

NQJ NEWS REPORT – PROGRAMME OF STUDY

THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATION IN JOURNALISM

The NQJ news report 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 in which he/she will attend speeches, formal public announcements, press briefings and conferences and from these events 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 |
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| <i>The trainee will:</i> | <i>The trainee can:</i> |
| <p>1. Learn and practice how to recognise, obtain and select the relevant and newsworthy facts from both written and verbal sources. Write a clear, vigorous, accurate and balanced news story from a speech or formal announcement, with sufficient contextual background, in a form that will attract and interest readers and website users.</p> | <p>1.1 Identify and note the best news angle and substantiating key facts from any verbal or written material provided</p> <p>1.2 Utilise verbal or written material to write stories that meet house style guidelines, are grammatically correct, 100 per cent accurate, legally sound and free of ambiguity</p> <p>1.3 Compose a story intro that will hold the attention of readers and website users</p> <p>1.4 Use appropriate quotes to give pace to a story</p> <p>1.5 Structure a story logically in a readable style that makes every word count</p> <p>1.6 Write to a specified word count and deadline to the standard of a senior reporter for both the newspaper and its website</p> |

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| <p>2. Learn and practice how to cover a press briefing/conference in order to obtain the relevant facts needed to write clear, vigorous, accurate and balanced news stories that will attract and interest readers and website users. Maintain and develop an accurate shorthand note up to a speed of 120wpm.</p> | <p>2.1 Identify relevant facts for a news story from written material provided before or after a press briefing/conference</p> <p>2.2 Identify the best news angle and quotes from verbal material provided at a press briefing/conference</p> <p>2.3 Note and transcribe accurately newsworthy facts and quotes provided at a press briefing/conference</p> <p>2.4 Ask supplementary questions to obtain other relevant facts to write an appropriate news story</p> <p>2.5 Produce news stories that have: powerful intros; a logical structure; contain telling quotes; are accurate, legally safe and which engage and hold the interest of readers and website users</p> <p>2.6 Write to a specified word count and deadline to the standard of a senior reporter</p> |
| <p>3. Learn and experience the application of media law and the custom and practices of public institutions, official bodies and organisations, that have a bearing on the lives of readers and website users</p> | <p>3.1 Apply the law as it effects the work of a newspaper reporter</p> <p>3.2 Apply the PCC's Code of Conduct to day-to-day reporting assignments</p> <p>3.3 Apply the Freedom of Information Act and identify and challenge confidently unwarranted official attempts to deny disclosure of information and the identity of individuals</p> <p>3.4 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. Learn and practice the role of a news reporter</p> | <p>4.1 Work professionally within a team</p> <p>4.2 Take on the role of the reader's champion and provide accurate, accessible stories in a format that engages an appropriate audience</p> <p>4.3 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 in print or on line</p> |
| <p>5. Apply their knowledge and understanding of how to develop a story using additional sources.</p> | <p>5.1 Demonstrate how to follow up a story using contacts and explain which sources they would use and why.</p> <p>5.2 Demonstrate an understanding of using different media platforms when writing a story.</p> |

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| <p>6. Learn and practice the importance of illustrative material in relation to stories, such as pictures and graphics.</p> | <p>6.1 Demonstrate an understanding of using pictures and illustrations to enhance a story and capture readers' attention.</p> |
| <p>7. Apply their knowledge and understanding in using appropriate follow-ups, features and use of campaigns to engage the readers and website users.</p> | <p>7.1 Understand and demonstrate occasions when a campaign could be an effective way of pursuing a story and how this can best be achieved.</p> |

Assessment

Assessment for the NQJ news report section is by way of an examination set and marked by NCTJ examiners. The total time allowed for the news report exam is one hour and 30 minutes and the format is as follows:

- Candidates read a briefing note that sets out the name and role of a speaker and the background/context of a speech that he/she will be delivering to the press. **(Time allowed: 10 minutes)**
- Candidates watch a pre-recorded speech on DVD/internet **(Time: 5 minutes)**
- Candidates write a 350-word story or two stories with a total word count of 350, based on information contained within the speech and earlier briefing notes and provide additional ideas on developing the story. **(Time allowed: one hour 15 minutes)**

Marks awarded

Up to 100 marks available.

Pass = 60-64

Merit = 65-69

Distinction = 70+

Up to 80 marks are awarded for the 350-word story and up to 20 marks for story development. 60 per cent is the pass mark for this section, but if a borderline mark is achieved (50 – 59) it will be subject to final moderation.

Marks are awarded in the following areas:

Part A: 350-word story:

Content, accuracy and selection: **40 marks available**

Quotes and reported speech: **20 marks available**

Intro, story structure and writing style **20 marks available**

Part B: Story development:

It is essential that candidates link their ideas and suggestions to specific aspects of the story in Part A.

20 marks available

Total: 100 marks

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.

Part A: news report - marks are awarded on the following basis:

Content, accuracy and selection (mark out of 40: pass 24+; borderline 20-23)

- Stories will be marked up for including main key points and a high level of detail.
- Stories will be marked down for missing key points or taking a superficial approach where main angles are not well backed up.
- There will not be room for all the lesser points, but detail selection should fit in with the approach to the story.
- Accurate reporting of the speech alone will not be enough for a pass. Candidates are expected to make extensive use of the additional material to acquire essential factual and statistical information.
- Inaccuracies will be penalised according to their severity. A mistake that would be likely to receive a complaint or necessitate a correction will be more heavily penalised than a lesser error.
- Key spelling errors will be penalised.
- Candidates should avoid too much old information at the expense of new.

Quotes and reported speech- style (mark out of 20: pass 12+; borderline 10-11)

- A good story should contain three decent quotes.
- Quotes should be verbatim. Any minor deviations from the speech will not be marked down if they do not alter the meaning of the original quote; if they do they will be penalised.
- There should be a good balance of quotes and reported speech.
- Quotes should be positioned to give pace and variation to the story. The speech contains several opportunities for including strong, emotive quotes to give the story added colour and vitality.

Intro, story structure and writing style (mark out of 20: pass 12+; borderline 10-11)

- Intros should include the core story with a strong angle.
- Extra marks should be awarded for intros that capture the drama and use good picture words.
- The intro should be backed-up with the other key points.
- The main body of the story should flow logically and include a good mix of quotes and reported speech.
- Well-written stories will be a blend of the speech and additional material supplied in the candidates' brief.

- A good story will have a strong key quote high in the story around the third/fourth par.
- This will be followed by a solid, logical approach to capturing the essence of the story. A high level of detail is required which should be assessed in the content section above.
- This section should assess how well the presentation of detail has been organised.

Word count

Candidates are required to write one story of 350 words, or two shorter ones with a total of 350 words.

No penalty is incurred if the total length is between 340 and 360 words.

Stories outside that band incur a penalty as follows:

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| -1 mark | 335-339 words | 361-365 words |
| -2 marks | 330-334 words | 366-370 words |
| -3 marks | 325-329 words | 371-375 words |
| -4 marks | 320-324 words | 376-380 words |
| -5 marks | 315-319 words | 381-385 words |

This will be continued to a total of minus 10 marks (maximum penalty) after which the story will be disqualified. Correctly hyphenated words count as one word.

Part B: Story development - marks are awarded on the following basis:

It is essential that candidates link their ideas and suggestions to specific aspects of the story in Part A.

The marking guide is deliberately open so that candidates can be rewarded for their grasp of the story, its implications and their news sense. Candidates who produce generic ideas but do not explain how they would be used in connection with the story will not be rewarded. Candidates who recognise the relevance of real world action – i.e. any national debates, action elsewhere, etc. will be rewarded.

1 How would you break this story immediately, assuming you have all the various forms of the media available? Explain the information you would publish and which media form/forms you would use.

Candidates may suggest any or all of the media forms available and their answer may be limited to what is available on their own papers. Mark according to the appropriateness of the answer given, i.e. breaking the news through Twitter would mean a brief 140 character Tweet, text messages would also be brief. Breaking news on the web or by email may be slightly longer. The markers should look for a succinct, brief outline of the key fact/or facts to encourage the reader to want to know more. Consider search engine optimisation. Mark down candidates whose suggestions are not appropriate for the media form they use.

(2 marks)

- 2 Suggest THREE suitable picture/graphic/video ideas which could be used to enhance your story either in paper or online.**

Look for imagination, breadth and depth of ideas. (4 marks)

- 3 The editor gives you 15 minutes to obtain some additional information or comments from a maximum of TWO sources to expand/balance your story. This is to be done by telephone. Who would you speak to? Give a brief summary of the information you would aim to get from your sources. Choose the most appropriate sources. Lists of specific questions are not required.**

Candidates should suggest either one or two sources they would contact immediately by telephone and outline briefly the information they would seek to obtain. Treat suggestions on their newsworthiness and whether they enhance the original story in an immediate way or whether they would be better used as follow-ups. They must also be practical to achieve within a 15-minute time span.

(4 marks)

- 4 Your news editor wants to develop the story. This might involve launching a campaign, a background feature, use of digital media with reader interaction or any other relevant suggestions. List your ideas.**

Candidates should suggest ideas which cover the background, present situation and any future action. Any campaign should have weight and substance and be realistic. Reward candidates who make use of the various forms of the media to gain reader interaction. Mark according to the depth and breadth of the ideas and overall package.

(10 marks)

Total: 20 marks

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. Follow-up ideas are valid and original with the correct sources identified; lines of questioning are broad and deep. Appropriate online, video and other digital opportunities have been listed.

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 changes. Good sources have been identified for follow-up ideas but the lines of questioning, although broad, have not been fully fleshed out. Appropriate online, video and other digital opportunities have been listed.

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. Satisfactory sources have been identified for follow-up ideas but the lines of questioning have not been fully fleshed out. Satisfactory online, video and other digital opportunities have been listed.

NQJ Pass/fail criteria

Those who gain 60 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 interview, media law and practice and the reporter's e-logbook.

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 Report 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.