

**“YOU WANT TO BE
A JOURNALIST?
BUT NEWSPAPERS
ARE DYING!”**

**BRIEF LESSONS AND
EXPERIENCES FROM A
2016 JOURNALISM
STUDENT**

Megan Hanner

“A true tour de force from a modern day student!”

-New York Times

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Megan Hanner began her college career at Front Range Community College. She is now a Journalism and Media Communications student with a minor in Legal Studies at Colorado State University. She is currently a Junior.



Megan has loved books for as long as she can remember. Her passion for writing began in high school. Though she loves both creative and technical writing, she ultimately chose to pursue journalism. Her previous work includes writing as an Arts and Culture reporter for the *Rocky Mountain Collegian*. She is preparing to be the Assistant Editor on the Blogs desk at the *Rocky Mountain Collegian*.

Megan is originally from the small town of Gallatin, Tennessee, and currently lives in Fort Collins, Colorado. She enjoys her hectic college life with two roommates and three dogs.

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“A good writer should be able to write comedic work that made you laugh, and scary stuff that made you scared, and fantasy or science fiction that imbued you with a sense of wonder, and mainstream journalism that gave you clear and concise information in a way that you wanted it.”

-Neil Gaiman

CHAPTER 1

MY STORY: DECIDING TO PURSUE JOURNALISM IN THE 21ST CENTURY

“You’re miserable, edgy, and tired. You’re in the perfect mood for journalism.”- *Warren Ellis*

I wasn’t one of those kids that had dreams of being a news reporter, or even a writer, at a very young age. When I was a kid, I wanted to be a marine biologist. That dream then turned into being a veterinarian. All throughout high school I wanted to go to Colorado State University to become a big time veterinarian. However, I realized quickly that I was actually terrible at science and math. So, there went that dream.

I realized I liked writing my senior year of high school. Up until then, I had already dabbled in my fair share of morbid teenage poetry. That all changed when I took a creative writing class. I realized that I could do so much more with my words. I could put together beautiful poetry, create my own stories, and share my writings with others. My professor gave us the option to turn in our work for publishing in the school magazine for extra credit. I turned in all my writing, and actually got some pieces in the annual school magazine.

Getting my writing published for the whole school to read was huge for me. It was scary, but then I realized that getting my stuff out there was actually pretty cool, too. After that, I had family friends, teachers, and close relatives telling me to pursue writing. Let's just say I took their advice pretty seriously.

Megan Hanner

I was young w
every little fiber of my
endless ominous storm
over my family for year
nothing but the debris
destructive power. It ma
I know about my life. N
he belongs. No longer w
gone. The Wave changed
broken pieces of my fam
it never hit, but we knew
stability, my sense of nor
ever being one happy fam

Fire spreads relen
til nothing is left but ash, fo
smallest of things to start it
like the burning tentacles o
ripping apart every piece b
feeling wa

Getting my writing published senior year was the definite moment when I decided that not only did I like writing, but I also wanted to spend the rest of my life doing something with my new found love of words. So, after two years of community college, I made the decision to begin journalism school.

I couldn't imagine doing anything else during college. I have had a lot of people tell me to switch majors, but that has never been an option for me. The world needs good journalists now more than ever.

I was constantly barraged with critical remarks about how I wouldn't find a job, I wouldn't make any money blah, blah, blah. My number one piece of advice for anyone who wants to be a writer, journalist or not, is this: don't let them get you down. They will tell you to do something else, and that your dreams will not come true. For me, it was my family. My father was not keen on my decision, but really, I had to get to a point where I didn't care. I got to that point, so can you.

Whenever giving up sounds like a good option, remember Nellie Bly. The woman was a badass. She started a whole new era of investigative journalism during a time when female reporters were unheard of. She is one of my heroes. If she can make a name for herself, so can you.

They will tell you journalism is dying. I would argue the truth of this to an extent. When people say this, they are really saying traditional journalism is dying. But journalism as a whole? It's not going anywhere.

CHAPTER 2

WHERE IS JOURNALISM NOW?

“I recognize that I had a good deal of good luck in my life. I came along at a time when it was pretty easy to get a job in journalism. I went to work at CBS News when I was about 22, and within a year or so was reporting on the air.”- *Charles Kurait*

When people think of journalism, they think of investigative reporters and newspapers. Hence the title of this e-book. If I had a dollar for every time someone told me to change my major because newspapers are dying, I would honestly have, like, ten dollars.

But really, it's not like I, or any of my peers, are ignorant of the fact that newspapers are dying. Yet, we are still majoring in journalism. Why is this? Because journalism encompasses so much more than merely writing columns. Think of it as an umbrella term for fields including: advertising, public relations, social media management, video design, blogging, production, photography, web design, and marketing.

My point is this: journalism prepares a person for many different fields, not just writing. This doesn't mean writing isn't important, but it does mean that it's no longer everything.

Newspapers and other traditional media outlets really aren't doing too well. I really learned this the hard way at a media festival put on by my school. This festival was meant for us to hear advice from

professionals. From what I could gather, their point was this: traditional ways of doing journalism are changing, but adapting.

Here are the facts on modern journalism, according to [*Pew Research Center*](#):

- Newspaper circulation is declining every year, and is currently at its lowest in history.
- Digital is the new way to earn advertising revenue.
- The number newspaper employees continue to fall every year.
- Cable news consumption is growing.
- 38% of Americans get their news from a digital platform.
- Since 2010, online radio listeners have doubled.

These aren't fun facts to have to swallow. Those of us that crave the old era of hard hitting investigative journalism are tempted to ignore this. My next tip? Don't ignore it. Instead, use it to prepare yourself.

Remember, journalism is evolving, not dying.

CHAPTER 3

MY TIPS ON HOW TO PREPARE FOR THIS CRAZY INDUSTRY

“Journalism will kill you, but it will keep you alive while you’re at it.” –*Horace Greeley*

So, how does one begin to prepare for an industry that is changing and evolving as much as journalism is? After three years of college, I’m finally beginning to understand what helps, and what doesn’t.

First, don’t limit yourself. Take every class you possibly can on a variety of subjects. Journalism is one of those fields where knowledge in multiple subjects is super helpful. As one of my counselors put it, you won’t be writing on journalism, but you will be writing on everything else. It’s always good to dabble in many different subjects.

Experience is also vital. I know this pretty much goes for any field, but it is especially so for journalism. Journalism is competitive, so doing anything to set yourself apart will help you. For example, if you are student your university should have some sort of student media organization. If not, intern as much as possible. It may seem like internships for anything media related would be in big cities, but you would be surprised at how man business are looking for media

professionals. I remember looking for an internship once and a yoga studio was looking for a social media manager.

Which brings me to my next point: social media. Like it or not, social media is a massive part of the news industry. This may be obvious, but this means that employers will definitely pay attention to your social media upon hiring. Also, take a social media class if you have the opportunity.

The next thing to prepare for is how fast this industry evolves. I remember reading an article about where journalism is going. According to [Poynter](#), these are the emerging jobs that are taking over journalism:

- Enhanced Reporter
- Augmented Reality Producer
- Bot Developer
- Platforms Manager
- Public Code Editor

As you can see, old journalism is out. Even social media is making its way out of the business. So, don't limit yourself, take some digital classes, and make yourself stand out.

My final thought is this: don't be afraid to get your writing out there. I was terrified to have my work published at first, but ultimately it becomes a pretty cool feeling.

CHAPTER 4

MY TIPS ON BEGINNING JOURNALISTIC WRITING

“Journalism is literature in a hurry.”

- *Matthew Arnold*

As I mentioned before, I started to love writing when I was in high school. I loved the creative outlet that writing provided to me, and writing papers never seemed like a big deal like it was for other kids. Now, I'm not saying that I'm some all-knowing writer and I rule at this. Quite the contrary, actually. I am still learning every day, and during my two years of journalism school I have learned a couple of things that have helped me along the way.

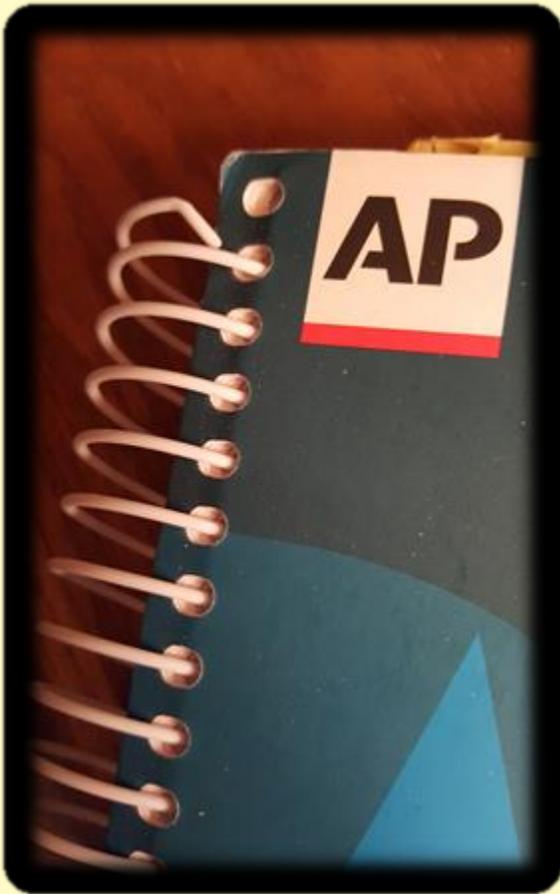
Tip #1-Accept Criticism

This is one thing that I was always terrible at. I tend to take things way too personally. However, there is not really a way to avoid other people editing your writing when you are preparing for a major like mine. I had a professor once who swore by the benefits of having someone else rip apart your writing in front of you. I have had that happen a couple

times, by both professors and editors alike, and now I swear it is one of the most helpful things a writer could do.

Have actual human being read your stuff. Once you get over the sheer fear of it, it becomes something you will crave as a writer. Don't be afraid of criticism. It will help you immensely in the long run.

Tip #2- Learn the Basics of AP Style First



AP Style is one of those things that just seemed to astonish me and a lot of my peers. It is something we are all exposed to (most of the time) while we read any news article. AP Style is a fun little guide on how journalists should write. Think of it as a way to keep things uniform. Now, not all publications use this style of writing, but most do. AP Style is a kick to the pants, especially after 12 years of English writing.

From my very first Newswriting class I was hit with the brick that is AP Style. There were so many rules on the smallest things- like totally ignoring the Oxford Comma- that I felt like learning them all was hopeless. The best thing to do is narrow it down to a couple of concepts, break out those note cards, and learn it. While writing for my school paper, I noticed that these were the basic AP concepts that I utilized the most:

1. Addresses
2. Writing Times

3. State Abbreviations
4. Month Abbreviations
5. Titles
6. Numbers

Learn these basics first. You will find it makes AP Style a lot less intimidating. The rest will come to you as you go.

Tip #3- Let Go of Some Rules

This probably the most important thing to wrap your head around if you plan on being a journalistic writer. Sometimes the most important thing you can do for your writing is let go of some of those ingrained rules instilled in us in English class. You are probably thinking “But wait, I thought AP was nothing but rules!” Hear me out.

Learning to separate your English writer from your journalism writer is not an easy accomplishment. This is something I struggled horribly with when I began writing for my journalism classes, and my writing suffered for it. The most important thing in journalism is to get to the point quickly in small paragraphs. This flies right in the face of the old five paragraph essay.

I had a writing meeting with a professor once that was pretty much a game changer. He took one of my articles from the school paper and edited it in front of me. It was honestly one of the most helpful experiences during my college career, because he told me exactly what was flawed in my writing. For two years I have been feeling insecure about my writing, and finally I got the answer as to why.

My problem was that I was restricting myself by still using those rules my English teachers spent days making sure we understood. You know, rules like these:

“Don’t start a sentence with a conjunction!”

“No fragment sentences!”

My teacher told me that these rules are basically useless in journalism. Why? Because we are supposed to write in the best way to communicate with our audience. I’m not saying go crazy with your rule breaking, but don’t be scared to break some rules to deliver your message. That is, after all, the point of journalism.

Tip #4- Write Whenever and Whatever

This one is huge, and one that I struggle with a lot during the semester. Write for pleasure, not just for work. Sometimes I get so caught up in my writing for classes that I tend to forget to do this. The creative writer in me needs to come out, but often I find that I don’t have the energy to write outside of class.

But here’s the thing: writing for your own benefit is essential in keeping your love of writing alive and burning. If you do nothing but write for work, writing becomes a job, not a passion. I have found myself complaining about how much I have to write all the time, and I realized one day that it’s because I wasn’t doing any kind of writing for me personally.

So, keep a journal. Write a poem. Write a fiction story. Breaking out of journalism mode is good every now and then.

My next tip gets a whole chapter dedicated to it, and is something that I contribute my love of writing to.

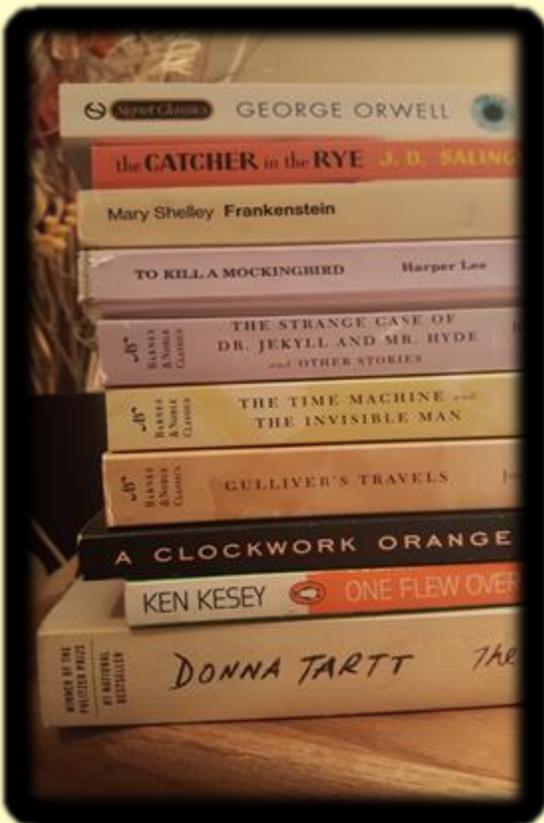
CHAPTER 4

THE IMPORTANCE OF READING

“I am always chilled and astonished by the would-be writers who ask me for advice and admit, quite blithely, that they “don’t have time to read.” This is like a guy starting up Mount Everest saying that he didn’t have time to buy any rope or pitons.” — *Stephen King*

I cannot stress enough how being a reader has shaped who I am, and how much it has influenced me. I tell my grandma thank you all the time for forcing me to do those summer reading programs at the public library as a kid. She thinks it’s not a big deal, but really, my love of reading brought me to where I am today.

I have loved books for as far back as I can remember. I don’t remember a point in time when I didn’t have a love for a book in my hand. Reading from such a young age instilled an appreciation for stories in me long before I knew I even liked to write.



But reading offers way more than just stories. That's why I'm dedicating a whole chapter to it.

One day, I was reading before starting to write an article, and I noticed something weird. After reading for twenty minutes, the words for my article started flowing like lava. At first I thought it was just some weird occurrence, until I researched it. Apparently, reading is vital in keeping your writing fresh, and I can attest to this. Now, I make sure I read for at least 20 minutes a day. This is actually pretty hard for a college student, but it works.

The cool thing is that the book industry is the one print media outlet technology isn't changing. Well, changing drastically I should say. E-books are growing, but not as fast as you would think. I still prefer holding an actual print book in my hand, but I recognize that e-books are important and relevant. Millennials, according to [The Atlantic](#), are even reading more the older generations. The good thing is, Americans are reading now more than ever. So, as long as people are reading, the platform shouldn't matter.

Now, let's get to the science of it. Your brain freaking loves reading. Reading activates 17 regions of the brain. Reading exercises parts of the brain that you may not even know exists.

So, read a good novel. Watch your writing flourish.

AKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have a couple people that help me grow every day not only as a writer, but as a person.

I would like to thank my grandmother and my aunts for always believing in me, even when I didn't believe in myself. My friends for telling me to get my shit together and helping me to get the most out of life. Avery for dealing with my craziness and being my own personal editor. Annie for being there always.

You guys rock. Thanks for being my inspiration.
