

Become a magazine journalist in only nine weeks

Sounds ridiculous? That's what everyone said when we started our postgraduate course in magazine journalism nearly 20 years ago. We've proved them wrong, year after year. This course, which we run just twice a year, has an exemplary record that will match any media-related college or university course, even those lasting a year or more. Since 1988, people who took our course have won all sorts of national awards. They include:

- Editor of the Year
- Consumer Journalist of the Year
- Specialist Consumer Journalist of the Year
- The Observer Young Travel Writer of the Year
- New Journalist of the Year

Several have even been recognised in national awards within months of finishing the course. Rory Kinsella was Press Gazette's Cadet of the Year in 2006. Yolanda Carslaw was voted IPC New Journalist of the Year. Jennifer Taylor was shortlisted in Press Gazette's Scoop of the Year. Sara Cremer, editor of Eve, was voted New Editor of the Year by the British Society of Magazine Editors. Many others have won specialist awards, such as Horticultural Writer of the Year and Transport Writer of the Year.

It could be you.



PMA POSTGRADUATE COURSE IN MAGAZINE JOURNALISM

Course information page.....	2
Fast-track way to a job.....	2
Why we recommend magazines.....	2
Finding that first job.....	3
What can give me an edge?.....	3
Why do PMA graduates do so well?.....	5
What will I learn?.....	5
One man who made the right decision.....	6
Where do people get their first jobs?.....	6
Comments from the last course.....	6
What they said after previous courses.....	6
How much does it cost?.....	7
Frequently asked questions.....	7
A checklist for you.....	11

Want to know more?

www.becomeajournalist.co.uk

email: training@pma-group.com

tel: **01480 300 653**

The fast-track way to a job

Thank you for your interest in our nine-week postgraduate course in magazine journalism, which takes place at the PMA Centre for Media Excellence in central London, twice a year. The dates of our next courses are:

Summer 2007 9 July–7 September

Winter 2008 7 January–7 March

Summer 2008 7 July–5 September

This course was devised in 1988. It immediately won full approval from the Periodicals Training Council (PTC), the official watchdog for the magazine industry. This approval has been renewed every year. It has also been approved by the National Union of Journalists.

The PMA course lasts just nine weeks. Many people (especially those running much longer courses) have questioned whether we can really teach anything worthwhile in such a short time.

Well, of course we would say: “Yes.” But don’t believe us: ask those who have taken the course and the editors who have employed them. We condense the essentials into just nine weeks by concentrating on the practical side, rather than talking theory.

Every editor wants someone who can write a news story, interview a tricky person, write a good headline and spot a potential libel, rather than someone who knows about the history of journalism in the world.

But a better guide is to look at our success rate, and what has happened to people from our previous courses. Page 6 will tell you more.

If we accept you, and you work hard during those nine weeks, you will be equipped with all the core skills to get a job in journalism. We can’t promise you a job: nobody can. But our success rate is unrivalled. Furthermore, our contacts within the magazine industry mean we often hear about jobs that are never advertised. We reckon that 75% of the jobs on offer are never advertised. It’s done by word-of-mouth. We hear about those vacancies because our “day job” is training the magazine industry.

It’s commonplace to hear: “When I see that people have taken the PMA course, they automatically go on my shortlist.” (After that, it’s up to you to shine and convince editors that you want the job!)

Since we started the course, someone has always secured a job, without fail, before the course has even finished. After this, progress can be very rapid, unlike newspaper jobs. Many people from previous years are now editors and deputy editors, on leading titles within the industry.

Our course is geared to getting you a job on a magazine or website – though several people have gone straight into newspapers. One even started on The Daily Telegraph!

It’s also excellent training if you’re trying to get into radio, television or PR.

TIP: If you didn’t learn grammar at school, or you’ve forgotten everything you were told, buy *English for Journalists* by Wynford Hicks (published by Routledge) and read it from cover to cover. Grammar isn’t an optional extra if you want to be a journalist.

Why we recommend magazines

You may be thinking about a job on a local newspaper. Unless you want to spend three years (and often a lot more) chasing fire engines and interviewing people who have lost their prize cat, we would advise you to concentrate on magazines and websites. Here’s why.

- It is the growth area within the media. The old days when newspapers led the way in creativity are gone. Daily and local newspaper circulations are falling inexorably. Magazines and websites are pioneering new ideas in everything from writing styles to design.
- There are more jobs available in magazines. In the UK alone, there are now nearly 9,000 publications, from weeklies to quarterlies. Compare that with the number of newspapers.
- Magazines and websites offer better scope to get on fast. We would expect someone who had taken our course to become news editor, features editor, possibly even deputy editor or editor after three years. A couple have even started as editors. Compare that with a job in newspapers, where a restrictive apprenticeship system means that you would probably be no more than senior reporter after three years.
- The magazine industry pays better. Starter salaries on magazines or websites will typically be up to £5,000 a year more than you’ll get on a local paper or radio station, and the pay goes up faster too.
- It’s not ageist. Few newspapers would consider taking on someone of 30 or over. But many magazines would do so. They see your knowledge of a specialist area: finance, snowboarding, medicine, architecture, cricket or computing, for example, as a benefit.
- It’s easy to switch media. There are no bars to switching from magazines and websites to daily newspapers, radio or television if your ambition is to work in other areas.

● It's better if you are changing careers. We have had doctors, astrophysicists, accountants, nurses, architects, money brokers and even dispatch riders taking our course, and going on to do well.

● Magazines deal with national issues. Would you prefer to write about a stolen bicycle, or cover the Cannes Film Festival; interview a local shopkeeper about a broken window or Elizabeth Taylor (as one of our graduates did)?

● Many publications may not sound that glamorous, but they can offer spectacular opportunities and will often want you to travel abroad as part of the job.

● The fringe benefits can be excellent. As well as travel (because magazines and websites are national, often international), the perks can include such things as:

■ The latest gadgets and gizmos

■ Specialist equipment

■ Free entry into shows and sport events

■ Driving the very latest cars or motorcycles

You can rapidly become an expert. Working for a specialist magazine or website, whether its subject matter is finance or fashion, retail or railways, means you rapidly acquire an expertise in that area. Such people are regularly called upon to comment on that field by radio and TV, or to speak at conferences.

Finding that first job

Those who have already tried to get into journalism, whether newspapers or magazines, will have learnt that a degree is not a passport to a job.

Most graduates find they can't get a job because employers insist on new recruits possessing some basic journalism skills.

The only way to acquire those skills is by working on a publication – or by taking an approved training course. You can try writing to editors, and sometimes you will be lucky. But you'll get a lot of rejections, which can be depressing even to the most enthusiastic person, and many won't even bother to write back.

Editors will always choose people who have the necessary skills, so they can make an immediate contribution. It costs a magazine, website or newspaper time and money to train you, and it takes several months to get newcomers to a stage where they become useful. How much better if they can find someone who can hit the ground running!

Don't worry if your degree is not in English, media studies, politics or sociology. In fact, a less common qualification such as medicine, architecture, business studies or horticulture (and especially science-related) can be a real benefit. Websites and the magazine industry are so diverse that they are always on the

lookout for those who can offer specialist skills, especially in the sciences. In fact, it's probably easier for such people to find jobs.

What can give me an edge?

Determination to be a journalist

This is probably our prime consideration. Journalism is one of the best jobs you can have, where you wake up and look forward to going to work. Can your friends who are bankers, accountants, teachers and civil servants say the same thing?

We need to feel your career choice is not a whim, but a carefully considered move. Does your CV give evidence of this? We have often rejected people who have gone away, filled in the vital gaps in their CV, reapplied and won a place. That's determination.

Each year, we interview people who are already working on a magazine, newspaper or in PR, but see no chance of developing or learning the essential skills in their present job. To give up a paid position to take the course, with no guarantee of a job afterwards, shows the determination we seek.

A degree helps, but it's not essential

We don't insist on it, but it gives you an edge. It proves you can work hard against tight deadlines, research information and assimilate complicated information.

The range of degrees useful in journalism is much wider than you might think. Qualifications in English or media studies are not essential.

A degree in a less obvious subject such as computing, business studies, the sciences, architecture or sports management is a real bonus. It's usually much easier for people with these specialisms to find jobs.

Languages can prove useful

One person secured her job on an international political title because she spoke four languages fluently. Several publishers with international magazines need people who have the journalism skills and are fluent in at least one other language. One person, now editor of a wine website, travels the world drinking the best wines because he spoke French and Italian as well as having the journalism skills.

Provide the evidence

One of the best ways is to supply cuttings. This may be from a college newspaper, though we're even more impressed by cuttings from commercial newspapers or magazines. Radio tapes and website work are equally good.

We also like the fact that you have actually sent news stories or features to newspapers or magazines (not poetry or letters, please). It doesn't matter if they've been rejected. It proves that you really want to be a journalist.

TIP: Try your local library for a copy of Benn's Media Directory or Willings. Both list every newspaper and magazine in the country. They will give you ideas for places where you can gain work experience. For those in outlying areas, time on your local newspaper or radio station is just as acceptable.

Gain some work experience

Preferably, this should be on a commercial (rather than a college) magazine, website, newspaper or radio station. If you live in Aberdeen or Falmouth, Bangor or Lowestoft, you won't find many magazines in your area, so you'll probably have to settle for work experience on a local newspaper. That's all right. But if you can add magazine or website experience, do so.

You will probably be tempted to apply to publications that you see on news-stands, such as Glamour, Vogue, New Musical Express, Wanderlust, Cosmopolitan, FHM, Q, Arena or Heat. All these magazines have an efficient system of handling work experience applications. Unfortunately, it will have very little to do with journalism.

You will make coffee, photocopy and fetch sandwiches for the staff, maybe even get to tidy the fashion cupboard. If you're really lucky, you might do some research, or even write a caption or two. But you will rarely do anything very useful. Some people are even put off journalism by such experiences.

We advise you to apply for work experience on smaller publications, perhaps where you have a specialist knowledge. Interested in tennis? What about Ace magazine? Your parents are antique dealers? Then think about Antiques Trade Gazette. Keen on charity work? Third Sector is a very strong title. Enjoy horse riding? Then why not try for a placement on Horse & Hound?

On all these titles, another pair of hands usually means they won't leave you sitting around the office, but get you to write stories that will appear in print. That's much better than saying you know how to order the editor's sandwiches.

Show that you have a command of English

(Hence the 450-word interview we ask you to write as part of your application.) We expect your application to be without spelling, grammar or punctuation mistakes. You would be astonished how many contain basic mistakes. Get someone else to check it!

Signs that you are a team player will help

Working in journalism means working as part of a team. If your hobbies are playing postal chess, watching videos and surfing the net, this doesn't exactly sell you as someone who will fit in well as part of a team. Journalism is all about relating to people. You need to be able to talk to directors or doormen and gain their trust.

Are you a member of any clubs? Do you help at the local hospital? Things like this show you can get on with a wide range of people.

Can you work under pressure?

If doing more than one thing at a time horrifies you, then journalism isn't the right choice of career. It often demands doing several things at once, and achieving tight deadlines that sometimes seem unreasonable. Those who believe that magazine journalism gives them more time for a news story or a feature are in for a nasty shock!

Read what previous people have said about the course. If you're not prepared to put your social life on hold for nine weeks, don't bother applying. We'll work you very hard – but you'll reap the benefits.

Clock-watchers, keep away.

Journalism is not a neat 9-5 job. Stories don't always break at the times we would like, deadlines don't always fit in neatly with our social lives. We look for people who are adaptable and don't watch the clock, who don't worry because they are still in the office at 7pm. Press day can mean working until 10pm. You may have to write a story from home, late at night, or telephone people in the US, Australia or the Far East for a quote. Time zones mean you can't do that in "normal" working hours. And if you expect to be paid overtime, forget it! Half the fun of the job is its unpredictability.

Know what's going on in the world.

Journalists should have curiosity and a knowledge of current affairs. If you are not reading a daily newspaper, start right now. We'll give you a general knowledge test when you come for interview. Do you know who the Foreign Secretary is? The circulation of your favourite magazine? Which new countries are joining the EU? Knowing what's going on in the world is vital for any journalist.

TIP: When you're assessing a course, make sure that you will have your own computer to work on, not one that you will have to share.

Why do PMA graduates always do so well?

There are two main reasons why people who have taken our course have such a high success rate.

1. PMA's high reputation in the industry

We have been running specialist, intensive workshops for more than 25 years, supplying training to all levels of the magazine industry and PR. This is our core work.

We train everyone from editorial assistants to editors and publishers. Much of our business is at senior or advanced level, and there is scarcely a medium or large publisher in the country that hasn't used PMA's training at some time. Our short-course programme of workshops is the largest in Europe.

PMA also undertakes in-house training for many of the major publishing houses. Even very large publishers, which have their own in-house training facilities, often come to PMA for more specialist workshops. This means that we know the magazines and websites, and we know the publishing houses. Over a year, hundreds of magazine journalists will attend workshops at our training centre.

Publications often phone us when they have vacancies, and ask if we have anyone who is suitable. If there's someone who's just finished our postgraduate course, you can guess whom we recommend.

2. The quality of our training

Go on any other journalism course and you will not get such high-quality tutors. This isn't sales talk. Colleges and residential courses generally have one or two full-time tutors, with the occasional "visiting lecturer". Those people are, to all intents and purposes, teachers, not journalists. All our tutors are working journalists.

We use up to 10 on this course to give you the benefits of their experience. They pass on skills from their specialist area, so a feature writer for, say, *Cosmopolitan* may tell you about feature writing; a chief sub-editor from *The Sun* may help you with headline writing skills; the former editor of *Time Out* may teach you how to interview. They include people such as:

Sally Adams, whose jobs have included deputy editor on *She* and assistant editor on *Family Circle*;

Keith Elliott, weekly sports columnist for *The Independent* on Sunday;

Roberta Cohen, launched a range of business magazines from *Marketing Week* to *Leisure Week*.

Ann Bird, former executive features editor for the *Daily Express*;

Andy Jones, chief sub-editor on *The Sun*;

Andy Bull, former deputy editor of the *Daily*

Express, and the man who helped to set up AOL in the UK

Our tutors are not professional lecturers. But this course isn't about lecturing; it's teaching the practical skills that enable you to handle every situation you will encounter day-to-day in a normal magazine office or website. Who would you rather have to teach you the essential skills: a teacher, someone who does some part-time journalism, or a senior journalist doing the job at a high level every day?

Forget everything you did at university. We don't talk at you. We don't give you lectures. We talk with you about the principles of, say, covering a press conference, and then we go out and do it. You find real stories, not pretend ones.

If you want to learn about the essentials of today's magazine journalism, rather than what was happening 20 years ago, this is the course you need.

What will I learn?

Writing is only one part of the editorial process. Our course covers news and feature writing, interviewing, sub-editing, headline writing, proof-reading, design and media law. Most magazines and websites are looking for generalists, people who can turn their hand to any part of the editorial process, rather than those who just want to write features.

To reinforce these skills, you will produce a magazine from scratch. This means finding news and features, then interviewing, writing stories and laying out the pages. Our last four magazines have all won awards.

We also teach Teeline, the easiest-learnt shorthand



for journalists. You should achieve a speed that makes note-taking far simpler. We expect everyone to reach 60 words per minute. Nancy Rowntree, who attended the summer 2006 course, achieved a word-perfect 110wpm.

Among other areas we cover are:

Production;

Quark XPress, Adobe InDesign and Photoshop;

Writing for the web;

Surviving as a freelance.

There are seminars with guest speakers to give you a wider view of the industry.

We review your progress with formal tutorials fortnightly, but everything you write, edit or design is assessed. You get personal treatment, because we only run the course

with small groups. On other courses, you will find as many as 60 people. You might reasonably question how much personal tuition you will get with such numbers.

You must complete every module of the course to our satisfaction (we use an experienced external editor to ensure impartiality here) if you are to receive the PMA Diploma on the final day.

Just one man's opinion

After every course, we ask all those who have taken it to complete a detailed questionnaire.

This is what Peter Crush, who is now working for Haymarket Publishing, wrote in his assessment:

"I'm in the lucky position of writing this and already having a job. I've already been taken to the Hilton, I'm going to Jersey next month to cover a conference, and in November I'm off to Frankfurt. I truly believe that I will owe the rest of my life to having been on the PMA course. I never had a moment when I thought: 'What am I doing here?' Change nothing."

Where do people get their first jobs?

Over the years, people taking our nine-week course have secured first jobs on a wide range of titles. They include Angling Times; Architects' Journal; Cage & Aviary Birds; Cambridge Evening News; Channel 4.com; Chat; Diver; FHM; Girl About Town; Hayters Teamwork; Horticulture Week; Jewish Chronicle; The Lady; Lloyd's List; Marketing; Middle East Economic Digest; PR Week; Press Gazette; The Press Association; Raw!; Radio Times; Real; Screen International; Sky Sports; Total Style; World Entertainment Network News; Woman's Weekly and even H&E Naturist!

.....
● **Here's a list of where people from the course that finished in September have secured their first jobs.**

Three had jobs before the course ended; all but one had a job within a month of the course ending, and he had turned down a job on an athletics magazine because it meant moving out of London.

Nancy Rowntree	reporter, Children Now
Holly Sutton	reporter, Regeneration & Renewal
Emily Seares	reporter, Retail Week
Rory Kinsella	reporter, Channel 4.com
Claire Stacey	sub-editor, The Grocer
Amy Golding	reporter, Printing World
Gemma Sharkey	reporter, Cycling Weekly
Vivien Wilson	reporter, Planning
Krista Wilkinson	assistant editor, John Lewis
Jenny Hoffbrand	reporter, Precision Marketing
Michael Stoneman	freelance subbing
Tom Vaughan	feature writer, Caterer & Hotelkeeper
Vibeka Mair	reporter, Utility Week

.....

Comments from winter 2007 graduates

"Whatever you expect before you arrive — don't expect to understand how challenging and rewarding it can be. You have to see it before you can believe it. I would recommend it to anyone."
Naoise Ryan

"It is expensive but I doubt I would have learned more on a longer or cheaper course."
Katy Moore

"Rewarding, shattering, exhausting, intense."
Timoth Sheahan

"I would recommend it. It gives a really good grounding, and gives a good career start."
Anna Jefferys

Some comments from previous courses

"Extremely valuable practical experience. I learnt a great deal, made new friends and got a job." Daniel Lester

"Tutors were always fun and very helpful with clear explanations and helpful criticism. It was a fun, but tiring nine weeks. I've met some great people and learnt a lot. It was a rewarding course."
Josh Brooks

"A good experience — I'd do it again! I've made some good friends and feel fully prepared for a journalism job." Jamie Carpenter

"Intense, inspiring, informative. I have learned an enormous amount and I am a changed person! I would definitely recommend the course to others. Thank you!"
Nancy Rowntree

TIP: Do your research. There are so many courses around these days, claiming to offer a magic route into a journalism job. Ask if you can talk to people from previous years, especially those who have just finished. Then ask those previous delegates if they felt truly equipped to handle any starter job in the industry, and how quickly they got full-time jobs. Find out about the tutors. Are they journalists who are still working at the highest level, or people who have retired from the industry? If you are unable to get a positive answer to all your questions, steer well clear.

...more comments

“Contacts were superlative.”
Job two weeks before course ended

“Brilliant fun and a terrific grounding for a job in journalism.”

“It was nine weeks of blood and sweat, but all worth it. I couldn't have got my job without the course.”
Job within one month of course finishing

“I came on the course to get a job at the end of it, and got one the Monday after it finished. I can't believe it! Lots of encouragement all the way along the line.”
Job two days after the course finished

“It was quite a step to give up an existing job, but I wasn't learning anything or going anywhere, and I didn't have the confidence to apply for jobs I really wanted. Your course gave me this confidence, and your contacts got me the job I'm in now. Brilliant fun, great teaching and a real lesson that I had a great deal to learn. I'm so glad I did it.”
Job within a month on a weekly magazine

“Having spent two years trying to break into journalism. I landed a job on a well-respected consumer magazine in the last week of my course. At last I am on the road to my dream career as a journalist, and if it hadn't have been for PMA, then I would be stuck in a job I hated. I learnt more in nine weeks than I ever thought possible. It was bloody hard work and I was totally exhausted by the end, but it was well worth it. I cannot recommend the course highly enough.”
Job before the end of the course

How much does it cost?

For the fifth consecutive year, the price remains unchanged. It costs £3,290 (including 17.5% VAT, a burden that we unfortunately have to charge).

It's a hefty chunk of money, especially if you've just left university with a bag of debts. You can get cheaper courses – but can they offer you the same care and service, the same results?

If you think the course is expensive, read the comments of previous delegates.

Many had just left university, some were unemployed or had given up a well-paid job to take a leap into the unknown.

The money was a huge commitment. But they got jobs — and thought it was excellent value for money. We even try to ensure you are equipped to survive as a freelance for a while, and help you find out about jobs that are not advertised to other journalism job-seekers.

No other course makes the same effort when the course is over. We can't make editors employ

you, but we can tell you where jobs are going, and in many cases, put in a word for you. Even years later, previous delegates who are looking to change jobs will telephone us for advice. Best of all, talk to the editors of magazines, or to our previous delegates, and ask them which course they would advise. If you really want to be a journalist and don't mind working hard to achieve it, there's nothing to match this course.

We know that this is a big chunk of money to find. But we try to help wherever we can. If you find a good story during the course, we'll help you sell it to a newspaper or magazine.

If you have to move down to London, we'll contact people from previous courses and see if they have a room free in their flat.

There are no hidden extras in our course fee. You don't pay for daily newspapers, tea and coffee, telephones, broadband or photocopying. Furthermore, we give you access to our Media Centre facilities to update your CV, talk to tutors or simply to use the reference facilities for up to two months after the course finishes.

On the plus side, you are very likely to be able to get a Career Development Loan from any of the following banks for the course fee and expenses while living in London.

- Barclays
- Royal Bank of Scotland
- Co-operative Bank

You don't have to be an account holder at the bank either. Such a loan (find out more information from www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/cdl) means the government pays the interest on your loan while you're learning and for up to one month afterwards.

TIP: It's always worth approaching your local education authority about possible grants. There are sometimes funds or charitable trusts that can defer some of your costs. Take a look through the Directory of Grant-Making Trusts in your local library.

Frequently asked questions

Who is PMA Training?
PMA is the oldest and largest independent editorial training company in Europe. It has been training journalists for more than 25 years, and has more than 100 tutors on its books. Its main work is short workshops on all aspects of communications skills training, particularly journalism and PR. It runs hundreds of courses a year, mostly at its Centre for Media Excellence in central London.

Many magazine and newspaper groups, a large number of public companies and government

departments attend our short courses. These run from one to three days and cover everything from basic writing skills to workshops for publishers and editors. PMA organises in-house training for many of the country's leading publishing groups such as Emap, Euromoney, Informa Group and Haymarket.

PMA trains journalists all over the world, from Kenya to the US, from Russia to Singapore. Our daily contacts with editors and publishers enable us to hear about jobs that are never advertised.

The company's chairman is Keith Elliott, a journalist and magazine editor. He writes a weekly sports column for The Independent on Sunday, and edits his own magazine, Classic Angling.

All PMA tutors are working in their industry, whether journalism, PR, broadcasting, production, marketing or online, and often at a very senior level.

What facilities do you offer?

You get the daily newspapers every day. Coffee and tea are free. We supply a microwave and a fridge so you can bring in or cook your own lunch.

Photocopying is free, and everyone has their own computer. Each one is connected to the internet with broadband, and everyone gets Skype.

I want to be a feature-writer

Specialist feature-writing jobs are quite rare, and the ones on the glamorous magazines such as Cosmopolitan, Marie Claire, FHM and Loaded are even more so. Nearly all the latter work is increasingly carried out not by staff people, but by highly experienced freelancers.

It's not impossible to leave the course and find a job that is pure feature-writing (one person did so from the summer 2006 course) but such jobs are uncommon. The journalist most valuable to today's magazines is an all-rounder (the term is multi-skilled).

This means that at a starter level, websites and magazine editors don't want someone who just wants to write features or news.

Nearly all of them are looking for all-rounders. They want you to be able to edit an article, write a headline, proof-read text, design a page and put it onto a website.

Our course reflects the importance of these all-round skills — enhancing your prospects of a full-time job.

Can you guarantee me a job?

Nobody can. Any course that claims to do so is not telling the truth. But we have a tremendous record. Less than eight weeks after completing the summer 2006 course, 11 of the 12 who graduated had full-time jobs, and the only one outstanding had turned down a job because he didn't want to move out of London. Three had jobs even before the course ended. Almost all of these came about as a result of our contacts or influence.

You may have tried writing for jobs advertised in The Guardian. Your chances are very low. Most jobs are

rarely or never advertised. You have to know who is looking for staff. We hear of many jobs because our day-to-day work is training journalists from the magazine industry and websites at all levels, right up to publishers and editors. We pass this information on. Where we have strong contacts, we'll put in a word for you too.

Can I become a freelance afterwards?

No reason why not. The trouble is that freelance work comes from contacts. You acquire contacts from working on a publication and covering an industry or an area for a couple of years. It can be done. But when you leave the course, you have no track record. Editors don't know who you are. They would rather give freelance work to a safe pair of hands with a proven track record, than a newcomer who only has a few cuttings to show.

Editors tend not to take risks, however enthusiastic you are. They have learnt the hard way that it all too often ends up costing them money.

We would expect most people from our course to earn some money by freelancing after the course, but only a very few will make enough to live comfortably on it.

For those with more general skills, especially those who are desperate to work on music or film magazines, we would advise against trying to survive as a freelance until you have built up enough contacts — not just with the industry, but with editors too.

What help do I get after the course?

Unlike all other courses, ours doesn't finish when you walk out on the final day. We want you to find a job, and we do our best to make this happen.

For example, we email you with any vacancies we hear about. Our main work is one or two-day workshops, and we ask people who attend those courses if they know of any vacancies. We ask editors to let us know about any jobs that may be coming up that could be suitable for you.

Our email newsletter, which goes to thousands of senior people in the industry, will advertise your skills as well. Editors like this system. It costs them nothing in recruitment, beyond one phone call.

If you're applying for a position, we may know the editor. If so, we'll contact them and put in a word for you.

Our media centre is open for you to use the facilities (reference books, computers, the internet) for several weeks afterwards. It's all free.

We'll also look at stories you've written after the course has finished, and show you ways to improve them.

We will supply you with references. These are much more relevant for a journalism job than your tutor at university or a personal friend.

We'll look through your CV (we keep them on record if someone phones about a possible vacancy), and help you to update them, or make them relevant to the job that you're applying for.

We're always available for career advice, sometimes even warning you about jobs to avoid. (An editorial assistant position might be the first rung on the journalism ladder, or just a secretarial job.)

You can even phone us years later, and we'll help with advice and contacts. We are still in touch with many people who took the course 10 years ago. Sometimes they too want career advice. They get it, for nothing. Sometimes their magazine has a vacancy for a staff writer or sub, and they are happy to let us know about it first.

Does grammar really matter these days?

Ask any editor! Grammar, spelling and punctuation are not optional extras; they are crucial if you want to enter an industry that specialises in words.

If you never learnt grammar at school, or you've forgotten it all, now's the time to bring it up to date. We recommend that you read *English for Journalists* by Wynford Hicks (published by Routledge), and *Troublesome Words* (Penguin) by Bill Bryson (that's right, the one who writes travel books).

We do not have time to teach remedial grammar. We expect you to have a reasonable standard, and give you a test at interview. Be warned!

How do I know how I'm doing?

You will have regular tutorials throughout the course to monitor your progress. But unlike a college course, where you hand in exercises for marking, you get constant assessment of your work by every course tutor.

Because there are only 12 people in a group, we can give personal attention to each person. You will certainly know if something you're writing is going off course long before you complete it.

We don't give marks out of 10. Journalism's not like that. Our prime consideration is: would this story be acceptable for publication?

Do I have to pass an exam at the end?

Not as such. In the final week, there are tests for certain things such as media law, shorthand, grammar and industry knowledge for which you must achieve a robust pass mark. But throughout the course, your progress is monitored and it is reviewed at regular meetings with your course tutor (usually, a formal tutorial lasting about 45 minutes every two weeks). If you are not achieving the standard that we expect, we will tell you.

This includes hitting deadlines. Working with you (we want you to pass, not fail!) we give extra work in areas where you are having problems. You have to reach an acceptable standard in every aspect of the course, from news-writing and sub-editing to design and interviewing, to receive the final-day PMA Diploma. Merely taking the course doesn't mean you automatically gain this. In exceptional cases, we may award distinctions.

To ensure objectivity, your work is also reviewed by an

external assessor. This is an experienced editor who will look at the stories you have written, the editing you have done and the layouts you have produced, to assess whether it is of an acceptable standard.

TIP: It's not always the glamorous-sounding titles that offer the best prospects. Smaller magazines generally need someone who can turn their hand to anything. This gives you a greater range of work, and you will probably progress much faster by working in a group with several small magazines rather than a couple of big ones. If you want to travel, look out for publications with the word "International" in their title.

TIP: Acquiring online skills could prove very useful. What happened to fledgling dotcom businesses a couple of years ago was the birth of an industry, not the death of it. Learn about putting a website together, and give yourself an edge.

What does a typical day comprise?

We try to replicate life in a magazine office as closely as possible, so typical days are rare! But to give a flavour of what happens, you might have a newspaper test. (Are you reading the daily papers regularly?)

Then we might write a couple of news stories from the nationals, targeting them for, say, a health title. Time for a quick coffee, then it's 90 minutes' Teeline.

This might be followed by the feature editor of a large publication talking about their job. You might be asked to take notes, and write a 400-word feature about that person's job.

There may be an exhibition at the nearby Business Design Centre. Hungry? Grab a sandwich on the way! You will go there as a group, but be left to your own devices to find two stories, come back and write them for two differing markets by 3.30pm.

While you were writing that story, the tutor would be looking at what you were doing, talking with you and suggesting improvements. Then the tutor might review what you had done right and wrong, then talk about, say, the principles of covering an exhibition.

It's probably about 6pm, but your day isn't over. The tutor tells you about a press conference at the Institute of Directors at 7.30pm from which she wants a 300-word news story by 9am tomorrow, adding: "Oh, and by the way, you're not invited. Have a nice evening."

Everyone taking the course will have to put their social life on hold. We will work you at weekends and evenings. **Be warned!**

Am I too old?

Probably not. We take people of up to 40 who want to change careers, and who are determined and focused about getting into journalism. But this course is geared to getting a first job in journalism, and it's very hard to secure a starter job for someone over 40. You'll have to convince us that your motives are right, that you'll fit in with others, that you're really serious about changing careers and working for less money.

Those on the course will typically range from people who have just left university to a few people who are over 30. But because older people have more experience of life, we expect more from them, and we need to ensure that they are realistic about what they will be capable of doing after the course has finished.

They also have to consider how they will feel, having their work altered by someone who could be 10 years younger.

Having experience of a particular area, be it sales, computing or railways, and combining it with the skills you acquire on this course, will enhance your chances of gaining a job in that area. But it's very unlikely to result in an editor's job. That comes with industry experience. You also need to consider if you can survive on a first-job salary. On magazines and websites, it's not as bad as what you will earn in newspapers or local radio, but if you've been used to earning over £35,000, could you really survive on half that amount, especially if you have a family?

I'm not British. Does that matter?

Not at all. We have taken people from Canada, Israel, the US, Australia, Germany, New Zealand and Colombia. But taking this course is no guarantee that you will be able to find a job on a British magazine. Work permits can be very tricky to obtain. It's not impossible, but it involves a fair bit of bureaucracy. You must speak and write English perfectly if it is not your first language.

If I have the money, do I get a place?

No. We take the best 12 people who apply. It's on ability and suitability, rather than if you can afford it. You will have to attend an interview in London, which will last about 45 minutes. You will also have to take a general knowledge and a grammar test at the same time. If it's one of the official interview days, someone from a previous course will be on hand to answer your questions. You will also have the chance to look at the facilities and the rooms where the course takes place.

What happens about work experience?

You arrange this yourself, with our help. The temptation is to try for the glamorous music, film or travel magazines. If you're determined to go there, we will help all we can, but it's extremely unlikely that there will be a job at such places.

We advise you to go somewhere with a possible job, or a group where a job could arise. Your chances of this at Heat or Glamour are pretty low, especially as they rarely take beginners (unless you're the editor's

daughter).

Furthermore, such magazines find it very hard to distinguish between work experience applicants who can make a valuable contribution like you, and those who have come along to see what life in a real magazine is like.

All too often, such publications give you little that's worthwhile to do. We encourage you to try less glamorous-sounding titles, but ones that will offer a range of work and give you plenty of cuttings, and where there may be the chance of a job.

We keep a database of previous placements. You can read through what previous graduates have said about magazines and websites, good and bad.

I don't live in London. Can you help?

Several people who take the course will be living in London for the first time. We can't actually find properties for you, but we contact people who have attended the course in previous years to see if they have vacancies in their flats or houses. Then we put those who have not found somewhere in touch with each other, so they can get a house or flat together.

You need to live within 45 minutes of our Media Centre, because you will often be starting early and finishing late.

Furthermore, most magazine jobs are in and around London, so it prepares you for what will happen when the course finishes.

I'm disabled. Can I apply?

Of course. If you're one of the best 12 that we interview, then you're on.

If I start on a small, specialist title, won't I get stuck there?

Not at all. The toughest thing in journalism is getting that first job. Once you're through the door, all the other doors open up. Someone from our course started on a specialist computer magazine, went to BB Gardeners' World then moved to She. There are no barriers between switching from business to consumer titles, or moving to the national press.

Will Drew, editor of Arena and a former PMA graduate, says that when he is interviewing for a job, he is always far more impressed by someone who has spent a year or 18 months on a trade title than someone who shows him a couple of reviews on non-famous bands from Dazed and Confused.

Typically, expect to stay 12-18 months in your first job. If you get promoted and you're doing more challenging work, there's nothing wrong with staying on that first magazine. Many do, and become editor.

Most people are surprised about the variety they get from working on specialist titles. As one of our recent graduates said: "It's much more challenging asking Sir Richard Branson or the head of Google some penetrating questions, rather than writing features on

12 different ways to put on lipstick."

A checklist for you

Take this with you when you're researching courses:

Do I get my own computer to work on?

Some courses share computers.

What software do you use?

A core writing program like Word is essential. You should expect to have a design program such as Quark XPress, though the industry is generally switching to Adobe Indesign now.

How frequently will I have personal tutorials? How long do they last?

You should expect these to be frequent. How else will you know how you're doing? And they should allow plenty of time for you to discuss problem areas in depth.

What extras aren't included in the price?

Some courses will charge you for tea and coffee, even photocopying. Many make you pay for newspapers.

Who will be teaching me?

You should have a course tutor to ensure continuity. Equally, you need to worry if that person is going to teach you everything. We've been teaching journalists for more than 25 years, and we still haven't found the tutor who can teach every aspect of the job brilliantly. Is the course tutor a working journalist? What was the last thing they had published? If it was 10 years ago, you're going to get 1990s teaching.

Who are the other tutors?

Once again, they should be working journalists, and doing so at a high level, rather than someone who has spent a couple of years on the Bicester Bugle. Get their names, and check them out!

How many people on the course?

We've heard of journalism courses taking as many as 67 people. How much personal attention do you expect from that?

Is it approved?

Don't even consider a course that is not approved by the Periodicals Training Council, the magazine industry's watchdog. The National Council for the Training of Journalists, whose specialism is newspapers, approves some magazine courses but its schedule is not what magazine and website editors want. (It includes reporting local councils, very little sub-editing or features.)

How quickly do people get jobs afterwards?

Many courses will boast that everyone gets a job. For a start, don't trust those that promise you a job. Nobody can. Some count someone who's got some freelance work writing a feature, or a week's subbing as a job. It isn't. Only full-time jobs should be included unless someone is clearly making a reasonable living as a freelance.

Where are those jobs?

Don't trust claims about lots of students getting jobs on the "glam" titles such as Heat, Glamour, New Musical Express or The Economist. These titles take very few beginners. First jobs are generally on less glossy titles, where you learn the trade. You can then switch in the direction you would like to head.

Are they paid jobs?

Another little trap for the unwary. Plenty of jobs going for people who don't want to be paid. Some titles (we won't name them here) will keep you on as long as you're mug enough to work there for nothing. But they almost certainly won't give you a paid job.

Do you count freelancing as a job?

They shouldn't, unless the person is earning enough from it for the income to more than match a paid job. Remember, if you freelance, you have to put away money for tax and national insurance, and there are periods when you won't find any work (typically, Christmas and Easter).

What help do I get when the course is over?

You should at least be able to speak to your course tutor and get advice.

Can I talk to others who have taken the course over the past year?

Best of all, ask for the names and email addresses of everyone who took the previous course. If you can't get it, have some concerns. Don't make a decision until you've talked to at least two previous graduates.

What magazine or website do you produce as part of the course? Can I look at it?

All too many look like student magazines. The magazines that your course produces should look like a professional publication, rather than kids with a computer having some fun. Could you take that magazine with you to an interview and use it as part of your CV? If you've got doubts, then have doubts about the course's worth.

Need more advice?

If there's anything else you'd like to know, email Melanie Gilbert on

postgraduate@pma-group.com

or call: 01480 300 653

or visit: www.becomeajournalist.co.uk