



# Making the news: Jobs in TV journalism

To engage a television audience, the news must be interesting as well as timely and accurate. Find out about some of the workers whose decisions affect the way TV news is presented.

**W**hat do TV news workers do each day? For many of them, contributing to daily news broadcasts has changed greatly over the years. This evolution will likely continue for years to come.

The first televised news programs, which began about 60 years ago, were brief segments produced by national networks. These programs gradually expanded to longer formats involving the networks' local affiliates. With the growth of cable television came 24-hour news stations—and, finally, expansion to the many around-the-clock weather, sports, business, and other shows we have today.

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And more changes to news production are expected, according to Tom Weir, an associate professor at the University of South Carolina's School of Journalism and Mass Communications. "The technology we will see in 5 years doesn't exist yet," he says, "at least not in a commercially viable form." Jobseekers whose diverse talents and training are adaptable to these developing technologies are likely to have the best prospects.

Some news anchors and correspondents who do national or local broadcasts are so recognizable that they have celebrity status. Although they are the faces of TV news, these workers compose a small part of the staff that broadcasts news to the public.

This article describes the work of anchors in a section on news analysts, reporters, and correspondents. But it also discusses some of the other workers on news broadcasts, including producers, camera operators, and film and video editors. Occupational descriptions cover the job duties, earnings, employment, qualifications, and training for people in these occupations. To weigh other considerations for would-be TV workers, see the sections about station size and the good and bad sides to the work. Finally, sources of additional information are provided at the end of the article.

## Newswork

From the people on the air to the people behind the scenes, workers in television news are responsible for preparing and broadcasting current events in a timely, accurate way.

### Producer

Producers plan and develop news broadcasts and coordinate the activities of on-air personnel, production staff, and other members of the broadcast team. In other words, these workers run the show.

There are a number of different types of producers, and each is responsible for different segments of the broadcast: The executive producer coordinates the overall show, pulling together the segments to create a cohesive program; line producers or associate producers have more hands-on involvement than the executive producer does in the day-to-day activities.

The executive producer is the person in charge. His or her role is primarily managerial. Other staff members report to the executive producer, who makes major decisions regarding the program and, often, its overall financing.

A line producer works with the production team to keep the show on schedule and within budget. An associate producer, whose job tasks are usually broader than those of a line producer, assists the executive producer in everything from writing news stories to proposing ideas for news coverage to making editorial decisions, such as setting priorities for the placement and duration of news items in the broadcast.

Producers work either in the studio or away from it ("in the field"). Studio producers usually have a set schedule and work indoors. Field producers travel with a crew to cover stories in locations that could span the globe. In addition to having a producer, field teams usually include a correspondent, editor, and sound person all doing specialized work. Their work may expose them to dangerous situations—such as when they cover military conflicts, natural disasters, or accidents.

Assignments vary in the commitment required, ranging from a few hours for a story about a local business, for example, to several weeks spent covering a natural disaster overseas. Although studio and field producers generally have the same rank and salaries, a move to the studio is desirable because the

schedule and working conditions are more predictable.

Producers must be familiar with the segment of the broadcast for which they are responsible. For example, a field producer is responsible for the segments prepared by his or her team, and executive producers are accountable for the entire program. The producer should be fully prepared before shooting begins, know exactly what is going to air, and manage the workers involved in creating the program.

During a live news broadcast, producers have specific duties related to the show. For example, producers may keep an eye on the studio monitors to ensure that everything progresses on schedule. If something goes wrong, it is up to the producer to fix the situation without disrupting the broadcast.

**Employment and wages.** The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) collects data on producers and directors as a single occupation overseeing stage, television, video, and motion picture productions. About 14,000 producers and directors were in the television broadcasting industry in May 2007, according to BLS.

In television broadcasting, median annual wages for producers and directors in May 2007 were \$55,620, according to BLS.

**Qualifications and training.** Producers need a combination of skills and training to succeed in their work.

To do their jobs well, producers need to be flexible, able to incorporate program changes and new information quickly, and able to remain calm and organized under stressful circumstances. They also must have solid communication skills, both written and oral, because they coordinate the activities of several staff members. And producers should be good negotiators, as they often manage

contract discussions, hiring interviews, and other personnel meetings.

Entry-level producers usually need at least a bachelor's degree. College courses teach students occupation-specific skills, such as writing a script, checking segments for accuracy and length, and overseeing a broadcast production.

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Television newscasts are planned and developed by producers, who coordinate segments for consistency.

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Competition for jobs is keen, so students should look for opportunities to gain relevant experience while still in school. For example, many high schools and colleges have broadcasting studios, in which students are responsible for producing programs that are transmitted primarily within the school or for a limited range in the community.

Working in an internship at a local station is another good way for students to gain experience. Many stations offer internships, usually unpaid but with another kind of payoff. “Internship programs give students hands-on experience,” says Weir. “And interns gain valuable industry contacts that may give them an advantage over other applicants for these sought-after jobs.”

Producers usually begin their careers in support positions, such as researching or assisting. Getting hired at a small station or in small markets is generally easier than starting out in large ones; however, even small stations are unlikely to turn over production to a recent graduate. Some full-time, professional experience is nearly always required.

## News analysts, reporters, and correspondents

News analysts, reporters, and correspondents are the on-air faces of TV news. They are the people we recognize from everyday broadcasts about what’s happening in our town, in our country, and around the world.

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News analysts, reporters, and correspondents often conduct interviews outside of the studio.

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ON AIR

Broadcast news analysts, commonly known as news anchors, are often the most recognizable members of a television news team. During the broadcast, they generally sit at a desk and report the news. Viewers sometimes mistakenly think that's all anchors do. "One of the most common misperceptions," says Julie Hartenstein, deputy director of career services at Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, "is that an anchor is nothing more than a mouthpiece."

In fact, anchors have a background in journalism. They may research and write a portion of the stories they deliver on the air, although the volume of news that must be reported means that professional newswriters prepare most stories. Still, nearly all anchors have the authority to rewrite or edit the news stories they report.

Anchors may conduct interviews, either on the air or as part of the research for a story being broadcast. They prepare for these interviews by learning both about the topics to be discussed and about the person they will interview. Even if the topic is something the anchor has little previous knowledge of, he or she must become well enough informed to be able to discuss it with the interview subject.

Some news anchors specialize, reporting on single topics such as sports or the weather. These anchors must have some expertise in their respective specialties. Having a background in meteorology may be required to develop or interpret weather forecasts, for example, and in-depth knowledge of a range of athletic activities and organizations is necessary to deliver sports news.

Reporters and correspondents often provide much of the foundation for anchors' news stories. Their research tasks include investigating leads and news tips, reviewing documents, observing events, and interviewing people. Especially at smaller stations,



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Research and writing are part of a journalist's job in preparing to deliver stories on the air.

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reporters and correspondents may have to take related photographs or video footage. Then, they organize the material they've gathered, write the story, and, in some cases, edit the accompanying video.

Reporters generally shoot a news segment in the field and submit it electronically to the station. Their segments may be broadcast live, may be previously recorded, or may be reported live with some parts prerecorded.

Correspondents are reporters who are sent, usually with field teams, to places outside the area served by their network or station. The cities or towns that correspondents visit may be anywhere in the world but are usually large and heavily populated locales or are temporary focal points. Correspondents may change locations often, including traveling to areas with harsh conditions or risks of danger. Whatever the situation, their job tasks are similar to those of locally based reporters.



Many reporters and correspondents research and investigate their stories before writing their scripts. They may spend weeks researching some stories. During their investigation, they seek out and interview sources and follow through on leads. This type of reporting may require a reporter to travel wherever the information leads. Similar to anchors, reporters, and correspondents make the final decisions in editing the script, even if they have writers providing assistance.

**Employment and wages.** In May 2007, according to BLS, there were about 4,110 news analysts and about 6,560 reporters and correspondents employed in television broadcasting.

BLS data also show that median annual wages of news analysts in the television broadcasting industry were \$58,130 in May 2007. For reporters and correspondents in television broadcasting, median wages were \$38,450.

**Qualifications and training.** Having a journalism background is generally expected of aspiring news analysts, reporters, and correspondents. But their on-air presence makes other preparation important, too.

The ability to communicate is essential in this occupation. And this need for communication skills goes beyond being able to write and speak well: No matter what their personal feelings are, news analysts, reporters, and correspondents should not let their emotions affect their on-air presence. Those who report the news must maintain their composure, even during chaotic circumstances.

Similarly, appearance is a consideration for anyone on television. At a minimum, news analysts, reporters, and correspondents must be clean and well groomed for broadcasts. Special makeup for television appearances is intended to counteract unnatural studio condi-

tions, such as bright lights, and is usually applied to both men and women.

News analysts, reporters, and correspondents usually benefit from getting a journalism education. A bachelor's degree in journalism teaches the basic skills needed to do these jobs: researching and writing, conducting interviews, understanding the industry, and learning business and journalism law and ethics.

Reporters and correspondents are generally expected to know how to handle a camera and to digitally edit and transmit their work. They may not need to use these skills, but those who have the training may have an advantage in a competitive job market.

Gaining experience in a school studio or through an internship is recommended for news analysts, reporters, and correspondents. Many high schools and colleges have student-run studios that have limited broadcast range but provide an opportunity for training in a less stressful environment than that of a TV station.

Many local stations offer internships, which may not include a paycheck but could lead to full-time employment. Interns in TV stations, like interns in other businesses, are often the first to be considered when entry-level openings occur.

## Camera operators and film and video editors

News is transmitted from the studio to televisions due, in part, to the work of camera operators and film and video editors. By recording and preparing segments and shows for broadcast, these workers make it possible for the information to be presented as the other members of the news team intend.

Camera operators record the images we see on the news. Often, their duties include setting up and maintaining camera equipment.



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A camera operator who works outside the studio must be ready to travel to events as they happen.

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Camera operators may work in a variety of settings that range from inside the local studio to outdoors anywhere in the world.

In the studio, jobs for camera operators have become more limited due to technology. For example, automated camera systems mean that one operator works several cameras remotely. Smaller news stations may not have elaborate systems, however. In these smaller stations, several operators are seated at different cameras. One camera at a time records live, and the producer often signals to the camera operators when it is time to switch to another camera.

Camera operators who work outside the studio are often called news camera operators or electronic news gathering (ENG) operators. Camera operators who work in the studio are more likely to have a regular schedule, but ENG operators' schedules may vary consid-

erably because they are rarely in the studio. Travel requirements may range from short distances for a few hours—a nearby city to cover a press conference, for example—to across the world for days or months. And camera operators face the same risks, dangers, and limitations that other members of the field team do.

Film and video editors are the last people to see a segment before it airs. After a segment is shot, an editor may be left with a jumble of material consisting of several takes from different angles. It is the editor's job to get rid of the extraneous footage and put together a final segment. The final segment reflects the best shots from each take and makes the reporter and interview subjects appear as intended by the producer.

Some editors work in the studio, and others travel with a field team and edit a segment



immediately after it is recorded. Wherever they work, editors make use of digital technology to do their jobs. Video is shot on a digital camera and uploaded directly onto a computer. There, the editor puts together the segments and makes changes as often as needed until the producer gives final approval.

**Employment and wages.** In May 2007, there were about 6,960 camera operators and about 2,900 film and video editors employed in television broadcasting, according to BLS.

BLS data also show that camera operators in TV broadcasting earned a median annual wage of \$36,060 in May 2007. Median annual earnings of film and video editors in TV broadcasting were \$37,270 in May 2007.

**Qualifications and training.** Camera operators and film and video editors in broadcasting usually need a degree to enter these

occupations. Workers in both occupations also must bring some specific abilities to the job.

Camera operators should have good hand-eye coordination and be able to move quickly in response to developing stories. ENG operators also must be physically able to hold a camera for long periods and to carry heavy equipment for short distances. Film and video editors must show good judgment, be able to concentrate in a chaotic atmosphere, and be adept at communicating reasons for editing decisions.

Familiarity with computers and digital technology is necessary in both occupations. But some knowledge and skills required may be specific to the equipment used in a particular job and, therefore, likely to be taught on the job. Camera operators get this on-the-job training during the first several months.

Most stations have their own criteria for what they seek in a job candidate. Some employers look for a candidate who has a well-rounded educational background; others may want someone with professional videography experience. Due to the more difficult conditions ENG operators face, positions in that field are usually less competitive than those in a studio.

Film and video editors may earn a bachelor's degree in any field, but majoring in broadcasting or a related field is also an option. Whatever their educational background, though, prospective editors should have some experience with editing software.

As with workers in other broadcast-related occupations, students interested in becoming a camera operator or film and video editor should gain experience before graduation. High schools and colleges with student-run studios and local TV stations that have internship programs offer opportunities to develop the skills needed in these occupations.

Video editors compile the best shots from multiple angles into one segment.



ON AIR



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Fact-checking tasks are often assigned to interns. Internships are a good way to gain experience for many jobs in TV news.

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## Station size matters

The size of news operations varies, which in turn can affect workers' tasks, pay, and opportunities for entry-level and more advanced positions.

Major cities have the broadest range of news operations. These include everything from large national—and international—network and cable stations to small, independent ones. Small stations may be in sparsely populated cities, or they may be second-tier stations in major cities.

Job duties within a specific occupation also vary by station size. Large stations generally operate with larger budgets, which allows for greater specialization. And some jobs exist only at large stations. For example, only large

stations can usually afford to send correspondents to other cities.

Workers at smaller stations often have less specific job functions than their large-station counterparts. For example, reporters or camera operators at small stations may also function as editors or producers. Some small stations might use what is referred to as a “one man band”: one person performing the role of an entire team. These workers go into the field, set up a camera, stand in front of it to report their story, and edit the segment before sending it to the studio.

High pay and prestige attract workers to large stations in populous cities. However, strong competition for jobs at these stations makes it difficult for all but a few—usually the most experienced workers—to secure these positions.

ON AIR

As a result, recent graduates are more likely to be hired by small stations. These stations provide workers with solid training, and there are a growing number of opportunities at smaller, local stations. Many cities, for example, now have 24-hour news stations that are dedicated specifically to local news.

## The good news— and the bad

Television journalism is a career option with broad appeal. Anchors and reporters become the face of the news for their community—and the Nation. And behind-the-scenes employees are important in shaping the voice of the broadcast.

But some aspects that make these careers appealing also present challenges. The fast pace that keeps the work exciting also can be stressful. For example, reporters and anchors must be prepared to handle breaking news. As

they rush to compile and broadcast the story, a reporter or anchor must also ensure its accuracy—which means evaluating quickly, with little room for error. Overzealous reporters who do not take the time to check facts may discover that their careers suffer.

Required travel, from none to much, varies by job and station size, among other factors. Many people enjoy traveling and might even consider the opportunity to do so a perk of the job. Enthusiasm often wanes, however, when travel becomes complicated, inconvenient, and lasts for extended periods, often to unappealing—or even dangerous—places.

News programs also have long, sometimes nonstandard, hours of operation. News cycles are 24 hours, 365 days a year. “If a story breaks on Christmas, you have to be there,” says Ed Esposito of Akron, Ohio, chairman of the Radio-Television News Directors Association. And recent entrants into news careers usually work the least desirable schedules.

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In their rush to cover breaking news, reporters must take care to ensure a story's accuracy.

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Still, Esposito says, working in the news—whether broadcast or print—provides unique opportunities. “You are a witness to history,” he says, “and you can express yourself and the feelings of your neighbors unlike you can in any other field.”

## Learning more

This article describes some, but not all, of the many occupations in TV news. Occupations in departments ranging from human resources to accounting are another important part of bringing the news to the viewing public. For more information about occupations in news broadcasting, visit your local library or career center. There are many books, periodicals, and other resources describing occupations in this field and how to prepare for them.

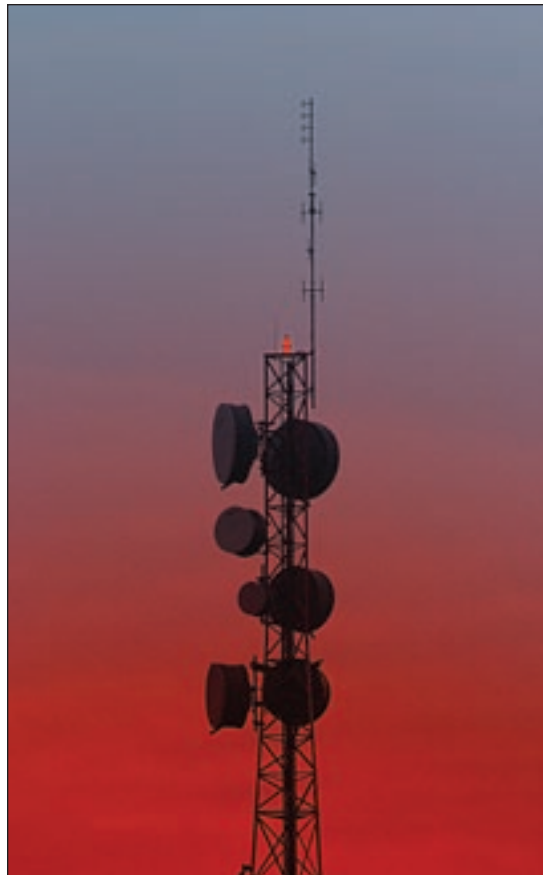
One resource in many libraries and career centers is the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, also available online at [www.bls.gov/ooH](http://www.bls.gov/ooH). The *Handbook* describes the nature of the work, required training, working conditions, employment, earnings, and job outlook of many TV news occupations.

In addition, the *Career Guide to Industries* profiles the broadcasting industry, which includes television news. To access additional information about this industry, go to [www.bls.gov/oco/cg/cgs017.htm](http://www.bls.gov/oco/cg/cgs017.htm).

University journalism and broadcasting departments are another good source of information in this field. In addition, State employment services may also be helpful.

Many associations also provide information, including the following.

National Association of Broadcasters  
1771 N St. NW.  
Washington, DC 20036  
(202) 429-5300  
[www.nab.org](http://www.nab.org)  
[nab@nab.org](mailto:nab@nab.org)



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Small stations and school-based studios have limited broadcast range.

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The Society of Broadcast Engineers  
9102 N. Meridian St., Suite 150  
Indianapolis, IN 46260  
(317) 846-9000  
[www.sbe.org](http://www.sbe.org)  
[mclappe@sbe.org](mailto:mclappe@sbe.org)

College Broadcasters Inc.  
UPS—Hershey Square Center  
1152 Mae St.  
Hummelstown, PA 17036  
(713) 348-2935  
Toll free: 1 (877) ASK-CBI1 (275-2241)  
[www.askcbi.org](http://www.askcbi.org)

Radio and Television News Directors  
Association  
4121 Plank Rd., 512  
Fredericksburg, VA 22407  
(202) 659-6510  
[www.rtnda.org](http://www.rtnda.org)

