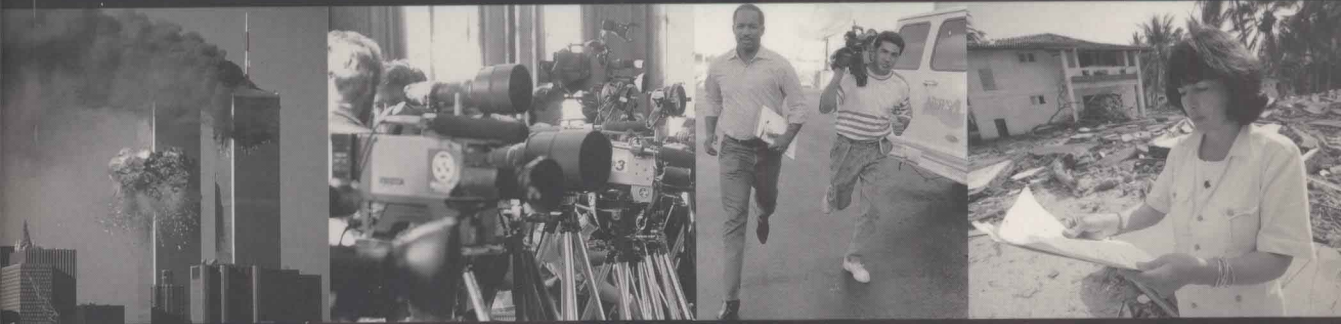


fourth **edition**

BROADCAST NEWS



WRITING, REPORTING, AND PRODUCING

TED WHITE

Broadcast News Writing, Reporting, and Producing

Fourth Edition

Ted White



Amsterdam • Boston • Heidelberg • London
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Foreword

They tell me that time has not speeded up, and that there are exactly as many minutes in an hour, hours in a day, days in a week, and weeks in a year as there were when the first edition of Ted White's fine how-to-do-it book on broadcast news was published. I don't believe it though. It seems to me that the world must be spinning faster and time must have accelerated for so many events to have unfolded and so much to have changed so much. News has been called the first draft of history, but the pace of change both in the wide world we cover and inside the smaller universe of broadcast news, has been such that the first draft of anything these days requires constant revision.

Few things are as they were before the attacks of 9/11. "The occasion," to quote Abraham Lincoln, "is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise to the occasion." And although the technological and structural changes in radio and television have not been as profound, they have been equally dramatic. They certainly have affected my own life and work at CBS where I've worked (if you can call it work) for nearly four decades now in radio where I still do *The Osgood File* and in television, where I've anchored *SUNDAY Morning* since 1984.

Some things do not change, however. The fundamentals don't. Reporting and writing are still at the heart of broadcast news, both in radio and television. You can have the greatest studio in the world, the latest equipment, the hottest signal, the catchiest news theme music, and the coolest news set ever designed, but if your reporting and writing aren't good, nothing is going to happen. You still have to find out what's going on, talk with the principals and witnesses, gather your information, assemble your facts into a coherent story, and then tell it. The writing part is easy. As Terence Smith's father, the great sportswriter, Red Smith, once said, "All a writer has to do is open a vein and bleed all over the page. Nothing to it."

That's true, but not very helpful, I'm afraid. Ted White's approach is easier, both on your health and on the carpet.

Ted and I worked together at CBS in New York. Our colleagues were wonderful people like Walter Cronkite, Douglas Edwards, Eric Severeid, Lowell Thomas, Hughes Rudd, Dallas Townsend, and Richard C. Hottelet. We had great editors like Hal Terkel and Marian Glick who had learned from the masters, Edward R. Murrow himself, and Murrow's own radio editor and writer, Ed Bliss. Our bosses were Joe Dembo and Emerson Stone, and their bosses were people like Richard Salent, Bill Leonard, and Fred W. Friendly.

So, when Mr. White tells students about radio and television news, he knows whereof he speaks. And when he writes in this book about the nuts and bolts of how to gather news and organize it so that it makes sense, he knows whereof he writes. You may decide after reading this book that broadcast news writing, reporting, and producing are not for you. This would be a sensible decision nobody could argue with. But if you do pursue this field anyway, you won't find anybody better to show you the ropes than Ted White.

Charles Osgood

Preface

Broadcast News Writing, Reporting, and Producing examines the skills, techniques, and challenges of working in broadcast news. Along with complete coverage of the fundamentals, the text presents up-to-date examples and issues through actual scripts and interviews with the people who bring us the news.

As you read the book, you may notice the extensive coverage of reporting. Eight of the book's 25 chapters focus on everything from basic skills and specialty reporting to research techniques and ethics. As in previous editions, the text is accompanied by scripts written by working journalists, including some in Iraq who often discuss the stories they are covering and the techniques they use. This edition covers in great detail the embedded journalist policy established by the Pentagon, and we have expanded the report on how broadcast journalists performed on 9/11. The earlier edition of this book had only a brief report on that terrorist attack because it took place only days before the scheduled printing of that book. The editors and I faced a similar dilemma with this new edition when, only a few weeks before the publication date, the world was shocked by what many are describing as the greatest catastrophe in history, an earthquake and Indian Ocean tsunami on December 26, 2004, that, as of this writing a month later, is estimated to have killed over 210,000 people. We will have more on the tsunami disaster later in the book.

The new edition takes hard looks at two major issues facing the profession—the disastrous incidents of plagiarism, deceit, and lying by journalists at two major national newspapers; and the growing debate over whether there is a liberal or conservative bias in the media. On the eve of another presidential election, we examine the nightmare media coverage of the last one in 2000 when everyone got the results wrong. We also examine, in more depth, the unfortunate increase in the amount of excessive reporting of high-profile stories such as the Washington, D.C.-area sniper killings, the Lacy Peterson and Chandra Levy murder cases, and the sexual assault case involving NBA star Kobe Bryant.

I believe this is the most complete assemblage of reporting techniques and scripts by outstanding correspondents available in a broadcast news text. Journalists such as Betsy Aaron, Bob Dotson, the late Charles Kuralt, Charles Osgood, Susan Stamberg, and Richard Threlkeld not only provided scripts for the book but also discussed how they write and report. The work of such distinguished reporters as the late Edward R. Murrow and the late Pauline Frederick is also examined and analyzed closely. I also spoke with numerous producers about their philosophies and techniques and what it takes to get good newscasts on the air every day and night.

Supplementing this is the emphasis throughout on real-life situations. The problems that reporters, writers, assignment editors, and producers face every day are discussed in detail. You'll find entire chapters devoted to interviewing, covering breaking stories, delivering the news, and finding a job. Two chapters are devoted to ethics. We also have expanded the chapter on technology, with a detailed report on the most dramatic change in news gathering equipment, the satellite phone, more commonly referred to as the "videophone."

Whenever possible, I've relied on the voices of the experts—through interviews and transcripts of professional seminars and conferences—to teach future professionals how it's done.

Instructors may want to assign the writing, review, and discussion exercises at the end of each chapter. These exercises ask students to apply what they've read, not just to summarize it. You'll find answers to the exercises in the Instructor's Manual, along with sample syllabi and my suggestions for organizing the course, whether it be a reporting, writing, or all-in-one course. The Instructor's Manual is available at www.focalpress.com.

One of the most important aspects of this new edition is that it literally **will not get old**. That's because between editions, we will update every subject in the book as it becomes necessary.

You will note as you go through the book that there will be author notes along the way, pointing out that certain subjects and stories are still developing and will be updated periodically on the publisher's homepage.

Among the reasons we are so proud of this book is that we had the assistance and input of so many professional journalists. It would have been impossible to write without the assistance of a great number of people. Much of this help came from colleagues in the broadcast news industry with whom I worked over the years. Significant contributions also came from journalism professors, research assistants, editors, and a variety of administrative assistants and public relations personnel throughout the country. I will try to thank by name all who have helped produce this book, but there have been so many of you that I am likely to miss a few. Please forgive me if one of them is you.

At the top of the "thank you" list is Ben Silver. Our relationship goes back more than 30 years to when we both worked for *CBS News*. Ben, now professor emeritus of the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism at Arizona State University, was a gold mine of information. I thank him for his research and for locating and interviewing knowledgeable practitioners whom we quote throughout the book. His examination of the vigorous news operations going on in Phoenix, where he lives, was particularly useful.

Charlie Osgood, too, has been a friend and colleague over the years, and the foreword he wrote for the book is greatly appreciated, as are the scripts that he has permitted me to reproduce, and the wisdom he has shared with us. We all miss Charles Kuralt who graciously allowed me to use two of his famous "On the Road" scripts and then described how he produced such gems. I also appreciate the help I received from Karen Beckers, Kuralt's wonderful secretary who has had the good fortune to end up with the same job in Charlie Osgood's office.

The list of other correspondents who assisted me is extensive. Betsy Aaron and Richard Threlkeld allowed me to share their scripts and insights with you. I thank them also for providing photos from their private collections.

My thanks to Roger Welsch for sending me one of his "Postcard from Nebraska" stories. And thanks also to Bob Faw and David Culhane for all their help over the years.

60 Minutes correspondent Ed Bradley gave me new insight into, among other things, the hopes and problems of African Americans in broadcast journalism. I thank *Dateline NBC* correspondent Robert McKeown (formerly of *CBS News*) for sharing with us, as so many others did, what it was like to report during the Gulf and Iraqi wars.

The *ABC News* team also provided me with many pages of copy. Special thanks to all who took time to speak with me, including Barry Serafin and former correspondent Morton Dean. News commentator Paul Harvey contributed a sample of his unique writing style; thanks also to his secretary, June Westgard.

Friend and former colleague Rob Sunde, who was among the veteran journalists who passed away in 2003, provided lots of useful information for young people trying to get started in broadcast news.

NBC News correspondent Bob Dotson was more than generous, giving me not only a sample of his splendid writing but very detailed notes on how he thinks and works when he's putting a story together. NBC's Roger O'Neil is not only an excellent journalist, but also refreshingly frank in describing the shortcomings of many of those working in broadcast news. Thanks to Chris Vanocur of KTVX-TV in Salt Lake City for sharing his Olympic scandal exposé with us.

The news staff at CNN was very cooperative. Former anchor Bernard Shaw, in particular, gave his views on a variety of subjects, including the Gulf War and the problems associated with reporting live and covering politics. We also thank CNN correspondent Walter Rodgers for his report from Iraq, along with Kawai McClarin who assisted us in obtaining scripts and photos. We appreciate the help of NBC, for providing a photo of David Bloom and one of his reports from Iraq before his tragic death. Thanks also to Brian Williams' assistant, Melanie Ludlum, Howard Kurtz of *The Washington Post*, and the gang at The Poynter Institute: Kelly McBride, Jill Geisler, Chip Scanlan, Jan Schaffer, Bob Steele, and Keith Woods for allowing us to use so much of their research and writings on a variety of ethical issues and other subjects.

CNN investigative reporter Jim Polk provided a lot of good advice about an investigative beat he has covered for many decades. Thanks also to friend and former CNN colleague Don Shultz, an editor-producer for *Headline News*; and to my former CNN boss, Ed Turner.

Many thanks also to the people at NPR, where, as Susan Stamberg reminds us, women journalists have made tremendous progress. I thank Susan and Cokie Roberts for their scripts and input on a variety of subjects and issues in broadcast news. I also appreciate the time that Nina Totenberg spent with me discussing her involvement in the leak of sexual harassment charges made by Anita Hill against Judge Clarence Thomas. Lots of thanks to Brant Houston, who provided the chapter on computer-assisted reporting. We very much appreciate the help of John Stoltz, an executive with Global Communications, for telling us all about how the new satellite phone systems (videophones) work.

I received a great deal of assistance from colleagues at radio and TV stations throughout the country. Much of that help was provided by stations in Baton Rouge, my home base. Special thanks to friend and colleague John Spain, former station manager of WBRZ-TV, who has provided extraordinary information about a variety of aspects of broadcast news.

Management and staff at WAFB-TV, the other major station in Baton Rouge, were equally cooperative. My thanks to Station Manager Nick Simonette and WAFB-TV anchor-reporter Paul Gates, who provided excellent examples of his work.

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Many thanks to John Stoltz for his excellent explanation of how the video phone works.

My appreciation to Will Wright, former news director of WWOR-TV in New York, for recalling how he rose from desk assistant at CBS to become one of only a handful of African American news directors at major TV stations. Wright and African American journalist Sheila Stainback provided valuable information and advice for minorities who hope to succeed in broadcast news.

Others at local stations who provided information and scripts include: Jack Atherton; Jerry Bell, news director of KOA-TV, Denver; news director Chris Berry and reporter Kris Kridel of WBBM Radio, Chicago; Tom Bier, news director of WISC-TV, Madison; Jerry Brown, weathercaster for KUTV, Salt Lake City; Christine Devine, anchor for KTTV-TV, Los Angeles; Ed Godfrey, news director of WAVE-TV, Louisville; Gordon Peterson of WUSA-TV in Washington; anchor Jerry Turner of WJZ-TV in Baltimore; and John Bobel, president of Talentbank.

Many thanks to the crowd at KPNX-TV, Phoenix including producer Mary Morse-Lay; and my appreciation also to those at KTSP-TV in Phoenix including investigative reporter Steve Kraft. Thanks also to News Director Dennis O'Neil, and Producer Lisa Hudson and Kathy Matz of KTVK-TV, Phoenix.

I received a lot of help from the late Marty Haag, former vice president of News and current consultant for the A. H. Belo Corporation, which owns several stations, including KHOU-TV in Houston and WFAA-TV in Dallas. Penny Scott and reporter Don Wall of WFAA-TV were a great help, as was Bill Bauman, news director at KCRA-TV, Sacramento.

Special thanks and a hug for friend and colleague Nan Siemer, who provided students with information on how to survive in our business. We remember another friend, John Lynker, who passed away in 2003.

Thanks also to the many journalism professors who shared information with me, including several at the University of Missouri: Rod Gelatt, John Ullmann, and Vernon Stone, former research director for the Radio and Television News Director's Association (RTNDA).

Another colleague and giant among us who will be deeply missed is Ed Bliss, a Professor Emeritus at American University and another transplanted *CBS News* writer and editor. He left us a marvelous book about the profession he loved, *Now the News*.

Other professors who made contributions to the book include: Robert Mulholland, former chair of Broadcast News at the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University and former president of the NBC network; Lou Prato, who heads Northwestern's program in Washington, D.C. And, of course, we'll all miss the smiling face of Travis Linn of the University of Nevada at Reno, and a former *CBS News* bureau chief in Dallas, who also passed away in 2003.

Thanks also to Bill Small, a former senior vice president of *CBS News*; Paul Thaler, author of *The Watchful Eye*; and Stephen Doig of Arizona State University; we also appreciate the assistance and photo from Charlie Bose and assistant, Sharon Tounley; thanks also to Ken Mellgren of Associated Press.

Special thanks also to my good friend and former student, Lennie Tierney, who has learned so much about TV news photography that he can teach his old mentor a few tricks, which he explains in chapter 24 (Using the Hardware). Thanks also to all the other students, too many to name, who have made me proud by becoming successful in news.

Lots of people shot photos for us, and many others dug pictures and scripts out of files and archives. These people include Kathy Ozatko of Madison, Wisconsin, and Marty Silverstein of CBS. The shooters included James Terry and Christopher Rogers of Baton Rouge and Mike Coscia of WFAA-TV, Dallas; thanks also to former CBS colleague Mike LUDLUM, now a professor at N.Y.U.

Special thanks to Carol Lichtenberg, curator at the Historical Photograph Collection at Washington State University, for finding photos of Edward R. Murrow. Thanks to Catherine Heinz, director of the Broadcast Pioneers Library, for telling me where to look for things I needed.

Help also came from Richard Lobo, president and general manager of WTVJ-TV in Miami, and from Carmen Perez, PR director for that station; and we thank Jeff Burnside for his environmental report.

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During the several years of writing and research for this new edition, I attended many conferences and meetings of broadcast groups (particularly those held by the Radio and Television News Director's Association and the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication) and reviewed many journals and magazines such as *The Communicator* and *Broadcasting and Cable TV* so that I could include the comments and observations of many whom I was unable to interview. A special word of thanks at RTNDA for their assistance, especially Noreen Wille.

Here's a list of those I have quoted, in one way or another, throughout the book: investigative reporters David Anderson, Jack Anderson and Peter Benjaminson; *ABC News* correspondents Sam Donaldson and Judy Muller; *NBC News* commentator John Chancellor; Bob Engleman of Scripps-Howard; former *CBS News* Vice President Peter Herford; *CBS News* anchor Dan Rather and correspondent Leslie Stahl; *Wall Street Journal* reporter Robert Goldberg; Craig Le May, editor of the *Freedom Forum Journal*; Robert Logan, director of the Science Journalism Center at the University of Missouri; former CNN environmental reporter Deborah Potter who is now executive director of the RTNDA Foundation; Bill Kovach, chairman, and Tom Rosensteel, vice chairman, of the Committee of Concerned Journalists; Walter R. Mears, vice president and Washington bureau chief of the Associated Press; Professor William Metz, University of Nevada; attorney and former reporter Bruce Sanford;

Penny Parrish, news director of KMSP in Minneapolis; Doug Ramsey of the Foundation for America Communications; network news veterans Liz Trotta and Ed Fouhy; the staff at Brill's *Content* magazine, which we miss; Christopher Dickey of *Newsweek*; George C. Wilson of *The National Journal*; Mark Fisher and Michael Getler of *The Washington Post*; Alicia C. Shepard and Mark Lehorn; weathercaster Jerry Brown of KVVU in Las Vegas; photographer Eric Foerch; professor Robert Logan of the University of Missouri; professor Hubert Brown of Syracuse University; Mark Lisher and sports commentator Bob Costas; *NBC News* president Andrew Lack; Hendrick Smith, PBS producer and former *New York Times* correspondent; Karen Foss of KSDK; and Seymour Topping, former managing editor of *The New York Times*, now an administrator of the Pulitzer Prize.

I also received help from Tom Goodman, director of media relations for CBS, and PR associate Eldra Gillman; Lynn Ross of AARP in Washington; Charlie Folds, PR director for WSVN-TV in Miami; the Gallup and Roper research and polling organizations; Magid Associates talent coach, Jeff Puffer; and Marvin Kalb, former network news correspondent and director of Harvard's Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics, and Public Policy.

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Rodgers, Walter, script from Iraq. Used with permission of CNN.

Introduction

Much of the earlier edition of this book was written during the conflict in the Persian Gulf and its aftermath. The timing offered a variety of opportunities to observe the broadcast media as they moved into a new role: the live reporting of a war on television. For the first time, the American people, along with most of the world, thanks to CNN, watched a war much as they would a Super Bowl. The instant coverage of rockets falling on Israel and Saudi Arabia brought the war into living rooms as never before. This coverage of the war showed us how dramatically electronic journalism had matured technically. Yet it also showed us many other things that were not as positive and were, in the minds of many, controversial. For, unlike the Super Bowl, the “replays” that Americans were seeing on their screens were censored and controlled by the military while frustrated journalists were often restricted to the “bench” or forced to take part in orchestrated pool coverage. As we mentioned in the Preface of this book, on the eve of the publication of the earlier edition of the book, terrorists attacked the World Trade Center buildings and the Pentagon. Because that earlier edition was already at the printers when the attack occurred, the author was limited in writing about how journalists covered the biggest story of their lives. But, in this new edition, the author was able to revisit that awful day on September 11, 2001, and research in more depth how broadcast journalists performed. This new edition also gave the author an opportunity to observe and report in great detail on a new landmark in American history, a preemptive attack on Iraq that included a dramatic new relationship between the military and the media, the so-called embedding of journalists. The author examines all the ramifications of this new policy, including the impact it had on the media coverage of the war and the effectiveness of the reporting for the American people. As in the earlier edition of the book, the invasion of Iraq provided an opportunity to examine some of the positive and negative aspects of electronic journalism, including the new technical advances, such as the videophone, which brought the war into American homes on an even more personal basis than the previous Gulf War. Another interesting development is how the new technology has provided a growing amount of independent TV stations and network affiliates to provide on-the-scene reports from their own reporters in Iraq. Because of the printing deadline problem mentioned earlier, the author was limited on what he could write about the December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, but, that report in Chapter 11 (Reporting Assignments) will be updated continuously on our web site (<http://www.broadcastnewsbook.com>).

Unfortunately, the author also found it necessary to continue his examination of the media excesses in the coverage of high profile crime cases, including the Washington, D.C.-area sniper killings, and a variety of other

murder cases, that continued the alarming drift toward increased tabloid journalism among certain segments of the media, particularly cable TV. In the past two years, there also has been an increase in convergence in the media, the practice of combining broadcast, print, and online news coverage, with an accompanying move toward using the same reporting staffs to provide the products for these combined operations. We'll look at the impact all this is having on the employment picture.

This new edition also required that we examine a frightening increase in journalism plagiarism, fraud, and deceit. We also looked at the disastrous media coverage of the 2000 presidential election and the problems with exit polling that occurred in 2004. And since our last edition, we also have added information on a story that has been demanding more attention, new gay and lesbian demands for more equal rights, particularly the right to same-sex marriage, and how the news media are adjusting to the coverage and assignment of reporters to these stories.

A Changing Industry

Long before the war, many TV stations had expanded their newscasts from 30 minutes to an hour or more in the evening, and some added an additional hour at noon and an other hour of news in the late evening. So, as we said earlier, it was not unusual, especially in the larger markets, to see local reporters competing with network journalists during the war in Iraq.

The significance of this trend for journalism students is that as more local TV stations begin to rely on their staffs to cover events outside their listening areas, more jobs will become available for people breaking into the field.

One of the most significant developments in broadcasting in the last few years has been the growing influence of Rupert Murdoch's Fox Network and its all-news operation. Also adding to the problems for CNN, which had a lock on the all-news business, was the emergence of NBC's all-news channel, MSNBC.

The expansion of all-news networks is good news for students coming out of J-schools. It means more jobs.

Another positive factor is the growing profitability of local TV news. But unfortunately less than 40 percent of radio stations are showing a profit. Competition from a variety of new sources has cut deeply into audiences for traditional broadcast stations and networks.

The explosion in cable and satellite dish programming has taken a heavy toll on broadcasters. Another threat is interactive news services, which make it possible for viewers to watch programs, news stories, and background reports whenever they want. Broadcasters fear that the saturation of information and news added to other programming could have a negative impact on both the networks and local stations. (There will be more on the changing industry later in the book.)

For now, at least, the job market shows signs of expansion. But also remember that competition for jobs in broadcast news is keen, and that is not likely to change. The field is crowded because the profession is a dynamic one. It's exciting, colorful, mostly rewarding, and often glamorous, attracting many people who want to be part of the action. But do not be overly alarmed. There always is room for the achievers. If you are determined to be among

those broadcast journalism students who “make it,” you will need plenty of determination, motivation, and hustle.

You do not have to be a born genius to become a good broadcast journalist. It never hurts, of course, but it’s certainly not a requirement. As in all professional fields, you must be intelligent. However, there are other characteristics and skills that you must have or develop as well. These include: (1) an insatiable curiosity about the world around you; (2) a desire to change those things and circumstances that you perceive to be unfair, improper, or unlawful; and (3) persistence and aggressiveness in discovering the truth.

Is Journalism for You?

The late Frank Graham, a sports columnist, once observed that journalism will kill you, but it will keep you alive in the meantime. An exaggeration, perhaps, but the lifestyle does not encourage a healthy or emotionally stable way of life. As one broadcast reporter puts it, “You have to be a little crazy to want to spend your life working lousy hours, eating bad food, probably drinking too much, and fighting with your wife or girlfriend because you had to miss dinner for the 99th time or had to break a date.”

ABC News correspondent Barry Serafin says the broadcast news business is “just awful” on family and married life. “You must have a very understanding, tolerant wife or husband. They must be very supportive.” He adds, “It is not the glamorous life that most people think. Last night I had a hotdog at an airport. After 25 years in the business, you wouldn’t think it would be that way, but it is—that’s the nature of the business.” Serafin recalls that earlier in the week he stayed up all night working on a complicated story. “We spent most of the next day on the story just to get it on the air,” Serafin adds, repeating, “That’s just the way the business is.”

The late veteran broadcaster and commentator John Chancellor noted that journalism is difficult work. “It’s often frustrating, frequently exhausting, not the way to get rich.” He said, “Every slip is out there in print or public view, to draw scorn, wrath or lawsuits.” In *The News Business* (which Chancellor co-authored with Pulitzer Prize-winner Walter R. Mears of the Associated Press), the authors also wrote that journalism is “exciting, fascinating, constantly challenging and changing work.”

What Role to Play?

Do you hope to be in front of the cameras or behind them? Most journalism students want to be on camera as TV anchors. The odds are not quite as bad as for college quarterbacks making it to the NFL, but the competition is still formidable. Fortunately, there are more TV stations—and an even greater number of radio stations—than there are pro football teams

If you are determined to be an anchor, keep in mind that it takes more than a college degree or time spent as an intern. Most anchors earn their spot in front of the cameras by putting in their time as reporters. In time, and with appropriate skills, a reporter may be given a shot at anchoring on weekends