

# Vocational profile – Journalist

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Published by the German Federation of Journalists (DJV) – the journalists’ trade union (adopted by resolution at the DJV federation’s annual conference in Kassel in 1996 and amended at the DJV’s annual conference in Rostock-Warnemunde in 2008).

The job of a professional journalist is to make public facts, trends and issues which are of general, political, economic or cultural importance to society. By providing comprehensive information in all forms of media, journalists create a basis on which every member of a society can recognise the forces influencing his or her life and to be able to participate in processes of forming pub-

lic opinion and reaching decisions. These are preconditions for the functioning of a democratic state. To undertake these journalistic tasks, Germany’s Basic Law (Grundgesetz/constitution) equips the media with guaranteed freedoms. To uphold and extend these freedoms, all journalists are called upon to exercise utmost diligence during their work, to respect human dignity, and to adhere to basic principles as defined in the Press Codex of the German Press Council (Deutsche Presserat). Journalists can only fulfil their task to provide information, commentaries and foster public checks and balances when they are free of legal restrictions and constraints that hinder these principles.

# I. General conditions

The constitutional basis of journalistic activity is prescribed in Article 1 and 5 of Germany's Basis Law (Grundgesetz). Further legal fundamentals are the Press Codex, federal and state (Länder) media legislation, the right to refuse to give testimony, copyright legislation, employment law, collective agreements signed by trade unions and employers, customary media-sector agreements for freelance journalists as well as individual contracts to deliver items and employment contracts.

A journalist is a person, whose main occupation, based on the following criteria, involves the formulation and/or dissemination of information, commentaries and entertainment via media through print, images and sound, or combinations of these presentational means:

1. Journalists are salaried employees or freelancers who work for print media (news-papers, periodicals, advertiser-type news-papers, and current affairs publications), broadcasting stations (radio and television) and other electronic media (providing that their offerings and services meet journalistic requirements), news agencies, press services, public relations for commerce, public administrations and organisations as well as media-related training and consultancy.
2. Journalistic work primarily involves the compilation of written and illustrated information through research (gathering and checking) as well as the selection and editing of informational content, the presentation of original and media-specific content (reporting and commentating), design and

transmission, and further more allocational tasks in the fields of organisation, technical facilities and personnel.

3. Journalists carry out their profession as freelancers or salaried employees of media companies or entities, for example, in the public relations section of a commercial firm or corporation, a public administration or an organisation.
  - Freelance journalists work:
    - regularly for one or several clients on the basis of individual agreements or collective agreements between trade unions and employers.
    - for one or several enterprises on the basis of single-assignment contracts or without assignment by compiling articles and offering them to the media.

A freelance journalist can also be the proprietor or shareholder of a media bureau who works in cooperation with other freelance journalists, providing that this journalistic activity is the main task.

- Salaried journalists work on the basis of the applicable labour laws and established collective agreements.

# II. Requirements

Article 5 of the Basic Law guarantees freedom of expression and thereby freedom to pursue a career in journalism. The obligations stemming from the Basic Law require of journalists a high degree of personal and professional qualification.

1. The exercise of journalism as a profession requires specific skills and is characterized by personal capabilities.

In particular these include:

- social and socio-political sense of responsibility
  - logical and analytical thinking
  - linguistic expressiveness and reliability
  - empathy and creativity
  - ease in making contacts and cooperating with others
  - readiness to handle conflict and criticism
2. Journalistic work presupposes a comprehensive broad education and the acquisition of expert knowledge. The German Federation of Journalists (DJV) therefore sees matriculation (Abitur) or an equivalent educational qualification as the desirable prerequisite for training to become a journalist. Beyond that the DJV recommends completion of an academic degree. Expertise acquired through a vocational training certificate can also contribute towards becoming a qualified journalist.
  3. Being a professional journalist requires the acquisition of expertise and presentational skills.

These include in particular:

- the mastery of media-specific skills of expression and communication,
- ability to create journalistic products,
- mastery of various methods of research and news checking (subediting)
- knowledge of media law fundamentals
- knowledge of the forms of economic competition and media structure

Journalistic expertise and presentational competencies shall be acquired through the following educational courses:

- a traineeship (Volontariat)
  - a journalistic degree
  - journalism training academy attendance
  - a special-subject training course of the same standard
4. Journalists must systematically pursue further education so as to keep in step with changing vocational requirements.

# III. Fields of Journalistic Work

Journalists provide information and commentaries about current or publicly significant events, developments and background details through their own research or careful editing of external sources.

Promotion (advertising) or the surreptitious insertion of commercial information (plugs, product placement) contravenes the work of a journalist. Journalists are obligated to ensure that editorial publications are not influenced through private or business interests. Journalistic reporting and PR activity while dealing with one and the same topic are improper.

The tasks in the journalistic fields of work overlap partly as the result of technical and work-related organisational changes. Technological developments require knowledge and skills in electronic (digital) research, presentation and production methods.

## 1. Print Media

Print media include newspapers, periodicals, subscription-free advertising-financed newspapers (advertisers) and topical-interest publications. They transmit information and views through the dissemination of texts, photos, graphic images and illustrations within the framework of typographical design.

### Newspapers

Newspapers aim their topical and publicly relevant content at an unlimited readership. The editorial offices are subdivided into thematic sections (Ressorts) such as politics,

business, culture, photography, community affairs and sport.

The division of labour within a newspaper can lead to:

- further thematic sections (Ressorts)
- thematic specialisation (special subject) within an editorial subsection
- interdivisional specialisation (e.g. project-based editorial team)

### Magazines

General-interest magazines aim their topical and publicly relevant content likewise at a broad readership. Their editorial offices are subdivided, according to subjects (beats or rounds), similar to newspapers. Expertise-based periodicals, corporate and institutional magazines and special-interest titles are aimed with their specialised content at limited readerships. Journalists working for these publications are typically qualified specialists.

### Advertiser newspapers

Such publications are financed solely through advertising and distributed to homes free-of-charge and target local or municipal readerships. Journalists at such publications largely work across thematic areas instead of being bound to a single editorial topic.

### Topical Publishing Productions

These publications contain journalistically compiled contemporary information, for example, in the form of yearbooks and doc-

umentation, and are intended for special-interest readers.

## 2. Broadcasting

Broadcasting spans radio and television stations run by public service boards of trustees or commercial entities. Journalists working in broadcasting provide information, commentaries, education, advice and entertainment using auditory and/or visual media. These journalistic tasks have become increasingly influenced by new technical possibilities for interactive communication.

### Radio

Radio stations provide topical current-affairs or special-interest content for regionally localised or national audiences. This is done using auditory means such as narration (spoken items), music and sounds.

### Television

Television stations provide topical current-affairs or special-interest content for regionally localised or national viewing audiences. This is done using audio-visual means such as narration, pictures and film sequences, music and sounds.

## 3. Journalistic Online Media

Through the transmission of digitised texts, sounds, static and moving pictures and combinations of these means, online media have emerged as distinct, stand-alone forms of journalistic communication. They provide top-

ical, public-interest or special-interest content to geographically unlimited user groups or segments of the public with special interests. Journalistic online media are characterised by a high degree of topicality and make possible direct interaction between journalists and recipients.

## 4. News Agencies

News agencies collect and transmit topical, public-interest and special information to media outlets and/or limited-access user groups. Content is delivered in the form of texts, pictures, graphics and illustrations as well as acoustic and audiovisual items.

## 5. Press and Public Relations

Journalists working within commercial, administrative or other organisations provide press and public relations services. This involves primarily the provision of direct information to the public through the entity's own print and audiovisual publications and the staging of press conferences and expert briefings for journalists.

## 6. Photo Journalism

Photo journalism provides visual information about trends, events and issues through the delivery of photos, moving images, information graphics, political cartoons and caricatures. Photo journalists work as salaried employees or freelancers for print media, electronic and digital media, news agen-



cies, press bureaus as well as press and public relations units.

Their technical specialisation depends on the circumstances of the respective media.

## **7. Media-related Training and Consultancy**

Journalists can also work in institutions that provide journalistic training and further education as well as be consultants for non-professional media activities.

If you wish to become a member of the German Federation of Journalists (DJV), which with 39,000 members is the largest journalist trade union in Germany, please contact the regional branch of the DJV in your region.