

NCE LOGBOOK GUIDELINES FOR CANDIDATES, TRAINERS AND EXAMINERS

These guidelines are updated regularly and you are advised to check the latest version, available on the nctj.com website.

The logbook records details of the trainee and training progress, including evidence of regular in-house assessments and a selection of cuttings demonstrating that the trainee has satisfactorily covered a range of key tasks.

It must be available to the editor at all times. It is the joint responsibility of the editor and the trainee that it is kept up to date and submitted, fully completed, to the NCTJ for assessment when the trainee sits the NCE.

SUBMISSION

Logbooks should be handed in to the exam organiser on NCE day. Logbooks will only be accepted after this date if they are submitted within the next seven days and are accompanied by an acceptable explanation by the candidate's editor/trainer. This must be agreed with the NCTJ prior to the NCE.

The logbook should be submitted in the light-weight folder with labels showing the candidate's name and newspaper in the top right-hand corner of the front cover and on the spine.

Logbooks will be returned automatically to all candidates after the results have been issued.

PRESENTATION

All logbook pages should be submitted, including any blank or incomplete. They should be clean, legible, and in the correct order.

Candidates who want to alter the information on the introductory pages or change Key Task cover page details about their stories are advised to complete new pages rather than submit ones that have information crossed out or amended. Candidates may find it advisable to make photocopies of these pages before starting the logbook in case replacements are needed later. The NCTJ can supply substitute pages to candidates upon request.

There is no need to put all the introductory and assessment pages in plastic wallets.

Introductory pages

The candidate's name, newspaper and NCTJ reference number should be entered on the title page and Page 1 should be fully completed. Candidates will be penalised if information is missing or if these pages are not completed satisfactorily.

Assessment pages

The pages recording in-house assessments should be submitted even if some or all have not been completed. These pages are not marked as part of the NCE but their content (or lack of it) may assist examiners to judge other sections of the logbook.

Further comments and additions

The Further Comments page that follows the final assessment page should be submitted even if it has been left blank.

Any letter(s) from an editor or trainer explaining deficiencies in logbook presentation or content should be inserted into the logbook after the Further Comments page.

Key task pages

The Key Task cover pages should be completed and signed by the trainer. Key Tasks will not be marked if these pages are not completed satisfactorily, and logbooks will be failed as a result. Candidates have failed the logbook because they swapped cuttings but forgot to amend the cover sheets. Others have failed because trainers failed to sign them off.

The cover pages, cuttings and original copy for each Key Task should be submitted in three plastic wallets, as follows:

1. First plastic wallet containing the Key Task cover page, facing forward, and the first cutting behind it, facing back
2. Second plastic wallet containing the original copy for the first cutting, facing forward, and the second cutting behind it, facing back
3. Third plastic wallet containing the original copy for the second cutting, facing forward

This allows each cutting and its original copy to be seen facing each other.

Where additional material is required, such as the original handout for Key Task 1, it should be stapled to the appropriate original copy.

Cuttings may be cut out and pasted onto A4 paper or thin card for insertion into the plastic wallets. Photocopies of cuttings, full-size or scaled down within readable limits, will be accepted.

Candidates should ensure they submit the whole of their stories. If stories are continued from one page to another, it must be clear which cuttings go together. If original copy covers more than one sheet of paper, sheets should be stapled together.

CONTENT

Cuttings

Two appropriate cuttings must be submitted for each Key Task. A Key Task without one or both cuttings will result in the logbook failing.

Varied cuttings should be submitted wherever possible. Different cuttings must be submitted for each submission in the Key Task section. Cuttings must be long enough to be assessed. Stories of fewer than 80 words are unlikely to be accepted.

Cuttings do not have to be by-lined. If they carry a joint by-line, it must be clear from the accompanying original copy which parts of the published story were produced by the candidate. If it is unclear, the Key Task will not be marked and the logbook will fail.

Sports stories are acceptable for most Key Tasks if their content satisfies the Key Task requirements.

Original copy

Each cutting must be accompanied by a print-out of the original copy as written by the candidate. Examiners will assess what candidates actually wrote and submitted for publication, not what appeared in the paper. Key Task cuttings without a print-out will not be marked, and the logbook will fail, unless there is an acceptable explanation from the candidate's editor/trainer. Print-outs of subbed copy or of copy re-typed after publication will not be accepted.

Print-outs should be endorsed as original copy by the candidate's editor/trainer. If print-outs do not have this endorsement the logbook will fail.

Candidates who write directly to screen and whose copy is not handled by anyone else before publication should submit an explanatory letter from their editor/trainer and cuttings should be endorsed as original work. Print-outs of stories written directly to screen but then open to amendment by subs or other journalists must be accompanied by a cutting of the published version.

Print-outs of newspaper website pages will be accepted if endorsed by a candidate's editor/trainer as being original unsubbed copy published on the web.

Examiners will only accept computer failure as an excuse for missing original copy if (a) the computer problem was short-lived (b) all the missing original copy clearly relates only to the time computers were creating problems and (c) there are very good reasons why the candidate was unable to substitute fresh stories, with original copy.

Long periods of "computer failure" will not be condoned. If candidates print out original copy at the time stories are published, problems should not arise or should be rapidly identified and corrected. If regular three-monthly assessments take place, the absence of original copy should soon become apparent to trainers, and substitute stories should be found.

KEY TASKS

Cover sheets

These should include headlines, publication dates and a brief explanation by the trainee of how stories were obtained and developed. It will do no harm to let examiners know that a story was self-generated, exclusive, the result of painstaking effort in the face of many obstacles, and followed up by all the nationals.

Each cover sheet must be signed by the candidate's editor/trainer. Logbooks may be failed if these signatures are missing.

1 Handout

Cuttings and original copy must be accompanied by the handouts on which stories are based. Photocopies of these will normally be accepted, as will emails from press offices, website announcements, etc.

Good submissions will demonstrate candidates' ability to develop handout material rather than merely re-write it. Submissions for this Key Task are marked for intro, story structure, balance, writing style, tone, quotes (taken from the handout or acquired from follow-up interviews), use of English, punctuation and house style.

2 Calls

Good submissions will demonstrate candidates' ability to follow up information received when from the emergency services. Calls made to personal contacts on an intermittent basis are not appropriate.

It should be made clear on the cover sheet what calls were involved and how they were pursued. Submissions for this Key Task are marked for intro, structure, balance, writing style, tone, quotes, use of English, punctuation and house style.

3 Family events

Good submissions will demonstrate candidates' ability to gather comprehensive information about people's life stories. Typical submissions are stories about family events such as wedding anniversaries, retirements and deaths. Hard news stories lacking detailed information about the people involved are unlikely to be appropriate.

Submissions for this Key Task are marked for intro, structure, balance, writing style, tone, quotes, use of English, punctuation and house style.

4 Human interest

Submissions should be off-diary stories about people. Submissions are marked for intro, structure, balance, writing style, tone, quotes, use of English, punctuation and house style.

5 Numeracy

Submissions should demonstrate basic numeracy -- the ability to handle figures, understand tables or interpret statistics, for example. Typical submissions are stories about council tax rises, house prices or school league tables. Lists of sports results or scorecards are not acceptable.

Candidates are encouraged (but not required) to submit original source material showing the figures, graphs, tables or statistics they used for their stories. Extra marks will be given to candidates who do submit the original source material. Submissions for this Key Task are marked for intro, story structure, balance, writing style, tone, evidence of numeracy, use of English, punctuation and house style.

6 Public events

Good submissions will demonstrate candidates' ability to produce comprehensive cover of organised events open to the public. Carnivals, fetes, village shows and royal visits have been typical submissions. Reports of a town's Christmas lights being switched on have been accepted. Previews of events will not be accepted.

Submissions for this Key Task are marked for intro, story structure, balance, writing style, tone, quotes, use of English, punctuation and house style.

7 Inquests

Submissions should be reports of full inquests, not adjournments. This Key Task is marked for intro, story structure, balance, writing style, tone, quotes, legal and ethical awareness, use of English, punctuation and house style.

Candidates in Scotland who cannot offer copy from Fatal Accident Inquiries must include an explanatory letter from their editor/trainer and substitute stories relating to the activities of the Scottish Parliament and its members. Such submissions are marked for intro, story structure, balance, writing style, tone, quotes, political awareness, use of English, punctuation and house style.

8 Press briefings/public meetings

Copy from two press briefings, or two public meetings, or one of each is acceptable. Press briefing submissions may include copy from face-to-face police calls or similar meetings. The cover sheet should confirm that stories have been written from press briefings if this is not clear from the story.

Submissions for this Key Task are marked for intro, story structure, balance, writing style, tone, quotes, use of English, punctuation and house style.

9 Business/industry

Acceptable submissions have included stories about mass redundancies at local factories, the launch of new products, company appointments, Chamber of Trade meetings, union threats to strike, and the closure of village post offices.

Submissions for this Key Task are marked for intro, story structure, balance, writing style, tone, quotes, use of English, punctuation and house style.

10 Inquiries/tribunals/statutory bodies

Stories need not be reports of actual inquiries or meetings. Copy based, for example, on a planning inquiry inspector's report or public reaction to a statutory body's decisions will be quite acceptable. Typical statutory bodies featured in submissions include police and fire authorities, Ofsted, primary care trusts, Ombudsmen, the Highways Agency and the Audit Commission. Reports of planning committee meetings are not appropriate.

Submissions for this Key Task are marked for intro, story structure, balance, writing style, tone, quotes, use of English, punctuation and house style.

11 Politics

Typical submissions have been about MPs' political activities, ministerial visits, and elections. Stories should not be reports of routine council debates unless there is a strong political dimension. Candidates will be credited for evidence of political awareness.

Submissions for this Key Task are marked for intro, story structure, balance, writing style, tone, quotes, use of English, punctuation and house style.

12 Community

Good submissions should demonstrate community involvement and may include stories from campaigns (candidates should *not* submit more than one story from a long-running campaign, but should explain its context on the cover sheet).

Submissions for this Key Task are marked for intro, story structure, balance, writing style, tone, quotes, use of English, punctuation and house style.

13 Writing to pictures

Submissions should demonstrate the candidate's ability to think in visual terms, by writing copy to accompany pictures or graphics. They should be stories – not mere captions -- clearly written with the picture(s) in mind. A good test is whether the story would be severely diminished without the illustration.

Simple photo-fit stories beginning "This is the face of the man police want to interview..." will satisfy the requirements, though the examiners would hope to see evidence of greater imagination. Submissions which are no more than stories to which library head-shots have been added by the subs are unlikely to be accepted.

Evidence from editor/trainer that a candidate initiated the picture will not go unrewarded. Submissions for this Key Task are marked for picture relevance, intro and structure, balance, writing style, tone, quotes, use of English, punctuation and house style.

14 Courts

Candidates must show they have attended court and produce two stories from two separate cases. Candidates whose publications do not carry court stories may submit shadow copy which has been endorsed by their editor. Stories re-written from copy supplied by a court agency or other third party will not be accepted.

Evidence that candidates are able to follow up what has happened in court will be welcome. Stories from inquests are not acceptable for this Key Task (see Key Task 7)

Submissions for this Key Task are marked for intro, story structure, balance, writing style, tone, quotes, legal and ethical awareness, use of English, punctuation and house style.

15 Councils/committees

Candidates must show they have attended two council or committee meetings. Good submissions will demonstrate the ability to interpret what is going on, identify the implications of council activities and decisions, and carry out appropriate follow-ups.

Submissions for this Key Task are marked for intro, story structure, balance, writing style, tone, quotes, use of English, punctuation and house style.

16 Major incidents

Most submissions for this Key Task are stories about major crimes, accidents or disasters, but major incidents do not have to be bad news: a mass protest or a visit by a celebrity that brings the town centre to a halt may be acceptable. Stories should be about incidents covered by the candidate on his or her own patch. Follow-ups to distant events (eg tsunamis, terrorist attacks) are not appropriate, even when they involve local people. Rejected submissions have included a story about a football manager being sacked.

Examiners are sympathetic to candidates on newspapers in isolated areas where 'major incidents' are rare. Stories will be judged in the context of their area.

Submissions for this Key Task are marked for intro, story structure, balance, writing style, tone, quotes, use of English, punctuation and house style.

17 Features/news backgrounders

Good submissions will offer two varied pieces of work – one hard news backgrounder, for example, and one softer feature-page item.

Backgrounders may be about hard news stories submitted elsewhere in the logbook. The cover page should make any such link clear. Candidates should not submit multi-part feature series.

Submissions for this Key Task are marked for intro, story structure, balance, writing style, tone, quotes, use of English, punctuation and house style.

18 Trainee's choice

This is an opportunity for candidates to submit any two other stories, perhaps because they do not fit easily into any of the previous categories – sports stories and reviews, for example. Good submissions will be original, off-diary and different.

Submissions for this Key Task are marked for intro, story structure, balance, writing style, tone, quotes, use of English, punctuation and house style.

MARKING

Logbooks are marked by senior journalists under the guidance of the NCTJ. Examiners do not assess the work of trainees they employ. They take into account at which stage of a candidate's training stories were produced and expect a higher standard from candidates at the end of their training than at the start.

Ten of the 100 marks available are awarded for presentation. The other 90 are awarded for the Key Tasks, up to five for each one. The pass mark is 60 per cent.

If the presentation or any Key Task is judged unmarkable or unacceptable, the logbook will fail regardless of the total number of marks.

Marked logbooks are subjected to rigorous moderation to ensure consistency of marking.

Exam reports are issued when logbooks fail to reach the required standard. These can be found at the front of the logbook upon its return. The Key Tasks which required attention may be resubmitted at any time. It is not normally necessary to send the whole logbook.

After each NCE the NCTJ publishes an Examiners' Report which includes advice for future candidates. This is available on the NCTJ website, and trainees are strongly urged to read it and note its recommendations.