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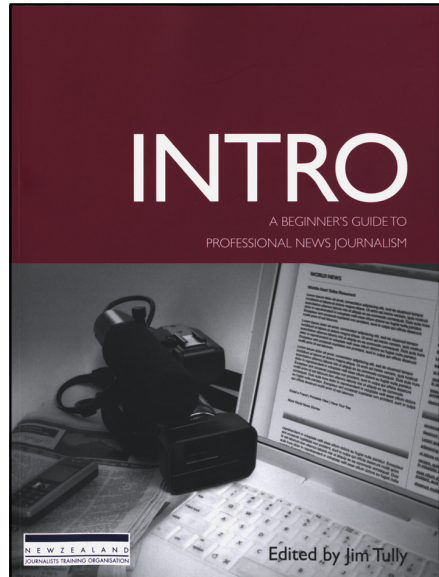
# Wealth of material for the cub reporter

***Intro: A beginner's guide to professional news journalism***, edited by Jim Tully. Wellington: Journalists Training Organisation, 2008, 455pp. ISBN 0 9582058 9 2

**E**DITED VOLUMES can be risky ventures, particularly when chapter authors are journalism academics and the text is an introduction to the fundamentals of the craft.

The task calls for coherence and clarity so that young journalists can absorb the basic skills and knowledge while engaging with the golden thread of such a book: the importance of journalism to modern democratic society.

Ten New Zealand journalism educators—all experienced journalists—have gone a long way toward meeting that challenge in this, the



fourth edition of their ‘Bible’—the key text for teaching the discipline to their nationally accredited unit standards.

University of Canterbury associate professor Jim Tully has taken over the editorship from former New Zealand Journalists Training Organisation executive director Jim Tucker, who stays on as a chapter author. The book reaps the rewards of their combined expertise and three previous incarnations.

What could be more straightforward than compiling an entry-level journalism text?

Nothing, of course, other than juggling the key dilemmas of our discipline in the modern era:

- Introducing students to the basic skills while appraising them of the prickly issues they generate; and
- Preparing students to ‘hit the ground running’ in newsrooms where that ground is shifting as we write.

The editor and chapter authors have clearly been cognisant of both challenges. Each is a question of judgment; of juggling the competing interests of stakeholders. There are tensions in an industry training course over creating reporters—not just critics—and over whether we should equip journalists for the workplace and work practices of yesterday, today or tomorrow. My considered view is that Tully and his chapter authors have recognised both dilemmas but have done a better job addressing the first challenge than the second.

The text offers a and even devotes its second chapter to Donald Matheson’s excellent introduction to ‘News and the Net’. There is also a small section on computer-assisted reporting in the research chapter and numerous website references throughout. The challenge for the next edition will be to integrate online journalism into the whole work because it has indeed infiltrated most newsrooms to that extent.

The text also deserves a separate chapter on online journalism techniques to accompany its radio and television chapters, given the number of journalists now working in the digital branches of their traditional media outlets. The target audience for this text has been breast-fed on digital media.

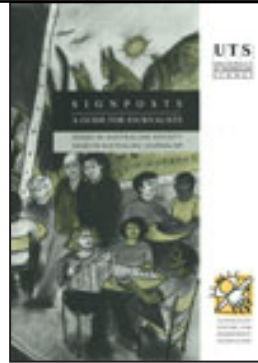
Most of the authors are well across the importance of new technologies, but their careers, like mine, were built in the old. So it takes a special effort to get across the applications to journalism, observe the ways traditional and new media organisations are adapting their products and, most importantly, suggest the means by which reporters should use them in their work.

Two other points of criticism are the lack of a media law chapter and a thorough index. Colleagues might dismiss the former as the bias of a media law academic, but I truly believe that at least the basics of defamation and contempt need flagging in an introductory text beyond the cursory mention in the court reporting chapter.

As for the abbreviated index, I suspect it is a symptom of the NZJTO being the official publisher rather than an established publishing house, but I’d suggest

next time the editor insist upon a professional indexer being hired for the task.

These comments should not detract from my considered judgment that this fine text is an admirable achievement. It is replete with useful graphics, exercises and examples, most from New Zealand. Kiwi journalism students will be indebted to their lecturers for creating a textbook of international standard with the familiarity of local names, places and events. Lecturers in other countries will find most chapters and exercises extremely useful resources for their teaching.



## **Signposts: A guide for journalists to reporting Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and ethnic affairs**

Authors: Kitty Eggerking, Diana Plater and ACIJ

Date: 1996

Price: \$8.95

ISBN: 1 86365 052 0

To Buy: Australian Centre for Independent Journalism

[www.acij.uts.edu.au/publications/index.html](http://www.acij.uts.edu.au/publications/index.html)

The area of 'Aboriginal affairs' and 'ethnic affairs' is unfamiliar territory to many journalists. Signposts is offered not only as a very basic survival guide for journalists reporting in these very specific rounds, but also as an invitation to all journalists to explore a larger slice of Australian society and to accept a challenge to find stories in areas outside their known world.

This book is as relevant as ever.

Available through the Australian Centre for Independent Journalism, University of Technology, Sydney.