

Subbing (text handling) - Introduction



Course outline

Course Tutor:

DAVID MCKAY

Course Content:

This course gives a one-day general introduction to the newspaper sub-editor's craft. But it will be useful to any would-be journalist, or indeed anyone who uses written English. It unlocks a toolbox of tips and tricks to produce clean, accurate prose that makes its point and packs a punch.

Run by an old hand in the national press, the course outlines the sub's vital role as a publication's last line of defence. It explains where subs sit in the news room structure, their relationships with other departments, and the mental checklist they need to complete before starting any story.

The course uses an interactive exercise to help explain the concept of house style and stress its importance, and to highlight the central role of fact-checking in a sub's work.

We meet the sub's six best friends, and they show us how best to approach the bread-and-butter of the job - cutting copy to fit.

Another interactive exercise gives a sense of this task. But more importantly, it tests the sub's most important skill - evaluating information and applying news values to make decisions. We then rummage through the sub's toolkit.

We discuss vocabulary: words to use, words to avoid, and words that should be chopped into tiny bits, burned to ashes and entombed in concrete under a motorway flyover. Be warned... here we will meet the spine-chilling "knobbly monsters".

We also discuss how to put a story together, touching on:

The most important paragraph of all ... the intro

Structure - of stories, paragraphs and sentences

The importance of detail

Background information: how to use it, and how not to

Quotes - journalistic gold. How to treat them, and how not to

Interactive work will reinforce the key points.

Subbing is a craft, but headline writing is an art. We look at the basics, with the aid of real-life examples of good (and hilariously bad) practice. Then we have a go ourselves. We also discuss the particular skills of picture caption writing.

Subs' words usually have to sit neatly on a page, be it in print or online. So we have a look at the ins and outs of typography and why subs hate widows and orphans.

Course costs **£95 for NUJ members** and places can be booked by contacting joanm@nuj.org.uk

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What you should bring with you:

No requirements. You may wish to bring a notepad.

Qualifications:

No formal qualifications required.

Expected learning outcomes:

The course does not teach spelling, grammar, page design or law, although some aspects of each will likely be discussed. We do focus on the importance of adhering to the NUJ Code of Conduct.

The course gives a good basic explanation of what subs do and how to do it well. Many of the lessons learned are applicable to other forms of written English, and there is some advice at the end on further reading. Bring a notepad, a pen, a passion for words and an open mind.