

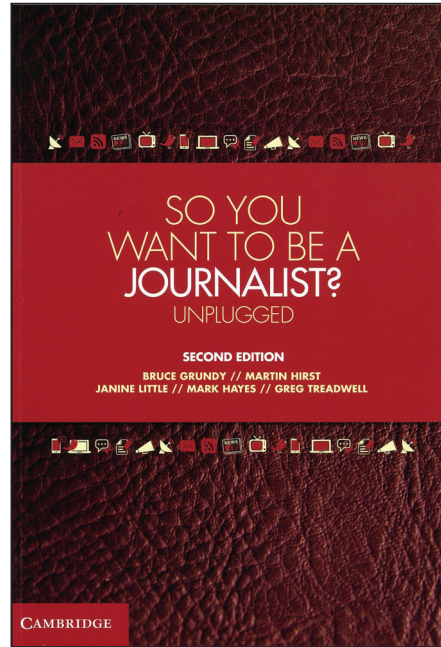
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Local focus is a plus

***So You Want to be a Journalist? Unplugged*, (2nd Edition).** By Bruce Grundy, Martin Hirst, Janine Little, Mark Hayes, Greg Treadwell. Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 304. ISBN: 978-1-107-69282-4

AFTER reading dozens of journalism textbooks to find one for our introductory students, I was relieved to find *So You Want to be a Journalist? Unplugged*. Unlike others in the education marketplace this year, it is straight-forward, practical, and more importantly, it focuses specifically on Australia and New Zealand. Students will be engaged with local examples, case studies, and newsroom practices.

One strong point of the book is that it is well grounded in the digital and online media world of the 21st century. It overshadows many other overseas textbooks that simply include a separate segment on website platforms. This textbook weaves multi-platform media throughout the book, whether the topic is accuracy, developing rounds, or sub-editing.



There is no indication which author wrote which chapter, but all are experienced university teachers as well as journalists. Bruce Grundy and Mark Hayes are from the University of Queensland. Janine Little is from Deakin University. Greg Treadwell is at AUT University and Dr. Martin Hirst used to be head of the department at AUT before shifting back to Australia, to Deakin University. These last two authors give trans-Tasman credibility to the content.

Concise writing and appealing structure serve as a model for students, as well as increasing the book's readability factor. An example of the

conversational writing style is the explanation of microfiche systems: ‘One of the most valuable resources cannot be searched online, even though it will be on a computer—the computer at the office of the Electoral Commission’ (p. 88).

The authors devote a lot of the book to professional media writing, and fortunately demonstrate it well. ‘Good writing is all but invisible. You know it’s there only because what you are reading or hearing has a flow, a rhythm and a beat that makes you want more. It holds your attention, but without drawing attention to itself. It is an art form’ (p. 174). The reference to ‘reading and hearing’ demonstrates how every section includes multimedia, not referring solely to print journalism.

The book emphasises that journalists today write in narrative style and that the overarching goal is to give the audience an easy-to-digest story. The text also hammers the requirement for solid fact checking and information accuracy. The authors have used sparing amounts of reference material to support their points, but copious numbers of journalism examples.

This textbook is probably the best one on the market at the minute for Australasian students, but it isn’t perfect. One of the most annoying

aspects of this text is the scrawny font. It is hard to read, and students who wait until late at night after finishing their part-time jobs to complete their assigned reading will find it hard to wade through the page after page of this unfriendly grey font.

In addition, the book includes no illustrations, photographs or charts. The book relies on stark text, but admittedly it still is a smooth read because of a multitude of boxed sections, shaded case studies, short blocks of text and titles written like catchy headlines.

The major content limitation of *So You Want to be a Journalist? Unplugged* is the lack of substantial information on how to conduct interviews. There are a few segments scattered throughout the book that refer to interviewing, and two pages describing the 5Ws. The textbook covers lots of methods to collect news, such as crowd-sourcing, archives, blog postings, data mining, Wikipedia, but would benefit from more on the basic method of conducting an interview.

Despite these shortcomings, I have required this book for our score of new journalism students. There is a lot of information within the covers that the students can rely on for years. In addition, an online companion to the textbook gives additional exercises and information.

I would have liked the textbook even better if the beginning chapters were more positive towards the journalism career. Unfortunately, it starts with the worst view of our profession. Pages four and five explain the industry's embarrassing issue of *The News of The World* demise, and page six elaborates on why the public no longer trusts journalists. This seems a dismal start for students who are only just exploring the career. And to top it off, the book ends with a segment headlined 'Why are reporters so far down the public esteem list?' (p. 284), so the student is getting the dreariness at the beginning and end of the book.

On the other hand, the textbook successfully tackles very recent issues facing the industry, with a segment on the Australian Finkelstein Report as well as the New Zealand Law Commission's proposed legislation on new media that will be discussed in Parliament later this year.

Some New Zealanders may complain that there are too many Australian examples, and some Australians may complain that there are too many Kiwi examples. The overview, however, is that there is a nice balance. New Zealand students get contacts, links and examples from their own country, and, in addition, they gain an overview of Australia, a country they may very well end up working

in later in their lives.

Overall, *So You Want to be a Journalist? Unplugged* is a basic journalism textbook that can easily serve the growing number of students studying journalism in New Zealand and Australia.