

Work Experience

The NCTJ recognise the importance of practical experience that compliments the study of journalism. Work experience is an excellent way to put the skills learned on a journalism course into practice and it may become the first step towards a successful career in the media.

Students are expected to organise placements themselves and these can take any form: a two-week block, two blocks of one week or single days spread out over a longer period. However, here are some tips on finding and making the most out of your work experience placement.

Basic Criteria

Here are a few pre-requisites if you're thinking about a career in journalism:

- Be a good listener. News reporting is about reporting the cold, hard facts without any personal opinion. The only person in a newsroom paid to write their opinion is a columnist.
- Be curious. You have to have a curiosity about people, places and events. A good ear for gossip also helps.
- Pay attention to detail. You need to be aware of the basics, such as spelling, punctuation and grammar. Make sure you get peoples' names right. If you're given a word count, make sure you stick to it. There are not as many sub-editors as there used to be and, with the added responsibility of updating social media, journalists are often left to check their own work.

Finding work experience

- Start by contacting your local media outlets: newspapers, magazines, news websites, radio stations or broadcasters. Try to find out who deals with work experience so that you can call or email them directly.
- Editors and journalists are busy people, especially when their deadline is approaching. Try to find out what time of day is best to contact them.
- If sending an email, introduce yourself, explain that you are looking for work experience and suggest some dates. Attach an updated copy of your CV and mention that you are studying, or intending to study, an NCTJ qualification. For advice on writing a CV see [here](#).
- Always give the media organisation enough notice to process any requests for work experience. Some companies have a waiting list of a couple of months for placements. Do not expect to get work experience the week after sending a request.
- Tutors can be good sources of information about possible work experience placements – use your contacts.
- Don't take rejection personally: learn to be thick-skinned and, if at first you don't succeed, keep trying. If someone hasn't replied to a work experience request, it's probably because they've been too busy or your email has been lost in the hundreds that are sent to newsrooms each day.

- It is recommended that you spend at least 10 days on work experience before, during or after your course but you should look for as many opportunities as you can in as many different media organisations as possible.

On placement

- Be prepared with your own ideas for stories. Employers value creativity and initiative. You can pitch them to the news editor or write them up during slower periods. Ask around family and friends for ideas, read national papers and make some of their stories local, or if you're on any extended placement you might have time to send some freedom of information requests.
- Be punctual- if you can't get to work on time, how can your editor be sure you'll be able to meet your deadlines?
- Volunteer for any tasks that are suggested, whether it be phoning a press officer or going out to get vox pops- it shows enthusiasm and dedication.
- Always have a notebook and pen at hand- you never know when you'll hear something that could make a good story.
- If you're interviewing someone, don't be afraid to ask questions multiple times, or repeat back to them what they said. Although you may not be covering the most contentious stories as a placement student, it's good practice and you can be sure the paper won't have to print any retractions!
- Make tea- don't spend all your time doing it but volunteering for the daily tea round is a good way to get to know your colleagues and, more importantly, for them to get to know you. It's a good opportunity to strike up conversation.
- Ask for feedback and/or a reference. Try and get a couple of minutes to sit down with your editor and ask for some constructive criticism- what did you do well and what could you have done differently? If you have completed an extended placement, getting a reference from an editor will be invaluable for any future job applications.
- Say thank you. Again, this may seem obvious, but even if you thanked your colleagues in person, it's usually worth sending an email to the news editor thanking them for their time and, if applicable, asking if there is an opportunity for further work experience/freelance shifts/a trainee job.