

Glib one line answers to massive complex questions about the state of journalism

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It's that time of year when student journalists send people like me a set of questions as part of their long-essay research. The best ones have actually

done some reading, but often it's just an easy way to avoid going to primary sources (blogs, books etc)

I try to answer because, sad as I am, I'm flattered they ask. I also think that it is essential for student journalists to learn how to do interviews – and as @Tom_Wien points out, they get extra marks for 'assertions from authority'. But the questions are often ridiculously broad. I wish their tutors would train them to be more focused. But it can still be fun to try to answer them in the one sentence that I have time for. Here's my latest five minute response. You may well have better replies.

1. What are the important criteria that distinguish a professional journalist from the crowd in your view?

The distinction between professional and "the crowd" is much less clear these days, but in a way is the same as it's always been: the professional is paid, subject to regulation, and has rights as well as responsibilities.

2. One problem journalists could be facing working online is the 'identity crisis', would you personally agree with this statement? Is this a problem for the media industry professionals?

The 'identity crisis' is actually an 'identity opportunity', as it gives journalists a chance to reinvent themselves and their work to make it more relevant and useful for the digital age.

3. For mainstream journalists the deadlines are constant on the online platform, could you state how this affects the journalist?

The loss of deadlines is not just for online – news is now instant and continuous for broadcast, too – which means that speed is the first law of news media – but for sustained value in a 24 hour news world, journalism must produce even more analysis, investigation and authentication.

4. According to recent reports an increasing number of journalists use social media to for newsgathering and research. News breaks an extremely fast pace on Twitter. Would you say that journalists rush and often do not check the facts before publishing?

Journalists have always rushed and sometimes failed to be accurate – now at least they can correct and be corrected almost as quickly

5. Would you say that speed is more important than accuracy for the online journalism industry seeing that you can always go back a simply delete the mistake? Is this ethically correct?

If you want a reputation for speed then publish instantly, but if you want a reputation for reliability, knowledge, understanding and accuracy then take time to check because in an instant world anyone can be first but only good journalists will be right.

6. If a mainstream journalist publishes a false tweet, what would you consider an ethical choice a) to simply delete the tweet and publish a verified version or b) to tweet an apology?

Why not do all three?

[For less glib answers try my books [SuperMedia](#) or [Wikileaks: News In The Networked Era](#). See also my post on [how to save journalism](#)]

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