

Journalist interview questions

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What to expect

Interviews for journalist roles test writing samples and editorial judgement as much as your resume. Expect questions about your reporting process, how you handle pressure and ethical grey areas, and practical checks on your research and writing skills.

- **Behavioural:** Questions about past reporting experience, framed around specific stories you've worked on.
- **Scenario and ethical judgement:** Hypotheticals testing how you'd handle a legal risk, a pushy source or a competing story under time pressure.
- **Process:** Questions about how you research, verify facts and structure a story from tip to publication.
- **Practical skills test:** A writing sample, mock pitch or on-the-spot edit done under a set time limit.
- **Client and source-facing:** Questions about building trust with sources and managing relationships with editors and interview subjects.

Most processes start with a review of your clips and beat experience, then move to a panel or editor interview covering judgement and process questions. Many newsrooms also set a practical task, such as a writing test, a mock pitch or an on-the-spot edit under time pressure, before making an offer.

1. Tell me about a story where you had to verify a claim that turned out to be false before publication.

Why they ask

Tests whether you follow proper verification steps and are willing to hold a story rather than run with something unconfirmed.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: describe the situation and the claim, the verification steps you took, the action you took when it didn't check out, and the result for the story and your standing with the editor.

Example answer

"A source told me a local business had lost its licence over a safety breach. Before running it I checked the regulator's public register, which showed the licence was still active, and called the regulator directly to confirm. The claim didn't hold up, so I held the story and instead reported on the underlying safety complaint with attribution to named sources. My editor backed the decision, and the story ran a day later with facts that stood up to scrutiny."

2. How do you approach building trust with a source who is reluctant to speak on record?

Why they ask

Sources are central to the research and interviewing work of the role, and reluctant sources are common in sensitive stories.

How to structure your answer

Walk through your approach step by step: how you make first contact, how you explain your process, and how you handle a request for anonymity or off-record information.

Example answer

"I start by being upfront about what I'm working on and how their information would be used. If someone's hesitant, I ask what specifically worries them, whether that's their name being attached or

how a quote might be framed, and address it directly rather than pushing past it. I've had sources agree to go on record once they understood I'd checked the facts independently and wasn't relying on them alone, and I've also honoured background arrangements when that was the only way to get accurate information into a story."

3. A competitor breaks a story similar to one you're working on. How do you decide whether to run with what you have or hold for more verification?

Why they ask

Tests judgement under competitive pressure, a common scenario in newsrooms chasing breaking news.

How to structure your answer

Explain the decision criteria you'd weigh, then describe how you'd act and what you'd communicate to your editor.

Example answer

"I'd weigh how solid my own verification is against the risk of being scooped further. If I have two independent sources confirming the core fact, I'd talk to my editor about running a shorter version immediately and following with more detail once it's finished. If I only have one unconfirmed source, I'd rather be second with an accurate story than first with something that needs a correction."

4. Walk me through how you'd research and structure a story from tip to publication on a tight deadline.

Why they ask

Direct test of your day-to-day process and ability to work fast without cutting corners on accuracy.

How to structure your answer

Give a step-by-step walkthrough: how you assess the tip, who you contact first, how you structure the writing, and how you manage the deadline.

Example answer

"First I assess whether the tip is credible and worth the time. I identify the two or three people who can confirm or deny it and try to reach them in parallel rather than one after another. While waiting for callbacks I draft the background and context so the story only needs the new information slotted in. I write the lead last, once I know exactly what's confirmed, and file with time for the editor to review before the deadline."

5. Tell me about a time you had to write the same reporting for two different platforms.

Why they ask

Tests adaptability across formats, a routine part of working with editors and multimedia teams.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: describe the story, the two formats you needed to serve, the changes you made for each, and how the audience responded.

Example answer

"I covered a public transport fare increase for both the website and a social video script. The web version had the full detail with quotes from commuters and the transport authority. For the social clip I cut it down to the headline figure and one strong quote, written to work with captions rather than voiceover. The video version got picked up and shared more widely than the article alone, which showed me how much the platform shapes what actually lands."

6. This work is considered highly exposed to AI-assisted tools. How do you see AI fitting into your reporting workflow, and where do you draw the line?

Why they ask

Grounded in the high AI exposure rating for the role; interviewers want to know you can use these tools without compromising accuracy or original reporting.

How to structure your answer

Give a considered scenario answer: where you'd use the tool, where you wouldn't, and how you'd protect accuracy.

Example answer

"I'd use transcription tools like Otter.ai to speed up turning interviews into usable quotes, and I'm comfortable using data tools to spot patterns in a dataset before I start reporting. I wouldn't use AI to draft quotes, summarise a source's position without checking the original material, or write a story without my own verification, because the accuracy and the judgement calls have to stay mine."