restrictions for media representatives as well. Space is carefully rationed, and tickets are highly coveted. The decision who gets admitted and who is left out is based on careful criteria, chief among them being the publication behind the journalist. After all, the whole reason for these mixed zones is to create buzz and drum up even more publicity for the stars, which means only those journalists most likely to have their work published are admitted. Anything else would be a waste of time.

With that, we have reached the end of another chapter. We hope you found the information we provided valuable. Now you know how to become accredited and why this step is crucial for your journalistic career. It will open up possibilities that you simply cannot miss if your goal is to be successful in the news business. And that brings us to our next topic. Part of your success strategy needs to be having a solid foundation. In the next chapter, we will tell you about the basic journalistic concepts and explain why it is important to take them to heart. An unprofessional, unenthusiastic approach will ruin your chances of success in this job. So keep reading.

Success is built on a solid foundation – Basic principles of journalistic work

Establishing a successful freelance business is not something that will happen overnight. Imagine thousands of journalists around the globe trying to stand out in a sea of competitors – not an easy feat. But with the right foundation and strategy, you will be able to make a name for yourself in the field.

Writing winning stories does not have to be hard. You simply need to know a few tricks of the trade. But don't worry, we've got you covered. The following tips will help you write compelling articles and get you on the right track to establishing a successful career. Let's start with the basics.

Elements of a successful news report

Writing for the media is a skill that can be learned. News articles follow a specific structure, with each element serving a purpose. Below, we have outlined the different parts of a successful article.

The headline

The headline is arguably the most important part of any news article. It must be meaningful and compelling, hooking the reader with just a few words. The headline makes people want to find out what happened, enticing them to read the rest of the story. Therefore, it is very important to customize headlines depending on your audience. A good headline will convince readers to give your article a chance, and it will do the same for the assignment editor who is reviewing your submission.

The subheading

Not every news article includes a subheading, also known as a subtitle. While the headline is designed to grab your attention, the subheading tells the reader at a glance what to expect from the article. It is another tool used to draw the reader in. Headlines and subheadings should complement each other.

The lead

The lead is the reader's first impression of your article, so it had better be good. No matter what type of article you are writing, a strong opening is important to hook your readers and make them want to learn more. The lead can be a sentence, a short paragraph, or just a single word. It serves as a teaser for what is to come and makes people want to read the rest of the story. In a straight news piece, this is often where the questions who, what, when, where, and sometimes even why, are answered. However, you don't want to give everything away at the top. Look at the teaser as a brief summary with an open end. And save background or chronological information for the body.

The body

Straight news stories are generally written in inverted pyramid style. Using this format, the most important information is placed at the top. The further you get to the bottom of the article, the less significant the information becomes. The body is also the best place to include statements and quotes from sources. The inverted pyramid

helps readers stay informed even if they can't make it to the end of the article. Don't take it personally: No matter how great your writing is, many people simply don't have time to read the whole story. This format also helps editors cut your article for space if needed – by trimming a few sentences from the bottom, no essential information is lost.

There are some types of stories for which the inverted pyramid may not be the ideal format. Features, narrative stories and investigative reports, for example, usually require a different approach. But those are skills you can hone along the way. To start out, make sure you become a master of the inverted pyramid.

A picture is worth 1000 words – Working as a photojournalist

Let's say writing isn't your strong suit. You can still be a successful journalist – one who tells stories through pictures rather than with words. Or maybe you just want to take your own photos to go with your stories. In either case, you need solid photography skills. Press photographers, or photojournalists, show people the world from a different perspective. Sometimes, this world is ugly. Other times, it is beautiful. Pictures play an important role in creating a chronicle of modern life. And we are not just talking about major event coverage. A business news story can benefit from some pictures that grant people rare insights into the corporate lifestyle, and a human interest story will be even more touching if it is illustrated with photos. Of course, important happenings should always be documented with a camera.

So you have enthusiasm, that essential touch of boldness, and are ready to throw yourself into the action. In most cases, it won't take long before you hit your first major hurdle: time. Imagine yourself covering an event with dozens of other photojournalists. They all want to get their shots in the can as quickly as possible so they can head back to the office, check their photos, find the best ones and be the first to publish them or sell them to a news outlet. Time is money in the photojournalism world. The problem is that most photographers at the event will have taken the same or very similar photographs. You can see that selling your work will not be easy. To help you get the most out of any photo op, we have outlined a few common traps you should try to avoid.

Mistakes of amateur photographers

Below are some surefire ways to keep your photojournalism career from reaching its full potential. Go ahead and follow these steps if selling your photos isn't high on your list of priorities.

1. Go where all the other photographers are. If everyone is photographing it, it must be good, right?
2. Pay no attention to photo composition. Who doesn't like to look at a chaotic mess?

3. Don't waste your time on photo editing. Either you got the shot or you didn't. Image adjustment is for amateurs.

OK - we know you know better. Just remember that organizers expect some benefit from allowing you to attend their events. If you failed to take high-quality, interesting photos, you are going to be hard pressed to fulfill your end of the bargain. Organizers want to see results, and bad photos don't sell. Your goal is not just to capture the perfect moment but also to do so in exceptional quality. Shaky or blurry photos are worthless. If your photos repeatedly end up in the trash rather than in print, you will no longer be asked to cover events. Therefore, it is important that you practice your photography skills before you accept assignments. Experiment with your camera and its various settings. There are no amateurs in photojournalism – even as a newbie, you must deliver professional quality. All of this may sound intimidating, but you will see that it is not as hard as it seems.

What makes a good photojournalist?

If you want to be a great photojournalist, it helps to have a winning personality. Moreover, you must be an expert when it comes to your camera and other photography equipment. We are not saying you need expensive gear. You would be surprised to learn how many photojournalists take professional-grade pictures with their smartphones! Yes, you read that right: smartphones and tablets are indispensable tools for photojournalists these days. Thanks to the excellent resolution of these modern cameras, the photos can be printed or published on the Internet without much editing. So don't worry if you don't have a good camera yet and can't afford to buy one at this point. All you need is your smartphone. The majority of today's media coverage happens through virtual channels anyway, and even photos taken with regular cameras are usually sent to editors over the Internet.

Of course, if you happen to have a professional camera with the right accessories, make sure you know how to use it. The best way to learn is to practice in your spare time. When news happens, you need to be ready and familiar with your equipment, or you run the risk of missing the perfect shot. And that's not exactly conducive to your goal, is it?

It should go without saying that in order to be a photojournalist, you need to be a good photographer first. Your photos must tell a story. They should be expressive and lively. Always try to capture the atmosphere of an event, and pay close attention to lighting. The better your photography skills, the less editing your images will require. This will save you time, which you can then invest in marketing your work. Every photo should be interesting in its own, unique way. This is crucial if you want to sell your pictures. Many news outlets, organizers and other clients want to see your personality shine through. A natural look and perfect timing are crucial elements of photos that sell and important if your goal is becoming known as a great photojournalist. Photos should never look arranged or posed. Eventually, you will develop your own style, and your photographs will be even better for it. If your work speaks for itself, news outlets will take notice. The keys to get there are practice, intuition and empathy.

Pinterest – A useful tool for photojournalists

Are you familiar with Pinterest yet? If your answer is “No,” we suggest you catch up with this trendy social network as soon as possible. Pinterest is a wonderful platform for photojournalists. The online pin board has quickly become one of the most important marketing tools for freelancers and companies alike. Unfortunately, many people still don’t realize its potential. Even so, the popularity of Pinterest is bound to grow over the next years, and its omnipresence will influence every aspect of your work.

At first glance, Pinterest may seem a bit chaotic and unorganized. However, once you have played around with it for a while, you will start to see how you, too, might benefit from having your own Pinterest page. In the next section of our book, we would like to introduce you to various tools and strategies you can use to take advantage of Pinterest in your professional life. Don’t worry, we will answer all your questions about pins, pinners and boards along the way.

What exactly is Pinterest?

Pinterest is a social media network that is particularly popular among creative professionals. It allows you to quickly save information and images you find on the Internet or share them with others. Users can follow other people on Pinterest and comment on their pins. There are various ways to describe Pinterest. Some call it an online pin board where you can publish photos and messages. Others see it as an online magazine you can customize according to your personal interests. No matter how you look at it, there is no denying that Pinterest appeals to a large audience. In October of 2012, the website counted 25 million visitors, making it the site with the fourth largest data traffic in the world.

Most Pinterest users are located in the United States and the United Kingdom. Moreover, studies show that about 67% of all Pinterest users are women – and women form the leading group of online shoppers! Users can spend hours looking at other people’s pins, reading articles or pinning information to their own boards. Indeed, Pinterest can be highly addictive, and many people spend more time on Pinterest than on other social media networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn or Google+. Companies and advertisers are already taking advantage of this fact – and so should you.

Getting started – How to create your own Pinterest profile

You no longer need an invitation to join Pinterest. In addition to a private page, you can create a business account. And if you already own a private Pinterest account, you can convert it to a business account.

In order to set up a private account, visit www.pinterest.com and simply enter your email address, create a password and click on “Sign up.” Alternatively, you may log in with your Facebook account. To create a business account, visit business.pinterest.com, where you can convert your existing Pinterest account or create a new account by clicking on “Join as a business.” During the sign-up process, you will be prompted to select your business type. Your business name and user name should be identical. This helps establish your brand and makes it easier to find you.

You can upload your company logo and include your website address. Helpful hint: Keep SEO principles in mind when writing your business description.

A Pinterest business account requires you to follow at least five Pinterest boards. Start by connecting with users who have similar interests. Once you follow five boards, you will have access to all of your account features.

Final steps:

1. Confirm your account
2. Add the Pinterest button to your browser
3. Add a "Pin it" button to your own website

Updating your profile

Your Pinterest profile is your online business card and should be optimized for search engines.

<i>Business Type:</i>	Choose the type of business you are running.
<i>Contact Name:</i>	This will not be published, so you can enter whatever you want.
<i>Email Address:</i>	As a photojournalist, you should add your business email address here. However, it will only be used for official Pinterest communications.
<i>Notifications:</i>	Decide if and how you want to receive notifications from Pinterest regarding your account activity.
<i>Password:</i>	Make sure you choose a secure password. You may change it at any time.
<i>Languages:</i>	Choose your language from the drop-down menu.
<i>Business Name:</i>	Try to include important keywords when naming your business.
<i>Picture:</i>	We recommend using your company logo for your business account. Alternatively, you may use a mug shot or another photo that represents your business.
<i>About You:</i>	Introduce yourself briefly and explain what you are offering and what your visitors can expect to find on your Pinterest page. Make them curious about your services.
<i>Location:</i>	Enter the primary region where you conduct your work.
<i>Website:</i>	Enter your business website and confirm it.
<i>Social Networks:</i>	Select any social networks you would like to connect to Pinterest.

Finally, don't forget to save your settings.

How to use Pinterest boards

In order to create a board, simply go to your profile and click on "Create a board" at the top left. The name of your board should include relevant keywords. Make sure you select the appropriate category from the drop-down menu. This will help you stay organized and make it easier for other users to find your board. Under "Collaborators," you can choose who gets to add pins to your board. Once you have created your first board, you can start pinning articles and images, either from other websites or by uploading them from your own computer.

7 Free tools to make the most of your Pinterest marketing efforts

Once you have familiarized yourself with Pinterest and figured out how to use it for your professional purposes, it is time to take a closer look at some tools that could make your page even more appealing. Pinterest offers a variety of useful tools. You can create pins, analyze users and engage followers. However, many of these tools come with a price tag. Luckily, there are some powerful tools that are easy to use and free to boot! The following free tools should be part of every photojournalist's repertoire.

Tool #1: Pinstamatic

Pinstamatic is a useful tool for creating Pinterest boards that grab people's attention. As more and more companies are discovering the benefits of Pinterest as a marketing tool, using Pinterest's default design is no longer effective for attracting visitors. With Pinstamatic, you can customize your boards to let your creativity shine through. You can add quotes and music, for example. The success of your Pinterest site hinges on the first impression. Creating a page that catches people's eyes is the best way to attract followers. Pinstamatic brings your content to life and makes your page stand out in the sea of Pinterest profiles.

Tool #2: PinPuff

PinPuff is one of the best free Pinterest tools. It is easy to use and provides valuable insights into which of your pins are more popular than others. This will help you decide what content to pin in order to increase user engagement and build your popularity. Learn what works and what doesn't, what's trending and what's a waste of your time.

Tool #3: PinAlerts

The useful PinAlerts tool notifies you of activity on your Pinterest page. Reply to comments, answer questions or thank other users for engaging. PinAlerts also helps you grow your following by inviting other pinners to visit your boards.

Tool #4: Repinly

Repinly is designed for people who want to keep up with the latest trends and information on and about Pinterest. Finding the most popular pins, boards and pinners is easy with this tool, which also helps you manage your own account. Repinly takes the guess work out of building your following.

Tool #5: Pinalytics

With Pinalytics, you not only track the latest trends but also find out what is popular on Pinterest right now. Simply enter a keyword and let Pinalytics do the rest. This will help you identify popular keywords to use when adding descriptions for your own pins.

How to become a power pinner

In order to make the most of Pinterest, you must pin with purpose. Creativity is a major component of marketing your services, esp. when it comes to image-centric sites such as Pinterest. When posting your own content on Pinterest, consider practicality as well as visual appeal. The following tips will help you create appealing Pinterest boards.

Create eye candy

- The first thing visitors notice on your Pinterest page is the pictures. Based on this first impression, people will decide whether or not to follow you. Choose images wisely to make your page appealing.
- The key to creating a successful Pinterest page lies in a mix of inspirational, engaging, humorous and unique content. This increases the likelihood of people repinning your pins. The more people share your content, the more popular your page will become.
Consider pinning relevant content that includes great photos simply for the sake of creating visual appeal.
Use infographics to convey data or information. Infographics are much more likely to be repinned than plain text.
- Stick to a theme
If your goal is to attract more clients, don't try to get more followers by adding everything with a "pin it" button to your page. Stick to pins that are relevant to your specialty. If you must save those photos of cute puppies, consider creating a secret board for your personal use.
Pinterest will not be beneficial for you if your pins don't relate to your brand or your clients' interests.
In order to use Pinterest to promote yourself and your services, you must decide on a theme that unites your brand, your target audience and your message.
- Create variety
There are no rules about what you are allowed to pin or how your page should look. However, there are some strategies for success.
In order to create a successful Pinterest page, your pins should include various types of content. Follow this formula and you will be on the safe side: Create great pins by focusing on 40% motivation, 40% information and 20% self-promotion.
This ensures that you don't scare visitors away by placing too much emphasis on marketing your own services or products. Your goal is to build a network.
- Size matters
Finally, an important note about image resolution. Beware of pins that are too pixelated and images that don't fit within the given parameters. This will look unprofessional and drive potential followers away.
When it comes to pinning, size is important. Pinterest doesn't place restrictions on the vertical size of images, but the horizontal width is limited. Always consult the current image size guidelines.
Avoid tall, vertical pins. This requires users to scroll down to see the complete image, which is discouraging for many people.

Characteristics of successful journalists

Writing good stories or shooting good pictures is only half the battle. To make it in this industry, you must possess certain qualities that will help you do your work more effectively. Here, we have outlined some key characteristics of successful journalists.

1. They are credible

Credibility is paramount for journalistic success. To protect your status as a credible news reporter, never accept bribes from sources or organizations seeking to influence media coverage. Always write the truth about what happened. Timeliness, news value and the public's right to know must be your priorities. Also be sure to gather as much quality information as possible. The better your source material, the better your stories will be.

2. They use their time wisely

Stress is an unavoidable part of a journalist's job. The unpredictable nature of this line of work can make it exciting, but also exhausting at times. On some days, you may have to process large amounts of information in a short amount of time, other times you may need to cover several appointments back to back. Use your time wisely and try to stick to a schedule to help take some of the pressure out of your deadline work.

3. They select topics with care

There is no point in writing something that no one wants to read. When it comes to choosing a topic for your next feature or news article, consider its appeal to a broad audience. Good stories take time and planning. You need to make sure that you approach the topic from the right angle and don't forget to cover any important aspects. Your stories should be carefully researched and well-rounded to avoid the impression of bias. With the right preparation, the writing part will be easy for you. Once you have decided on a topic, make sure it is relevant and interesting for your target readership. Here are a few categories that lend themselves to good articles:

- Breaking news
- Local impact
- Celebrity life
- Innovation
- Public interest
- Impact
- Sad stories
- Conflict
- Strange occurrences

Your chosen topic should touch on at least one of these criteria. The more you can include, the better.

4. They strive for consistency

Effective journalism requires consistency. The trick is finding the perfect balance between too much and not enough. When trying to get your work published in a newspaper or magazine, don't inundate the assignment editor with a flood of story ideas. Try to establish rapport first in order to increase your chances of getting published.

5. They choose their words carefully

We mentioned this earlier in the book. Still, it warrants repetition. Ensure that your writing style is matter-of-fact and easy to understand. Never fall prey to advertising lingo! More importantly, try to boil things down to the most important information and focus on the five W's (and one H): Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?

6. They include photos

People like to see pictures. Including photographs and images with your articles will underscore the information you provide and evoke readers' interest. However, many editors may not appreciate emails with large or too many attachments. Consider burning your images on a CD and sending all of your materials by mail. Remember to include a descriptive caption for each picture that clearly establishes the connection between the image and the story.

7. They keep expectations realistic

Not every article or each photo you send out will be published, and oftentimes, you may find that your work has been edited or cut when it appears in print. It is an editor's job to improve journalists' pieces for maximum reader friendliness. It is also up to the editor to decide when and where to publish the submissions of contributing writers and photographers. Just accept that this part is out of your control.

8. They keep copy deadlines in mind

Copy deadlines, i.e. the time by which your submissions must be received by the copy desk, are important to know. When submitting articles to journals or magazines, these deadlines might be a minimum of six weeks ahead of the publication date. Articles submitted after the copy deadline will not be included in the upcoming issue and may lose time relevance.

9. They stay positive

Effective journalistic work requires planning and time. Don't take rejection or setbacks to heart, though. They don't mean you are bad at your job. Simply keep doing what you love and try again another time!

10. They publish their own work

We live in the age of the Internet. Newspapers and magazines publish news content on their websites, so why shouldn't you? Create an online portfolio to showcase your work and increase your professional visibility. The Internet allows you to reach a large readership.

11. They research diligently

If you are a professional journalist, research is likely to take up a significant portion of your day. It is the foundation of a good news article. Accuracy and fairness should be your guiding principles. Look at every story from all angles. If you are unclear about something, ask. You can never ask too many questions as a journalist. It is better to double-check your facts than to publish false or inaccurate information. Be diligent in your research in order to avoid having to publish corrections or, in the worst case, risking a lawsuit.

12. They stay away from bulk emails

If you want to see your work in print, don't send bulk emails to as many news organizations as possible. Messages addressed to "Dear Editor..." usually land straight in the trash. Instead, find out who the person in charge is at the organization you are targeting and send a personalized email whenever you pitch a story. Finding the appropriate person may require some digging – but that's your forte as a journalist, right? In many cases, the names and email addresses of assignment editors can be found on a newspaper's or magazine's website. LinkedIn can also be a valuable tool in finding the right contacts. If all else fails, call the news organization and ask who the responsible assignment editor is. Sure, this process

is more time consuming than sending the same message to hundreds of editors at once, but the chances of an editor actually reading what you wrote are much higher. What matters is quality over quantity.

13. They avoid being pushy

Remember that you are not the only one who has a busy schedule. Assignment editors and other newsroom employees are always under time pressure, so don't worry if you don't immediately get a response after sending in your article, photo or press release. Continuous inquiries are a waste of their time and yours, leave a bad impression, and are usually pointless. However, if you have not heard anything after a few days – or several hours if it involves breaking news – consider following up with a phone call to ask if your submission was received.

14. They are always available

If success is your goal, you should always make yourself available for follow-up questions. An editor who needs to reach you to discuss your story should not have to hunt you down. Always provide your email address and phone number, and make sure you are able to answer promptly.

The Press Code of Conduct

Now that you know the basic principles behind journalistic success, it is time to discuss ethics. Any journalist, whether writer or photographer, must adhere to a professional code of conduct, designed to protect both journalists and their sources or subjects. Depending on your country of residence, there may be well-established guidelines in place for media representatives, e.g. the Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics in the USA or the Press Complaints Commission's Editors' Code of Practice in the UK. Many elements of these codes are universal. Below, we have outlined the most important aspects to keep in mind when practicing journalism.

Truth and fairness

- Journalists must always report the truth, to the best of their knowledge and abilities.
- Journalists are responsible for the accuracy of their work.
- Reliable sources and independent verification are the keys to producing accurate news stories.
- Sources must be clearly identified unless they have been promised anonymity for good reason.
- Mistakes must be acknowledged and corrected without undue delay.
- Journalists should avoid conflicts of interest and provide fair and unbiased reporting.

Minimize harm

- Journalists must show respect for sources, subjects, colleagues and members of the public.
- The public's need to know must be balanced against the potential of harm for the subject of a news report.
- Journalists should show compassion, especially when dealing with juveniles,

victims of crimes, or inexperienced sources.

- When covering crimes, people are considered innocent until proven guilty. A defendant has only “allegedly” committed a crime until convicted by a judge. Everyone has the right to a fair trial.

Legal considerations

- The truth is the best defense against libel.
- People’s privacy rights must be balanced against the public’s right to know when reporting information about them. Different countries may have different rules about what constitutes an invasion of privacy, but private persons generally have a greater right to privacy than public figures.

Crossing the line – Opportunities in PR for freelance journalists

Public relations and journalism go hand in hand. As much as journalists and PR representatives may insist that there is a big difference between their professions, there is no denying that these two fields are closely related, and one can’t exist without the other. Journalists need PR departments to provide them with access and information, and PR departments need journalists to turn their press releases into published articles.

In today’s media world, the lines between journalism and public relations or even advertising are getting blurred more than ever. New marketing techniques such as native advertising, brand journalism and content marketing are breaching the mythical boundary separating journalism and PR. For freelance journalists, this is good news: If you have great writing skills and are willing to branch out into the world of PR, there are lucrative opportunities for you as a public relations copywriter.

Not every company, particularly small businesses, can afford an in-house PR department or the services of an expensive PR agency. As a freelance journalist, you have the perfect combination of writing skills and business insight to approach these potential clients. Freelance PR writers are in high demand by companies that are looking for media exposure. So why not use your journalistic training and expertise to supplement your income by writing contributed articles, press releases or content marketing copy? Compared to large PR firms, you have the advantage of a low overhead, which means you can offer your services at reasonable rates. And while you may not have access to a large database of news outlets, you have the World Wide Web at your disposal. Between online newswires, press release distribution platforms and your own Internet presence, you have all the tools you need to disseminate your press materials.

Writing compelling PR copy

Good public relations writing isn’t all that different from journalistic writing. After all, the goal of both types of writing is to capture the attention of your readers and communicate information. However, if you are writing PR copy, you must differentiate between your target audiences. Press releases, for example, are usually written for journalists,

while contributed articles are written with the general public in mind. Either way, you want to keep advertising lingo out of your articles and try to stay unbiased, even though you are running a promotion for your client. One-source reports about the newest developments at a company or the benefits of a product may be easy to write, but if the end result sounds like marketing copy rather than a news story, it will just end up in the wastebasket under an editor's desk. Don't waste anyone's time. Instead, try to write well-rounded stories that speak to your audience.

When it comes to promoting products or services, press releases are, without a doubt, the most cost-efficient option for business owners. They are easily distributed to a large audience, and the cost factor is much lower than for other forms of advertisement. However, this form of advertising comes with an inherent disadvantage: There is no guarantee that a press release that is sent to a news organization will be published or incite a follow-up story. That is why good writing skills are essential in PR writing. When your press release lands on an editor's desk or screen, it must capture his or her attention immediately. Only then will it earn a second look. If you fail to get through to the editor, your press release will only end up joining thousands of others in the recycling bin. By some estimates, about 90 percent of press releases sent out every day end up in the trash. Why? Because they don't appeal to editors, and from an editor's point of view, that means they won't appeal to readers either. Always remember who your audience is.

Sometimes, press releases are tossed because they are missing key information or are written unprofessionally. That is why experienced journalists have an advantage when it comes to writing press releases – you know what editors are looking for, you know how to pitch a story, you know how to target your readership, and you know how to write engaging copy that is both informative and hooks your audience. If you package all that into the basic format of a press release, you are on the path to PR success.

5 Tips for writing great press releases

Writing press releases that are both informative and fun to read takes practice. But we are here to help. Follow the five tips below, and you will be crafting press releases like a pro in no time.

1. Write to the point

Editors are busy people. Rather than read every press release that comes across their desk, they scan the text briefly to determine whether the information provided is worth their time. Whether you are writing for editors or a general audience, the key to getting people to dive into your article is to write fresh, new content in an engaging way while shying away from unnecessary details. As Shakespeare said: "Brevity is the soul of wit." Long-winded writing tends to be redundant and provides more opportunities for introducing errors. Skip the prose, and get to the point quickly. Your sentences should be concise without too many clauses. Save the ornate details for narrative stories, but keep them out of press copy. Avoid the passive voice. And focus on the facts.

2. Start with what's important

Press releases follow a specific structure. You generally want to write in an inverted pyramid style, moving from most important to least important information. Newcomers often make the mistake of writing a lengthy introduction before getting down

to business. Jumping straight into the facts might seem strange at first, but it is the only way to capture an editor's attention. Your goal is to announce news. If your press release fails to convince the editor of its importance at a glance, it will never appear in print. This means that anything important you want to announce needs to be in the lead. Just like in a straight news story, the reader should get the answers to the questions

• Who? • What? • When? • Where? • Why? • How?

as quickly as possible. It may help to jot those questions down on a sticky note and keep it on your desk as a handy reference whenever you write a press release. After a while, you will have developed a routine and no longer need such a cheat sheet.

3. Keep it simple

Writing a press release is not the time to unleash your inner poet or let your subject matter expertise shine. Your writing style should be clear and easy to understand, down to earth and focused on the facts at hand. In the United States, most newspapers are written at a 6th- through 8th-grade reading level. So save the stylistic devices and exuberant prose for another day. Your goal is to convey information to as many people as possible. If your press release is hard to understand because of too much rhetoric, jargon or specialized terminology, you will only confuse editors, not mention readers. Write for your target audience, not your peers. Your job is not to impress anyone. Unless, of course, you want to write for the recycle bin rather than a large readership. In that case, go ahead and use as much grandiloquent or flowery language as you can conjure up. Good luck with that.

4. The last paragraph

A unique characteristic of press releases is the last paragraph. It is not technically part of the story but rather provides background information about the business or organization that is publishing the announcement. Many companies already have a prepared paragraph they want you to include here. If you are asked to write this section yourself, make sure all information is 100% accurate, as it will likely be reused over and over.

Finally, don't forget to review the entire press release for spelling and grammar mistakes. It is easy to overlook a seemingly minor detail, but for a professional writer, even small errors are inexcusable.

5. Don't overlook the power of pictures

You know the old adage, „A picture is worth a thousand words.“ This holds true in the area of PR as well. Whenever possible, try to include photos with your press releases. The right image can help you get your message across even more effectively. Plus, you are increasing the chances that an editor will publish your announcement, because good visual material is always in demand. Just make sure that any images you provide complement your text to create a cohesive package.

A note about product photos: Including photos is generally a good thing. However, don't submit straight product photos, even if you are announcing a product release. Remember, you are working in public relations, not advertising. Of course, that doesn't mean you can't show the product at all. Try to find a way to display the product wi-

thout making it the primary focus of the picture. Creative, fun photos have a much better chance at getting published along with the article.

Getting your press release published

Now that you have written a proper press release, you want to make sure as many people as possible get to read it. So your next challenge is to get it published. Before you start sending your press release to every news outlet you can think of, try to figure out who your target audience is. Then, tailor your pitch to those news publications most likely to serve your intended readership. There is no point in sending a press release to a newspaper or magazine that doesn't cover the type of news you are trying to announce. Your best bet are usually local newspapers, both dailies and weeklies, as well as regional publications. National publications receive thousands of press releases each week, and your announcement would have to be groundbreaking to compete with the flood of information that inundates these newsrooms. For most news outlets, you can easily find contact information on their website. Try to determine who the editor in charge of press release submissions is, and make sure you save his or her contact information for future use. This will help you build your own press release distribution list over time. Alternatively or in addition, you can take advantage of one of the many online press release distribution services. Some of them are free, while others charge a fee.

Submitting your press release

When you are submitting press materials to newspapers or magazines, make sure you stick to the guidelines required by the publication. Here are a few common requirements:

- 1.** Along with your press release, send a brief cover letter.
And we mean really brief. Just let the editor know the subject of your press release. Everything else should be included in the press release itself.
- 2.** Above the actual press release copy, write „NEWS RELEASE“ or „FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE.“ If you want to hold publication until a certain date, write “FOR RELEASE AFTER...”
- 3.** Press releases should use a standard letter format.
- 4.** Don't forget to include the following information:
 - Name • Address • Phone and fax number • Email address • Website URL
- 5.** Press releases should use a spacing of 1.5 lines with 20-30 characters per line. Choose a font that is easy to read, such as Times New Roman. Don't use bold or italics.
- 6.** Stay away from acronyms or abbreviations. If you use acronyms, make sure you provide an explanation what they stand for.
- 7.** If your press release includes people's names, always include their titles and, if relevant, their ages.

The easiest way to send out a press release is via email. However, always make sure that this is in fact the preferred method at the newsrooms you are targeting. A quick phone call asking about the proper procedures at your target publications can save

you a lot of time and wasted effort. Never underestimate the helpfulness of your colleagues. Many of them may be more than happy to give you tips on how to contact various news outlets. Once you are certain that email is acceptable for submitting your press release, make sure you go about it the right way.

Perhaps the most important aspect to keep in mind is the subject line. It should indicate the topic of your announcement in a compelling way. Avoid generic phrases such as “Press Release” or “For Immediate Release” without further information. Keep it short and simple. Your goal is to evoke the editor’s interest and entice him or her to open your email to read more. Another important tip is to paste the press release directly in the body of your email rather than merely include it as an attachment. Many editors are weary of viruses and therefore hesitate to open attachments without knowing what to expect. Make sure that the files you attach are not too large, particularly when it comes to photos or presentations. Large files should only be attached upon request. When in doubt, ask.

If you are submitting photos with your press release, always include a descriptive caption and the full names of all people seen in the pictures. At the bottom of your email, don’t forget to provide the following information:

- Name of media contact
- Contact information
- Name of the sender

If your email announcement meets all of these requirements, you are good to go: Hit “Send,” then sit back and wait for the fish to bite!

As you can see, effective PR work isn’t rocket science, though it does require some careful preparation. Discipline and meticulousness are the hallmarks of a good PR writer. If you want to be successful as a freelancer in PR, take some time to get familiar with the processes first. Then, start marketing your services to prospective clients. We will tell you how to go about that in the next chapter.

Self-promotion – An essential part of any freelancer’s job

By now, you have the necessary tools and knowledge to start working as a journalist. Alas, there is one more aspect that can make or break your freelance career: your marketing skills. If you want people to become interested in your services, you must promote yourself as a professional. This has nothing to do with vanity or narcissism. Moreover, it is about knowing who you are and what you have to offer. You must trust in yourself before you can get others to trust you. What do we mean by that? Let us explain.

Promoting yourself means recognizing your strengths. If you don’t know what makes you special, how should others? Be critical in your self-assessment, but don’t be too

hard on yourself. The goal is not to bring yourself down but to build yourself – and your career – up. Having a negative self-image will reflect on your journalistic work. Your job requires you to work with other people, and you will be much better at that if you are kind to yourself.

The more you reach your goals, the more your self-esteem will increase. You will carry yourself differently and exude confidence, which will help you earn the trust of those around you. Occasionally, a goal may turn out to be too hard to reach, no matter how much time and effort you invest. In that case, realize when it is time to let go – and that sometimes, it is ok to do so.

There will be times when you feel particularly proud of your work. Maybe your story was published on page 1A, or your photo went viral on the Internet. While this is exciting, too much self-praise can come across as boastful. Don't forget that your goal is to get more assignments in the future, and your job requires you to act professionally at all times. So, while it is OK to rejoice on the inside, don't display these feelings too exuberantly on the outside. Above all, don't let your successes get to your head.

As a freelance journalist, the way you dress also plays an important part in your self-marketing strategy. Journalists must garner respect from authorities, sources and the general public, and dress accordingly. Clean, neat clothes are just as essential in your strategy as a pen and notebook. If you show up for an interview or photo shoot wearing a stained shirt and torn jeans, your source may not look at you as a professional who is serious about his or her job.

Another important aspect of your self-marketing efforts is being organized. How will you convince people to trust you if your life appears to be in complete disarray? No one expects you to be a perfectionist, but having a system in place will help you do your job and promote yourself more efficiently.

Your self-marketing efforts are only going to bear the fruits of your own labor. A positive mindset can go a long way. Not everything will turn out the way you planned. But you should never lose sight of the bigger picture. Our thoughts influence us more than we may realize. Positive thinking creates positive actions. Negative thoughts, however, stifle our success.

Obviously, you cannot promote something that isn't there. If you don't deliver quality work, you can't promote yourself based on the quality of your work. If you want to be a successful journalist, you must invest the time and effort to get there. Work on your skills and try to do a great job every time you pick up your gear. If you encounter a hurdle, jump over it and carry on. Don't compare yourself to other journalists, but try to find your own path. It may be windy, but when you finally reach your goal, you will know that you went the right way.

Effective marketing also means taking advantage of opportunities that come your way. If you have the chance to cover a great assignment, take it, even if it may require some sacrifices. We are not saying you should go against your personal principles, of course, but sometimes, you may have to do things that you would rather not do under normal circumstances. You never know if you will receive a second chance. Don't risk feeling like you missed out on your big break. Grab the bull by the horns.

For a freelance journalist, reputation is everything. Make sure yours remains untainted. You won't be able to avoid stepping on someone's toes from time to time, but in general, you should try to stay on people's good side. Part of marketing yourself is to always act courteous and respectful when you are out in public. Don't push people's boundaries. You never know who might turn out to be your next source. One impulsive action can ruin your reputation, and in many cases, this can mean the end of your career. We realize this may be hard to follow through, but a little self-restraint can pay off big time.

Self-promotion is crucial to your journalistic success. The more thought you devote to your marketing efforts, the more your career will thrive. With the right strategy, you will soon find enough freelance work to turn a profit. The key is to be flexible and open to alternative ways for earning money. There may be times when you have to look into copywriting or proofreading to pay the bills, but so what? Look at it as a way to expand your horizon and gather experience. The point is that you can decide. You are the boss.

Your 5-step guide to establishing a professional image

We have almost reached the end of our book. The information contained in these pages may be a lot to take in at once. To help you get your career off the ground, we have created a quick start guide. Follow the steps below, and you are well on your way to a successful freelance journalism career.

Step 1: Make yourself known

Show everyone that you work for the media. A logo on your mailbox or a sticker on the laptop you take to work at your local coffee shop can signal to others that you are serious about your job as a journalist and serve as an effective communication starter.

Step 2: A new phone number

Even if you work from home, you should have a phone number you use exclusively for your journalistic business. Imagine an editor calling you back to discuss a pitch, or a source wanting to provide information, and your 5-year-old answers the phone before you get to it. To keep up your professional image, get a separate line, and always answer with your full name or the name of your press service.

Step 3: Market yourself professionally

Business cards and stationary are basic requirements for your freelance business. This will help you underscore your status as a professional. Consider investing in your own logo, which should be professionally designed. If that's not your forte, hire a graphic designer. The up-front investment will pay off in the long run.

Step 4: Build a strong online presence

You've heard it before: If you want to be truly successful, you need to have your own website. This is how people find your services in the 21st century. Your website is essential for your client acquisition strategy by providing information about your ser-

vices as well as samples of your work. If possible, include some testimonials. Your domain name should include the word “press,” to help with search engine optimization. Creating your own website is easy, and various online providers offer templates that require no html-skills. Some of them are free to use, while others charge a small monthly fee. Members of IAPP and USPA, for example, can create their own news pages with a profile as well as an online portfolio.

You should also take advantage of social media networks. This can be an effective marketing strategy while helping you build your network, and many news outlets actually prefer working with journalists who are familiar with various social media channels. It also offers potential clients another way to contact you, and by being omnipresent, you increase trust in the legitimacy of your services.

Step 5: Appearance is everything

Finally, the time has come for you to do your first interview or cover your first event. Before you go, check yourself in the mirror: Are your clothes neat and professional, do you look well-groomed and self-confident? How you present yourself will influence others’ opinion of you. Also pay attention to polite behavior and proper etiquette, which includes announcing your visit to the organizer or host, assuming you did not receive a personal invitation. That way, you can tell the security person at the entrance that your visit is expected. This creates a positive impression and shows that you are a professional.

Following these steps is no shortcut to success. However, these tips will guide you in the right direction, and if you don’t give up, you will reach your goals. Keep them realistic, and try to keep your feet on the ground even when you are running with the big dogs. No one likes to talk to a pompous, self-absorbed reporter. But with the right attitude and tenacity, you can get far in this field. If you are just starting out, it all may seem very intimidating. But at the end of the day, media work is just a job like any other. Hold your ground and keep moving forward. That’s the key to success.

Glossary of journalism terms

Every profession has its own terminology, and journalism is no exception. Below, we have put together a glossary of some of the most important journalism terms to help you sound like an industry veteran in no time.

accreditation = Advance registration for journalists

advertorial = An advertisement written in the style of a news article

beat = A journalist's area of specialization

blog/weblog = A series of entries on a Website published in reverse chronological order and updated regularly; not only written by journalists

caption = A short description placed below or beside a photograph describing the scene and identifying the photographer and/or copyright holder

censorship = Changing or suppressing information which may be considered objectionable or offensive by governments, authorities, religious groups or other institutions

characters = Used to define the length of a standard line (incl. spaces)

circulation = Number of copies sold by a newspaper or magazine

clustering = A set of stories on related topics

code of conduct = A set of ethical guidelines for journalists

column = A vertical block of text

copy desk = Central desk inside a newsroom where all news copy is edited and prepared for print

copyright = The exclusive right of an originator to his or her work

correspondent = A journalist with expertise in a specific subject area or geographical location

deadline = The time by which the finished article must be submitted

editorial conference = A meeting of staff members to map out coverage and story placement

editor-in-chief = Leader of the editorial department

freelance journalist (freelancer) = A reporter or photographer working as an independent contractor for various news outlets rather than a staff member for a particular media organization

gatekeeping = The process by which journalists and editors serve as filters who decide what is news

headline = Title of an article

insert = Additional flyers and leaflets added to newspapers; usually advertising

internship = A way for beginning journalists to learn the craft while working inside a newsroom; often unpaid

kicker = An explanatory headline above the main headline

lead = The first sentence or paragraph of a news story, designed to hook the reader

lead story = Biggest story on the front page of a newspaper

letter to the editor = A letter written by a reader and intended for publication in a newspaper or magazine

managing editor = Supervises the day-to-day operations at a news organization and coordinates all departments

media award = An honor bestowed on individual journalists

or news outlets by an institution or organization

meta search engine = A search engine that also searches other search engines for the search term

newsroom = Place inside a news organization where news articles are assigned, written and edited

ombudsman = An independent arbiter between a news organization and the general public

op-ed = A regular feature in a news publication in which the writer, usually a prominent journalist, expresses an opinion; aka column

periodical = A regularly published newspaper or magazine

press kit = Press materials prepared by a company's PR department, often incl. press releases, background information and photos approved for publication

press release (news release) = A written announcement by a company or organization, directed at media outlets

public relations (PR) = The practice of managing the release of information from an organization to the public

put to bed = When the finished newspaper is sent to the presses for printing

reporter's privilege = A journalist's right to protect the confidentiality of sources

research = The process of gathering information

sidebar = A column beside the main story providing additional information

source = The organization or person providing information; may need to remain anonymous

stringer = A regular contributor to a news publication who is not employed as a staff member

synopsis = A brief summary

tabloid = A newspaper in a more compact format; also used to describe newspapers engaging in yellow journalism

tie in = How a current story can be seen in the context of past events

undercover research = A type of research during which the journalist does not reveal his or her professional identity

Epilogue

We have reached the end of our book. Hopefully, you have enjoyed reading it and learned some useful information in the process. We have tried to summarize the most important elements of journalistic work in an effort to provide you with a guide for turning your freelance career into a profitable one. Being a journalist isn't always easy, but it is interesting, rewarding, and a lot of fun! Every day, you get to meet new people and learn to see things from a different perspective.

We have shown you various ways how you can make a living as a journalist, from working as a freelance reporter or photojournalist to writing PR copy. No matter which path you choose, don't lose sight of what's important: a professional approach. Try to build your network and take advantage of connections you make along the way. Fact is that you will have to work hard and put your own needs aside from time to time. But try to find a balance between work and play nonetheless. A creative mind needs time to rest. And no matter what, don't focus on the negative.

We wish you the best of luck on your way to becoming a successful journalist, and if you are a member of USPA or IAPP, we will try to support you as much as possible. Please feel free to contact us any time to discuss how we can help your career grow. Welcome to the world of journalism.

Your team from the United Journalists & Photographers Association, Inc. (UJPA)



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