

PREFACE

Somewhere, not too far from here, at this very moment, a politician is taking a bribe. A factory is dumping toxic sludge into a stream. A deadly virus is landing at the airport. A high school halfback is bulking up on steroids. Someone's mother is opening a can of contaminated tuna.

Just a typical day in America, in other words, where ordinary folks suffer from a lack of reliable information. What they don't know *can* hurt them.

Who's the watchdog here? Whose job is it to expose the lies, explain the dangers, inform the uninformed?

If you become a journalist, it's *your* job.

Now, I'm a realist. I don't want to fool you into thinking journalism is glamorous. I don't want to dupe any dreamy-eyed idealists into believing you can single-handedly slay society's dragons.

Very few news stories will ever change the world.

Still, sometimes a single story — *a single sentence* — can have an effect you never imagined. Put the right facts in the right order and you can make someone laugh. Cry. Reconsider. Understand.

That's how you make a difference in this crazy world: one reader at a time.

Journalism is in flux these days. Experts say that print is dead and TV news is dying, but blogs are big and multimedia is *the real deal*.

You can analyze statistics, theories and predictions until your head explodes. But if you're considering a career in journalism, where should you begin?

For now — in this book — we'll focus on fundamentals. Not trends. Not theories.

If you want to be a journalist, you need to learn how to gather facts and tell stories. That's basically all there is to it: 1) Gather the facts. 2) Tell the story.

Sure, you can add photos and headlines and Web links and audio sound bites and animated graphics. And we'll get to all that, eventually.

But first, you start with the basics. That's why this book focuses on *news* writing. It's the traditional, tried-and-true way to master the journalist's craft.

Some of you, I realize, don't want to write for a newspaper. (Some of you don't even want to *read* a newspaper.) You'd rather be Webcasters, bloggers, radio anchors, TV correspondents.

I sympathize. As time goes by, I too get increasingly frustrated with slow-motion, old-school, ink-on-dead-tree journalism. But whatever medium we choose for news — text, graphics, audio, video or multimedia — it still begins the same way: Gather facts. Tell stories.

So that's where we'll begin, too.

Speaking of multimedia: This book demonstrates what you get when you blend words and visuals simultaneously.

Most authors write the text first, then hand their manuscript to editors and designers who add photos, illustrations and fancy type.

But for this book, I designed each page as I wrote it. Or, rather, I wrote each page as I designed it. Whichever.

It's an unusual way to produce a book, but it's how I like to work. More than 25 years ago, I started designing newspaper pages that way, blending text and images into packages with (hopefully) greater reader appeal.

This kind of "convergence," as it's called, is becoming more common in newsrooms. If you can write and design stories, generate images and create Web pages, you'll be a hot commodity in the journalism job market.

This book, I confess, has been quite a monster to produce independently. But ideally, it will show you how challenging and rewarding and important and seriously *cool* journalism is. Maybe, just maybe, it will even inspire you to become a journalist.

That's how you make a difference in this crazy world: one journalist at a time.

— Tim Harrower



We hounded these veteran reporters with weekly e-mail questions for nearly nine months. Their expert advice appears throughout this book. Our sincere thanks to our panel:

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Ted Anthony, *The Associated Press*
Sarah Bahari, *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*
Erin Barnett, *The Oregonian (Portland, Ore.)*
Jill Barrall, *Hutchinson (Minn.) Leader*
Bob Batz, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*
Michael Becker, *Journal-Advocate (Sterling, Colo.)*
Bret Bell, *Savannah Morning News*
Rick Bella, *The Oregonian (Portland, Ore.)*
Matt Benson, *Fort Collins Coloradoan*
Laura Berman, *The Detroit News*
Michael Bockoven, *The Grand Island Independent*
Tim Botos, *The Repository (Canton, Ohio)*
Alex Branch, *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*
Caren Burmeister, *The (Jacksonville) Florida Times-Union*

Steve Buttry, *American Press Institute*
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Toni Coleman, *The Pioneer Press (St. Paul, Minn.)*
DeeDee Correll, *The Gazette (Colorado Springs, Colo.)*
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Jesse Fanciulli, *Greeley (Colo.) Daily Tribune*
Todd Frankel, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*
Mark Freeman, *Mail Tribune (Medford, Ore.)*

Ron French, *The Detroit News*
Ken Fuson, *The Des Moines Register*
John Foyston, *The Oregonian (Portland, Ore.)*
Nancy Gaardner, *Omaha World-Herald*
Steve Gunn, *Muskegon Chronicle*
Heidi Hagemeyer, *The Bulletin (Bend, Ore.)*
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Scott Hammers, *Lake Oswego (Ore.) Review*
Kevin Harden, *Valley Times (Beaverton, Ore.)*
Bill Harlan, *The Rapid City (S.D.) Journal*
Jim Hart, *West Linn (Ore.) Tidings*
Kyle Henley, *The Gazette (Colorado Springs, Colo.)*
Doug Hoagland, *The Fresno Bee*
Dave Hogan, *The Oregonian (Portland, Ore.)*
Deb Holland, *The Rapid City (S.D.) Journal*
Karen Jeffrey, *Cape Cod Times*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author is sincerely grateful to the following friends and colleagues:

◆ The McGraw-Hill staff:

Phil Butcher and Rhona Robbin, for their relentless support, patience and good humor through it all; Brian Pecko; Karyn Morrison; Brett Coker, Preston Thomas, Randy Hurst and the San Francisco crew.

This book is based on a proposal and teaching strategy developed with Alice Klement, the former Mildred S. Hansen Professor at the University of Northern Colorado.

◆ Advice and feedback:

Marie Naughton and her students at Washington State University Vancouver; Buck Ryan and his students at the University of Kentucky; Linda Vogt and her students at Clackamas Community College; Mark Witherspoon, Brenda Witherspoon and Barbara Mack, Iowa State University; Mark Larson, Humboldt State University; Don Hamilton; Stu Tomlinson; Amy Martinez Starke; Jeff Mapes; James Tidwell; John Zelezny; Jay Bender; Tracy Barry and Joe Donlon at KGW; Melanie Mesaros at KXL; Pete Schulberg; Ken Kahn; Mark Wigginton; Sandy Rowe.

◆ Morgue annotations:

Special thanks to the writers who generously shared their insights and expertise: Don Hamilton, Dave Philipps, Jodi Cohen, Alana Baranick, Vanessa Gezari, Sanne Specht, Stuart Tomlinson, Linda Johnson, Kelley Benham, Heather Svokos, Dan Raley, Joe Posnanski, Colleen Kenney, Judd Slivka, Manish Mehta, Mark Morford, Doug Elfman, Claudia Puig and David Sarasohn.

◆ Illustrations and photography:

Steve Cowden; Tony Champagne; Joe Spooner; Michael Lloyd; Ross Hamilton; Chuck Kennedy; Marshall Gorby; Monica Lopossay.

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◆ Supplement authors:

— Paul Kandell, teacher and journalist, for the online workbook.

— David Swartzlander of Doane College for the instructor's manual and test bank.

— Michael Swinford of Saint Anselm College for the learning goals, multiple choice and true-false quizzes, and chapter summaries on the Online Learning Center.

◆ Student survey coordinators:

Buck Ryan, University of Kentucky; Mark Larson, Humboldt State University; Lana Jackson, Amarillo College; Rich Cameron, Cerritos College; Beth Dickey, University of South Carolina; Cheryl Pell, Michigan State University; David Swartzlander, Doane College; Mary Arnold, South Dakota State University; Mark Witherspoon, Iowa State University; Lois Breedlove, Central Washington University.

◆ **And most of all:** Without you, Robin, this book — and all the good things in my life — would not be possible.

ACADEMIC REVIEWERS

Special thanks to these instructors for taking time to provide valuable feedback on the text:

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Jeff Boone, Angelo State University
Candace Perkins Bowen, Kent State University
Mark A. Butzow, Western Illinois University
Betty Clapp, Cleveland State University
Kay Colley, University of North Texas
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