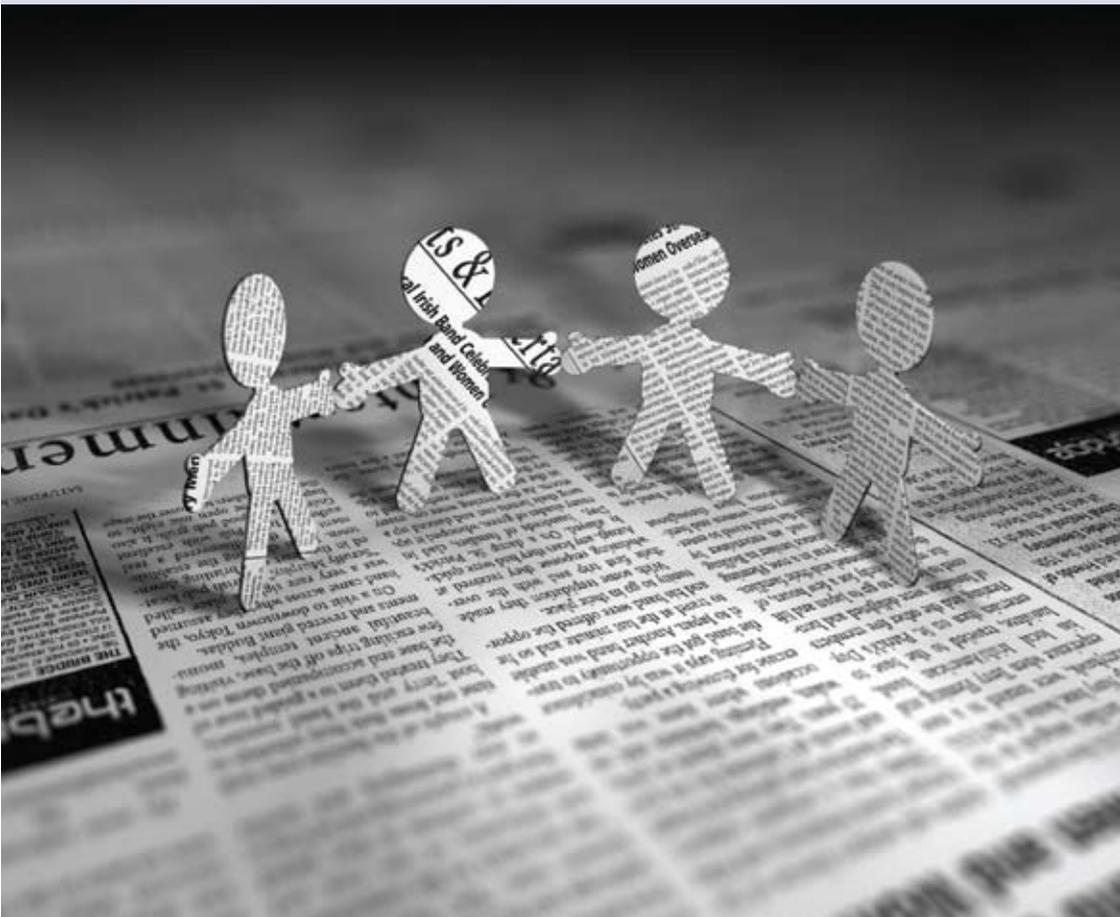


## HNC and HND Practical Journalism



# HNC and HND Practical Journalism

Journalism can be a great career – exciting, rewarding and challenging – but it is also hard work and very competitive. With fewer jobs available in the industry than previously, only the best candidates will succeed. That's why having the right qualification is more important than ever.

The HNC/HND Practical Journalism course is the ideal introduction to this demanding but enjoyable career. It can teach you the skills and help you gain the experience needed in the industry, but can also prepare you for many other jobs.

The right journalism qualification can help get you started in a variety of careers – it all depends what direction you want to go in. You can be anything you want to be...

- A reporter on local newspapers, working at the heart of the community
- A magazine journalist, writing features and in-depth articles
- A specialist financial, sports or foreign reporter, explaining complex stories clearly and concisely
- A sub-editor, designing pages, writing headlines and editing the work of others
- A television and radio reporter or presenter, working in the high-pressure world of broadcast journalism

- An online journalist, writing material that is accessible via smartphones, tablets and PCs worldwide
- A press officer, representing an organisation and helping to get their message across
- A copywriter with an advertising firm, using your words to sell the client's product
- A political researcher, compiling speeches and reports for different areas of local and national government

Students who achieve an HNC/HND in Practical Journalism at a further education college in Scotland can apply to join any of these careers. We give you the knowledge and training you need – the rest is up to you.



## Have you got what it takes?

Simply wanting to be a journalist isn't enough – there are some key skills that course leaders look for in all prospective candidates:

### Writing skills

Good journalists need first-class writing skills, no matter what type of media operation they work for. Journalists tend to be creative people who can use different writing styles for different stories. But it is also crucial that journalists can write straightforward, accurate, plain English that is free of spelling and grammatical errors. If you don't know how to use apostrophes, don't care about the difference between 'affect' and 'effect' and don't think it is important if a name is spelled correctly, then you won't get far as a journalist. Editors need people who can do the basics without having to be corrected.

### People skills

Do you get embarrassed talking to strangers? Feel uncomfortable in a room full of people you don't know? Hate job interviews? Then the reality is you are unlikely to be employed as a journalist – you have to be able to talk as well as write! As a journalist, you will have to meet and interview a wide range of people, from politicians and celebrities to local councillors and parents. Confidence in speaking is essential. You must be articulate and tactful – as well as a good listener who instinctively wants to find out more.

## **A hunger for news**

If you want to become a news journalist, you need to have an unquenchable thirst for every part of news coverage. Do you read a daily paper? Do you have a news website in your online list of favourites? Do you check your phone constantly to see what news is breaking? Then that's a good start. Get into the habit of watching the news on TV, listening to it on the radio and following it online via news websites – as well as on Twitter and other social media. Consume news at every opportunity. If you don't check the news headlines within an hour of getting up in the morning and just before you go to bed at night, then you haven't got the sense of urgency that is crucial in a news reporter.

## **A natural curiosity**

You should be inquisitive and interested in what is happening around you, not just in the news. If you are always the first person to tweet about the latest funny/weird/exciting event in your area, then you could have the right kind of personality to be a reporter. An enquiring mind and an insatiable curiosity, along with the discipline to apply them to get results, will carry you far in a journalism career.

## **The ability to meet a deadline and work under pressure**

The first rule of journalism is never miss a deadline. The second rule of journalism is... never miss a deadline! The pressures in journalism are huge, but having lots to do and not enough time to do it is still no excuse for not meeting a deadline. You have to be able to work fast, write well and think on your feet, but this counts for

nothing if you don't get your article in on time. An editor has to know he/she can rely on you – you only have to miss a deadline once to lose all credibility as a journalist.

## **Knowing a little bit about everything**

You might have a special interest in fashion or music or sports but that doesn't mean this should be all you focus on. A journalist needs to become an expert on everything under the sun, whether it interests them or not. You will be required to talk to a vast array of people about a huge range of things and it helps if you have at least a passing knowledge of some of them. It's this constant variety that makes the job so rewarding but it demands a lot of you! Music, sport, history, politics, economics, culture, literature... these are all your specialist subjects if you choose to go into journalism.

## **A love of reading**

Anyone who wants to write has to read. If you are interested in being a journalist, you should read anything and everything – not just newspapers, but magazines, novels, poetry, non-fiction and anything else you can get your hands on. The best way to learn how to write is to read what other people have written. Immerse yourself in the printed word – look closely at how different newspapers treat stories and you will soon recognise what good journalistic writing is all about. People who do not read journalism are not likely to work in it. But don't forget about books – you should always be reading one, whether in paper form or on your tablet. You'll be amazed at what you can learn from books!

## How can you give yourself the edge?

Prove to potential employers that you are serious about becoming a journalist – here's how:

- Get good grades in school. This offers evidence that you can work hard and apply yourself. For a career in journalism, Higher English is a must, but Higher Modern Studies is also useful.
- Build some life skills. Take a part-time job, do voluntary work, travel, develop new hobbies... Jump at the chance to learn about other people and places.
- Get some work experience in a media operation, whether it's a newspaper, radio station or website. This can be daunting but as well as giving you some real-life skills, it will let you see whether it's the right career for you. Best to find out before you start!
- Write for your school newspaper or magazine, contribute to a website or publish your own blog – there are lots of places to show off your skills. It will impress a prospective editor if you can show that your work has been published somewhere.
- Follow media and news sites on Twitter, re-tweet articles of interest and comment on breaking stories of the day. Employers nowadays will often research an applicant's social media footprint and will be impressed if you show a keen interest in the news. By the same token, they will be unimpressed if all you do is talk about your social life at the weekend and how late you were for class that day – you have been warned...



# Training options

There is no right or wrong way to get into journalism, but some training will better prepare you for what the job entails.

## College or university?

The main difference between them is in the way work is studied and assessed. The HNC/HND Practical Journalism course is delivered through a continuous assessment system, meaning you'll do assignments throughout the year as part of the coursework which will determine your final achievement.

The focus is on gaining practical journalistic experience, so you will be expected to write real-life stories, based, for example, on court and council reporting, and to carry out interviews and research for these assignments.

The clue is in the title of the course: Practical Journalism. You learn to be a journalist by studying and practising the necessary skills, not by simply reading or writing about them.

By contrast, universities still rely fairly extensively on final exams, taken either in stages or at the end of the year, which often focus on a more academic view of the world of journalism.

## What kind of things will I study on a Higher National Journalism course?

The content varies a little between colleges but the core subjects are the same, particularly in the first year, when the emphasis is on learning the key basic skills.

These subjects appear on all courses:

- News writing
- Law
- Sub-editing
- Feature writing
- Shorthand
- Public affairs
- Research and interviewing skills
- Desktop publishing
- Online journalism

You may have knowledge of some of these subjects, but others will be completely new to you. Shorthand is one of the most important skills you will learn as part of your HNC/HND, but also one of the most difficult. The majority of universities teaching journalism do not include shorthand as a compulsory part of their course, but feedback from newspaper editors strongly supports its inclusion as part of any journalistic qualification.

The HNC/HND also allows students to study additional subjects such as video-journalism and broadcast journalism. Check with colleges in advance to find out which Units they offer.

In addition to the HNC/HND, some colleges will also be accredited to deliver other professional qualifications, for example those of the NCTJ (National Council for the Training of Journalists) and the BJTC (Broadcast Journalism Training Council). Both are excellent qualifications and are highly regarded in the industry.

If the college you apply to is NCTJ/BJTC accredited, you will study for these qualifications at the same time as you work towards your HND – the individual Units merge into each other very well. The big advantage of this is that it means you will graduate from college with two impressive qualifications in journalism – an HND and an NCTJ/BJTC Diploma. This winning combination will make you much more employable as a journalist.

## How long will I have to study?

An HNC course lasts one year, full-time, while the HND lasts two years. You would be expected to study for an HNC first and then progress to a second year if you wish to complete an HND. It isn't always necessary to make up your mind at the start about which you want to go for.

If you wish to take your academic career further, you can transfer to university after two years at college and complete a journalism degree.

## Workplace experience

The emphasis in college courses is on vocational training, so there will be a strong practical emphasis in the HND. Most colleges include a period of work experience as part of their course and will often have strong links with local papers to help organise these placements. Students should have as much opportunity as possible to gain real-life skills in a media operation.



“If I was just starting out, I’d do it all the same again. The HND kick-started my career in journalism.”

George Pascoe-Watson,  
Former Political Editor of  
The Sun, partner at Portland PR  
(HND Practical Journalism,  
Napier College, Edinburgh 1986)

“I love my job because every day is different... I don’t think any of this would have been possible if I hadn’t done my HND and I have nothing but fond memories of college!”

Stephanie Manthorpe,  
magazine journalist at  
DC Thomson & Co Ltd  
(HND Practical Journalism,  
Adam Smith College, Fife, 2007)

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## More information

If you are interested in studying for the HNC or HND Practical Journalism, you can search online to find out which colleges deliver these courses.

For more details on what’s included in the HNC or HND, you can visit our website [www.sqa.org.uk](http://www.sqa.org.uk) or get in touch with our customer contact centre:

Tel: 0845 279 1000  
or email: [customer@sqa.org.uk](mailto:customer@sqa.org.uk)



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