

NQJ NEWS INTERVIEW – PROGRAMME OF STUDY

THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATION IN JOURNALISM

The NQJ news interview syllabus is based on a programme of supervised on-the-job training undertaken for a minimum period of 18 months at the trainee’s newspaper office. During this period the trainee will undertake a series of reporting assignments involving face-to-face and telephone interviews and produce copy for publication that shall be assessed by a qualified senior member of staff to industry standards. The objectives and outcomes of this supervised training programme are as follows:

Programme objectives	Programme outcomes
<i>The trainee will:</i>	<i>The trainee can:</i>
<p>1. Study and practice interviewing techniques so as to elicit and capture facts and quotes that will attract and interest readers and website users</p>	<p>1.1 Identify who to interview and communicate effectively the purpose of the interview 1.2 Formulate questions so as to obtain relevant facts and opinions 1.3 Interview firmly and confidently without aggression 1.4 Ask open questions in a form that encourages the interviewee to talk freely 1.5 Conduct a structured interview so information is gathered in the most time-efficient way 1.6 Identify facts and quotes needed to validate and reinforce a story 1.7 Record information using shorthand satisfactorily and unobtrusively without interrupting the flow of the interviewee 1.8 Accurately transcribe relevant facts and quotes.</p>
<p>2. Study and practice how to recognise and select relevant facts from information supplied by interviewees and use them to write clear, vigorous, accurate and balanced stories that will attract and interest readers and website users</p>	<p>2.1 Identify the relevant facts of a story 2.2 Identify the best news angle 2.3 Write concise, powerful intros that will capture and hold the reader’s interest 2.4 Structure stories logically in a readable style that makes every word count 2.5 Use appropriate quotes to give pace to stories 2.6 Write stories that meet style guidelines, are grammatically correct, 100 per cent accurate, legally sound and free of ambiguity 2.7 Write to a specified word count and deadline to the standard of a senior reporter</p>

Programme objectives	Programme outcomes
<i>The trainee will:</i>	<i>The trainee can:</i>
<p>3. Study and practice how to identify and utilise sources of news material, including how to make and nurture contacts.</p>	<p>3.1 Establish and nurture contacts who can generate story leads and provide facts and quotes to enhance the quality of those stories</p> <p>3.2 Apply professional conventions governing confidentiality of sources and the treatment of off-the-record material.</p> <p>3.3 Identify obvious and less obvious news sources such as the blogosphere and websites (including social networking, corporate and news sites), magazines, national and local newspapers - and use these sources to enhance stories</p> <p>3.4 File copy that requires the minimum of editing to a specified word count and deadline, and do so to the standard of a senior reporter</p>
<p>4. Study and experience the application of media law and the custom and practices of public institutions that have a bearing on the lives of readers and website users</p>	<p>4.1 Apply the law as it effects the work of a journalist in general and in the reporting of court cases and other judicial hearings</p> <p>4.2 Apply the PCC's Code of Conduct to day-to-day reporting assignments</p> <p>4.3 Apply a good working knowledge and understanding of the structures, functions and responsibilities of central and local government bodies and other organisations with whom journalists have regular contact</p> <p>4.4 Apply the Freedom of Information Act and identify and challenge confidently unwarranted attempts to deny disclosure of information and the identity of individuals</p>
<p>5. Study and practice the role of a news reporter</p>	<p>5.1 Work professionally within a team</p> <p>5.2 Take on the role of the reader's champion and provide accurate, accessible stories in a format that engages an appropriate audience</p> <p>5.3 Understand the strategy of the editor, news editor and other senior editorial managers and ensure that all stories meet the newspaper's criteria for publication</p>

Assessment

Assessment for the NQJ news interview section is by way of an examination set and marked by NCTJ examiners. The total time allowed for the news interview exam is one hour and 40 minutes and the format is as follows:

- Candidates read a news briefing that outlines the bare facts of a news story and gives the name of a person at the centre of the story whom they are required to interview (**Time allowed: 10 minutes**)
- Candidates undertake a face-to-face interview with the person named in the brief (**Time allowed: 20 minutes**)
- Candidates write a 400-word story based on information acquired from the interview and earlier briefing note (**Time allowed: 1 hour, 10 minutes**)

Up to 100 marks are awarded for the 400-word story.

Pass = 60-64

Merit = 65-69

Distinction = 70+

Marks are awarded in three areas:

Content, accuracy and selection: **50 marks available**

Intro and story structure: **25 marks available**

Readability and writing style **25 marks available**

Total: 100 marks

Word count

Candidates are required to write one story of 400 words, or two shorter ones with a total of 400 words.

No penalty is incurred if the total length is between 390 and 410 words.

Stories outside that band incur a penalty as follows:

-1 mark	385-389 words	411-415 words
-2 marks	380-384 words	416-420 words
-3 marks	375-379 words	421-425 words
-4 marks	370-374 words	426-430 words
-5 marks	365-369 words	431-435 words

Continue this scale to a total of minus 10 marks (maximum penalty).

Correctly hyphenated words count as one word.

Assessment criteria

Writing within required limits is an essential skill of journalism. Penalty marks will be deducted for writing under or over the number of words stipulated.

Candidates who exceed specific limits as per the examination instructions will be disqualified from this particular examination.

Marks are awarded on the following basis:

Content, accuracy & selection (50 marks available). A gross inaccuracy likely to lead to a demand for an apology and/or correction will result automatically in a “fail” for this examination. The omission of a piece of ‘must-have’ information means a candidate cannot gain a pass mark in the content, accuracy & selection section

- 40-50 marks: All the essential facts have been included in an accessible style. Any other facts that have been omitted do not alter the thrust of the story. There are no inaccuracies.
 - 30-39 marks: The key facts plus the majority of the other worthwhile facts have been included in an easily accessible style. The omissions do not radically alter the thrust of the story. There are no inaccuracies.
 - 25-29 marks: Some of the key facts have been omitted and there are other facts missing that make the story incomplete. There may be minor inaccuracies that would not warrant a correction.
 - 0-24 marks: Many of the key facts have been omitted and others are missing that make the thrust of the story inaccurate.
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- **Intro & story structure** (25 marks available)
 - 20-25 marks: The best angle has been chosen; the intro is tightly written and carries real impact through the choice of picture words and phrasing. The copy flows well from the intro right through the story structure.
 - 15-19 marks: The best angle has been chosen; the intro is tightly written and there is some good phrasing. The copy flows well from the intro through the story structure but there are areas where the story and phrasing do not hang together.
 - 13-14 marks: The angle chosen is not the one with the most impact; the use of words in the intro may be clumsy and there is little active pace. The facts are assembled in the rest of the story in a disjointed way and there may be awkward phrasing.
 - 0-12 marks: The intro angle has been missed and the choice of words lacks impact. The rest of the story is disjointed, lacks cohesion and there is clumsy sentence construction.

 - **Readability & writing style** (25 marks available)
 - 20-25 marks: The story is written authoritatively and consistently in the style of the candidate’s newspaper; there is good phrasing and linking throughout. The story is readable, accessible and has pace and rhythm that engages the reader.
 - 15-19 marks: Most parts of the story are well written and authoritative; there are some examples of good phrasing and linking. The story is generally readable, accessible and has pace and rhythm that engages the reader.
 - 13-14 marks: There is evidence of inconsistency in writing style and minor inaccuracies and grammatical errors. The story is generally readable and accessible but there are occasions when reader is made to work too hard.
 - 0-12 marks: The writing lacks authority and consistency and there are major inaccuracies that may warrant a correction. The story employs an inaccessible style and there is little pace and rhythm.

Grade descriptors

Distinction 70+

All the essential facts have been included in an accessible, well-structured story with no inaccuracies. The candidate has chosen a compelling angle and produced a tightly written intro that carries real impact. Story construction is logical and aids understanding. The best quotes have been selected, used accurately and attributed correctly. The final copy demonstrates a high-level of journalistic skills and can be published with little or no correction.

Merit 65-69

The key facts, plus the majority of the other worthwhile facts, have been included with no inaccuracies. The candidate has chosen a strong angle and the intro is well written. Story construction is logical and aids understanding. Good quotes have been selected, used accurately and attributed correctly. The final copy demonstrates a good level of journalistic skills and can be published with few, if any, changes.

Pass 60-64

Most of the key facts, plus most of the other worthwhile facts, have been included. Any inaccuracies will be minor and not change the thrust of the story. The candidate has chosen a good angle and the intro is satisfactorily written. The story has a sensible flow and can be easily understood. Acceptable quotes have been selected, used accurately and attributed correctly. The final copy demonstrates a satisfactory level of journalistic skills and can be published without major changes.

NQJ Pass/fail criteria

Those who gain 50 marks or above will automatically pass this section. Those who fall below 50 marks will fail this section.

Those who gain a borderline mark of between 50 and 59 will go into an aggregating process (final moderation) involving the other assessments that make up the NQJ qualification – news report, media law and practice and the e-logbook for journalists.

If a candidate has gained 60 marks or above in each of the other three NQJ assessments, a candidate achieving a mark of 50-59 will be awarded a pass for news interview as long as he/she has achieved an overall score of 240/400.

To pass the NQJ overall, a candidate must achieve a combined mark of 240/400.