

## PREFACE

Somewhere, not too far from here, at this very moment, a politician is taking a bribe.

A factory is dumping toxic sludge into a stream.

A deadly virus is landing at the airport. A high school jock is bulking up on steroids. Someone's mother is opening a can of contaminated tuna.

Just a typical day in America, in other words, where the lives of ordinary folks depend upon trustworthy information. Because what we don't know *can* hurt us.

Who's the watchdog here? Whose job is it to expose the lies, explain the dangers, inform the uninformed?

If you become a journalist, it's *your* job.

Now, I'm a realist. I won't try to dupe you into thinking journalism is glamorous, that your deathless prose will slay any dragons.

Very few news stories change the world.

Still, sometimes a single story — a *single sentence* — can have an impact you never imagined. Put the right facts in the right order and you can make someone laugh. Cry. Understand. Get involved.

That's how you make a difference in this chaotic world: one reader at a time.

For journalism, this is a time of turmoil and transformation. Take newspapers . . . . . *please*.

Once mighty and beloved, the ink-on-dead-tree news biz now suffers layoffs, bankruptcies and the painful desertion of once-loyal readers who'd rather browse headlines online. For free.

Times are tough in TV and radio newsrooms, too. It sometimes seems like journalism, after a long, difficult journey, has come to a fork in the road. If we continue the way we've been going, the road plunges off a cliff. Our only other option? Follow the fork that disappears into a spooky, unexplored jungle — *the Technoverse!* — where either:

- a) we'll all be eaten alive, or
- b) we'll discover dazzling new wonders we could never have imagined. ▼

So what does all this turmoil and transformation mean for a journalism guidebook like this?

This new, improved edition of *Inside Reporting* provides a greatly expanded road map to the Web: blogs, multimedia, social networks, user participation. Yet we still focus more on old-school basics — writing and newsgathering — than on audio, video and interactive graphics.

Why? Why waste time on old-media fundamentals?

◆ **Writing is still the simplest, most effective way to deliver information.** Sure, audio, video and Web graphics are cool and dramatic, but when it comes to conveying complex ideas, nothing distills data better than the written word.

◆ **You never know what the future holds.** It's trendy to predict that newspapers will soon croak like dinosaurs, but don't bet on it. More likely, print media will adapt, evolve

and continue to coexist with TV, radio and whatever new digital options emerge. American consumers demand their news in a wide variety of formats, which means the smartest journalists are those prepared to produce material for any platform.

◆ **You never know what your next job might be.** You may dream of becoming a cable-news commentator, a multimedia producer or a video blogger. But out there in the real world, your first job may require you to crank out stories for a TV station's website — or cover city hall for a weekly paper. For that, basic newswriting skills will be essential.

◆ **You never know what you're going to enjoy.** You may think writing is a slow-motion, old-fashioned bore compared to shooting video and creating touch-screen graphics. But don't knock it till you try it. You might find out you're good at it — that you actually *love* it — like countless reporters before you.

◆ **It's all connected.** If you want to be a journalist, you need to gather facts and tell stories. That's basically all there is to it: 1) Gather the facts. 2) Tell the story.

Sure, you can add photos and hyperlinks and sound bites and animated graphics. But before you can dazzle viewers with cyberjournalism, you've got to develop news judgment and reporting skills. The basics, in other words.

That's why this book focuses on *news* writing. It's the traditional, tried-and-true way to master the journalist's craft. Whatever medium you choose for news — audio, video, multimedia or ink on paper — it all begins the same way: Gather the facts. Then tell the story.

So that's where we'll begin, too.

Speaking of multimedia: This book demonstrates what you get when you blend words and visuals simultaneously.

Most authors write the text first, then hand off their manuscript to editors and designers who add photos, illustrations and fancy type.

But for this book, I designed each page as I wrote it. Or, rather, I wrote each page as I designed it. Whichever.

It's an unusual way to produce a book, but it's how I like to work. For three decades now, I've created magazine and newspaper pages that way, blending text and images into packages with (hopefully) greater reader appeal.

This kind of multi-tasking — or *convergence* — is becoming essential in newsrooms. If you can write and design stories, generate visuals and produce Web pages, you'll be a hot commodity in the journalism job market.

This book, I confess, has been quite a monster to produce independently. But ideally, it will show you how challenging and rewarding and important and seriously *cool* journalism is. Maybe, just maybe, it will even inspire you to become a reporter.

That's how you make a difference in this chaotic world: one journalist at a time.

— *Tim Harrower*