

Roles and responsibilities of journalist



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Introduction

In my opinion, the main responsibility of a journalist is to report the news in a truthful, unbiased and apolitical way. As a result of this, I endeavour to make certain that my own writing adheres to this criteria.

Both the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) and the Office of Communications (Ofcom) codes of conduct detail accuracy as one of the major guidelines that journalists should respond to. The PCC work to enforce their code of conduct in the newspaper industry and it is ‘ the cornerstone of the system of self-regulation to which the industry has made a binding commitment.’ (Press Complaints Commission 2009).

As a practicing journalist I feel it is important to work in correlation with these codes right from the offset, so as to ensure my writing is of the highest standard throughout my entire career. I hope that this is evident in my journalism portfolio assignment.

In this report I will be looking at the importance of accurate, unbiased journalism and how I have applied this to my own news stories.

Discussing the roles and responsibilities of the journalist with reference to my own experience of working as a journalist

Journalists have a number of roles and responsibilities that they must consider throughout the course of their entire career; but of course this depends upon the area of journalism with which they are involved. For the sake of my report I will be concentrating on the main area of journalism we have explored thus far and that is reporting the news.

Whilst reporting the news, Journalists should take into consideration the audience and prospective publication, their editor and importantly, their own personal interests (for example, any legal obligations). While some journalists may choose to go against what could perhaps be described as an ethical grain, I feel that a truly successful journalist would always consider the above before submitting anything for publication. However, one could perhaps put forward the argument of public interest.

Accurate

A journalist has a service to the media prescribing public to make sure that the news they report is accurate. This is enforced by self-regulating bodies and media laws such as libel and defamation. Other laws are in place to make sure that journalists do not impose upon court trials, such as contempt of court.

At present I am learning Teeline shorthand as part of my course module: 'Preparation for NCTJ Accreditation.' One of the main factors that has made reporting accurately a real problem for me so far has been my inability to write at a high enough speed in court hearings and council meetings.

All that it would take is one piece of information taken down incorrectly or missed out altogether and the credibility of a news story could be lost completely. While I don't think that I have made any errors in my work so far, it is definitely an issue for me. Hopefully as my Teeline skills improve, I will become more confident and begin to apply it to journalistic situations.

On my first visit to Sheffield Magistrates Court, I was unfortunate enough to sit in on a hearing that was eventually committed to Crown court for trial

before a jury. Legally, I would be unable to report on this story until sentencing was complete, something our assignment would not permit us to do. Because of this, I had to look for another case to write about that I could report on without the fear of contempt.

I tried to ensure complete accuracy in my stories, lending extra care to the names and details of the people involved. While there were no real legal issues with my stories as they were not intended for publication, it was still important both for mine and the assignments sake for them to be precise. I tried to put myself into the mind-set of a professional journalist and consider their roles and responsibilities, which I think enabled me to write my stories as though they really were intended for an audience.

Unbiased

Further to accuracy, Journalists should ensure that their news writing is unbiased and presents the basic facts for their audience to determine their own set of judgements. Any opinions should be in the form of attributed quotes and a good journalist will show both sides of the story.

As our assignment entailed writing up a report of a court case, I presented the facts in order of importance in the pyramid style we have been taught and without offering any opinions of my own.

For my council story, I was dealing with a potential story of high human interest. The subject matter was fairly sensitive as it was regarding the confirmation of a school closure in Sheffield, affecting hundreds of local children and parents. I wrote my story using the facts and quotes I had obtained from a full council meeting, a cabinet meeting and relevant

literature from both sides: the cabinet, education officers, school governors and the parents themselves.

I think I succeeded in writing this story from a completely neutral and unbiased perspective. Due to the sensitive nature I wanted to make sure that my opinion did not come out in my writing. Whether I was for or against the closure was not important for the type of the story and my main intention was for the prospective reader to create their own opinion.

Apolitical

Sheffield is a Liberal Democrat council and throughout the council meetings there was some heckling from the Labour and Conservative party representatives that were present. I think I succeeded in keeping to the third responsibility for journalists that I outlined earlier by being politically neutral in this particular piece. I think my writing here is apolitical and my own political persuasions are not directly accessible in any of my three news stories.

Plain English

To help with the readability and accessibility of their news stories, Journalists should ensure that their writing meets the style of their specific publication and editor. Further to this, writing should be in plain English and without jargon. This is especially important in writing stories from court cases, council meetings and police statements.

For our assignment, we were to write our three news stories in the guise of a regional newspaper reporter. I read a lot of regional journalism both online and in print and feel that I have a good knowledge of the writing style, which

I hope is evident in my work. In addition, I always attempt to maintain a good level of plain English throughout my journalistic writing. I feel that my court story reflects this positively and reads well.

Public Interest

The final area I wish to explore is public and human interest. Above the ethical responsibilities, Journalists are encouraged to write interesting news as that is what really sells newspapers. Public interest is the Holy Grail for journalists and ideally all stories we write would draw a large amount of it.

Public interest can also be used as a defence for when journalists go a little too far out of their way to obtain a story. For example, if a journalist goes against either the PCC or the Ofcom code of conduct, but it can be said that the story holds a significant amount of public interest, they may well escape unscathed. However, it is easy to question the ethical consequences of these actions.

For my court and council stories I think that I have captured a good amount of public interest, as both stories have elements that make them newsworthy. I am slightly disappointed that my own sources story is not quite as successful in this element, but I still regard it as a fairly strong piece of journalism. While it does not have the immediacy and drama of the other stories, it takes a more feel good and festive approach. I feel I could have found a more exciting story, but quite liked the varied themes of my 3 pieces.

Conclusion

While I completely understand the need for bias and political standing to be kept separate from news stories and reports, not all aspects of the journalism trade call for this. For example, columnists build up an entire fan base and reputation based upon their witty and interesting take on the news. Being objective and impartial in journalism will serve a purpose as far as simply reporting the news goes, but one must learn to associate certain roles and responsibilities with different areas of the craft.

I have always thought of myself as a competent writer, but have found the news writing side somewhat challenging since I started my degree. We have learned in our lectures and seminars that news writing follows a certain formula which I am doing my best to learn, but up until this most recent assignment my practice has mainly been writing from fictional briefs. While helpful, this does not give the journalist to be the real sense of reality that this task has provided.

Sitting in on both court cases and council meetings in situations that were potentially life changing for those involved has been a much more rewarding experience for me. It is this encounter with the people directly affected by the news I am writing that I feel helps to shape the practicing journalist and give them sufficient respect for the importance of upholding their roles and responsibilities throughout the course of their career.

One cannot truly appreciate the need for upholding the codes of conduct set in place by the PCC and Ofcom, or have a complete understanding of the necessary responsibilities being a journalist entails, without the first-hand

experience of working with real people. I feel that my own stories in this assignment were successful pieces of news writing and further than that, of a sufficient standard for publishing in regional newspapers. However, I feel that the things I have considered in this report will be the catalyst for me to get out and improve my confidence and abilities further and actively try to investigate stories with a serious view to getting them published.

Bibliography

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