



EMBASSY
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OF JOURNALISTS
OF UKRAINE

Journalism Under Fire: Lessons from Ukraine



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Journalism Under Fire: Lessons from Ukraine

Handbook

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This educational handbook for local media journalists in frontline and de-occupied regions, «Journalism Under Fire: Lessons from Ukraine», was prepared by the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine as part of the project «Strengthening the Resilience of Frontline Media as a Tool to Combat Disinformation», with financial support from the Embassy of the Republic of Lithuania in Ukraine under the Development Cooperation and Democracy Promotion Programme.

The handbook synthesizes insights from mentoring consultations held for 20 participating media outlets and four thematic webinars. The publication is structured around three core areas: media literacy (countering disinformation, fact-checking, source verification), content (ethical journalism, covering sensitive topics), and digitalization (use of artificial intelligence, multimedia content creation, digital security, and social media work). A key feature of the handbook is its practical focus: it includes checklists, step-by-step instructions, and infographics tailored to the realities of journalistic work during wartime.

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The publication is available in Ukrainian and English for distribution through the regional offices of the NUJU, Journalists' Solidarity Centers, as well as national and international media organizations.

The electronic version with interactive links is available on the NUJU website.

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Dear Colleagues!

This handbook is the result of collaboration between the teams who delivered the training under the project «Strengthening the Resilience of Frontline Media as a Tool to Combat Disinformation» and the journalists who work daily under the extreme conditions of war. Twenty newsrooms from frontline and de-occupied regions shared their challenges, and experienced trainers worked alongside them to find practical solutions.

The war has profoundly transformed Ukrainian journalism. **Local media on the frontlines have become critically important to their communities.** They do more than inform – they help people survive, counter disinformation, and maintain trust and communication between authorities and society. When electricity and communications are cut, it is often the local newspaper or website that remains the only reliable source of information. Yet these newsrooms work on the edge – under fire, with limited resources, overcoming physical and emotional exhaustion.

This handbook is not a theoretical manual but a **practical tool for building resilience.** It contains advice on how to ethically report tragedies, verify facts under time pressure, use artificial intelligence to streamline work, and protect both oneself and one's newsroom in the digital space. Every recommendation has been tested in the field by our colleagues working on the ground by our colleagues on the ground.

We are sincerely grateful to **the Embassy of the Republic of Lithuania in Ukraine**, which supported this project through its **Lithuania Cooperation and Democracy Promotion Programme.** Your belief in the power of independent journalism helps us strengthen Ukraine's information space. Lithuanians are our dear brothers and sisters! Special thanks to the trainers – **Tetiana Ivanova, Yuliia Surkova, and Andrii Yurychko** – for their professionalism and dedication, as well as to all the newsrooms whose stories and questions brought this publication to life and made it truly valuable.

The experience of Ukraine's frontline media in countering disinformation is important not only for Ukraine but also for colleagues abroad.

Every day, these media prove that even under the harshest conditions, independent journalism can defend the truth, serve the community, and uphold human dignity.

Sergiy Tomilenko

President, National Union of Journalists of Ukraine
Steering Committee Member, European Federation of Journalists
November 2025



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Introduction

In the conditions of Russia's full scale war against Ukraine, information has transformed from an instrument of communication into a powerful weapon capable of influencing the course of events, society's morale and trust in state institutions.

Ukrainian frontline media operate on the front line of the information battle, where every word can determine someone's safety or save a life.. Kremlin disinformation, propaganda and fakes are aimed at undermining unity, demoralizing

citizens and weakening belief in victory.

Therefore, **strengthening the resilience of journalists** through the development of media literacy, adherence to ethical standards and ensuring digital security is not only a professional duty, but also an element of national defence. The Ukrainian experience of journalists working literally **under fire has proven: truth, professional responsibility and critical thinking are the most effective weapons against Russian lies.**



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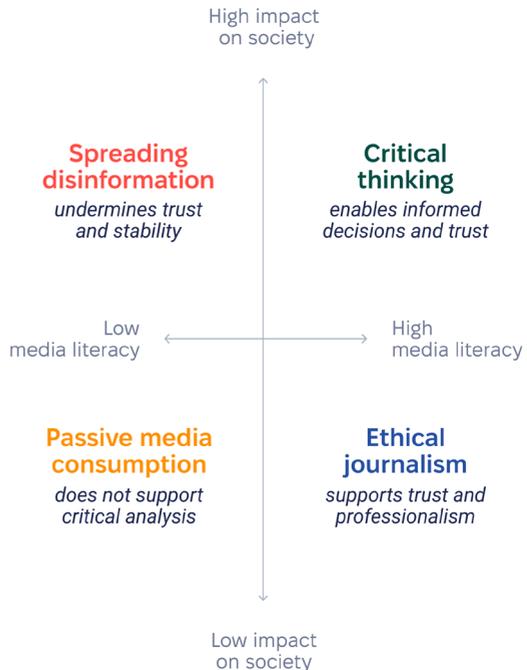
Chapter 1

Media literacy of journalists during war

Information as a weapon

In the modern war reality information has become not only a source of knowledge, but also a weapon capable of amplifying panic, discrediting institutions and influencing citizens' morale. Journalists stand on the front line of this information battlefield, where every word has the power to protect or to harm.

In this context media literacy is not an abstract competence, but a vitally necessary tool of professional safety. It combines professional responsibility, information security and the basis of trust between the media and society.



The essence of propaganda: how to recognise, understand and counter it. Why people believe propaganda

Propaganda is a systemic influence on consciousness and behaviour of people through information, images and emotions. During war it becomes a dangerous tool: it demoralises, sows distrust, changes perceptions of reality. For journalists in frontline territories understanding propaganda is a key competence.

European dimension

Countries facing hybrid threats (Estonia, Poland, Czech Republic) have created state centres of strategic communications and media literacy programmes. Ukrainian journalists can draw on such experience:

- rapid verification of information;
- building counter narratives;
- «fact inoculation» – prebunking with facts.

Key concepts

Propaganda is a systemic influence on consciousness and behaviour via information, images and emotions.

Types of propaganda:

white – open influence (PR, social advertising);
grey – semi hidden influence through context;
black – lies, falsification, disinformation.

Typical Russian narratives:

- «We are victims, they are aggressors»;
- «The authority in Ukraine was seized by Nazis»;
- «In Ukraine there is a civil war»;
- «Ukraine is an incapable state»;
- «Europe is confronted by immoral Ukrainian refugees»;
- «Ukrainian subject defenders are not needed by Ukraine».

Influence techniques:

- Bandwagon appeal – «everyone thinks so».

Fact-checking for journalists

Unverified information

Unreliable sources and narratives



Source verification

Identification of reliable sources of information



Comparison of points of view

Consideration of different perspectives



Narrative Tracking

Monitoring the evolution of narratives



Verified information

Reliable sources and narratives

- Meta immunisation – pre-empting criticism.
- Emotional visualisation – hidden influence through images.
- Narrativisation and clip thinking – easy perception through entertainment.

Why people believe propaganda:

- they seek simple answers;
- the illusion of their own immunity;
- familiar context;
- the need to belong to the majority;
- conformism and fear of change.

Practical tools for journalists

Detecting propaganda

- Who is the source?
- Whose interests?
- Emotional triggers?

Journalist's counter actions

- source verification;
- comparing viewpoints;
- tracking narratives;
- counter narratives;
- immunisation with facts.

Countering disinformation and fakes:

- Account and source verification: TGStat, Whois, Twitter Search.
- Photo and video: Google Reverse Image Search, InVID, YouTube DataViewer.
- Geolocation: Google Maps/Earth, MapChecking.
- Archives: Wayback Machine, Hoaxy, Bellingcat Tools.
- Telegram channel checklist: creation date, tone, media analysis, audience growth.
- OSINT – collecting and verifying data from open sources, satellite imagery and social networks.

Countering disinformation and fakes in wartime

During war information becomes a battlefield. Fakes and disinformation discredit institutions and weaken trust in journalism. Russian disinformation is strategic, often aimed at frontline territories. Each fake can cause harm, so the journalist must act quickly and responsibly.

The journalist's task is to detect, refute, inform and defend the truth.

The role of journalism in wartime



European dimension

European platforms and fact-checking networks demonstrate the importance of coordination and common standards:

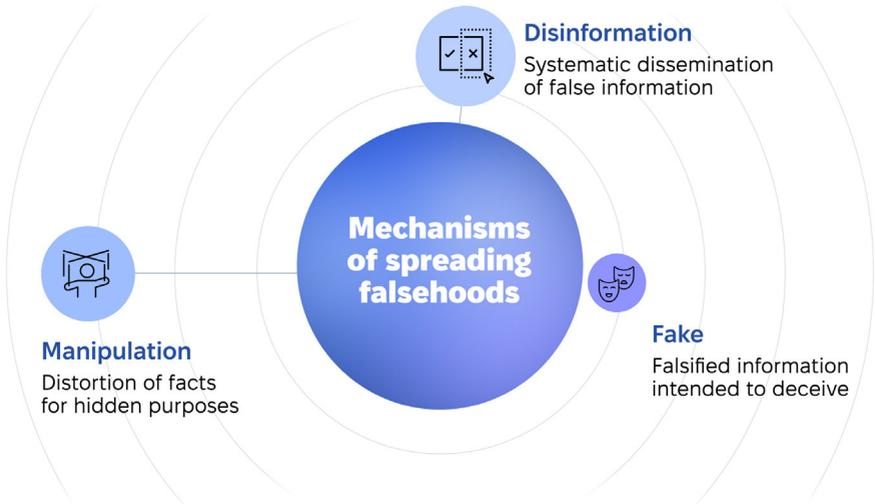
- EUvsDisinfo;
- FactCheckEU;
- networks of fact checkers.

Key concepts:

- fake – fabricated information;
- manipulation – distortion of facts with a hidden purpose;
- disinformation – systematic spread of falsehood.

Mechanism of disinformation influence:

emotional triggers + cognitive biases;
social and technological factors amplify the effect;
There is a stable mechanism for spreading falsehood.



Practical tools for journalists

1. Account and source verification: TGStat, Whois, Twitter Search.
2. Photo and video: Google Reverse Image Search, InVID, YouTube DataViewer.
3. Geolocation: Google Maps/Earth, MapChecking.
4. Archives: Wayback Machine, Hoaxy, Bellingcat Tools.
5. Telegram channel checklist: creation date, tone, media analysis, audience growth.
6. OSINT – collecting and verifying data from open sources, satellite imagery and social networks.

Fact-checking tools



Account verification

Using TGStat, Whois, and Twitter Search to verify accounts and sources



Photos and videos

Using Google Reverse Image Search, InVID, and YouTube DataViewer



Geolocation

Determining geolocation via Google Maps/Earth and MapChecking



Archives

Access to archives via Wayback Machine, Hoaxy, and Bellingcat Tools



Telegram checklist

Telegram channel checklist: creation date, tone, media analysis, audience growth

Practical advice for journalists:

- do not repeat a fake verbatim;
- verify primary sources;
- record evidence;
- automate verification;
- enhance critical thinking;
- refutation should be short, precise and not echo the fake.

Ethical standards during war

War changes the conditions of journalists' work: responsibility for words, images and facts increases. Ethics becomes a tool of defence, preserving trust and reputation.



European dimension

European journalism relies on stable ethical practices supported by institutions such as **the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), the Council of Europe, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media**, and networks of national media councils and press ombudsmen. They develop codes, recommendations and self-regulation mechanisms that help maintain a balance between freedom of expression and societal responsibility.

Main principles:

- priority of security and national interests;
- balance of opinions and context of enemy sources' quotes;
- emotionally sensitive subjects – sustain, do not dramatise;
- coverage of death and burials – family consent, delicacy, shock content labeling;
- respect for dignity – showing death as a human tragedy; photos of bodies only with legal permission.

How to follow ethical standards during war

01 Security and national interests

02 Balance of opinions

03 Emotional sensitivity

04 Coverage of death

05 Respect for dignity

Practical tools:

- harm check checklist;
- avoid direct quotations of the enemy;
- family consent;
- neutral language;
- social network verification;
- shock content labeling;
- memory language.

Advice for journalists:

- adhere to objectivity and fact-checking;
- use OSINT for source checking;
- ensure a rapid and precise response to a fake;
- increase audience trust through transparency of process.

Conclusions

Thus, Ukrainian journalism in wartime has not lost standards. It has reinterpreted them. We have proven that truthfulness can coexist with patriotism, objectivity with a moral stance, and ethics with survival.

European colleagues can learn from us **not only professional techniques, but also the internal readiness to work where truth is a matter of life and death.**

Communication with the community (service journalism)

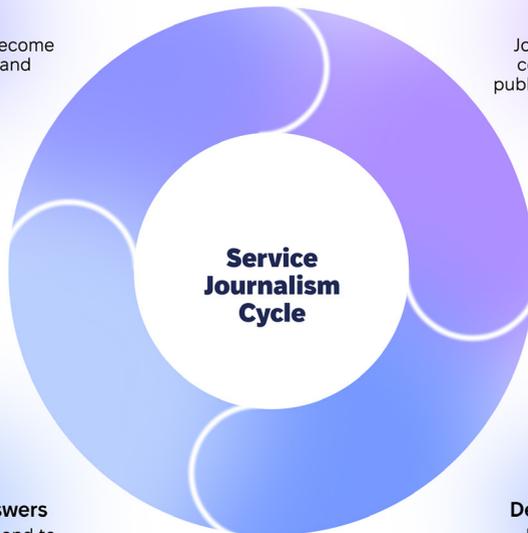
In wartime conditions journalism not only informs, but also supports psychological resilience, builds trust and solidarity. Modern communication technologies help media preserve the human dimension and adapt pace, tone and format to the audience's condition. Service journalism explains the complex, debunks fakes, answers the question: «What does it mean for me?»

Empowering communities

Communities become more informed and able to act

Explaining complexities

Journalists simplify complex topics for public understanding



Providing answers

Journalists respond to community questions, ensuring clarity

Debunking fakes

Journalists detect and disprove false information

European dimension

European service journalism has long been oriented to **community needs** – it is journalism that explains, not just reports. Initiatives such as **the European Journalism Centre (EJC)**, **Solutions Journalism Network (SJN Europe)**, **Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism** develop the public service journalism approach – serving societal interests through credible, understandable and useful information.

European media pay attention to:

- transparency and accountability;
- dialogue with the audience;
- community involvement in content production;
- development of **data journalism** and **human storytelling** – stories with a human face.

What does a journalist need to know when communicating with the information consumer through a media text?

Psychology of information perception

Journalism is not only words, but also **work with perception**. People see not what is, but what they are **ready to see**.

Communication myths

Myth 1



«If the fact is obvious – everyone will perceive it the same»

Myth 2



«The reader is rational»

Myth 3



«The main thing is to tell the truth»
(how you tell it matters)

Cognitive biases:

Projection bias



People tend to believe others think and feel the same as they do. Therefore the journalist must consciously go beyond his/her own attitudes

«Concave-mask» effect (R. Gregory)



We do not see the object itself, but its familiar image. Remember: the headline, tone, metaphor are already interpretation.

Confirmation bias



The reader seeks out information that confirms their convictions and ignores contradictory. Therefore it is important to balance viewpoints and explain context.

Key communicative technologies of journalism during wartime:



Slow journalism

deep reflection on facts, context and consequences. This is resistance to informational noise: fewer – but more accurate, humane, truthful.



Conversational journalism (human voice)

natural, human language, rejection of officialese. The voice of the journalist is not only a source but a partner in dialogue with the reader.



Engagement journalism

co-creation of content with the community. Readers are not objects, but co-participants. Trust is born through participation.



Solutions journalism

focusing not only on the problem but on ways to overcome it. Materials show what already works and how to act.



Empathy storytelling

stories that do not evoke pity, but create understanding. Emotion becomes a channel of cognition, not manipulation.



Constructive communication

finding common ground between different positions, reducing tension, developing the culture of listening.



Emotional pacing

deliberate alternation of informational and emotional highlights to keep attention without overloading the reader.



Feedback loops

constant receiving, analysing and taking into account audience reactions; joint adjustment of topics, tone, formats.

Types of texts by impact

1. **Rational persuasive** – work with facts, logic, analytics.
2. **Emotionally impactful** – appeal to experience, empathy, trust.

Practical tools:

- Simplicity principle (KISS) – short sentences, understandable vocabulary
- Structure: Problem → Explanation → Solution → Contacts
- Text types: rational persuasive and emotionally impactful
- Work with attention: important at the beginning and at the end, lists, quotes, subheadings
- Digital tools: video, memes, infographic.

Effective Journalism Strategy

- 01 Principle of simplicity
- 02 Structure of material
- 03 Types of texts
- 04 Attention management
- 05 Digital tools

New formats of communication for journalists during war

- **Telegram journalism:** short explanations, storytelling in real time.
- **Visual journalism:** maps, graphics, infographics.
- **Podcasts and audio testimonies:** presence effect, voices of eyewitnesses.
- **Data storytelling:** combining facts and human stories.
- **Communication via memes and social networks:** explaining the serious in simple language.
- **Dialogue journalism:** live broadcasts, Zoom discussions, and «meetings in the square».

Advice for journalists:

- Speak with the community, not to it.
- Anticipate different interpretations of words.
- Avoid manipulative tone.
- Explain context.
- Test texts for clarity.

Conclusions

Effective journalistic practice during wartime is based on three principles: **knowledge, critical thinking, and responsibility.**

A journalist is not only an informer, but also an analyst, a defender, and a communicator. Media literacy is essential for society's security, the resilience of the information space, and public trust.

Ukrainian journalists' wartime experience

In the field of countering propaganda

This is a unique experience of systematic monitoring of Russian disinformation campaigns that operate both domestically and internationally.

- **Analytical centres** (Detector Media, StopFake, VoxCheck, Texty) developed effective algorithms for tracking, classification and decoding of fakes.
- **Work in anticipation:** Ukrainian journalists learned to predict which narratives the enemy might launch next and create counter narratives even before the fakes appeared in mass circulation.
- Ukrainian journalists, analysts and media experts developed a strong school of **semiotic and critical analysis of propaganda**.
- We analyse speeches, texts, «interviews» of Kremlin actors at the level of **lexicon, symbols, historical allusions and manipulations of memory**. (Examples: analytical unpacking of Putin's article «On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians», his interview with Tucker Carlson, RT films or First Channel plots).
- **We have examples of technologies of desanctifying the enemy through humour** as a method of psychological resistance that destroys fear.
- European countries can also adopt the experience of **meme communication as an element of strategic communications and society's psychological resilience**.

Ukrainian colleagues' experience with informational «inoculation» against fakes and Russian IP SO

- Ukrainian society has effectively undergone **massive «inoculation» with facts, because since 2014** Ukraine has been confronting a multilayered information war on a daily basis, Ukrainians have developed a kind of **media immunity**: critical thinking, distrust of unverified sources, and the habit of verifying information. They have learned to recognize emotional manipulation, memetic traps, and «informational gaslighting».
- **Civic initiatives** such as the Academy of Ukrainian Press, StopFake or Po toy bik novyn (On the Other Side of the News) became laboratories of fact-checking and media literacy.
- **Media education in schools and universities** is a unique example of integration of media literacy into educational programmes during war.

Ukraine created one of the most effective ecosystems of independent fact-checking in Europe:

- **StopFake, VoxCheck, Po toy bik novyn, Bez brekhni, Filtr, GRASS FACT check, Texty.org.ua** – these are not just sites, but analytical laboratories that systematically unpack fakes. They developed proprietary verification methodologies: metadata verification, cross referencing, tone analysis, source chain, geolocation, reverse image search.
- In Ukraine **a culture of collective fact-checking** has formed – collaboration of media, NGOs, IT specialists, bloggers and volunteers.
- **Use of OSINT (open source intelligence)**. Ukrainian journalists became leaders in verification of photo and video materials, using satellite data, metadata, archives.

Ukrainian experience of observing journalistic standards and ethics during war

War forced Ukrainian journalists to **revisit the classic formula «say everything you know»**.

- War conditions demand **ethical self-regulation**: publish the truth, but so that it **does not harm the defence, the army, civilians**. Instead of censorship – **conscious ethical restraint**.
- We learned to **balance between society's right to know and the state's right to survive**.
- New standards of reliability appeared: «confirmed by two independent OSINT sources», «video verified by geolocation», «refuted by military».
- European journalists can also adopt the Ukrainian practice of **ethical responsibility in crisis conditions** – when the main goal is not a «sensation», but maintaining humanity and safety.
- Classic European journalism long adhered to the principle of «neutrality» – «two sides, two views». The Ukrainian experience showed: **in a war between aggressor and victim neutrality is silent complicity in evil. In Ukrainian journalism we observe a shift from neutrality to a moral position**. And this is a new approach that Europe should assimilate: **ethics is not indifference, objectivity does not mean a lack of principle**.
- We also formed a school of **journalism of compassion** without pity, but with understanding of pain. This approach gives a new ethical framework: **respect suffering, without exploiting it for views**.
- European colleagues can learn **the ethics of empathy**: not fetishise tragedy, but help society comprehend it.

Ukrainian experience of implementing service journalism in the war media space

Ukrainian journalists learnt not only to inform, but to **communicate with the community**.

- The key principle – **«not from above, but from below»**: hear, see, explain so that every person recognises themselves in the material.
- After 2014, and especially since 2022, **trust journalism** emerged, when the journalist becomes a mediator between the authorities and the people, between pain and hope.
- We can teach European colleagues to **speak simply about the complex**, without losing depth.
- Ukrainian journalists became innovators not only in methods, but also in the very logic of presenting their materials through such forms as: **visual journalism, podcasts and audio testimonies, data storytelling**, live broadcasts, Zoom discussions, etc.



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She worked as Bloomberg correspondent in eastern Ukraine. She cooperates with AFP, TAZ, Goethe Institut and UNICEF.

Author of the project «The Most Mined Country in the World». Journalist of the global UNICEF campaign «Children Under Attack», which won the Shorty Awards 2023. Awarded the badge of the Joint Forces Command of the Armed Forces of Ukraine «For Service and Valor».

Specialises in field reporting and human stories

Chapter 2

Covering children's stories during war: ethical and practical guidelines

Children – little heroes of great stories

Mark Twain said: «You must write for children the same way you write for adults, only better..» Likewise – children should be written about «as about adults, only better».

Children's stories always evoke a strong emotional response. During the war in Ukraine they become vitally important because children are **the most unprotected victims of aggression**.

According to UNICEF, over **660 children** were killed, over **1,800 wounded**, every fifth child lost a close one.

This is not only statistics – this is **the change of childhood of an entire nation**. Shelling, evacuations, life without a home and friends, separation from parents have become everyday realities. Such data bear the features of genocide, and it is journalists who record this truth for historical memory.

At the same time, one must remember: a child is **more than their trauma**.

The journalist's goal is not only to tell, but **not to harm**. Therefore children's story journalism must be **empathetic, humanistic, honest**.

European dimension.

Ukrainian journalists developed their own approaches to ethical coverage of children during war – these practices may be useful for colleagues from other countries working in conflict zones or humanitarian crises. In particular, **the system of written consents, rules preventing retraumatisation and work with «stories of healing»** are unique Ukrainian contributions to modern crisis journalism.

Ethical coverage of children's stories during the war

Ukrainian practices

Unique methods of ethical reporting

Empathetic journalism

An approach that focuses on emotional well-being

Traumatic experiences

Children's lives changed by war

UNICEF statistics

Data on child casualties and losses

Emotional response

Strong emotions caused by children's stories

Key concepts

1. Consent – written permission of parents or guardians for photo, video or interview.
2. Retraumatization – the child's re-experiencing of trauma through careless questions or actions.
3. Empathetic interview – a conversation based on respect, without pressure, caring about the emotional state of the interlocutor.
4. Psychological safety – a condition when the child may refuse to answer or stop the interview.
5. Ethical journalism – an approach in which the benefit of covering the story outweighs the risk of harm.

Consent and respect

Rule No. 1: **no shooting or interviewing without parents' or guardians' written consent.**

The consent form must include:

- date and place of shooting;
- name and age of the child;
- contact details of parents/guardians;
- an explanation of where and how the material will be used.

The journalist must clearly introduce themselves and explain the purpose of the work. If the child does not want to participate – **that is a sign to stop.**

You cannot show faces of children with HIV status, in orphanages or foster homes without separate permission.

Working with trauma

Children's stories are not sensations, but **survival experience**. After a traumatic event it is worth giving time for recovery, not asking questions immediately.

- Do not pressure the child – if they are silent, allow silence.
- Do not repeat questions, do not demand «emotional quotes».
- Interviews should take place **in a safe location**, sitting at the child's eye level.
- Explain that they may choose not to answer a question if they do not want to.

Main rule: «**Do no harm**» – today and in the future.

The benefit of publication must outweigh the risk for the child.

Avoid:

- sensational descriptions («destroyed home», «crying after the explosion»);
- excessive detail of violence, rape or death;
- photos that evoke pity or stigmatise.

Getting acquainted and building trust

Start with something simple:

- talk about school, friends, a favourite game or animal.
- ask what the child likes to do now;
- give them time to relax.

✗ Do not ask:

«What did you feel when the house was destroyed?»

«Why didn't you save yourself?»

«Do you want to go home?»

✓ Better ask:

«Who was with you then?»

«What helped you cope?»

«What makes you happy now?»

Do not promise the child («after this feature everything will change»).

Explain: your story will help understanding, but it does not solve everything.

Practical advice

- During the interview **return attention to the present**, ask about school, friends, hobbies.
- Conclude the conversation **on a positive note**: «What are you planning to do tomorrow?», «What is your dream?».
- Thank the child for their time and trust.
- If you feel the story might harm, **then decline it**.
- Be prepared for **silhouette filming**, changing the name or details for safety.

Cases and examples

Ukrainian experience

- Reports from frontline regions (Sumy, Chernihiv, Kherson oblasts) demonstrate a balance between empathy and accuracy.
- Materials by UNICEF Ukraine – an example of correct visual work with children.

European experience

- Agencies AP, AFP, Reuters cover the impact of war on children's mental health, avoiding naturalism and excessive emotional pressure.
- BBC and Deutsche Welle apply the «context first» rule – first explain the event, then the emotional part of the story.

Advice for journalists

- Do not hurry – give the child time.
- Do not look for «tears»; look for meaning.
- Always put the ethical principle above the news hook.
- Be ready not to publish the material if it can harm the subject.
- Remain human – even when the camera is off.

Field perspectives

Ukrainian journalists developed their own approaches to ethical coverage of children during war – these practices may be useful for colleagues from other countries working in zones of conflict or humanitarian crises.

In particular, the system of written consents, rules preventing retraumatisation and work with «stories of healing» are unique Ukrainian contributions to modern crisis journalism.

Ukrainian colleagues can advise European journalists:

- **Do not treat children's stories as breaking news.** Instead it is worth taking contacts of parents and families and returning to these stories over time. This will help avoid traumatising of the child and make the story deeper.

- **Show not only tears and tragedy, but also stories of resistance and overcoming.** Through large medical institutions such as **Superhumans Center, Unbroken National Rehabilitation Center and Okhmatdyt Children's Hospital** one can find stories of children who after injuries received prostheses and now do sports, volunteer or engage in creativity.

- **Write about long term consequences of war, not only about shelling and burials.** For example, a complex and important topic is the mental health of Ukrainian children during war. Funds like **Voices of Children Foundation, Save the Children and UNICEF** can provide western colleagues with support, contacts and access to locations where psychology sessions, art therapy and schooling of Ukrainian children take place.

- **Pay attention to children who still remain in «kill zones».** Even in the fourth year of the full-scale war children live near the front line. Through the Juvenile Police of Ukraine, humanitarian organisations Proliska and East SOS, one can get data about the number of children evacuated daily from frontline districts, as well as those who still remain near the combat zone.

Conclusions

The full-scale invasion shifted the priorities of many Ukrainian journalists covering children's stories — from impartiality and speed to empathy. And when we talk about stories involving children, we must remember that these are not breaking news or sensational narratives; they require careful work that must not cause harm.

Sometimes, when working with children, it is better to be a «bad», untimely or non-sensational journalist — but remain a good human being.

Formats of classic Western media that local editorial offices can use

Contemporary Ukrainian journalism is gradually moving away from post Soviet traditions and orienting towards European standards. Local media are increasingly experimenting with formats that lie at the core of Western journalism — features, human-interest stories, breaking news, literary reportage, and first-person narratives. These approaches help make their coverage deeper, more emotional, and more accessible to international audiences.

Journalistic genres

01

Breaking news

Urgent news reporting the most important facts in the format of an «inverted pyramid» or according to the principle of «Five Ws»

02

Feature

An expanded journalistic piece combining facts, emotions, reportage elements and human history

03

Human-interest story

A story built around a specific person, their experience and feelings

04

Background

Additional information explaining the context of the event

05

First-person story

A text presented as the subject's own narration based on an interview

06

Literary report

A documentary-style text with artistic elements that recreates reality through images, dialogues, metaphors

Relevance in the context of war, propaganda and frontline territories

During war journalists work in extremely difficult conditions – between the need to inform quickly and the responsibility not to spread panic or disinformation.

Use of Western formats makes it possible to:

- increase **audience trust** through transparent structures of information delivery;
- **show the human dimension of war**, focusing on real stories;
- **counter propaganda** by creating materials built on facts, empathy and respect for subjects;
- help communities in frontline regions **preserve their own voice** in the global information space.

Building trust and impact in journalism

Community voice

Highlighting local perspectives within global narratives

Factual empathy

Combining facts with emotional understanding

Transparent structures

Ensuring clarity and openness in presenting information

Human stories

Focusing on personal experience to connect with audiences

Ukrainian journalists can integrate into the European media by adopting approaches to **analytics, storytelling and working with emotional content**. European colleagues, for their part, can borrow from Ukrainian media:

- **the ability to work in extreme conditions;**
- **examples of the ethical war coverage;**
- **strategies for supporting local communities through media.**

Key concepts (short glossary)

- Breaking news – urgent news that reports the most important facts in the «inverted pyramid» format or according to the principle «Five Ws» (Who, What, When, Where, Why).
- Feature story – an extended journalistic material that combines facts, emotions, reportage elements and a human story.
- Human interest story – a story built around a specific person, their experience and feelings.
- Literary reportage – documentary text with artistic elements that reproduces reality through images, dialogues, metaphors.
- First person story – text presented as the narration of the subject themselves based on an interview.
- Background – additional information that explains the context of the event.

Breaking News – fast, precise, with context

Urgent news must be short but meaningful.

- Use the «inverted pyramid» principle – the most important first.
- Provide background so that the reader understands the context of the event.
- According to research by Jacob Nielsen, most readers scan text in an «F» form, so the main information should be in the first paragraphs.

Feature – depth of story

A feature combines analytics, reportage and storytelling:

- Main attention is to the human story;
- Use several points of view (subject, experts, eyewitnesses);
- Respect the subject even in difficult topics;
- Language should be lively, without surplus adjectives.

Human interest story – a story that touches the heart

- The subject is the central figure through whom the global event is revealed.
- Describe emotions, details, place of events.
- Conclude with a strong quote from the subject.

New Journalism – between journalism and literature

- Use of metaphors, dialogues, compositional structure (setup – climax – resolution).
- Literary reportage helps tell about social processes through the fate of one person.
- «First person story» creates the effect of presence, but requires the subject's consent and text agreement.

Creating compelling stories



Practical tools

Checklist for journalists

- Is there context (background) in the material?
- Is the «Five Ws» principle observed?
- Is there a human story?
- Are emotions and facts balanced?
- Are sources verified?
- Is there respect for the subject?

Digital resources:

- BBC Academy Journalism Guide
- Reuters Handbook of Journalism
- Poynter Institute Training

Cases and examples

- Ukrainian local media (for example, Suspilne, Hromadske) actively implement European approaches to storytelling and background.
- European media (BBC, DW) use **ethical standards and presentation structure** that can serve as a benchmark for frontline editorial offices.

Advice for journalists

- Remember: **emotions must be a tool, not the goal.**
- Always add **context.**
- Do not use **evaluative judgments.**
- Respect the **personal boundaries of subjects.**
- Avoid **repetitions and clichés** («peaceful residents», «horrible tragedy» etc.).
- If the story is difficult – end it with a note of **hope or the strength of a person.**

Conclusions

Local Ukrainian media can effectively use Western formats by adapting them to their own context. The main goal is not to copy, but to **thoughtfully reinterpret** someone else's experience. Human stories are a **bridge between war and peace**, between Ukraine and the world. The quality of journalism is determined by **respect for the fact, the reader and the subject.** European experience helps increase **trust in local media** and make their voice significant even under fire.

Chapter 3

Digitalisation: from «black box» to the editorial daily tool

This chapter explores how large language models and other artificial intelligence tools are already woven into the day-to-day work of Ukrainian newsrooms, especially those on the frontline. It examines effectiveness and the new rules of the game, the risks and limits of responsibility, the security settings that can save years of work and entire archives, and the AI prompts that genuinely save time.

Relevance in the context of war and frontline territories

Overburdened editorial offices must automate routine (transcription, drafts, summaries) without risking audience trust.

Platforms reduce visibility of «problematic» or low quality content – discipline of presentation and AI labelling becomes part of informational security.

In Ukraine Telegram is the main news consumption channel; this increases the speed of spread of both facts and disinformation. Editorial offices must act quickly, transparently, cautiously.

European dimension: what we take and what we can give

We take: human-in-the-loop policies, transparent labelling of AI's role, new formats of repackaging for social media.

We give: practices of working in wartime conditions, source protection (Tails, Signal), explanatory formats for communities, experience of countering disinformation and moderating «heavy» comments according to Ukrainian law.



Author:

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PhD, teaching journalism at the Institute of Journalism of Taras Shevchenko Kyiv National University. Cooperates with the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine and the Academy of Ukrainian Press, conducts training for journalists, bloggers and students in media literacy, audience engagement, fact-checking and countering disinformation.

Emphasises the role of quality journalism and society's resilience to manipulation, author of over 20 scientific works and manuals on journalism.

Key concepts (short glossary)

- **LLM (Large Language Model).** A model trained on large corpora of texts that generates coherent responses. It «thinks» in tokens; long dialogues «eat» context – large tasks are better broken down.
- **Prompt.** An instruction to the model. An effective prompt includes role, task, format and tone of the response, as well as context with examples.
- **Remove–Reduce–Inform.** Platform moderation approach: remove clear violations; reduce visibility of «grey» content; add context/warning.
- **«Human-in-the-loop».** Final decision is made by the journalist/editor; AI is a preparatory tool.
- **Tails / Signal.** Live OS without traces and messenger with E2EE by default – basic data protection tools.

«Non magic» of AI: what actually works

Large language models (LLMs) have already become part of editorial routines: transcription of interviews, creating drafts, short summaries, SEO headlines, translations, archive search, help with code and monitoring digital threats.

- Associated Press automated short financial notes on the principle: data → templates → editor review.
- BBC publicly tests **At a glance** – short summaries under materials – and Style Assist – cues for clarity in text.
- Reuters created **the Tracer system**, which filters out «noise» on X and issues signals about news requiring journalist attention.
- According to the Reuters Institute, audiences generally accept the back-office use of AI (personalisation, technical assistance) but remain cautious about «mostly AI» news.
- Therefore labelling the role of the algorithm (LLM) is now part of trust. [Source¹](#)

Where the tool ends and ethics begins

Editorial practice is gradually defining clear boundaries.

- We do not publish «pure» AI texts/images without human review and labelling.
- We do not place the model in the position of «source of truth» in legal, medical or political topics.
- Experiments – only under editor control and with clear description of AI's role (AP).
- If the algorithm helps with headline or summary – this is marked (Reuters Institute).

Editorial workflow with AI: from idea to publication

We remember about «algorithmic hygiene»

Platforms reduce visibility of low quality content according to «remove, reduce, inform» (Meta Transparency Center). Editorial offices must care about clear post structure, subtitles, time codes, warnings for sensitive topics. [Source²](#)

¹ <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/generative-ai-and-news-report-2025-how-people-think-about-ai-role-journalism-and-society>

² <https://transparency.meta.com/policies/>

Ingest – search, verification, transcription, quotations, time codes.

This is the stage of collecting raw material for the future story. AI helps quickly transcribe interviews, extract key quotes and automatically apply time codes. In newsrooms, this is already standard practice – saving time by a factor of 3-4 without any loss of accuracy.

For example, journalists use Otter.ai, MacWhisper, Whisper API, free services like 123apps.com or nvmp3.com - and free services like 123apps.com or nvmp3.com (for short audio).

Generation of ideas, approaches, search for way of presentation

After ingest begins the main thing – the search for the angle from which to tell the story. This is where language models become real helpers of a journalist.

- We use page analytics. Telegram – Chat Export Tool; Facebook – Download Your Information; website – Google Analytics. Using AI, we perform topic clustering and identify peak hours, key topics, and audience preferences.
- We use Story SpinnerAI for search. Its author – editor of Deutsche Presse Agentur (DPA) Simon Kremer. The tool is a specialised ChatGPT bot created for generating ideas for journalists and content creators based on audience needs.
- The main principle of work – rapid creation of ideas for articles and plots depending on needs (for example, «illuminate», «inspire», «help»).

Practical tools

- ChatGPT, Claude, Qwen – for brainstorming («What 10 angles can we take for the topic 'Volunteering under fire'?»).
- NotebookLM, AI Studio (Google) – for structuring notes and searching logic in a data mass.
- Midjourney, Leonardo, DALL·E – for creating sketches of visual concepts.

Editor's algorithm of work

- Pose the question: what do we want to say?
- Collect facts after ingest.
- Formulate a prompt for idea generation.
- Select ideas by criteria: novelty, relevance, format.
- Refine the task for AI – plan, subheadings, lead.

Content creation process using AI

<p>01</p> <p>Draft: AI helps create a draft with subtitles and structure</p> <p>The language model helps see the logic of the text, formulate the lead and produce a draft which the journalist then edits. Here it is important to clearly set the structure and verify that the model did not add invented facts.</p>	<p>02</p> <p>Fact-check: Journalist verifies facts from various sources</p> <p>Models often invent references, so the journalist must manually verify everything: via official sites, databases, open sources, OSINT tools and fact-checking platforms.</p>	<p>03</p> <p>Adaptation: AI adjusts content for different platforms</p> <p>At the final stage, AI helps adapt the material for different platforms – form the lead, create subtitles, translation, or add warnings for sensitive content.</p>
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Conclusions

LLMs help see new angles, formulate clear theses and avoid templating. The human remains the main author – they are the ones who decide which ideas are worth turning into a story.

How to write prompts

Clarity is key: role, task, format, tone, context, examples. Useful template: «Give me five ideas – from the most typical to the most fantastic.» Remember the tokens: long dialogues cut context, so big tasks should be broken down.

Level 1 – Basic prompt (like an ordinary person)

```
Write a post about a healthy lifestyle for Instagram.
```

Characteristics:

- Minimal instructions;
- No structure;
- No context;
- No format specificity.

Typical problems of the answer:

- General phrases («exercise», «eat right»);
- No efficiency strategy;
- Unknown audience;
- No design recommendations;
- May contain false information.

Level 2: Advanced prompt (with roles and structure)

```
You are an experienced Instagram content manager with 3 years of experience. Your task: create 5 posts for a beginner blogger about healthy lifestyle.
```

```
Structure for each post:
```

1. **Headline** (hook that grabs attention in 2 seconds)
2. **Main text** (100 - 150 words)
3. **Key tips** (3 concrete actions)
4. **Hashtags** (10 popular)
5. **Call to action** (CTA - question or invitation to action)

```
Use a simple, friendly tone. The material should be inspiring but realistic.
```

Characteristics:

- Defined role
- Amount of content
- Structure of each post
- Tone guidance
- Practical elements

Typical results:

- Grouped content
- Has hook and CTA
- Better design
- More purpose

Level 3: High quality prompt (professional approach)

CONTEXT:

You are a Senior Content Strategist and medical consultant with 7 years of experience in creating wellness content. Your role is to ensure that the content is both engaging and science-based, helping to prevent the spread of health myths.

AUDIENCE PROFILE:

Age: 25-40 yrs

Gender: mixed

Knowledge level: beginners (asking basic questions)

Engagement type: motivation + practical hacks

Behaviour: scrolls fast, stops on emotional content

TASK:

Create a series of 5 posts for an Instagram beginner blogger that will:

1. Generate 10-15% engagement (realistic norm)
2. Be factually correct (no myths)
3. Motivate to act, but without pressure
4. Be saved and shared by them

FOR EACH POST:

└─ POST #1: [Specific topic - e.g. «How to start exercising if you never did sports»]

|

---- STRUCTURE:

| └─ HOOK (2 lines): Question or statement that triggers recognition («Do you also...»)

| └─ PROBLEM (3 4 lines): Why people have problems with this topic

| └─ SOLUTION (5 7 lines): 3 concrete steps with examples

| └─ SCIENCE (2 lines): Short reference to a scientific

```
fact
|  └ CTA (1 line): Question for comments or an action
|
|---- REQUIREMENTS:
|  └ Volume: 200-250 words (balance between
informativeness and readability)
|  └ Emojis: 3-5 (relevant, not overload)
|  └ Tone: simple, authentic, without paternalism
|  └ Credibility: MUST specify source if citing a fact
|  └ Personality: show your understanding of a topic, but
not as an expert
|
|---- DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS:
|  └ Colour suggestion (what emotions required)
|  └ Type of illustration (photo, graphic, text)
|  └ Layout (where to place text on picture)
|  └ Dimensions: 1080x1350px (vertical post)
|
|----HASHTAGS (12-15):
|  └ 3-4 mega tags (over 1M posts) for reach
|  └ 5-6 medium tags (100K-1M) for relevance
|  └ 4-5 micro tags (10K-100K) for community
|
└ PUBLICATION DATE: Recommended day and time
```

TOPICS FOR 5 POSTS (must cover different aspects):

1. How to start if you never did sports
2. Most common nutrition myths (debunk 3)
3. How to recover after a workout in 5 minutes
4. Psychological side of a healthy lifestyle
5. How to synchronise health with a busy schedule

IMPORTANT:

Each post can exist independently, but together they create a narrative

Refer to scientific sources (give a specific link or study title)

Avoid unnecessary optimism («In a week you will be like a fitness model»)

Add realistic expectations and timeline

If you give physical advice - add info about consulting a doctor

OUTPUT FORMAT:

Present each post separately with all the above-mentioned elements. At the beginning, add a brief strategy plan for new health bloggers (how to use these posts to engage an audience).

Characteristics:

- Multi-aspect context
- Detailed audience profile
- Architecture for each post
- Scientific verification
- Design recommendations
- SEO-optimization (hashtags)
- Strategic sequence
- Realistic expectations
- Ethical guidelines

Typical results:

- Profiled content for a specific audience
- Factually accurate material
- Ready for publication (with design tips)
- Measurable success metrics
- Ethically sound
- Strategic blog development

How to create an effective post



«Human-in-the-Loop»: Editorial Policy

A short policy document with the five points:

- (1) where LLMs can be applied;
- (2) where they cannot be applied ;
- (3) how to indicate their role;
- (4) who is responsible;
- (5) what must not be uploaded (personal data, unpublished documents, trade secrets).

Associated Press and BBC affirm the principle: «AI enhances a journalist but does not replace them.»

Risks

- **Hallucinations:** fact-check via official sources, not AI (Reuters Institute).
- **Reach drop:** follow the remove–reduce–inform policy (Meta Transparency Center).
- **Platform security:** comply with social media restrictions, moderate comments, according to Ukraine's Media Law.
- **Privacy:** use Tails, Signal, WhatsApp with the strict private data discipline.

Security – the backbone of digitalisation

Basic digital hygiene: always have antivirus installed, enable two-factor authentication, use a password manager, set local access passwords, and have a plan for data compromise.

- **Tails** – an operating system that leaves no traces and routes all traffic through Tor.
- **Signal** – the most popular messenger with end-to-end encryption.
- **Telegram** is widely used in Ukraine, but maximum chat encryption is not on by default.

Insights from the frontlines

Ukrainian newsrooms implement AI not because it's trendy, but because they are overwhelmed. It helps automate routine (transcription, drafts) and frees up time for what matters: verification, analysis, and creating original content.

Tip for Europeans: view AI not just as a cost-cutting tool, but as a strategic instrument to enhance newsroom resilience during crises (elections, terror attacks, natural disasters, wars) when information flow becomes uncontrollable.

Conclusions

Digitalisation is not a «magic button» that solves everything – it's about procedures. Where there are rules for AI usage, algorithm role labelling, and «human-in-the-loop,» models bring speed and scale without loss of trust. That's the «skeleton» of editorial digital transformation – something we're building with the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine.

Chapter 4

Methodological insights from practitioner experts

Human stories – what draws the world’s attention to the war in Ukraine

From NUJU’s webinar «Truth versus disinformation in conditions of war»

Media trainer:

journalist at the Associated Press, producer of the film “20 Days in Mariupol,” and Pulitzer Prize laureate Vasilisa Stepanenko.



The gist

Telling the truth about war is a form of resistance. Independent regional media, in particular, can show the world human stories because they know the locality, the people, and the context best. Even experienced international journalists sometimes lack that depth of understanding.

European dimension

Keeping global community interest in Ukraine is difficult. But human stories are the key that helps not only reach an audience but also hold its attention. Local journalists have a special trust from people and can show the truth sincerely and in depth.

Main guides for journalists

- **Humanity:** remain human even when documenting pain. People open up only to those who listen respectfully.
- **Openness:** introduce yourself, don’t hide your name—it increases trust.
- **Knowledge of locality:** visit the places, talk to people, look for details.
- **Mission: remember** – you give a voice to those whom others try to silence.

Practical advice for journalists

- Pay attention to the visual part—it «hooks» the global audience.
- Reportage details strengthen credibility.
- Find a balance between interest and respect for personal boundaries.
- Remember: no story is worth broken human dignity.
- Don’t forget about safety, especially in frontline zones.



How to find compelling cases in court registries

From NUJU's webinar «How to find a readable story in court registries».

Media trainer:

founder of the online publication «Judicial Reporter» Iryna Saliy.

The gist

The court registry is an **open data source** where a journalist can find unique stories without leaving the newsroom. It contains **more than 129 million rulings**, making it a powerful tool of analytics.

European dimension

Transparency of court registries is rare. Ukraine is an example of **judicial authority openness**, which meets European standards of access to information.

How to search for information

- **reyestr.court.gov.ua** – main resource.
- Search by **context, case number or phrase** (in quotes).
- Use **advanced parameters** – region, category, judge.
- Attend court hearings to see the **human dimension of the case**.
- Photograph hearing schedules if the ruling lacks names.

Practical advice for journalists

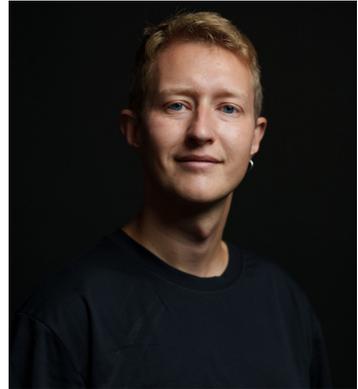
- Pay attention to **the criminal proceeding number** – it reveals much about investigation actions.
- Analyse **the duration of the case** via recent numbers.
- Do not fear going to court – **the best stories are born there**.
- Take comments from **direct participants**, not «experts on everything».
- The best materials are a result of **systematic, not one time, work**.
- Monitoring the registry is **your daily search for resonant topics**.

Photo versus fakes: how to shoot truth in conditions of an information war

From NUJU's webinar «Photo versus fakes».

Media trainer:

photographer and photo journalism lecturer
at Kyiv Mohyla Academy Serhiy Korovayny.



The gist

Every truthful photograph from Ukrainian cities is **an evidence of Russia's crimes**. Photography is the strongest argument against fakes and propaganda. Being a photo journalist during war is **a mission of responsibility and courage**.

European dimension

The world trusts what it sees. Ukrainian photographs from Bucha, Izyum, Mariupol forced the international community **to see the truth**. European media use these frames as evidence and as a reminder: truth has a face.

Ethical principles of a photo journalist

1. Show **truth**, don't stage scenes.
2. Respect the subjects and do not intervene in their behaviour.
3. Avoid **stereotypes** and distortions through editing.
4. **Do not accept gifts or pay for photos.**
5. Remember about **the safety of people and military secrecy**.

Safety and humanity

- Do not show **faces of victims in wide shots without consent**.
- At funerals – remain **inconspicuous and delicate**.
- In combat zones – mandatory **bullet proof vest, helmet, minimal equipment**.
- Check the situation, consult with press officers before departure.

Practical tips

- Shoot **different angles** (wide, medium, detail).
- Learn to work with **light, colour, composition**.
- Look at **quality photos, film, theatre, comics**. Develop visual thinking.
- Shoot **a lot and regularly**. Under stress you will act only at the level of preparation.
- Always care about the **ethical frame of the image**. Do not turn pain into sensation.

General Conclusions

Ukrainian journalism during war has become a front of truth and responsibility. Journalists in frontline regions daily prove that professionalism and humanity are the most important weapons against disinformation.

Media literacy, ethics and digital security are key components of professional resilience. European standards of truthfulness, balance and responsibility help maintain trust, and the Ukrainian experience of working in extreme conditions enriches the European media space.

Thus, journalism today is not only about transmitting facts but about defending human dignity and forming a resilient society.

Recommendations

- Develop systems of local fact-checking and cooperation with European networks.
- Introduce internal standards of ethical content verification.
- Increase digital literacy and cyber resilience of editorial offices.
- Use AI only as an auxiliary tool, with clear marking of its role.
- Expand international interaction between Ukrainian and European journalists.
- Support psychological resilience of journalists through training, supervision and mutual support.

The power of stories: why storytelling is a unique way to convey information

From the NUJU webinar «How Storytelling Helps Journalists Communicate in Modern Conditions».

Media trainer:

journalist, lecturer, and author of the book
«Tell a Story: Storytelling Tips»,
Tamara Kutsai.



The gist

People are 20 times more likely to remember facts if those facts are part of a story. That's why storytelling is one of the most powerful tools for communication. Stories are memorable, give a competitive advantage in the age of AI, and effectively convey knowledge, values, and experience in a compact form.

European dimension

Western experts foresee the rise of an «empathy economy» in the coming years, where societies will increasingly rely on powerful, emotional stories that can influence economic decisions.

According to research in psychology and neuroscience at Princeton University, when people listen to a story unfold, their brainwaves synchronize with those of the storyteller.

Stories have accompanied humanity from the beginning of civilization—starting with cave paintings. Villages, cities, and even technologies have their own stories. Behind every invention, there's a story. That's why, as the expert notes, it's essential for journalists to recognize and uncover these stories – they are everywhere.

Effective way to share information

Why stories are an effective way to share information

- Structure (stories help organize information clearly and logically);
- Audience orientation (they are tailored to the interests and needs of specific audiences);
- Empathy mechanism (emotional connection helps the story stick in memory and makes it easier to share).

Because of how the human brain works, facts are better retained through stories. Most people don't think in numbers or percentages. We process the world through narratives: events, causes, consequences, and especially emotions.

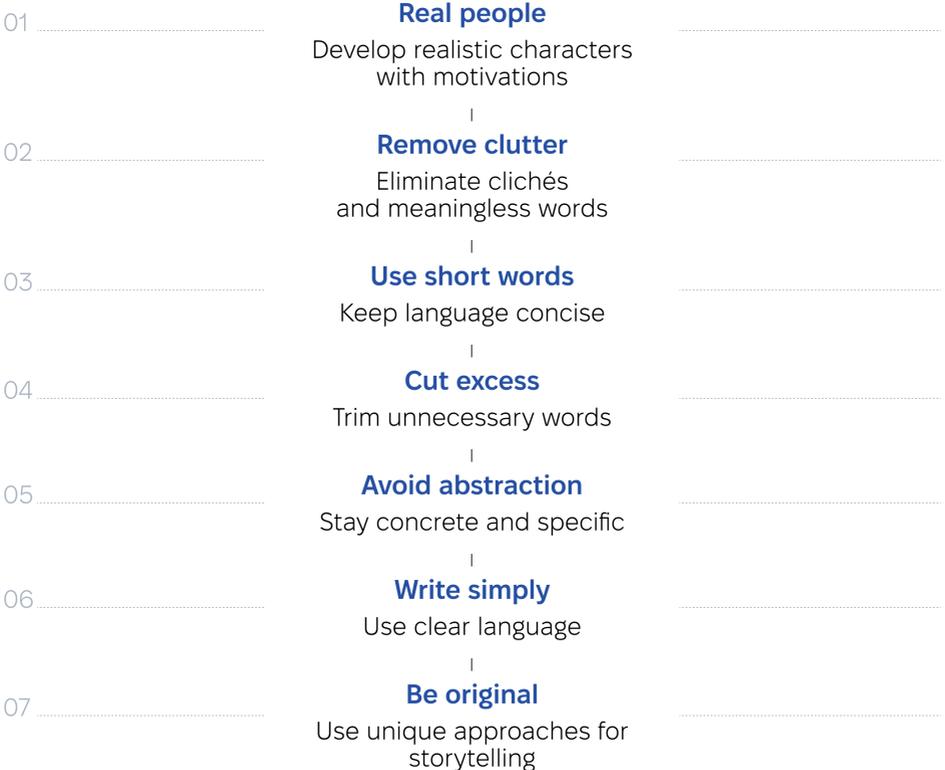
That's why AI is not a competitor in storytelling – it lacks emotional experience and true empathy.

How to write stories: practical tips

A good story should contain action, dialogue, and specific details. A strong story activates the reader's or listener's imagination – they can mentally «enter» the world you create.

1. Keep your characters real: avoid idealization, exaggeration, or fictional traits. Their actions and desires should be authentic.
2. Cut «verbal junk»: remove clichés, empty metaphors, and meaningless words.
3. Use short, clear words.
4. Trim the fat: if a word can be removed—remove it.
5. Avoid abstractions and banalities.
6. Write simply: simplicity is the most effective way to communicate your story.
7. Break the mold: unconventional approaches often lead to the most compelling stories.

Crafting a compelling story



Chapter 5

Case studies: participant's articles and expert analysis

Authors: Yulia Surkova, Tetyana Ivanova

One of the main objectives of the project is to help participants develop the skills needed to write media materials about the war, socially and ethically sensitive topics, and stories that support people's belief in goodness, recovery, and the future.

This chapter gives readers the opportunity to explore a selection of articles created by the project's participating journalists, along with the expert evaluations (peer reviews) provided by our trainers.

Peer reviewer of the article by Tetyana Logvina. Newspaper «Visti Zmiivshchyny», Kharkiv region



Title: «And for me Dmytro's story is a story about human possibilities. If he managed it, then I will too»

Subject: Dmytro Bezusiy, veteran, former prisoner of war, athlete, serviceman

Source: zmiiv.gromada.group

This story is a model of a quality local journalistic piece about the war, where the human being rather than the fact of combat or the trauma comes to the foreground. It was exactly this that was the principal criterion of training of journalists in the project. - This story is an example of high-quality local journalism about the war, where the human being — not the combat itself or the trauma — is placed at the centre. This focus was the key criterion in the training provided to journalists within the project.

Let us set out some arguments which prove that the journalist completely coped with the training tasks.

The headline is successful: it immediately sets the tone of empathy and inspiration. There is no artificial pathos, only a simple and honest formula – «if he succeeded, I can too». There is no pity in it, but faith, which is a very modern approach to talking about veterans.

The language of the material is **alive, conversational, human:** no bureaucratise or pathos. The author allows the subject to speak on his own, not «edits» his voice into smoothness. Thanks to this trust appears – it seems that you really are listening to Dmytro, not reading a summary. The text includes quotes which precisely set accents: «Don't ask

me questions to which there are no answers!» or «Every man with PTSD has a period when he searches for meaning in life». They are deep, not contrived.

The emotion in the text is restrained but sincere. The author does not play with feelings. There is no breakdown, no tears or subjectic pathos. Instead there is a feeling of dignity, strength, equilibrium. This is the case when a war piece does not traumatise but restores faith in the human.

The structure is built dramalogically – from the past to the present: captivity → sport → injury → return to service → training → dream. Logic and tempo of the narration are felt: first pain, then movement, then stabilisation and hope. This creates the effect of «subject's journey»: important for a quality emotional feature.

Imagery in the text is moderate. There are apt expressions («he digs into himself», «a 90 kilogram barbell crushed him»), but there is not enough sensory detail – sounds, smells, sensations, which could have made the story even closer to the reader. At the same time the symbolism («dream of Madrid» becoming an image of the future) works well.

A separate strong feature of the material is its **ethical nature**. The author avoids excessive dramatization of pain and exploitation of emotion of pity, does not show suffering as a marathon for clicks. On the contrary, the text is full of respect for the subject: he is not pitied, not idealised, but simply shown as a living person who seeks himself and moves forward. We consider that this is the highest form of journalistic ethics in war materials.

And the most important thing to note is what the material ends with. The ending leaves the reader with a bright feeling: the subject not only survived, but returns to the dream, has support, sees purpose. There is belief in life, development and the future. That is, the material carries not trauma but **restoration** – and that is what makes it a truly emotionally sensitive war story.

The format of the material is the classic feature with a human story at the centre of the narrative. The journalist coped with one of the project tasks – to write in a Western format.

Another strong side of the story is that this is a follow up story. That is, the journalist already wrote about this subject earlier, kept connection with him and returned to his story to trace changes that happened to him over time. This method emphasises that the path of overcoming the trauma identifies the subject far more than his wound. This is human-centred journalism, which was the objective of the course.

The author of the text should add more general war background, add statistics of similar injuries and add contacts where veterans can seek medical and mental support.

Of course, one could slightly strengthen the artistic imagery, add smaller sensory details (how Dmytro puts on his uniform, how the gym smells, how the voice sounds during training). But overall – this is one of those texts after which you simply want to silently thank the subject and the journalist.

As experts and trainers of the project, we can summarise that the submitted material is deep, ethical, motivational. The author maintained the balance between documentary and emotion, without falling into pathos or breakdown. Some shortcomings that were made in the storytelling were discussed with the author during individual sessions with mentors. This is an excellent example of how one can write about war - through human possibilities, not through suffering.

**Peer reviewer of the article
by Svitlana Tomas.
Newspaper «Novyny Horodnyanshchyny»,
Chernihiv region**



Title: «Boy from the territory of possible active hostilities»

Subject: Ivan Kholodniak, 13 year old schoolboy from a border village in Polissya, Chernihiv region.

This story has a completely different emotional temperature than the previous: if Dmytro Bezusiy is the strength of an adult, then Ivan Kholodniak is the silence of child courage.

The material is an example of **social emotional reportage** with a high level of humanity. The author works in the tradition of «small stories of a big war», showing not the front, but the rear, not the explosion, but life between explosions.

The headline – strong, short and precise. It contains a contrast: «boy» – symbol of childhood, «territory of possible active hostilities» – symbol of threat. Already in the first sentence two worlds collide: war and childhood. And that is exactly the narrative of the text. The subheading clarifies the content and adds the human dimension: «the only school-aged child who travels daily to the lyceum for the opportunity to sit at a desk». This is very human and touching, without breakdown.

The language of the material – **good, light, yet restrained**. The author does not try to write «beautifully» for style's sake – the emotion comes from the facts. There is a smooth rhythm of phrases, the feeling of oral narration. Especially well working are sentences which convey the simplicity of everyday life: «He has breakfast, gets ready and waits: will there be alarm or not. If it is calm, then he can go to school». This is not a journalistic cliché, this is life preserved in words.

We believe that the emotional and thoughtful build up of the material is balanced and emotional. The author gives general information about the number of inhabitants and the beginning of the shelling, which adds facts and evokes trust in the professionalism of the journalist. Geographic markers give understanding of context even to a Western reader. First, it is geography of the war: the road, borderland, mention of the monument «Friendship of Peoples» which now sounds ironically. Then, importantly, gradual approach to the subject: from the landscape – to the bus, from the bus – to the child. It is cinematic, the reader seems to «ride» deeper into the frame. The story unfolds through voices: mother, sister, official, teacher. Each voice adds a layer of understanding, and as a result the child's story becomes a cross section of an entire border region.

The ending of the article is also very precise: quiet, with warm emotions. The mother hugs the children, and around «the beauty of the Polissya land» and «the treacsubjectus neighbour 15 kilometres away». This is true catharsis: the light of nature against the darkness of war.

The text is rich in **imagery and contrasts**. Particularly expressive: «through the

murky bus window serious for his years Ivan sees border landscapes», «tanks under the child's window», «walls in the old hut tremble» is especially effective.

The author knows how to show tragedy through detail, without naming it directly. The image of the bus which every morning takes the only child through a danger zone is a powerful metaphor of Ukraine's resilience.

One cannot ignore the ethical nature of the material. Because exactly that was one of the most important criteria of writing war stories in our project. The author does not romanticise danger nor does she exploit the child theme – on the contrary, she speaks with respect and tenderness. The subject is not defined as «victim», but as a small citizen who consciously makes his choice. This is the highest level of respect and the task of our project – to show the child as a subject, not an object.

Although the text does not directly speak of «faith in the future», it is present between the lines. Faith in education, knowledge and normalcy. The boy who daily rides to school is a living metaphor of life continuing. Even when «walls tremble from shelling», all Ukraine gets up at seven and goes to the lyceum.

Created under editorial guidance with the mentors, the author included in the final version all the suggestions that made the story hold in a Western format.

General conclusions. The text reads like a prayer for childhood, written by a journalist who knows how to see not just the ruins, but the life between them. It is slow, quiet journalism of resistance, where strength is born from the ordinary.

Of course, one could talk of slight stylistic overload in first paragraphs (double participles, somewhat heavy construction) but that is a technical smallness, not substantive. The key is the tone of this article: honest, gentle, without artificial pathos. In such stories it is important not just to describe, but to allow the reader to see with the subject's eyes. It would be interesting to hear from Ivan at least a few first person sentences about his fear or dream. Yet even without this, the material sounds deep and sincere.

Overall, it is a strong, ethical and poetic report. The author managed to show the scale of war through the story of one child, doing so not via tears but via respect. In the text there is no subjectism but dignity. Such materials do not simply «move you». They form memory from which empathy and responsibility grow. We believe that the goals and tasks we set for the journalists are generally fulfilled.

Peer reviewer of the article by Olesya Skrypka. Newspaper «Novyi Den», Kherson region



Назва: «Another Front. Life on Prostheses»

Джерело: newdayua.net

The first thing to note is the title of the material, which is symbolic and multi-layered. «Another Front» creates an image of continuation of fight after the war, and the subheading «Life on Prostheses» – specifies the topic, immediately evokes emotional response without pathos. The balance between metaphor and fact is masterfully maintained. The headline grabs attention without manipulation.

The material is full of visuality. There are «iron legs», «Lego under the prosthesis», «ruined houses of Kherson», «child touches father's prosthesis». Such details already create their own «frames». The ethical purity of using these epithets is flawless.

The language of the journalist is simple, precise, deeply human. It is documentary, but has a warm emotional underpinning. There is a sense of living conversation with the subjects, not «official recording». The author avoids clichés about «indomitability» or «subjectism», instead shows strength through everyday life. The writing style of the article is mature, without embellishment yet rich in imagery.

A small drawback of the material can be considered the absence of general war context, statistics and expert opinions. These shortcomings, discussed with the author during the personal consultation, he has taken on note.

The emotional background is sincere, steady, without breakdown. That was exactly what was discussed during the training in our project. The author does not push feelings of pity, but helps the reader feel the subject's dignity and pain through small details: «Lego under the prosthesis», «child's curiosity», «denial of housing». This is empathy, not dramatization. The emotional level is balanced almost perfectly.

One should also note also the effective narrative of the text.

The structure of the article is strong: beginning – personal memory and trauma, then – adaptation, civilian challenges, finale – acceptance and hope. There is logical dynamic: «war → survival → dignity → life». The contrasts (pain ↔ humour, loss ↔ family) create a full story that reads like a documentary novel. Internal narrative is flawless.

The material is literally imbued with imagery: «iron leg», «Lego under the prosthesis», «potato sack as a gift», «empty houses – skeletons». These details form a deep symbolism of survival, of human habit of living. The symbol «another front» – is the fight for ordinary life – omnipresent and powerful.

Olesya Skrypka managed to «highlight» the heroes' story, rather than write the story for them. Yegor and his wife Olena speak for themselves. The author steps back delicately, giving space to their voices. The heroes are multi-dimensional: strong, vulnerable, ironic. Humanity appears in small details, without moralizing. This is true «I», not a newspaper figure. Respect for the subjectes is visible in every line.

The most important thing is the ending – bright and realistic: «the absence of bad changes – that is already good news». This simple phrase is the «quintessence of resilience». You feel catharsis, and not loud, but quiet, human. The subject doesn't

«win», he lives – and that is hope.

The journalist was able to ethically approach the depiction of the problem.

No element of exploitation of trauma. The description of amputation, phantom pains or prosthesis problems – factual, no sensationalism. The author behaves carefully, with great respect. This text is an ethical standard of work with the theme of war and embodiment. The photographs are also ethical, they are not aimed at shocking the reader but to give him a view of the subject.

We consider that the material is deeply authentic. One feels trust between the author and the characters. The text does not embellish, hyperbolize or moralize. It leaves an aftertaste of dignity, quiet and gratitude. Professionally made example of humanistic journalism, where war is not the background but the context of human life.

Thus, by Olesya Skrypka's article is a model of ethical, psychologically deep and emotionally measured war journalism. The author masterfully combines documentary and imagery, without betraying truth. The text has a cathartic effect and forms empathy in the reader without exhaustion.

The level of execution – **this is a high professional standard**, worthy of publication in international media as an example of post-war humanistic reportage.

Peer reviewer of the article by Oleksii Pasiuga. Newspaper «Vorskla», Sumy region



Назва: «How a Ukrainian mother in France fights for the Motherland»

Джерело: vorskla1930.com.ua

We begin immediately with the headline, which, in our view, grabs and sets the tone of human struggle, without excessive pathos or artificial drama. It includes a positive verb «fights», which already conveys action, strength, belief. Overall, it can be considered successful, although there is some straightforwardness («fights for the Motherland») and this somewhat reduces the potential of imagery.

The text contains many concrete photographs, which successfully reinforce sincerity and complement the content of the article.

The language of the material is natural, without bureaucratic words. The author uses simple phrases in which you feel «a real person». There are emotional accents («I was trembling from fear», «the smiles of my wards don't let me lose heart»), but without breakdown. The tone maintains the balance between documentation and empathy. The author avoids clichés, except for some phrases such as «the strength of the spirit of a Ukrainian woman», which though familiar, are justified by the topic.

We also consider it appropriate to note that emotions are restrained, authentic, non manipulative. The author lets the subjects themselves «carry» the emotion – through quotes of children and their mother. This creates trust and empathy without pity. The reader feels warmth, not fatigue.

Pay attention as well to the effective narrative structure of the text. The material has clear internal dynamic: from flight – to adaptation – to action – to hope. There is contrast between pain and strength, darkness and light. The climax – in Svitlana's statements about her work, her children, her belief. All this creates catharsis. The structure is logical, and the rhythm is controlled.

The article contains imagery through detail: «her favourite toy she could not keep in her hands», «the smiles of my wards do not let me lose heart». Symbolically the children as «two wings» – natural, strong image. Imagery is unforced, not decorative.

The piece has a clear human centre. This is Svitlana's story. The voices of children amplify authenticity, add depth. You feel respect for the subjects. The author does not «write about them», but gives them voice.

One of the strongest aspects of the article – motivation, hope, faith in the future. Despite the pain, the material breathes with life, work, community. There is a message: «to live further. And that too is fight». The ending of the article is optimistic, not forced but with inner calm.

We note that the text is fully ethical: no shock descriptions, no exploitation of trauma. It respects privacy and dignity. Emotion – not for effect, but for understanding.

Overall expert impression

The article inspires trust – it is realistic, not invented, so you feel the author's personal presence. There is an aftertaste of warmth and respect. The text belongs to

high quality journalism of the human dimension: sincere, caring, bright.

Thus, Oleksii Pasiuga's piece is **emotionally honest, structurally balanced and ethically sustained example of humanistic war reportage**. The author successfully conveys not only pain but also strength; not only tragedy but life. One can classify the text as high quality media example that builds empathy, not war fatigue.

We believe that the goals and tasks which we set for the journalist training have been largely achieved.

General conclusions and recommendations

1. Information during war is a weapon, therefore journalism must combine truthfulness, responsibility and safety.
2. Media literacy and critical thinking are key competencies and methods for countering disinformation and propaganda.
3. Ukraine's experience in fact-checking, OSINT, and countering information operations offers valuable lessons for Europe.
4. Ethical journalism in wartime requires moral clarity, not neutrality; self-regulation, not censorship.
5. Coverage of children's stories requires consent, respect, empathy and safeguards against retraumatization.
6. Digitalization and AI are powerful supporting tools – but humans remain at the center (“human-in-the-loop”).
7. Ukrainian journalism has combined truth, empathy, and technological literacy, creating its own school of crisis media during Russia's war against Ukraine.



Recommendations for journalists

1. Develop local systems of fact-checking and exchange experience with European networks.
2. Introduce internal standards of ethical content verification: source checking, balance of opinions, sensitivity in war and children's themes.
3. Increase digital safety: two-factor authentication, encryption, data protection.
4. Use AI only as an auxiliary tool, with its role clearly disclosed.
5. Develop storytelling and service journalism: explain complex issues simply through human stories.
6. Support journalists' psychological resilience: supervision, training, peer-to-peer support.
7. Build partnerships with European newsrooms to share Ukrainian expertise in working under extreme conditions.

Handbook

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