



## How to lose friends and influence people (how to be a columnist)

### Course Tutor:

#### KEVIN MCKENNA

Kevin McKenna's career in newspapers spans five decades. In this time, he's been a senior executive on several of our biggest national titles before embarking on a successful freelance career writing columns and features for The Herald, The National, The Observer, The Guardian, The Herald on Sunday, The Times, The Daily Mail, The Sunday Mail and Scottish Field magazine. His work regularly appears in titles across the UK and overseas.

**Duration:** Two 2 hour sessions via Zoom.

### Course Content:

The secrets and myths of writing newspaper columns. Drawing from 35 years in newspapers editing and writing columns and features, Kevin will seek to unravel some of the common misconceptions about writing opinions. He also seeks to demystify some of the more esoteric misapprehensions about the world of newspapers.

#### Session 1 -

- Introduction: who am I?; tutor's experience; why columnists are the pillars of modern newspapers and some of the common misconceptions about columnists and column-writing.
- The Good, the bad, the ugly: a light-hearted series of anecdotes illustrating the highs and lows of being a professional curmudgeon and opinionated so-and-so.
- Why columnists matter ... now more than ever before in the age of algorithm; fake news and manipulated truth.
- Everyone's opinion matters: How to craft your deeply-held opinions into a pungent, highly effective 800-word piece.
- The most common pitfalls: Repetition, cliché and the curse of the low-hanging fruit.
- What to aspire to: Originality; simplicity; finding your own exclusive voice.
- Question and Answer: A general, no-holds-barred Q&A about all aspects of columns and newspapers.
- Commissioned exercise.

#### Session 2 -

- Introduction: A selection of two or three of the tutor's own favourite columnists and his reasons why.
- The week in columns: A trawl through some of the best read columns of the last few days in newspapers.
- Over to you: The group get the chance to hear their own work.



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- Group discussion: what did they experience as they wrote these pieces? What were the main difficulties? Did they enjoy it?
- Impostor Syndrome: Why you are just as bright, sharp and well-informed as the top columnists. And how what we do is mainly the result of deploying best practice and making many mistakes over several years.
- Legal pitfalls and dealing with the trolls: How columnists have much more leeway in criticising and exposing wrongdoing, but why this has its limits. Online trolls are simply something we all have to live with. The top three tips for dealing with them.
- Conclusion: A general question-and-answer session.