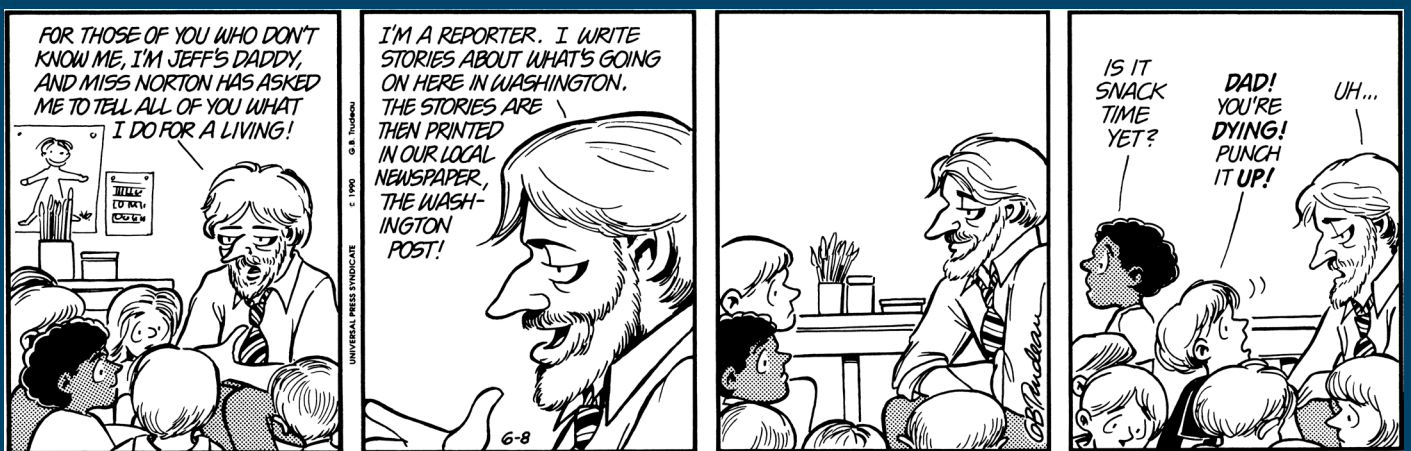


*How not to be boring when you explain  
how professional newsgathering works*

# A journalist's guide to meeting the class



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This is a working document. We welcome your comments and suggestions – and especially your additions! This basic guide is a slightly adapted version of a guide written for the Finnish Newspapers Association by Päivi Lehtikoinen and kindly shared with the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) to adapt for global use and digital content. This version has been edited and updated by Aralynn McMane of WAN-IFRA (2015). Send your ideas and suggestions to her at [aralynn.mcmene@wan-ifra.org](mailto:aralynn.mcmene@wan-ifra.org)

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## **JOURNALISTS INTO SCHOOLS – WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?**

Who will consume our news in the future? Presumably those who have learned to do so already in their homes, however this is far from certain in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Thus, the school must take on a larger role than ever before in helping the youth become acquainted with the news and how it is made.

As part of this process, meeting a real live journalist can be an important moment for a child or adolescent, giving the news and the news organization a human face.

Meeting real students can also be a important moment for a journalist, who has an unbeatable opportunity to really listen to their opinions and learns what interests they have at this key time in their lives, when they are forming lifetime habits as media users, news consumers and citizens. In the best case, you may even have to sign autographs, because a reporter can be almost a celebrity. However, it's easier than you may think to get it wrong: to be dull, irrelevant or incomprehensible.

The most important aspect of a visit to a school or similar institution is tangibility. Show or read examples, tell stories, take along props. Sometimes you also need activities in class or you can give activities to the teachers to enable them to continue the theme.

**In fact, enabling the teacher to continue is a main point of doing this at all!**

## THE BASIC VISIT OUTLINE

### **BEFORE YOU GET THERE:**

- Make sure the class has had access to your content BEFORE you see them– reading it in print or online so they can react, even if it is that day’s news that they look at only in the hour before you arrive. They should look at it for at least 20 minutes before you get there. The first question: What have you been reading?
- Plan to get an item published about the visit, ideally on the day or after the fact. Most of the time it’s not a story but could be a brief or item on your Facebook page saying, “today, class so and so will be working with so and so to discuss news and how it’s made” or, later, the fact that you went. This is a small gesture that helps show that your organization takes relating to youth seriously.

### **WHILE YOU ARE THERE (IN ANY ORDER):**

QUESTIONS FOR THE CLASS: Goal is to find out their reactions to news content. Ask some of the questions appropriate for each age group (see those sections of this guide).

QUIZ: Goal is for them to be able to easily give a “right” answer related to content.

- Scavenger hunt in groups to find a list of items in a printed newspaper. This is a great ice-breaker (a full list of potential items for this is at the end of this guide)
- What news has already been shared with you by some friends?
- Was also on TV? Radio?
- What was only in the newspaper?

### TELLING ABOUT YOUR JOB

\* Think journalistically here. What are the most interesting elements of your story and how can you make it compelling?

### TELLING ABOUT YOURSELF

\* Again, what’s particularly interesting in your own story?

### ASKING COMMENTS ABOUT HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR NEWS COVERAGE

\* Be sure that they have had time to look through the whole site or print edition before you do this so they are sure to have a basis for something to say. Otherwise, you may face a lot of blank faces.

QUESTIONS FROM THE CLASS (can come even before you say anything and will likely come throughout)

Remember that you can use these approaches for adults as well.

## A FEW HINTS ABOUT TEACHING TECHNIQUES:

**Attitude:** The biggest fear in schools is that you will try to sell your product. Thus there is a limit to how much you should praise your own operation.

**Advance work:** Giving pupils tasks in advance will help you get directly to the point. The easiest advance task is to get pupils to prepare questions to ask you. Another alternative is to ask them to select the most interesting news item from the day before you come.

**Introducing yourself:** To make things easier for smaller children, write your name on the blackboard. Tell them what you do in your job, show them your work. Bring yourself closer to the group by telling them about any ties you may have to the school or the area where it is located.

**Aids:** Write difficult words on the blackboard. If you create a presentation, write little on each slide and in BIG letters (nothing under 24 points).

**Using print editions:** Ideally, students should have spent time reading your newspaper ahead of time. When there is little time available, think whether the pupils need their own copies or you will show them things in your own copy. Reading news is a slow process for children in lower school classes and a large broadsheet copy is awkward to handle. Often, the easiest way is to study the paper in pairs. In this case, clearly guide them to the relevant content. (If time, do let them browse and comment and question.)

**Using digital editions:** Be sure to consult with the teacher ahead of time to see what is available: a single electronic white board, a few computers, tablets for all, smartphones allowed? It will make a difference in what you can do.

**Participation:** Let the pupils participate and make observations, ask them a lot of questions, let them guess among different alternatives. What news do you remember from last week? Where do

you usually get your news? What was the last time you watched TV news? The last time you read a story in printed newspaper? The last time you shared a story on social media?

**Doing more than saying:** Learning is easiest when it is done through examples and doing. Show the students the tools of your trade, such as your press card, phone, pen, notebook, tape recorder, camera, laptop and so on. Show them the position in which you hold your notebook in your hand, how you photograph, tell them when you use your tape recorder, what apps you use, etc.

**Reading aloud:** Reading [SHORT!] extracts from articles suits also older students. You can illustrate what is read by, for example, explaining how summaries of what people have said alternate with direct quotes in an article. By reading you can also illustrate how descriptions and creating a sense of being present are good special effects when you are writing an article.

**Circulate in the classroom:** Especially when you are showing something in your hand or a picture, move around among the students.

**Humour, secrets:** Children love humour and secrets. It's always a smash success when you confess your juiciest blunders. You can also reveal something that will be in the following day's news offer..

**Gifts & Props:** Advertising pens, notebooks and posters are always welcome.

**Get feedback:** Exploit this rare situation! Ask for feedback and ideas and requests for what to cover. With older children, you can suggest writing comments on stories and to the editor.

## BE WARY OF JARGON:

People outside the profession are not familiar with many of the words and phrases that we take for granted and may totally misunderstand them.

Here are some examples of words that many non-journalists find incomprehensible (there will be more from your own situation):

masthead	jumps
deadline	scoop
feature	Reuters, etc
intro	tabloid
blurb	broadsheet
flyer	paper (referring to the organization)
banner headline	media/medium (yes this may be hopeless at this stage, but you can try).
a front page refer	

Words that can easily be misunderstood:

**special correspondent** (= a journalist who writes articles on some or other specific area, such as economics or a journalist sent to a specific place for a specific story)

**article** (= the general name for one story or item in a newspaper)

**spoof/hoax** (= an article that is not factual, but meant to be recognised as only a joke)

**presses** (= printing machines)

**lead article, leader, editorial** (= explain the difference, because these are often confused with each other)

**layout** (= explain that this means arranging text and pictures in relation to each other)

**sub editor/copy editor** (= explain that this different than the chief editor or a section editor)

**the paper** (= clarify whether you mean the news organization or the newsprint it is printed on.

## BE READY WITH ANSWERS

1. How much does a reporter earn?
2. What's the most enjoyable / most boring part of your work?
3. Are you on Facebook?
4. What has been your most enjoyable / most special / most dangerous assignment?
5. What celebrities have you interviewed?
6. How much are people paid for giving interviews?
7. Where can photographs for newspapers be taken?
8. Where does a reporter get themes for articles?
9. Why does the newspaper contain so much / so little sport activity?
10. How does one become a reporter?
11. What is a good journalist like?
12. Why is the newspaper so large in size / why does the newspaper contain loose pages?
13. Is it true that newspapers are dying?



## TIPS FOR CLASSES OF 7 - to 13-YEAR-OLDS

When you visit a primary school, it is essential to remember that the children's reading abilities can still be weak. Printed newspaper texts are generally too long for even someone who is 13 years-old, and the terminology in them is difficult.

Choose examples of articles in advance: animals and sports are good, safe themes. Read the articles and text samples aloud to the children.

The physical size of a newspaper and computer access can create a problem in a classroom. When you use print editions the easiest way is to let the children work in pairs. Remember to check out the status of the classroom technology if you are going to present online content or make a slide presentation, and to check it all out ahead of time with the teacher. Have some form of printed back-up if you are going to rely solely on digital delivery.

Be concrete, tell and show examples. Let the children participate, ask them questions and give them activities to do.

### **SUBJECTS:**

#### Producing the news

How is a news written? Photographed? Where does a newsroom get its material, articles/pictures/cartoons? How does a newsroom produce the news, timetables? Editorial offices, sections, job tasks.

#### News items:

What things get into the news? What makes a news story big / news criteria? Where does a reporter find news? Structure of a news item.

#### The visual format:

What's in a printed newspaper and an online news service and how is content presented and organized? What are the elements of each section? Who adds the content?

#### Ethical rules, morality:

Can journalists write whatever they want? What rules do they observe when they are collecting information and writing texts? Do the media tell the truth?

#### Advertisements:

What are advertisements? Why does a news operation have advertisements? What do advertisements cost?

## **ACTIVITIES** (ages 7-13):

1. What is the most interesting news item / most interesting news image you've seen in the last 24 hours?
2. The structure of news: look for different categories of content. Which ones are the most important? How can you tell?
3. Structure of a news item: Look for a report in the paper about something that happened to someone. Examine it to see whether it contains answers to the basic questions about news, i.e. What happened? Where did it happen? When did it happen? Why did it happen? To whom did it happen or who did it? What resulted from what happened?
4. Look for a) local, b) national and c) foreign news items. What are the most interesting themes to you?
5. Does the news contain positive reports? Why is the news often sad/bad? Does the newspaper contain news items about special events?
6. Does the newspaper contain any news items with a bearing on your family's life?
7. Vote to choose the best image in today's print edition? What is the worst image?
8. If you could go back in time, what news events in today's news would you like to change, and how? Rewrite the news story in that way.
9. If you could be a reporter, on what subjects would you write articles?
10. Does today's news have a story or pictures of a person you would like to meet? What is one question you'd like to ask that person.
11. Practice interview: Think of three questions that will enable you to find out something new about school meals.
12. What do you think journalists need to do to better engage young people with the news?

## **TIPS FOR CLASSES OF 14- to 16-YEAR OLDS**

Some teenagers are already habitual news consumers, whereas others do not follow news at all. Therefore you should give careful thought to what content you choose as examples so that you retain the students' interest.

Before your visit, consult the teacher to find out what subjects are of current interest among the students or being covered in teaching. Your related content can help make an academic topic come alive.

Good places to start are include sport, hobbies, celebrities, appearance, dating, environment, portrayal of teenagers.... Material from a youth supplement, or special sections for young people or children, can also prove useful.

Avail yourself of the opportunity to get feedback and tips that your newspaper can use.

### **SUBJECTS:**

#### **Your work process:**

Prepare a description of what's involved in writing some article or other, especial on a topic of interest to teenagers.. How did you come up with the theme? How did you find your sources of information? Did you have any difficulty obtaining information? What did you include in the article, and what did you leave out? How was the idea of illustration developed? Why was the article so proinent or small? Did you get any feedback on your article? Have you written any other articles on the same theme?

#### **News criteria:**

Ask what other themes interest young people. Outline what gets into the news and why. Discuss what kinds of themes are interesting, and which ones are boring. If you have time, ask students to look in groups at competing print editions and create a new Front Page thay they think would be more interesting to their classmates.

Be ready to talk about critical perspectives on news criteria: sensations, the influence of media competition on the reliability of news, etc.

#### **Visual format:**

What means are used to entice people to consume news? How is a visual format planned? What means are available to add effectiveness? Choose for example good and bad designs from various print and online editions and examine them together.

Media-critical perspectives: What does an article's placement in a particular part of a spread mean? What significance has the size of an article or of pictures?

#### **Ethics, morality:**

The media's responsibility. Guidelines for journalists, i.e. what principles do you observe in your work? Presentation of the work of any press council or other media accountability body in the country. What kind of material does your news organization not publish?

#### **Consuming news:**

Why do people follow the news? What are the platforms on which the get it and how (directly, sent by a friend, from a news site, from an aggregator)?

Statistics on the consumption various media. If there is time, you can get the students to do a survey of their cohorts about this and compare it to a recent national or international study. When was the last time anyone read a print edition and why?

**ACTIVITIES** (ages 14-16):

What news items do you remember from recent times? Why did they become big news stories?

Work in pairs with today's paper and find content that :

- you and your partner both would definitely share with a friend
- you both would NEVER share with anyone
- you and your partner disagree about sharing
- is on a theme that is important to young people today
- tells about something that happened near here.
- concerns many people.
- will be of use to someone. To whom?
- that needs more reporting. Why?
- that contains an interesting opinion.

Evaluate how the news looks on a page or on a screen. Is it appealing? Would you change the heading? Are you satisfied with the images? Would you use some means of adding effect?

Vote to choose the favourite image.

What do you think journalists need to do to better engage young people with the news?

## **TIPS FOR CLASSES OF OLDER STUDENTS**

Young people look to the future: Tell them how you became a journalist and what the good and bad sides of your profession are.

If you work for a print edition, remember that it may seem old-fashioned: Outline your paper's digital services as well and see if that assumption of "vintage" is correct with this particular group of students. You may find they love paper...

Human relations, the environment and leisure pursuits are generally interesting themes with which to begin a general discussion, but get a sense of the interests of this particular class as you would any audience, by ASKING. For example, senior secondary pupils are often interested in international issues and the job market. Young people learning a trade are interested in their sector – choose examples from articles with a bearing on this.

### **THEMES:**

#### **Producing the news:**

What has gotten into today's news and why? What kinds of themes have established themselves as permanent fixtures in recent times? Why? Where does a reporter get tips for articles, how news agencies work, looking for background material, the Internet as a source of information. How is the storytelling approach decided: the relative and combined effect of text, images, videos. How reporters verify what they find out. How students as citizens can participate in creating the news.

#### **Opinions:**

How does a news organization express opinions? Is the news objective/fair/etc.? The importance of feedback in the form of online comments, letters to the editor, and the guidelines. What kinds of texts and comments will not be published? What is an effective commentary like?

#### **Ethics, morality:**

What is meant by a news organization's "line" (policy)? What does it mean from a journalist's point of view?

Various means of evaluating material, for example the choice of theme/information sources, the angle from which the article is written, the influence of the type of article (immediate news, feature...).

What about copyright of content at your organization? Who owns the story and why?

#### **Wielding influence:**

Do news organizations have power? Do news organizations try to wield influence? How is the voice of citizens heard?

## **ACTIVITIES:**

1. Analysis of recent leading news themes. Why did they become big news items, what news criteria were met? What are the most forceful news criteria?
2. Are there themes for a follow-up article? Examine today's news. What theme is so interesting that it would deserve to be dealt with tomorrow as well? What information is lacking?
3. Look at the letters page or some comments and do a reply. What is your core argument?
4. Examine the news headlines. Are they neutral? Can you find headlines that seem to adopt a stance, hint at something or take the side of one or other party? Discuss what that seems so.
5. Examine who has been interviewed in the paper/section/spread. Make a list of the interviewees' professions. What can you conclude from that? Now do it for age and gender.
6. How are young people presented in the paper? What roles do young people play in pictures and texts?
7. Create a front page for a print edition that you think would appeal to your classmates.

## A PRINT EDITION SCAVENGER HUNT

Group Assignment - Find one example for ten of the items listed below:

- (a) a number greater than a thousand
- (b) the price of a kilogram (or pound) of meat or cheese
- (c) a temperature in degrees
- (d) a face with glasses
- (e) an animal, either pictured or mentioned
- (f) the price of a used car
- (g) a letter from someone
- (h) a game
- (i) a number smaller than one
- (j) a vehicle, other than a car
- (k) something to play with
- (l) an event that starts between 18h and 20h
- (m) the price of the newspaper
- (n) an action photograph
- (o) a picture of five things