

The Journalistic Wishlist: Exploring Reporters' Desired Skills Using Delphi Method

ODED JACKMAN

ZVI REICH¹

Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Israel

Research shows that journalists are expected to develop new skills in the innovative peripheries of journalism, such as data and multimedia journalism. However, the extent to which new skills are expected for its core activity, news reporting, remains disputed. This study aims to determine whether news reporters are expected to master new skills following a series of transformations in news environments. To allow ego-free and anonymous negotiations of reporters' desired skills, we organized a Delphi panel of news executives and experts. Findings show that reporters are expected to prioritize traditional skills: be knowledgeable about their beat, think critically about raw materials, and be swift but accurate. However, they are expected to utilize databases and prioritize story detection over storytelling. These findings raise opposing views regarding the survival strategy of news reporting in changing news environments: must reporting adopt brand new skill sets or rediscover traditional ones?

Keywords: journalistic skills, Delphi panel, expertise, news reporting, traditional skills, new skills

One of the most crucial factors behind the quality of news products and their capacity to inform citizens' decisions on public and private matters is journalists' skills and proficiencies (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014). These skills enable journalists to identify newsworthy stories, recruit sources, explore databases, use interview techniques, expose corruption, and construct coherent and attractive stories. With these skills, news reporters provide the "bread and butter" of journalism: "construct realities" and "maintain the institutional power of the media" (Hardt, 1995, p. 2), as well as its values and norms (Schudson, 1978).

Obviously, new skills are replete in journalism. So far, they have appeared mainly in new journalistic activities, including multimedia storytelling, data journalism, and social media editing (Bradshaw, 2017). However, the extent to which they infiltrate the traditional core of journalism, news reporting, remains unclear, hardly explored, and disputed between the two main camps of scholars.

Oded Jackman: odedja@post.bgu.ac.il

Zvi Reich: zreich@bgu.ac.il

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According to reformist scholars, who emphasize the transformative nature of the news environment, new skills are an integral component of journalism (Bro, Hansen, & Andersson, 2016). They are mandatory for the survival of news reporting since journalists are increasingly expected to perform new tasks: integrate information from different knowledge areas, enhance reasoning, contextualize reports, apply historical thinking, interpret and evaluate the issues at hand, and harness new technology to develop their networking skills (Fourie, 2005; Örnebring, 2016). New skills, according to this camp, will inoculate journalists against trends of de-skilling, following pressures of commercialization, rising audience participation (Örnebring, 2016) and increasing delegation of news assignments to algorithms (Schapals & Porlezza, 2020) and ordinary citizens (Darbo & Skjerdal, 2019).

According to the more traditionalist camp of scholars, the future of news reporting depends on its capacity to rediscover and maintain traditional skills. These scholars do not deny transformative changes, such as the acceleration of reporting cycles, but maintain that journalistic skills change and should change much slower (Singer, 2003). Traditional news reporting skills are maintained by enduring professional norms and practices of truth seeking (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014), change-resistant sourcing practices (Reich, 2014), and long-lasting structure and division of labor (Nerone & Barnhurst, 2003). Hence, traditional skills invite reporters to ignore noises and hypes and go "back to basics" (Drok, 2013, p. 145).

Research findings about the expected skills of reporters today are inconclusive. Most skill studies are either industry-employment-training oriented (Fahmy, 2008; Marta-Lazo, González-Aldea, & Herrero-Curiel, 2018; Pierce & Miller, 2007), based on classified ads that can miss more general "softer" and enduring skills, or new-technology oriented (Himma-Kadakas & Palmiste, 2019; Van Dalen, 2012; Wenger, Owens, & Thompson, 2014), acknowledging the technological debate over journalistic skills (Deuze, 1999; Ferrucci, 2018), yet overemphasizing recent skills, such as coding or multimedia. Others limit themselves to one particular news beat or one medium (Ketterer, McGuire, & Murray, 2014; Neidorf, 2008). Only a minority of studies focus on the wider social and democratic implications of skilled reporting (Örnebring, 2020; Örnebring & Mellado, 2018). Furthermore, most studies use surveys and content analysis of job postings (Örnebring, 2020), limiting themselves to the unilateral perspective of endogenous stakeholders, typically reporters, editors, and news directors (Ketterer et al., 2014; Örnebring & Mellado, 2018). These studies overlook exogenous stakeholders, such as academics, experts, journalism educators, and media critics, who might have unique insights and priorities about reporters' desired skills (Larrondo Ureta & Peña Fernández, 2018).

To narrow these theoretical and empirical gaps, this paper explores whether reporters' expected skills have been revolutionized following the transformative changes in news production and consumption or whether reporters are still expected to adhere to traditional skills despite these changes, contrary to the technology-oriented skill studies, which found an increasing demand for new skills, as detailed below.

To achieve this goal, we searched for a methodology that enabled ego-free discourse between endogenous stakeholders (currently employed editors-in-chief, desk editors, reporters, and commentators) and exogenous ones (journalism scholars, educators, and media critics, some of whom were former journalists). The chosen method, the Delphi panel, has scarcely been used in journalism studies and never in the specific context of journalistic skills. Delphi panels allow effective, anonymous, and structured discussions of challenging topics among individuals and groups, addressing consensual and nonconsensual

issues. Our panel included 31 experts, 20 endogenous and 11 exogenous, using three rounds of questions, as detailed below.

Theoretical Framework and Research Questions

Skill is one's ability to perform a mental or physical task proficiently—a trained practice (Sennett, 2008). Many skills begin as a "technical understanding [that] develops through the powers of imagination" (Sennett, 2008, p. 10) up to the point where the "knowledge how" to do something becomes tacit (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986, pp. 19–20). Skills are the building blocks of expertise, yet expertise is broader and more profound, involving capacities that can be precious for news reporters, such as identifying patterns unnoticed by lay people, detecting interconnections between phenomena, understanding causality, and mastering more than one way to achieve the same goal (Attewell, 1990).

While it is clear that new skills are expected in specific innovative areas of journalism, such as data and multimedia journalism, the extent to which they infiltrate the core activity of news reporting remains unclear. If new skills are expected, they are especially likely to be found in five particular areas that have undergone transformative changes: the prioritization of speed over accuracy, new skills versus traditional newsgathering, interpreting over reporting skills, generalism over beat specialism, and story detection over storytelling, all of which are detailed in the next sections.

While the following research questions revolve around theoretical and normative concepts, skill production rests on a variety of practical affordances, such as on-the-job training, organizational "osmosis" (Breed, 1955), and learning-by-doing. Yet, the normative and the sociological are interrelated, shaping both the "ought" and the "is" (including how skills are enacted and internalized by newswriters and evaluated by their superiors and educators).

Speed vs. Accuracy

Newswriting was always hasty. Nonetheless, in digital environments, the time lag between events and their reporting is often compressed to almost real-time reporting. This acceleration increases the tension between time-related skills, such as immediacy and availability, and quality-related skills, such as accuracy and the provision of context (Shapiro, Brin, Bédard-Brûlé, & Mychajlowycz, 2013).

Classic studies have emphasized the role of "time" in routinizing the unexpected (Tuchman, 1973) and as a scarce resource of news production (Gans, 1979). More recent studies emphasize temporal acceleration (Harro-Loit & Josephi, 2020), the termination of newshole limitations in digital environments (Zelizer, 2005), the "instantaneous present" (Phillips, 2011), the emergence of "ambient journalism" (Hermida, 2010), followed by multitasking and multiskilling (Carr, 2021), and PR-led "churnalism" (Davis, 2008). On the other hand, Willnat, Weaver, & Choi (2013) stated that "reporting news quickly" was ranked lower by journalists compared with previous studies because of their "ambivalent attitude" toward speed (p. 176). After all, some of the most serious forms of journalism, for example, investigative reporting, longform, and magazine writing, have a record of slow-moving work.

Time matters to different occupations that must act quickly without a chance to correct mistakes on-the-go. Under such circumstances, other than "crude skills" practitioners must develop "subtle skills" (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 2005; Reich, 2012). These insights led us to the first research question (RQ).

RQ1: Are time-related skills more appreciated today compared to skills of thorough and accurate reporting?

New Skills vs. Traditional Newsgathering

As an industry susceptible to technological changes, from the printing press to generative AI, journalism has always been expected to adopt not only new modes of production and dissemination of news but also new skill sets. Thus, throughout recent decades, a series of scholars have expected them to develop new skills to accommodate e-mail, Internet searches, mobile technology, social media sourcing, and data skills (Phillips, Singer, Vlad, & Becker, 2009; Westlund, 2013). The idea that traditional journalistic skills give way to new ones in response to the rise of new technologies emerged over three decades ago, relating to the use of search engines and e-mail (Pavlik, 2000). Even traditional skills, such as interviewing or writing in an "inverted pyramid" format, were once innovations that, according to some scholars, emerged in response to new technological, commercial, political, professional, and cultural realities (Pöttker, 2003; Schudson, 1994).

More recent developments inviting new skills include multimedia technology that enhances cross-platform production and online management skills (Phillips et al., 2009), web analytics (Belair-Gagnon, 2019), mobile reporting (Westlund, 2013), and immersive storytelling (Shin & Biocca, 2018). According to Anderson, Bell, and Shirky (2012), reporters and newsrooms must adapt their skills to an everchanging media environment, including the emergence of new soft skills (such as a "networked" mindset or development of a public persona) and new hard skills (such as becoming data literate knowledgeable specialists who can identify audiences using analytics, and coding).

Despite these changes, however, according to some scholars, "a traditional journalist's reportorial skills—negotiating with and interviewing sources, witnessing and recording events, and turning what has been learned into a cogent, original story—remain largely unthreatened" (Singer, 2003, p. 15). According to Willnat et al. (2013), "new reporting skills are required to adapt to the ongoing changes in newsgathering and news consumption, while an emphasis on traditional skills and practices remains" (p. 175). This brings us to the second RQ.

RQ2: Are technology-related skills more appreciated today than traditional newsgathering skills?

Interpreting vs. Factual Reporting

Since the "interpretative turn" and the rise of "contextual reporting" (Fink & Schudson, 2014) during the second half of the 20th century (Barnhurst, 2014), the reporters' role has shifted from mere stenography of information to interpretation and sense making.

The shift toward interpretation was described as a response to the emergence of real-time and around-the-clock television reporting during the 1980s and online coverage during the mid-1990s, which

generated a stream of unedited raw information. These trends encouraged the rise of news skills that combined information, interpretation, and opinion-based stories (Esser & Umbricht, 2014; Hallin, 2000).

Interpretation and analysis were ranked higher among news reporters compared with neutral reporting (Willnat, Weaver, & Wilhoit, 2017); both also emerged in journalism studies, which expect future journalists to possess analytical and critical thinking skills (de Burgh, 2003). The demand for analysis, forecasts, and insight (Letukas, 2014) and for other services as "secondary claim-makers" (Tuchman, 1978, pp. 90–91) has risen further since the turn of the new millennium, with the growing information overload and acceleration of specialism in knowledge societies (Albæk, 2011). Against this backdrop, we turn to the third RQ.

RQ3: Are today's news reporters expected to prioritize interpretation and analysis over plain "stenographic" factual reporting?

Specialism vs. Generalism

News reporting is organized around beat systems that prioritize domain specialization in areas such as economics, politics, or health (Magin & Maurer, 2019) based on specialized knowledge (Donsbach, 2014) and "interactional expertise" (Collins & Evans, 2007; Reich, 2012). In recent years, scholars have suggested that reporters develop even more domain expertise (Nisbet & Fahy, 2015; Patterson, 2013; Ward, 2018).

On the other hand, journalism has always been deeply generalist by nature (Hanitzsch, Hanusch, Ramaprasad, & De Beer, 2019; Hess, 1996), partly since "each specialist must be a generalist" (Tuchman, 1978, p. 67) covering broad terrains such as health or sciences. Compared with more learned occupations, such as medicine and law, journalism "is not grounded in a systematic body of substantive knowledge that would protect its practitioners' autonomy and inform their judgment" (Patterson, 2013, p. 71). Similar generalism can be found in other creative industries that favor data and multimedia (Deuze, 2004).

Recent years have seen a strong push toward more generalism following layoffs and economic hurdles, so beat specialists are assigned to cover more beats, and generalists and freelancers are expected to cover areas once covered by regular beat reporters (Pew Research Center, 2021; Van Leuven, Vanhaelewyn, & Raeymaeckers, 2021). Fewer specialized reporters raise expectations for more general knowledge (Claassen, 2001).

Generalism is seen as a journalistic asset valued by editors (Dickson & Brandon, 2000; Huang et al., 2006), enabling versatile coverage of various topics (Marchetti, 2005). However, generalism comes at a price—a growing dependence on expert sources. The merits of generalism are increasingly acknowledged in areas such as sports, art, business, and even sciences (Epstein, 2019). This leads to the next RQ.

RQ4: Are news reporters expected to prioritize generalist knowledge over specialized beat knowledge?

Story Detection vs. Storytelling

Reporters are traditionally known as storytellers. More than mere collectors of facts, they are expected to mold the relevant facts into stories to portray, describe, narrate, make claims, and "tell stories of consequence" (Bird & Dardenne, 2009, p. 241). Furthermore, reporters are expected to augment their

storytelling with new tools, such as data visualizations and interactive infographics (de Haan, Kruike-meier, Lecheler, Smit, & van der Nat, 2018).

However, one might expect reporters to prioritize skills associated with the earlier stage of news detection over the later stage of storytelling, following the acceleration of production time and growing competition over exclusive publication (Allern, 2002; Anderson et al., 2012; Phillips, 2015). While rewriting desks can repair the imperfections of storytelling, they can do nothing if stories are not detected in the first place. News detection is a skill in itself, described as involving reporters' body organs, such as "nose for news" or "gut feeling" (Schultz, 2007, p. 190). Reporters today have numerous ways to augment news detection, for example, by subscribing to RSS feeds and news alerts, following social media accounts, joining mailing and instant messaging lists, and monitoring competitors and colleagues (Boczkowski, 2009). This brings us to the next RQ.

RQ5: Are early-stage story detection skills prioritized over later-stage storytelling skills, following the growing competition for first publication and exclusivity?

Methodology

To offer an updated, systematic, and hierarchical map of more or less consensual skills negotiated anonymously between endogenous and exogenous stakeholders, this study uses a series of Delphi panels. Though hardly used in journalism studies (for exceptions, see Van Der Wurff & Schönbach, 2011), Delphi panels are a well-established technique that utilizes a multi-staged survey structure, urging participants to form consensus (Keeney, Hasson, & Mckenna, 2011) based on informed judgments (Turoff, 1970).

Because in our case, areas of disagreement are no less interesting, the pressure for consensus is somewhat eased. Instead, we tried to push interviewees to reflect on their votes and the reasoning behind them. Their explanations provided the rankings with greater depth and the logic that enabled them to put at least some of the skills "under a magnifying glass." Participants were asked to reflect on those skills in which their own ranking deviated substantially from the group (as explained below).

To detect suitable participants, we used an expert sampling method (Frey, 2018)—a series of in-depth interviews with knowledgeable and experienced key informants prior to the Delphi panels. This yielded a list of skilled and proficient participants from a variety of media and key positions outside the media. The original list included 71 potential participants who met the following criteria:

Employment and experience—all participants were either full-timers, active in their field, role, or profession for at least 10 years, or scholars and academics with 20+ publications.

Recognition and awards—journalism award winners and those highly regarded by colleagues (based on preparatory interviews).

Out of the 71, 49 agreed to participate in the study. Eventually, 31 panelists participated in the first round.² Despite our efforts to diversify the panel, we ended up with a gender imbalance, covering 24 male and only 7 female panelists,³ which reflects gender relations in the higher echelons of media management in Israel, especially in top level, senior, and middle management positions (Lachover & Lemish, 2018). The number of participants in all rounds and the dropout rates are both acceptable for Delphi panels (see Gnatzy, Warth, von der Gracht, & Darkow, 2011), as in many studies, the panel size ranges from 3 to less than a dozen (Rowe & Wright, 1999).

The Delphi panel encompassed three rounds. To encourage panelists to elicit their own list of desired skills while allowing a more comprehensive evaluation of other relevant skills, the first round started with an open-ended phase asking panelists to suggest a list of reporters' desired skills. Following that, they were asked to rank a list of skills drawn from former studies based on a systematic literature review and grouped into skill categories.⁴ Overall, participants proposed and ranked 247 skills in this round.

The second round integrated 99 skills, collapsed by two independent coders into 11 thematic areas of skills that relate to (1) traditional reporting skills, (2) news sources, (3) knowledge, (4) work, (5) time, (6) thinking, (7) analytic (8) digital and technological, (9) storytelling and presentation, (10) ethics, morals, and values, and (11) personality traits. Each skill was ranked on a 7-point Likert scale, enabling the detection of the level of consensus (at least 70% agreement between panelists, a common threshold in Delphi research; Vernon, 2009). Another highly accepted measure for variance in Delphi panels is the interquartile range (for IQR usage in the Delphi technique, see Keeney et al., 2011). A high IQR means high variance, while a low IQR means that the data points are bunched up around the mean (see Beiderbeck, Frevel, Heiko, Schmidt, & Schweitzer, 2021).

The third and final round focused on nonconsensual votes, in which interviewees were at least two Likert levels away from the average opinion. In these cases, the interviewees were asked to reconsider whether they agreed to join the consensus. While regular Delphi panels use this procedure to increase consensus, we used it to detect deeper positions of our interviewees, not so much according to their conformist/steadfast position, but mainly according to the reasoning behind their choice. In this round, 14 panelists participated (45% of the original group). Both the number of final participants and the dropout rates were within the accepted standards of Delphi panels (see Gnatzy et al., 2011). To maintain participants' anonymity, correspondence with them was conducted via e-mail and WhatsApp using Qualtrics software for questioning and ranking.

² First round took 12 weeks, second round 4 weeks with 97% participation of the initial group, and the final round took 4 weeks with 45% participation.

³ List of participants can be found, here: <https://www.dropbox.com/s/z84gczlie63nwp7/Appendix%201%20-%20list%20of%20participants.docx?dl=0>.

⁴ The initial list consisted of dozens of skills that were collapsed into 53 items (for example, integrating writing and phrasing skills). The literature was often over-specific relating to computer or mobile skills rather than using broader categories such as digital skills.

Measurements

To obtain a comprehensive list of reporters' desired skills, interviewees could suggest and later vote on whatever skills they wished. The original list contained 99 skills; however, after removing mere traits (27 statements), general or vague statements (15), skills that incorporate one another (5), and ethical expectations (4), we remained with a total list of 48 skills, 41 of which are presented in this study. Seven statements were excluded since they neither addressed recent trends nor were pertinent to journalism generally, not specifically to news reporting:

1. *Speed vs. Accuracy*. While the former covers skills associated with work pace expectations, including deadlines and pressures, the latter focuses on reporting rigor and precision.
2. *New Skills vs. Traditional Newsgathering*. While the former refers to skills associated with digital news work, the latter covers the core skills of traditional reporting, such as researching, fact-checking, and editing.
3. *Interpreting vs. Factual Reporting*. While the former concerns sense making, analysis, and forecasts, the latter covers reporters' factfulness.
4. *Specialism vs. Generalism*. While the former emphasizes the depth of news beat knowledge, the latter covers the breadth of knowledge and general knowledge outside one's beat.
5. *Story Detection vs. Storytelling*. While the former concerns early-stage skills to find new items and discover story leads, the latter relates to later-stage skills to narrate and report the story.

Findings

Our findings show the extent to which innovations and new trends are reflected in the desired skills of news reporting, the core activity of journalism, and the "bread and butter" of the public news diet. These skills were negotiated anonymously between endogenous and exogenous panelists. Findings are presented from the most to the least consensual, alongside the average, median, standard deviation, and interquartile range, which shows the degree of consent and dissent for each skill. Ambiguous combinations, such as low levels of agreement with a high IQR, mark skills deemed by the panelists as non-important or questionable.

Speed-Related vs. Accuracy

RQ1 sought to detect whether time-related skills were preferred over accuracy-related skills in accelerating news environments. Interestingly, as shown in Table 1, news reporters' capacity to work fast is not a single trait, covering a lengthy series of competences, including deadline, pressure, availability, etc. Unsurprisingly, time-sensitive skills attracted the highest levels of consensus. And yet, reporters are expected to maintain accuracy.

Table 1. Speed vs. Accuracy.

Skills	Consensus level ¹	Average ranking	Median score	S.D.	IQR ²
Speed-Related Skills					
Meeting deadlines	100%	6.8	7	0.37	0.00
Working under pressure	97%	6.7	7	0.51	0.00
Availability	97%	6.7	7	0.65	0.75
Speed and agility	90%	6.5	7	0.96	1.00
Accuracy-Related Skills					
Accuracy	93%	6.5	7	0.63	1.00
Attention to details	86%	6.5	7	0.72	1.00

Notes. Number of participants: round 1–31, round 2–30, round 3–14.

Skills were arranged according to the level of panelists' agreement, with scores of 6 and 7 combined to represent higher levels of consensus.

¹Consensus level—percentage of agreement between panelists. A 70% agreement threshold was used to achieve consensus as common in Delphi studies.

²IQR—interquartile range. <1 indicates a low spread of participants' rankings, while >1 indicates a high spread.

The long series of time-oriented skills indicate that time acceleration is an authentic driver of newswork, and yet speed and accuracy are not really antonyms. Rather than an either/or state of mind regarding the speed and accuracy that bothered practitioners during earlier periods of digitization (Porlezza, 2019), panelists expect today's reporters to have both without being supermen.

New Skills vs. Traditional Newsgathering

RQ2 queried whether, in today's news environments, technological skills were more valued than traditional newsgathering skills. As shown in Table 2, findings indicate that despite the transformative impact of technology on news work, traditional newsgathering skills are overwhelmingly more valued today. Higher levels of consensus can be seen in a long series of skills that relate to information gathering, such as interviewing skills, research skills, and identification of facts skills. Only one technological skill attracted similarly high levels of consensus: the utilization of databases for news reporting. The lower consensus on technological skills was consistent not only regarding skills mentioned in the literature but also those offered by interviewees.

Digital and technological skills complement reporters' newsgathering capabilities yet do not replace them. Interestingly, the six leading traditional skills are all epistemic, that is, associated with facts and knowledge acquisition. Even the single technological skill that attracted consensus among our panelists—utilization of databases—is knowledge oriented. The superiority of epistemic skills is in tandem with journalists' "basic desire for truthfulness" (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014, p. 58) and with the primacy of "being out in the field, talking to people, doing research, and working independently (alone)" (Örnebring & Mellado, 2018, p. 458).

Table 2. New Technological Skills vs. Traditional News Reporting Skills.

Skills	Consensus level ¹	Average ranking	Median score	S.D.	IQR ²
New Technological Skills					
Database utilization	79%	6.1	6	1.07	1.00
Digital skills ³	68%	5.8	6	1.35	2.00
Social networking	66%	5.7	6	1.31	2.00
Cross-platform newswork ⁴	50%	5.5	6	1.18	2.00
Information security skills ⁵	21%	3.8	4	1.92	3.00
Basic programming and code writing	0%	1.9	1	1.27	1.00
Design capabilities	0%	2.3	2	1.49	2.25
Traditional News Making Skills					
Information gathering	97%	6.8	7	0.50	0.00
Interviewing	87%	6.3	7	1.10	1.00
Research	86%	6.3	6	0.87	1.00
Objective reporting	62%	5.4	6	1.81	3.00
Self-editing	23%	4.7	5	1.24	1.00
Editing	17%	4.2	4	1.38	1.00

Notes. Number of participants: round 1–31, round 2–30, round 3–14.

Skills were arranged according to the level of panelists' agreement, with scores of 6 and 7 combined to represent higher levels of consensus.

¹Consensus level—percentage of agreement between panelists. A 70% agreement threshold was used to achieve consensus, as is common in Delphi studies. Skills below the dotted line were nonconsensual.

²IQR—interquartile range. <1 indicates a low spread of participants' rankings, while >1 means a high spread.

³Digital skills—capacity to manage various devices for collecting, communicating, processing, and presenting news information.

⁴Cross-platform news work—capacity to report news across media, including text, audio, video, social media posts, etc.

⁵Information security skills—maintaining source confidentiality and protecting sensitive information, especially regarding unauthorized disclosures and leaks.

Interpreting vs. Factual Reporting

RQ3 enquired whether, following the "interpretative turn," reporters are expected to develop more interpretive skills or their traditional reporting skills. While reporting skills emphasize facticity and getting things right, interpretive skills expect reporters to go beyond the facts and connect them to the bigger picture.

Table 3. Interpretative vs Factual-Related Skills.

Skills	Consensus level ¹	Average ranking	Median score	S.D.	IQR ²
Interpretative Skills					
Generating new knowledge from existing information	60%	5.9	6	0.96	2.00
Providing context and perspective	57%	5.8	6	0.97	2.00
Identifying patterns and deviations thereof	53%	5.5	6	1.43	2.00
Drawing inferences	50%	5.6	6	1.26	2.00
Analytic capacity	43%	5.3	5	1.46	2.00
Abstract reasoning	30%	4.8	5	1.46	2.00
Forecasting skills	13%	4.6	5	1.20	1.00
Interpretation skills	10%	4.3	4	1.24	1.00
Factual-related Skills					
Ability to identify facts	77%	6.3	7	0.89	1.00
Ability to integrate raw facts into news items	73%	6.2	7	0.91	1.75

Notes. Number of participants: round 1–31, round 2–30, round 3–14.

Skills were arranged according to the level of panelists' agreement, with scores of 6 and 7 combined to represent higher levels of consensus.

¹Consensus level—percentage of agreement between panelists. A 70% agreement threshold was used to achieve consensus, as is common in Delphi studies. Skills below the dotted line were nonconsensual.

²IQR—interquartile range. <1 indicates a low spread of participants' rankings, while >1 indicates a high spread.

Findings show, as shown in Table 3, that despite the "interpretative turn," reporters are expected to adhere to their classic role as mediators and "stenographers" of information rather than interpreters and sense makers. News reporters are expected to focus more on raw information and basic facts than on supplying analyses and interpretations. In other words, the primary role of news reporters remains "trying to independently discover and verify new facts" (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014, pp. 110–111). One should bear in mind that the emphasis on facticity might be typical of the Israeli case, where analysis and opinion are the domains of other practitioners, the commentators. On the other hand, in countries that adhere to a reporter-commentator model (e.g., for political reporting, see Calfano, Martinez-Ebers, & Ramusovic, 2021), ordinary reporters might also be expected to supply analysis and commentary.

Specialism vs. Generalism

RQ4 focused on the existing priorities between specialized beat knowledge and generalist knowledge. Findings in Table 4 show that despite the deterioration of beat expertise in recent years (Reich & Lahav, 2021; Van Leuven et al., 2021), reporters are still expected to prioritize beat knowledge as manifested in panelists' clear-cut preference for news beat knowledge (93% agreement that beat knowledge is highly important) over general knowledge (47% agreement).

These findings indicate that even when the epistemic pendulum seems to shift slightly from specialism to generalism, both inside and outside the media, reporters are still expected to master, first and foremost, their own domains rather than develop general knowledge associated with their broadening terrains.

Table 4. Specialism vs. Generalism.

Skills	Consensus level ¹	Average ranking	Median score	S.D.	IQR ²
Specialism					
News beat knowledge	93%	6.7	7	0.69	0.00
Generalism					
Up-to-date knowledge on current affairs	86%	6.4	7	0.90	1.00
General knowledge	47%	5.5	5	1.23	1.00
Mastery of a second language	28%	5.0	5	1.10	2.00

Notes. Number of participants: round 1–31, round 2–30, round 3–14.

Skills were arranged according to the level of panelists' agreement, with scores of 6 and 7 combined to represent higher levels of consensus.

¹ Consensus level—percentage of agreement between panelists. A 70% agreement threshold was used to achieve consensus, as is common in Delphi studies. Skills below the dotted line were nonconsensual.

² IQR—interquartile range. <1 indicates a low spread of participants' rankings, while >1 indicates a high spread.

Story Detection vs. Storytelling

RQ5 explores whether story detection and ideation are becoming more crucial than storytelling skills in hypercompetitive news environments. Findings show that early-stage detection and ideation of stories are clearly preferred over later-stage and more traditional skills of news construction and storytelling. These findings are in tandem not only with studies on the impact of time acceleration (Anderson et al., 2012; Phillips, 2011) but also with the rising role of "exclusivity" as a factor of newsworthiness (Harcup & O'Neill, 2017).

Table 5. Story Detection vs. Storytelling.

Skills	Consensus level ¹	Average ranking	Median score	S.D.	IQR ²
Story Detection Skills					
Detection of newsworthy stories	97%	6.7	7	0.52	0.00
Capacity to separate the wheat from the chaff	80%	6.3	7	0.78	1.00
Storytelling Skills					
Narrative skills ³	66%	5.9	6	1.01	2.00
Popularization of complex information	66%	6.1	6	0.88	2.00
Expressive abilities	62%	6.0	6	1.08	2.00

Writing skills	45%	5.6	5	1.16	2.00
Claim making	38%	5.1	5	1.43	2.25
Storytelling ⁴	27%	4.6	5	1.52	2.00

Notes. Number of participants: round 1–31, round 2–30, round 3–14.

Skills were arranged according to the level of panelists' agreement, with scores of 6 and 7 combined to represent higher levels of consensus.

¹ Consensus level—percentage of agreement between panelists. A 70% agreement threshold was used to achieve consensus, as is common in Delphi studies. Skills below the dotted line were nonconsensual.

² IQR—interquartile rang. <1 indicates a low spread of participants' rankings, while >1 indicates a high spread.

³ Narrative skills—the descriptive ability to illustrate a sequence of events or to tell what happened.

⁴ Storytelling—the ability to formulate a coherent and whole story.

Storytelling is not only a skill, but a hallmark of journalism. Hence, indications that this hallmark is somewhat fading may suggest a substantial change in professional priorities, probably due to the reversibility of errors associated with different skills. While storytelling and presentation errors can mostly be fixed by editors and copy desks, errors in news detection can hardly be corrected in later stages.

As Table 5 shows, findings somewhat contradict former studies that emphasized writing skills (Cleary & Cochie, 2011; Fahmy, 2008). One cannot rule out that storytelling and other skills scored high in these studies as long as participants, in this case publishers, could allocate high rankings across the board. On the other hand, they were more inclined to prioritize writing skills compared to other skills. Inquiries into writing skills can indicate deskilling, if indeed left for editors, denoting the "rewrite man" practices a century ago (Salcetti, 1995).

Discussion

This study explores the extent to which reporters' desired skills are affected by five recent trends: the acceleration of newswork, the emergence of new newsgathering skills, reporting vs. the "interpretative turn," growing generalism, and the prioritization of story detection over storytelling. To map the desired skills, we used three rounds of a Delphi panel in which news executives and external experts anonymously negotiated reporters' desired skills. Contrary to former studies, this study maps specific skills that are more susceptible to change versus those that are more persistent—a valuable map for employers, educators, scholars, and journalists.

The list of desired skills seems to work against the grain of recent trends. Despite transformative changes in news environments, news reporters are expected to master mainly traditional skills, such as interviewing, researching, curiosity, and fact identification. Contrary to former studies highlighting the dominance of digital skills (Lowery & Becker, 2001), "old standards remain at the top of the list" (Pierce & Miller, 2007, p. 59), leading journalists' professional skills (Singer, 2003).

How can skills be stable when the entire occupational context is changing? Journalists are expected to reskill, deskilling, and upskill, following the adoption of new methods from the tech industry, while

newsrooms are losing centrality and work is becoming precariat and less career oriented (Deuze & Witschge, 2018). The answer involves several explanations.

First is the reluctance of professions in general to adopt new skills (Attewell, 1990), as seen in engineering (Lappalainen, 2009), manufacturing (Kelleher, Scott, & Jones, 1993, p. 444), and teaching (Dembo & Seli, 2004; Zimmerman, 2006). Professional skills change more slowly than practices do (Nikolaou, Gouras, Vakola, & Bourantas, 2007).

Second, according to "new institutionalism" theory, especially when organizations are facing uncertainty, practitioners adhere to persistence, stability, and control (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), which lead to isomorphism (Powell & DiMaggio, 2012). They resist change with regard to disruptive technologies (Bovey & Hede, 2001; Christensen, McDonald, Altman, & Palmer, 2018) and when "liability of newness" threatens to make existing skills obsolete (Ferrucci & Perreault, 2021, p. 1439; Stinchcombe, 1965).

Third, new skills are incorporated more slowly and cautiously at the core of journalism, and while news reporting is at its more innovative periphery, such as data and multimedia storytelling, journalism is widely open to new skills. One should expect little change here as long as news reporting remains affixed to three major anchors: maintaining its "first obligation to the truth" (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014, p. 8); being organized around beat systems that will soon celebrate their 200th anniversary (Magin & Maurer, 2019); and prioritizing human sources (Reich & Barnoy, 2021) despite the availability of technologies and practices that make it possible to bypass them.

The adherence of our panelists, many of whom are at the forefront of advanced news outlets, can also be seen as a reconfirmation that traditional journalistic skills not only remain relevant in current news environments but also even more relevant than newer and more "glitzy" skills. This perspective should not be seen as the regular resistance of occupations to change, since implementing traditional skills in a new context requires substantial adaptability and resourcefulness.

Why are certain journalistic skills adopted as a desiderata of news executives and journalism educators, while others are not? The filtering system through which desired skills are adopted must incorporate not only the practical needs to address changing news environments, but also the economic realities of news organizations' need to maintain legitimacy as credible sources. Moreover, the desired skills must incorporate reporters' preferences to develop successful and visible careers with greater job security. The selection of desired skills cannot be free of power relations between news executives, institutional sources, and audiences that have their ways to manifest preferences. Reporters, executives, and educators must respond to these dynamics by learning and unlearning particular skills.

According to our panelists, to survive in a changing news ecosystem, rather than rush to adopt new skills, news reporting should rediscover its traditional and deeply rooted nucleus of skills. Get the story, prioritize information, talk to sources, work under deadlines—skills that still prevail, though today can be done harnessing new technology.

The relatively stable skill set is both occupationally alarming and professionally soothing. It is alarming since our panelists, who are intimately acquainted with the realities of the current news environment, can be seen as trying to put their “finger in the dyke” to stop the drift toward interpretation, technological sources, and the mix of news and views. At the same time, these findings are professionally soothing since they show clear adherence to the fundamentals of the trade by both insider panelists and outsiders. Their map of skills calls for refocusing news reporting around a core of skills, ignoring mounting expectations to master endless new skills—from monitoring audiences (Belair-Gagnon, 2019) to managing social media (Wu, 2018) and learning new storytelling techniques (Weber, 2020).

Despite our efforts to select the most relevant and diversified endogenous and exogenous participants, Delphi panels are always prone to selection bias. In addition, despite our efforts to include dozens of potential participants, only two and a half dozen actually participated in the first rounds of the study. Nonetheless, their preferences and rankings are consequential due to the diversified panel and remarkable consensus.

Findings relate to the Israeli media, which tend to employ different practitioners, such as news reporters and news commentators. Furthermore, Israeli news agendas tend to prioritize serious, hard news and issues of politics and national security, alongside soft-popular items that characterize a developed economy. Israeli journalists work mostly (60%) in news beats, reporting high levels of editorial freedom (Hanitzsch et al., 2019) and relatively little political effort to influence their work. Most news outlets are privately owned, competitive, and technologically updated, similar to other modern Western press (Hanitzsch et al., 2011). However, the Israeli media map is highly concentrated in terms of geography and ownership. Panelists cannot be dismissed as unusually conservative, since they were too senior, diverse, visionary, and updated about the current and future realities of the news industry.

Future studies are invited to replicate ours to detect whether the desired reporters’ skills are still largely change-resistant in other news cultures. They might also focus on specific niches of news work, such as commentators, data journalists, general assignment reporters, social media curators, investigative reporters, columnists, and citizen journalists, who might substantially diverge in their desired skills.

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