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# Qualities and Duties of a Journalist

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Journalists function as eyes and ears of any newspaper or new channel. It is not an easy task to unambiguously classify all the qualities of a correspondent. Although, correspondents must be capable enough to confidently, courageously and patiently complete any job assigned to them. For instance, if you are assigned to cover the functioning of a government department related to redressing of public grievances; you must know everything about that area inside out. You should



have special knack for generating sources. You should be readily able to accept challenges arising out of working in an unfamiliar area. As a reporter you must have the capability to dig out information from anywhere and everywhere. You should be a lucid and cogent speaker. You should have unlimited patience. You should be able to perform well under different and most demanding circumstances. To proficiently perform your job and emerge as a competitive reporter it is important that you have capability to analyse and evaluate different situations and prognosticate about the future course of events. Besides, you should also be capable enough to manoeuvre news according to the event.



While writing news, a good reporter should be conscious of her/his responsibility towards the society, the institution s/he is working for and humanity as a whole. S/he should use her/his camera or pen prudently and carefully. The point to be noted here is that a journalist is neither a social worker nor a social reformer or a preacher. Job of a correspondent is only to attract the attention of the public towards various anomalies

prevalent in the society. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary for a journalist to always remain inquisitive and attentive. Her/his health should be impeccable and s/he should have unlimited capacity so that s/he may be able to perform even the most difficult tasks with minimum fuss. Above all, a reporter should be a social animal and should remain in constant touch with the people.

#### Qualities Necessary for a Journalist

**i. Capability to 'Smell News':** To smell news means to be able to you should be able to foretell that whether a particular information or incident has any news value or not or whether they are being concealed. This is not a quality which can be acquired overnight. It can be developed only by working in the field for a long time. To be able to prognosticate ever changing equations forming in the society and to inform the people about them is the most important quality of any journalist.

**ii. Extroverted and Sociable Nature:** A professional journalist can never be an introverted writer. Generally, an unsociable person cannot become a competent journalist. Journalists are required to meet innumerable persons daily, win the confidence of the others and create sources. Investigative journalism is the order of the day; people are interested in knowing about the activities going on behind the scenes and to collect such news stories it is imperative for a journalist to be extroverted.

**iii. Capability to form 'contacts' or 'sources' and maintain them:** It is important that the trustworthiness of 'contacts' or 'information sources' should be frequently appraised but, at the same

time it is also important to maintain your credibility in front of your contacts. As the time spent by journalists in their profession increases so does their experience and the number and extent of their contacts. These contacts are exclusive to them. No matter which news channel or newspaper they work for these contacts always remain with them. Formation of contacts requires time and patience.

**iv. Capability to remain a Neutral Analyst:** A correspondent disinterestedly observes and analyses various events and presents them in a balanced and objective manner in front of the readers or audiences. A correspondent consciously tries to avoid cardinal sins of omission and commission while reporting. Although, journalists may have their own opinions regarding an event or happening but inculcation of their points of view and opinions in the news copy cannot be allowed. News can achieve objectivity and balance only when the data and facts are collected and compiled in an unprejudiced manner and the conclusion is left upon the audiences.

**5. Ability to present thoughts clearly:** As a reporter a person has to work in multifarious fields such as science, technology, economics, etc. You should have good command over a number of different subjects. A deep knowledge of various different subjects is necessary for a reporter in order to be able to explain the most complex of issues in the simplest possible manner to the common audiences, so that even a layman can understand them. Specialised news stories (Science, Technology, Economics, etc.) have complex technical words in them which have to be explained by reporters in simpler terms in order to make them intelligible to all the audiences.

**6. Teamwork:** Routine news is generally covered by a single reporter but investigative news is gathered by a number of reporters working as a team. This makes their task easier and quicker. 'Bofors Kickbacks Scam' was exposed by the Indian journalists on the basis of reports received from Geneva and Stockholm. 'Securities Scam' expose was a joint effort of Sucheta Dalal and R. Srinivas Rao. Reporters have to work under the leadership and guidance of senior journalists. If they can work with



discipline within a team then it would certainly prove to be very useful for them in securing a better professional future.

**7. To be able to perform under various internal and external pressures:** When reporters publish or air a report which may go against the interests of certain individuals they try to pressurize the reporters for not publishing such reports by offering them bribes or intimidating them with various unlawful means. Besides, government and publicists also pressurize journalists. The pressure for withholding news may come from the management of the newspaper, the government or from various political parties. If publication of a report may prove detrimental to the future prospects of any individual or organization then they may try to pressurize you by various lawful or unlawful means. You can be intimidated and demoralized by various threats or by violence. There can be following three ways to counter pressure:

1. Face the pressure.
2. Cave in to the pressure and modify your story according to the requirements of the pressure group.
3. Analyse the pressure and act accordingly.

First method of countering pressure is most respectable. There are numerous examples in the world journalism as well as Indian journalism where people have preferred to lock down their newspapers; to compromise with the quality of their newspapers. During the 'Emergency Rule' imposed in 1975 newspapers like 'Mainstream' considered it better to shut down their newspaper than to give in to governmental pressure.

But sometimes it becomes necessary for the journalists to compromise with the pressures because running a newspaper has now



become a commercial industry. Livelihood of thousands of people is dependent upon it. If your newspaper or channel stands with you in combating pressure then you can fight it otherwise, you will get into troubles as morals cannot fight hunger. If you have a strong character then you will be able to counter these pressures with a certain degree of ease. To ask for 'police protection' and other legal help proves quite helpful in combating various pressures.

### Duties of Journalists

Journalism is a much more serious profession when compared with other professions. Any lapse on the part of journalists in carrying out their duties may lead to apocalyptic repercussions. Even a slightly lackadaisical approach towards the process of news writing could raise doubts in the minds of the audiences about the credibility of a newspaper, a news channel or a journalist publishing or airing such news stories. Main responsibilities of journalists are delineated below:

**(i) Responsibility towards the 'News Organisation':** Journalists or reporters are like a soldier in a battle field. The manner in which a soldier performs her/his duties reflects the capabilities of her/his army or battalion. Similarly, the manner in which a journalist performs her/his duties determines the 'quality' and 'superiority' of her/his newspaper, news channel or news organisation. As a journalist a person is a carrier of the 'policies', the 'customs', etc. of the newspaper or the news channel s/he is working with. As opposed to smaller newspapers, if you are working with bigger news organisations then you will be required for sure to adjust yourself to the work environment of that organisation. Besides, you will be required to develop your investigative capabilities. Each and every action of a journalist affects the news channel, the newspaper or the news organisation s/he is working with either positively or negatively. Therefore, it is imperative for journalists to maintain an appropriate blend of objectivity and balance in their news stories.

**(ii) Responsibility towards 'Contacts' or 'Sources':** A good journalist should always keep in mind that safety and security of her/his contacts or sources is her/his primary and very important



responsibility. A journalist will have to prove her/his trustworthiness to her/his contacts and will have to give assurance to them that the information provided by the contact will not be used against her/him or be of a cause of any harm or danger to her/him. If a contact wants to maintain her/his anonymity then it is a pristine duty of the journalist to preserve that. There are several instances in the history of journalism where journalists preferred incarceration to revealing the identity of their sources or contacts. Thus, under normal circumstances journalists are wholly responsible for preserving anonymity of their sources or contacts and ensuring their safety.

**(iii) Responsibility towards the readers and the society:** Principal responsibility of journalists is to provide correct, objective, unbiased and balanced news to their readers. To fulfill this responsibility, journalists should be free from all kinds of prejudices and should include versions from all the concerned or affected parties in their reports.

To uphold their credibility and reliability in the eyes of the readers, journalists should not publish or broadcast any news story whose veracity, accuracy and correctness cannot be ascertained or which may arouse even an iota of doubt or suspicion in the minds of the readers.

Now a days reporters are proffered various gifts for attending press conferences and other such events. At such times, reporters must choose the middle path between the importance of the news and publicity.

Qualities of a reporter are not divine gifts. Any person who wants to join the profession can acquire them. S/he only requires dedication and perseverance. Duties of journalists are those guiding principles which keep reminding you that you are not a practitioner of any ordinary profession. You are involved in a very important job of directing the country as well as the society and shaping public opinion. This very feeling keeps you conscious of your responsibilities.