

AS LEVEL
FACT FILES
Journalism

For first teaching from September 2013

For first AS award in Summer 2014

For first A Level award in Summer 2015

**Technical and Presentational
Skills and Formatting in
Print Journalism**



**journ
alism**

in the Media and Communications Industry (JMC)

Technical and Presentational Skills and Formatting in Print Journalism



Learning Outcomes

Students should be able to:

- Design a house style for their chosen publication (newspaper or magazine) and use appropriate software (for example Word or Frontpage) to apply this to their portfolio.



Course Content

Technical and Presentational Skills and Formatting in Print Journalism

(page 10, specification)

The ability to design and lay-out pages is becoming more important in journalism as newsrooms make do with fewer staff. Frequently the same people will lay-out and sub-edit pages in a newspaper or magazine. All journalists should be at least familiar with the skills of sub-editing and page design. You will need these skills when producing your print portfolio.



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How to sub-edit copy

A sub-editor is a 'second pair of eyes' and edits copy to correct inaccuracies and spelling, grammar and punctuation errors. They may rewrite copy to fit the 'house style' of the publication. They also make sure there are no legal errors, such as libels, that could land the publication in the courts. They write elements including headlines to reflect the story and encourage the reader to read on.



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Exercise: look at a selection of newspapers, both broadsheets and tabloid, and pick out six headlines. Discuss what makes you want to read on and what turns you off the story. How do the tabloid headlines differ from the broadsheet headlines?

Things to remember when sub-editing your stories:

Spelling, grammar and punctuation

- Be very careful with spelling. Use the spell checker on your computer but remember that it will not show every error, e.g. The man went threw the door; Our Britain's courts fir for purpose?

- Grammar affects meaning, so knowing the rules and applying them consistently is vital. Common errors include mixing singulars and plurals (the company was in trouble long before they went bankrupt) and tenses (he says it will be a long time before he went back home).



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- Know how to use punctuation, including commas, full stops and semi-colons, correctly. People often get confused about apostrophes in particular – make sure you know the rules.
- For quotations, use either single or double quotation marks but be consistent. Whatever is inside the quotation marks must be exactly what the person said, although you can take out ums and ahs and some repetition, e.g. “I just think, I mean, I just think he should go to jail” could be changed to “I just think he should go to jail.”
- If the quotation is a complete sentence, place full stops and commas inside the quotation marks, e.g. “I directed my first film in 1987,” he said. If it is a fragment of speech, write it like this – Sarah Baker said she was unsure whether her husband would be home soon as “he’s in client meetings until late”.
- Avoid splitting infinitives – “to boldly go”.
- Active voice usually reads better than passive voice, e.g. compare “The police came under attack from hundreds of stone-throwing youths” (passive) to “Hundreds of youths threw stones at the police” (active).

Legal errors and taste and decency

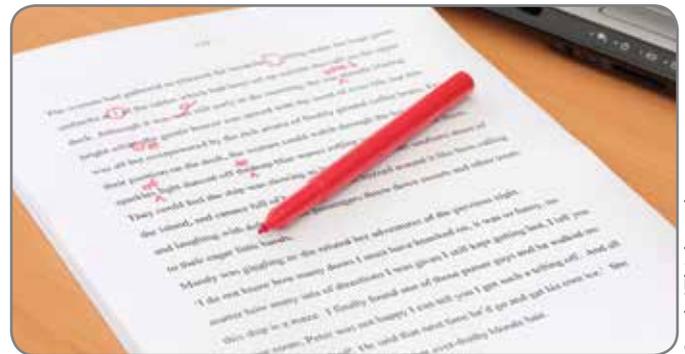
- Make sure you know the relevant laws including those on defamation (note that saying something “allegedly” happened will not protect you if you have no evidence for the claim), and contempt of court.
- Be careful how you report sensitive stories. Avoid reporting salacious details that are not relevant to the story, especially if they are likely to be upsetting e.g. the gory details of a road accident.

Style

- Most newspapers and magazines have their own house style which covers everything from how dates are written (e.g. 11th November 2013 or November 11, 2013) to using titles (e.g. ‘Mr John Smith,’ ‘Mr Smith’ or just ‘Smith’). When producing your portfolio, be consistent about how you use language. For instance, avoid writing the ‘Finance Minister’ and the ‘finance minister’ elsewhere.

Mistakes

- An excellent general knowledge helps you spot mistakes, which can creep in especially when a reporter is in a hurry to file a story. For example, is the capital of Canada really Toronto, as the reporter writes, or is it in fact Ottawa? If in doubt, check it out, and that applies when you are writing your own stories for the portfolio.



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Headlines

- The headline is your first (and maybe only) chance to sell your story. Try and make it as dramatic or attractive as you can. However, don’t mislead the reader by misrepresenting or overselling the story in the headline – it should reflect the story.
- Tabloid headlines are generally more playful, often using techniques such as puns and alliteration. Broadsheets generally play it straighter.
- Keep it as short and snappy as possible, especially in a tabloid newspaper.
- If the story is based around an interview, you could use a strong or emotional quotation as a headline, e.g. War turned my son turned into a monster.

How to design a newspaper or magazine page

The two most widely used lay-out programs in newspapers and magazines are Adobe InDesign and QuarkXPress, however you can also use software programmes such as Word to lay out basic pages.

Most newspapers and magazines have a set of standardised rules and guidelines covering design elements including fonts and headlines. Try to ensure you choose an appropriate style for your publication and apply the rules consistently.

Page design is more an art than a science, and pages can be designed in many different ways. However, there are some general principles that will help you design your portfolio publication.

Magazine pages generally use more complicated design elements than newspapers do, giving a more artful and colourful look. Pictures are especially important and are



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often used across a full page. Headlines too tend to be more creative and playful. The picture on the cover is everything – it ‘sells’ the magazine.

Newspapers have a cleaner, simpler look than magazines. There is typically more than one story per page. The design style will differ according to the target market of the publication and whether it is a tabloid or a broadsheet/quality newspaper.

Tabloids often use just one story on the front page (the splash) with a huge headline and picture dominating the



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page. There may only be a few sentences (‘pars’) of the story on the front page with the rest of the story inside. Headlines, which are often in large, bold fonts, make use of puns, alliteration and plays on well known phrases. Tabloid headline writing is a real skill and The Sun’s headline writers are thought to be the best in the business. Stories and headlines are often fairly short and snappy.

Broadsheets/quality newspapers tend to be more text heavy than tabloids.

Headlines are generally longer and ‘wordier’. The design tends to be more restrained and less ‘splashy’ than in the tabloids. Pictures are still important but may not dominate the page in the style of the tabloids.

It is important to note that page design varies according to the section. Feature sections usually have the liveliest, most stylish page design. Designers can play around with colour and graphics and use pictures to great effect. News pages tend to be simpler. Opinion pages often include a masthead



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with the name of the publication, editor and office address at the top of the opinion column.

Design elements

- **Masthead:** The publication title, often in a ‘fancy’ font and sometimes in colour. Goes at the top of the front page and includes the date and sometimes the issue number. Every page thereafter should have the name and date of the publication at the top of the page.
- **Headlines:** Avoid ‘bumping heads’ – placing two headlines side by side so they clash and confuse the reader. Go as big as you dare if it looks right and the story warrants it, especially in tabloids.
- **Byline:** The writer’s name, usually at the beginning of a story. Style it up in a standard way e.g. **Amanda Daly**
North America Correspondent
- **Pictures:** Vitally important. Choose the best, most dramatic image you can to illustrate your story.



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- **Columns/legs:** A vertical stack of text. Most papers have four or five columns to a page – any more is hard on the eyes. Magazines can get away with fewer – two or three is common.
- **Fonts:** It is usually better to choose a font for your

publication and stick to it, although some publications use different fonts for body copy and headlines. However, you can use bold font, larger point sizes and italics (sparingly) as appropriate.

- **Text:** This is usually justified or ragged right. Stories that run down the side of the page in a single column often look better in ragged right.
- Label your pages clearly according to the section, e.g. news, features, opinion etc. This usually goes at the top of the page.



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- **Use modular layout:** Having the stories stacked in rectangular shapes generally looks best. Don't stack stories side by side in a way that clashes and confuses the reader.
- **Rules:** You can use vertical or horizontal line to separate stories on a page.
- **Borders:** You can use a thin border (usually 0.5 or 1 pt) to form a box or edge a photograph/graphic.
- **Briefs or one column sidebars:** These can be used in a vertical column at the side of the page. They can help to break the page up.

- **Graphics:** elements including graphs, tables, charts, maps, summary boxes and pull-out quotes can help explain complex information to busy readers.
- **Colour:** This can help guide the reader, organise information and make the page more attractive to the eye. Use carefully to give a consistent and harmonious look and avoid clashes.



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- **Sub-heads:** A line of type, often bold or underlined, can be used to separate body copy into smaller sections, making it easier on the eye.
- **Air:** Avoid having too much white space or 'air' not filled with text or photos, especially in newspaper designs.

