


# Polis – Hack or Nerd?

 [blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2008/04/29/hack-or-nerd/](https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2008/04/29/hack-or-nerd/)

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As a journalist now based in a University I am always interested in the different cultures of the academic and the journalist. Superficially they are similar. Both trades are made up of hugely competitive egotists who deal in analysis and data. I think it is mainly the deadlines that differ. But [here](#) is an interesting article by a young intelligent person who had to decide between the Ivory Tower and the newsroom which sheds light on more subtle differences.

[Here's](#) why Sam Friedman first chose journalism:

 *"Coming from a family of academics, one of the earliest promises I made myself was never to follow in the dreary footsteps of my parents. Locked up in a darkened room for most of the day and wheeled out only for the occasional conference or lecture, most of the academics I met in my youth were socially awkward, patronising and violently uncool. It was therefore not much of a surprise that when I began looking around for career ideas it was the glamorous world of journalism that attracted most of my attention. For three undergraduate years I threw myself into all kinds of writing, rising up the ranks of the Edinburgh Student, running my own Fringe publication and gaining experience everywhere from The Guardian to The Big Issue. I was sure it was the life of a fast-paced, high-energy hack that I craved and with graduation approaching, things were going to plan."*

But here is why he then rejects it:

*"However, one day in the summer before my final year, things suddenly changed. After an incredibly stressful shift running around with a Canadian TV journalist, I started to see a few cracks in my masterplan. Staring at this underpaid, undervalued and probably quite unwell 42-year old, I suddenly saw a terrible caricature of my chosen profession. I was also beginning to feel increasingly frustrated with the temporal limitations of journalism, where I was usually expected to master a topic in a matter of hours and where the kind of substantial investigative work I loved was few and far between."*

And this is what he eventually goes on to do:

*"I began researching for my undergraduate dissertation, looking at the bizarre world of online gamers. I was struck by the time and freedom I had to breathe life into the project and slowly saw how outside reading enhanced the clarity of my thoughts. Put simply, over the following months I became a geek, a full-blown nerd, and my entire final year was spent in pursuit of that elusive first."*

Well I suppose journalism offers many opportunities, but a life-time spent studying online gamers might not be one of them.

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