

# Studying Journalism in Australia

So You Want to Be a Journalist · By Simon Townsend · 3 min read

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Simon did not go to university. He went to *The Gosford Express* at sixteen, and from there to the Sun, the Weekend Australian, A Current Affair, and the rest of a long working career. He was quick to point out that some of the best Australian journalists he knew had never been near a journalism school.

He was also quick to point out that the trade had changed, and that for a young person starting out in 2026 the question was not whether to study, but where, and how to make the most of it.

This is a practical guide to journalism study in Australia. It covers the major universities, the industry programs, the cadetships, and the things a degree does and does not give you.

## Where to study

Sydney: University of Sydney, UTS, UNSW, Macquarie. UTS has the strongest undergraduate program in the city, with good connections to the ABC, News, Nine and independent outlets. Sydney Uni's Master of Media Practice is well-regarded for career-changers.

Melbourne: Monash, RMIT, Melbourne. RMIT's journalism program is the most established and produces many Fairfax and ABC staffers. Monash has a strong postgraduate stream. Melbourne runs its Masters of Journalism as a two-year combined program.

Brisbane: Queensland University of Technology (QUT), Griffith, University of Queensland. QUT has the oldest and largest journalism program in Queensland. Griffith is newer but growing.

Adelaide, Perth, Canberra: University of South Australia, Murdoch, Curtin, ANU. Smaller programs, often with strong regional work placements.

Regional: Charles Sturt University at Bathurst runs one of the longest-established journalism programs in the country. Students produce *The Prindle*, the university's working newsroom, and graduates fan out to regional papers and the ABC across Australia. If you want to train in the rural journalism tradition, Charles Sturt is the destination.

## What a journalism degree actually teaches

The mechanics of news writing. Intro, nut graf, inverted pyramid.

Media law. Defamation, suppression orders, contempt of court. This is the single most valuable block of material a journalism school teaches, and it is hard to pick up on the job.

Ethics. The MEAA Code of Ethics. Case studies in conflict of interest. Source protection.

Production. Subediting, headline writing, layout, captioning. Broadcast scripting and editing. Podcasting.

Digital. SEO, CMSes, social media, analytics, and increasingly data journalism.

Industry placement. Most Australian journalism programs include a mandatory internship. This is where the real learning happens. A placement at the ABC or a metropolitan newspaper is worth more than any classroom unit.

## **What a degree does not teach**

How to get a story out of someone who does not want to tell it.

How to survive a newsroom politically.

How to pitch.

How to deal with the emotional pressure of repeated deadlines.

How to run a freelance business.

The only way to learn those is in the job. A good program admits as much and tries to bridge the gap with industry mentors and real newsroom time.

## **Cadetships and graduate programs**

ABC. The ABC runs an annual graduate program for journalists, producers, and digital specialists.

Competitive. Highly regarded. The ABC also runs a regional cadetship program specifically for young journalists willing to work outside the capitals.

News Corp. Runs graduate and cadet programs across its metropolitan papers and national titles. Still a major entry point into daily journalism.

Nine/Fairfax. Graduate programs run by the combined group at the SMH, The Age, the AFR, and associated mastheads.

The Guardian Australia. Occasional intern intake.

Seven, Ten, SBS. Graduate and cadet programs in broadcast journalism.

Country Press Australia and rural cadetships. The best-kept secret in Australian journalism. A two-year cadetship at a regional daily will teach you more than a metropolitan graduate program, because you will be covering everything and owning your bylines from day one.

## **Scholarships**

The Walkley Foundation runs a number of scholarships, including the Our Watch scholarship for reporting on violence against women, and country-specific reporting scholarships. Check the current offerings at [walkleys.com](http://walkleys.com).

The MEAA offers member-only training, workshops and some bursaries.

Many universities run their own journalism scholarships for students from under-represented backgrounds, rural areas, or First Nations communities. Ask the program administrator.

## **A non-traditional route**

If you cannot afford university or do not want to study full-time, the modern alternative is to build a body of work independently. A regular Substack or self-run blog, freelance commissions at online publications, volunteering at a community or student newspaper, creating a podcast. By your mid-twenties you can have a clippings file of 50 published pieces without ever setting foot in a university tutorial.

Several of the best-known young Australian journalists of the last decade took this path. Employers hire on the clippings, not the degree.

## **Simon's advice to students**

Enrol if you want to. It will not hurt you. It will expose you to media law and ethics, which you will need.

Do the placement seriously. A good placement outweighs your best subject.

Start reporting immediately. Write for the student paper. Pitch to small online publications. Build clippings.

Keep a notebook. Every day.

Read the papers. All of them. Know the voice of each one by the end of your first semester.

When you graduate, do not wait for an editor to come to you. Go to them.

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Reprinted from The Wonderful World of Journalism. Written in the spirit of Simon Townsend's journalism craft advice. Visit [simontownsendjournalist.com](http://simontownsendjournalist.com) for the full archive.