

Careers in Journalism



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Description

Journalism is an incredibly diverse field that offers a variety of career possibilities ranging from investigative reporting to editorial review. Regardless of the specific job within journalism, the end result is the dissemination of information to a specific, or general audience. This can be done through forms of print media, such as newspapers and magazines, or electronic media such as the internet, television or radio. Some of the specific fields within journalism are analysts, correspondents, writers and editors. It is these peoples' job to gather information, prepare their stories for a particular medium, and present it to their audience. They offer information about local, national or international events. They present points of view on current issues, and report on the actions of officials, executives, celebrities and common citizens alike. The common objective in all these forms of journalism is to relate news and events to an audience.

How does one get there?

Journalism is a highly competitive field, and job opportunities are often hard to come by. Very few journalists begin their careers in their idealized position. Rather, they begin at low-level entry jobs and over time work their way up. The most basic and universal pre-requisites for the various fields within journalism are education, an extensive knowledge of a specific field, and experience.

An education in journalism can prepare a student for their career by providing them with the necessary technical and theoretical skills. Today there are numerous schools for journalism at which students can gain experience and skills in different fields.

¹ Most journalism schools offers courses in areas such as writing, interviewing, broadcasting and photography. Schools also often offer their students an opportunity to gain experience through internship programs with various news organizations. The University of Western Ontario for example, offers internship placements at CBC Radio, CTV Newsnet, National Post, W-Five and the Globe and Mail.² The practical and working knowledge gained through journalism schools will aid aspiring journalists in gaining access into the journalism industry.

Education in areas besides journalism can also prove beneficial. Many employers look for applicants with expertise in specific areas such as politics, economics, or business. Having such a specific degree allows a journalist to give qualified and knowledgeable information on the subjects they are reporting on.

Of the journalists profiled in this dossier, most have had some sort of education. Anderson Cooper for example, graduated with a degree in political studies and international relations. Alan Johnson graduated with an MA in English and politics and has a diploma in journalism. Amelia Shepherd-Smith also has a diploma in journalism.

While education has proven itself to be beneficial in getting into the journalism industry, it is not the only way. Of the journalists featured in this dossier, both Daniel Lak and renowned National Geographic correspondent Lisa Ling, are university dropouts. Rather than pursuing their careers in journalism through education, these two journalists sought to further their careers through experience. Experience is essential to a successful career in journalism.

¹ See appendix for list of journalism schools

² <http://www.fims.uwo.ca/journalism/courses-internship/Internship.htm>

In the case of Lisa Ling, she was gaining experience in journalism by the time she was 16. That experience at a televised teen show was critical in her development as a televised reporter. While not everyone will have the opportunity to work on a TV show at such a young age, there are other opportunities to gain experience. High school and university newspapers for example, can provide writing, editing and other forms of journalism experience.

Internships also provide a great form of experience depending on the company and the jobs you are given. Most newspapers, magazines, and broadcast news organizations offer reporting and editing internships. Interns usually start with a newspaper, publisher or a broadcaster. In these positions, they will perform basic duties around the office, or assist in covering small news stories. As they gain experience or demonstrate potential in one or more areas of the business, aspiring journalists may be appointed to one of a number of specialist areas:

Becoming a well-paid reporter is a long arduous process. Seldom does a person begin a career in journalism at a prestigious position. Rather, most successful journalists began at the bottom and spend years working their way up to where they are today.

Experience is a prerequisite for advancement throughout any journalist career.

Experience gained early in life will be an ideal way to improve one's chances of getting a job and demonstrating potential for advancement. Also instrumental in shaping journalism careers is education. An education in journalism, or a more specific field like economics or political science will enable an aspiring journalist to give competent and informed opinions and coverage.

QUALIFICATIONS:

- Excellent writing, editing, research, leadership and interpersonal skills
- Ability to handle a heavy workload and stress
- Journalism education and journalism experience
- Knowledge of a diversity of political and social issues
- Ability to work with tight deadlines in a team environment with people holding diverse perspectives
- Willingness to travel extensively
- Willingness to take risks

Journalist profiles:

Daniel Lak

Daniel Lak is currently a CBC online news writer, based in Toronto. He researches and writes articles that are posted on CBC News website. Lak first began his journey to journalism in a Pakistani restaurant. The food gave him a desire to travel to South Asia, where his skills as a journalist would also be useful. Lak didn't finish university but started working for the media in television and print in Canada. He wanted a job as a foreign correspondent and went to England where he managed to get employed by the BBC. After some time he was assigned to Pakistan where he was a news correspondent. He has also worked in India and Nepal with the BBC.

One benefit for Daniel is being able to travel and experience new cultures and foods. Also, the knowledge that you are informing the world can be very rewarding. He admits that this can also lead to an egotistical view of oneself. His position in Pakistan gave him a lot of exposure since he was the only BBC correspondent there. When he was

in Pakistan working for the BBC and was asked about his plans he said, “to see more of my family and to stay sane even as the BBC demands more and more of me.”³

Pay for journalism is directly linked to your willingness to work hard. Lak says that six figure salaries are possible but require a lot of work and commitment. An average salary is about \$80,000. The more committed to your employer you are the more pay you receive.

His advice for pursuing a career is to be well educated in history, politics and geography and also journalism and communications. “Follow the media -- print, television, internet, radio if that's your passion. Use the resources of the web to look at other country's media, pod casting, web versions of newspapers abroad, streaming video of world events and so on. Get a job, any job, in journalism and be ambitious.”⁴

Anderson Cooper

Anderson Cooper is a CNN anchor and host of Anderson Cooper 360. He spends much time in front of the camera reporting on international issues. He covers major events like the tsunami in Sri Lanka, the war in Iraq and hurricane Katrina in New Orleans.

Cooper always wanted a career in televised journalism. He graduated with a degree in political science and international relations. He pursued a career with Channel One but failed to get an on-air position. Frustrated, he took his camera, made a fake press ID and started to cover events in Somalia in 1990. He sent his footage to Channel One, which eventually landed him a job with there. He has also covered the events in Bosnia and Rwanda. This was followed by a job with ABC News as a televised journalist, and

³ BBC News. Daniel Lak Biography.

⁴ Daniel Lak, e-mail.

finally in 2001 he was hired by CNN, where he is to this day. For Anderson Cooper his pathway to journalism was quite direct. His current position was attained through hard work and perseverance.

Travel is a high point for Cooper along with being on the frontlines of the news. He believes in the importance of informing the public of world events and the significance they have. In the devastation left by hurricane Katrina, Cooper felt it important to inform the public and ensure that it would not be forgotten. A down side for Cooper is being constantly bombarded by pain, loss and suffering. The constant travel and risks associated with his job requires a high level of commitment from Cooper. Cooper is one of the highest paid journalists on television. His annual salary is two million dollars.

Alan Johnston

Alan Johnston currently works as a foreign correspondent with the BBC in Gaza. His job requires overseas placement of one to three years covering current events. His medium for reporting is television and radio.

Johnston graduated with MA in English and Politics and holds a diploma in journalism. He began work as a sub-editor for the BBC World Service Newsroom. He then secured a job as correspondent in Uzbekistan for two years and then in Afghanistan for one year. He returned to London for six years working again in the BBC World Service Newsroom as a general reporter. His three-year post in Gaza began in 2004.

Johnston's story demonstrates the great risk involved in international journalism. Nearing the end of a three-year assignment in Gaza, Johnston was kidnapped on March

12, 2007 by the Army of Islam group. He was held for 114 days in Gaza City. Although he was not tortured, at times he was held in chains, left in darkness and was sick from the food. The risk was not great enough to discourage him from returning to journalism. He hopes get back to work quickly. His story also demonstrates the benefits of journalism, that is the camaraderie of journalists worldwide. Rallies were held to protest his captivity and demand his release.

Alan Johnston has always worked with the BBC, although he has held different positions in different countries.

Cory Eldridge

Cory Eldridge is currently a writer for a local newspaper in The Dalles, Oregon. He was formerly a writer in Jordan and the United Arab Emirates. Cory Eldridge completed a degree in journalism. During his third year of university he studied abroad in the Jordan. There he worked for an English-language monthly in Amman, called the JO Magazine. He wrote one article a month for the magazine. Most of his time was spent researching. This was reading background information, conducting interviews, taking pictures and traveling. He traveled to the West Bank and Israel for six weeks for one article. About a week was spent writing and editing the article. A year later, he went to the United Arab Emirates to intern for Reuters. While there he wrote short articles, about 500 words, as a financial correspondent. Information from the stock markets had to be found and reported on quickly before it became old information. The focus was quantity and speed. Currently he is working for The Dalles Chronicle and saving money. He wants to return overseas, preferably to Turkey, and continue working as a journalist.

Travel is the key benefit for Cory. Working for a small paper overseas can pave the way for a job with a bigger newspaper. Salary for journalists at small papers is not a benefit. At JO magazine Cory made \$100 per article. He was offered a job in Yemen that paid \$300 a month.

Cory is still at the beginning of his journalism career. His hope is to get his name on a big story that will help him get a better position at a well known journalist agency overseas.

Amelia Shepherd-Smith

Amelia Shepherd-Smith is a business writer based in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. She analyzes and reports on regional and international business. She writes for several magazines and can have six stories in progress at the same time. Articles range from 800-4000 words. Much of her time is spent in research, either reading newspapers and magazines or conducting interviews.

Amelia holds a broad based Arts degree. To start her career as a journalist, she got a diploma in journalism. She worked for free for one year for local papers in Sydney to gain experience. At the same time she began submitting articles to various magazines and attained a job in property reporting. Once she had the sufficient experience, she was able to begin working in Dubai as a business writer.

Amelia does freelance in her spare time but the benefit to working in an office is the easy access to mentors and other writers. Freelancers can control their own hours and work whenever they want or need but do not have the security that full-time writers

enjoy. In Dubai, a business writer, like Amelia, can receive \$4000 or more per month which requires about a 60 hour work week.

Lisa Ling

Lisa Ling is currently a reporter and host of National Geographic's Ultimate Explorer program. Lisa's job at National Geographic is to gather firsthand information and footage on various national and international issues. These issues can range from drug running in Colombia to life inside North Korea. Lisa's job requires her to travel to these often unstable, and dangerous regions to investigate firsthand the specific topic she is researching. After she has gathered her information and footage Lisa compiles it into a documentary film or series of films, which is then aired on the Explorer program.

Lisa Ling has been involved in the television and journalism field since she was a teenager. Born in Northern California, Ling was in front of the camera by age 16 as host of a nationally televised teen show called "Scratch." At 18 Ling moved on to Channel One News and became its youngest reporter. It was at this job that Ling got her first taste of international reporting. For Channel One, Ling hunted down cocaine processing labs in the Colombian jungle, conducted interviews with members of notorious guerrilla groups, and covered the refugee crisis in Algeria. After high school, Ling continued her career at Channel One news while attending the University of Southern California. She studied history while working forty hours a week. Ling dropped out of university in her junior year and became Channel One's senior war correspondent. In addition to her full time reporting for Channel One, she was also part of a joint investigation with *Time* magazine into a Russian company accused of smuggling nuclear weapons. She has produced eight

documentaries for PBS, ranging from drug trafficking to her 13-year-old cousin's unsuccessful struggle with liver cancer. Ling has also worked as a freelance correspondent for ABC News' weekend edition. In 1999 Ling began working with world-renowned reporter Barbara Walters on the daytime talk show *The View*. Ling offered a younger perspective and opinion on a variety of topics that were discussed on a daily basis on *The View*. In 2002 Lisa joined National Geographic and has been there ever since.

Some of the benefits of Lisa's job at Explorer have been her ability to get paid to travel the globe and see countries and parts of the earth very few get to see. The necessity and frequency of travel is also a challenge at times. Lisa's life is incredibly inconsistent, as she has to be ready to travel on short notice. Lisa has a packed suitcases always on standby. One in her car, one in her office and one at home. This obviously makes it hard to maintain any sort of normal lifestyle or relationship. The locations that Lisa does her work in are sometimes very dangerous. She was under heavy guard while reporting on the war in Algeria, and was shot at while reporting on drug running in Colombia. Lisa's job can be incredibly stressful as she tries to meet deadlines and works in unstable foreign locations. Lisa desires a family but recognizes her lifestyle is in no way conducive to one. This type of job requires an incredible commitment, Lisa must be willing to forgo not only any immediate plans if she must leave the country, but also her desire for a family.

Lisa did not begin her journalist career with the intention of joining National Geographic; rather she has come to this job in a roundabout way. She has slowly worked her way up the competitive ladder through various jobs to the one she is now at.

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Job Postings

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<http://www.journalismnet.com/jobs/>

<http://www.journalismuk.co.uk/links.htm>

Job Applications

<http://www.ctvglobemedia.com/en/>

Journalism schools

<http://www.journalismschools.com/>

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http://www.business.com/directory/media_and_entertainment/journalism/education_and_training/international/

<http://www.writerswrite.com/journalism/jschool.htm>

Journalism Internships

<http://128.32.58.71/jobs/>

<http://members.tripod.com/~journalismcenter/internships.html>

http://www.campusinternships.com/Journalism_Internships.cfm

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Job Opportunities

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