

# FashionWriter.co.uk

## Factsheet

### A Career in Fashion Journalism

#### What is fashion journalism?

Fashion journalism is essentially anything and everything that is written about fashion - from online blogs to the latest catwalk reports in *Vogue*. As such, the work of a fashion journalist includes a wide range of activities from writing and editing stories, to styling photo shoots and researching the next big trend.

#### What skills does a good fashion journalist need?

**A good fashion journalist needs to understand and love fashion, not just shopping** - sounds obvious but there is a difference between fashion and shopping - are you interested in fashion in its wider economic, social and historical context? Do you understand the interconnections between society, culture and fashion? Can you see how a designer relates to the world around him or herself? Fashion is a sociological medium, and to be a good fashion journalist you will need to look beyond your own experiences and understand fashion in a wider and more diverse context.

**A good fashion journalist needs to be imaginative and inventive** - in addition to writing articles, you may need to style photo shoots, so you will need a good eye for what will catch the attention of the reader. The fashion industry is enormous, and there are literally millions of people writing about fashion - what makes you stand out from out the crowd?

**A good fashion journalist needs to be organised and to be able to manage his or her time well** - to organise a photo shoot you will need to make sure that everyone is in the right place at the right time, from the model to the photographer to the stylist. Remember, their careers are on the line as well as your own.

**A good fashion journalist needs to be able to write well** - you need to be able to express your ideas and impressions of what you see so that readers will understand, be entertained and be inspired by what you write. You may also be involved in editing, so you will need to be able to assess and improve the written work of others.

**A good fashion journalist needs to be reliable** - if an editor needs a piece of work by a certain time and date, then you have to deliver if you want to keep working.

**A good fashion journalist can take on board constructive criticism** - if you hate your work to be challenged or changed, then this isn't the industry for you. Editors are notoriously ruthless and demanding in their pursuit of perfect copy.

**A good fashion journalist is a good communicator** - networking is key so you will need to be able to get along well with lots of different types of people.

**A good fashion journalist needs to be dedicated** - you may need to work long hours, for little pay or recognition until you get your big break.

## Where do I start?

Breaking into fashion journalism can take time and inevitably involves a lot of hard work, but the rewards are well worth it once you have your foot in the door.

In order to get that big break, you will need to work on three areas:

**Work Experience**

**Networking**

**Getting Published**

You may also choose to look into some form of **Academic Study**

## General Career Advice

**Be patient and remember your long term goals**

*'It's a good idea to begin at the bottom in everything except in learning to swim'*

Unknown

Remember that everyone has to start at the bottom and work their way up the ladder.

**Be nice to EVERYONE**

*'Don't burn bridges. You'll be surprised how many times you have to cross the same river.'*

Unknown

Fashion is a small industry and many jobs are secured through word of mouth and personal recommendation so it pays to be nice to everyone, no matter how junior. If someone asks you to do something, then do it well, on time and

with a smile and you will have made a good impression that one day might mean the difference between getting that job or not.

### **Be tough**

*'When you get in a tight place and everything goes against you, until it seems as if you could not hold on a minute longer, never give up then, for that is just the place and time when the tide will turn'*

Harriet Beecher Stowe

Fashion is a cut-throat industry - it is fast paced and there are a lot of people with very large egos with whom you will have to work. So grit your teeth, stand firm and have confidence in yourself.

## **Academic Study**

In theory there are no minimum qualifications required for a career in fashion journalism. However, most fashion journalists are graduates of university or college and many also have a postgraduate qualification.

### **What undergraduate degree course should I study?**

Landing a job in fashion journalism does not require you to have followed a particular course of study in the same way as some other careers, such as medicine. The simple answer then is to study whatever you enjoy. If you are interested in a career in fashion journalism then chances are that you will be drawn to subjects which require a large amount of writing, such as English or history, although there is no reason why a graduate in chemistry or maths cannot forge a successful career in fashion journalism. There are also a large number of fashion related degree courses, including fashion design, fashion studies and fashion journalism itself.

### **Are there any postgraduate courses that I could take?**

There are a large number of postgraduate degree courses available both in journalism and fashion journalism in particular. One of the best and most widely respected is offered by Central St Martins.

### **Are there any non-degree courses that I can take?**

The NCTJ (National Council for the Training of Journalists) offers non-degree qualifications in journalism as does the PTC (Periodicals Training Council).

## Work Experience

To be a successful fashion journalist, you will need to eat, drink and breathe all aspects of fashion, so the more that you can demonstrate your love of the fashion industry the better.

Fashion journalism is a highly competitive field of work and you need to make sure that your CV stands out amongst all the others - a full and varied history of work experience is one way of securing the attention of potential employers.

### Why do I need to do work experience?

Work experience is essential for two main reasons. Firstly, in order to be a good fashion journalist, you need to know your stuff. That means that you need to have firm opinions and view points on all aspects of fashion, and these take time and experience to develop and mature. Secondly, in order to get a job, you need to have a solid background in fashion and a 'look at me' CV, so a full work experience history will help.

### Where to start

Some aspiring fashion journalists are lucky and secure dream work experience placements with their first round of applications, but for most, you will need to work up from the bottom.

### First Steps

Since the work of a fashion journalist is so varied, there are a wide range of skills and interests of which you may need to demonstrate an awareness.

### High Street Fashion

Britain is rightly world renowned for its fashion savvy High Street, and this is an excellent and accessible place for you to start building a solid history of fashion related work experience.

Either as work experience, or as a full- or part-time job, working in one of the main high street fashion stores such as *Zara*, *Topshop* or *Mango* will expose you to current street trends and also the opinions of the buying public, who will also be the ones ultimately buying what you write. You may be asked to help with the layout of clothes in the store or the dressing of mannequins, which will give you experience of fashion styling. Yes, some of the work may be menial, but remember the words of Oscar Wilde,

*'We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars'*

Perseverance, hard work and determination are all required for a successful career in fashion journalism.

## **Journalism and publishing**

At this stage look for work, either paid or unpaid, in any kind of journalism or publishing - be it the student magazine, the local newspaper or a small publishing firm. Don't just restrict yourself to work which allows you to write or to purely 'fashion related' work experience - as a successful fashion journalist you will need to show an understanding of publishing as a wider industry, so any experience of this kind of work will look good on your CV.

### **The day to day work of a fashion journalist**

As a fashion journalist you will need to establish a good working relationship with a large number of people in the fashion industry, including photographers, make up artists, stylists, designers and PR representatives, so it may be worth trying to secure work placements, work shadowing or part time work in these fields to learn about what it is that they do.

*'Don't criticize what you don't understand, son. You never walked in that man's shoes'*  
Elvis Presley

A good fashion journalist understands that to produce good copy, you need to work as a team, and to be a team player you need to understand and appreciate the work of others.

### **Dream Work Experience**

Dream work experience would be to secure a placement at one of the major fashion magazines or in the fashion department of one of the national newspapers. Be aware that competition for placements, which typically last anywhere between one week and three months, is fierce, but don't let that dishearten you.

If you are lucky enough to secure one such dream work experience placement, don't expect to be writing your own fashion column just yet - most people on these kinds of work experience placement spend their time making cuttings from the morning's newspapers and bagging and returning clothes and accessories after fashion shoots.

Likewise a placement with a major fashion house or a well known fashion designer or photographer will also look very impressive on your CV.

## **Networking**

The fashion industry relies heavily on networking - who you know and who you are known by can make all the difference in landing those jobs.

Treat everyone you meet as a potential source of work - they may not seem to be of any help now, but you never know what they will do in the future or who they might know.

It may seem quite daunting at first, but you neglect the social aspect of fashion journalism at your peril - the fashion industry is a small, close knit group and it is important to have a recognised profile if you want to succeed.

## **Where to start?**

Aside from the inevitable contacts that you will make as part of your work experience, try to attend every fashion related event that you can. Not only will this give you the opportunity to make contacts within the fashion industry, but the experience will help to broaden your understanding of fashion as a whole and may form the basis of potential articles.

### **Fashion Shows**

If you live near to a university or college, find out if they offer a course in fashion or fashion design and attend their graduate fashion shows (the designers of the future?).

If you can, get tickets for a show at London Fashion Week, or attend the Clothes Show Live.

### **Lectures and Exhibitions**

Similarly, most higher education institutions provide seminars or lectures which are open to the public to attend - remember that you need to develop a solid grounding in fashion as a sociological medium, so don't just look to see what the fashion department offers, but also check out other faculties such as history, politics, social policy, religion and art to see if they run seminars on fashion related topics.

Many large museums have fashion related exhibitions which are also worth visiting, if nothing else to help you learn more about fashion.

### **Keeping in Touch**

Once you have made contacts, then keep them up to date with what you are doing so make sure that you maintain your contact details (i.e. don't change your email address every few months) so that if they want to find you, then they can.

### **Online Networking**

Finally, don't neglect online networking - social networking sites such as MySpace allow you to meet and exchange ideas with other like minded people from around the world from the comfort of your own living room.

## Getting Published

If someone wants a career in fashion journalism then it is because they love to write, so whilst producing the articles may not be too much trouble, getting them published can be a whole different matter.

In addition to a killer CV, you will need to compile a portfolio of work that will wow future employers, so that means getting your work published

### Practice, Practice, Practice

Before you take a shot at getting something into one of the big fashion magazines, you will need to hone both your journalistic technique and your opinions about fashion - that means coming up with original ideas for articles that people want to read, doing your research and then writing the article. Many fashion journalists develop a unique perspective on fashion or focus in on a particular aspect of fashion (for example, fashion history) and forge a career and name for themselves as experts in that field. Others are more general in their approach and interests - the important thing is that you have a real passion for what you are writing about.

The best advice then is to gain as much exposure to fashion in all its guises and then to write, write, write.

Do not underestimate the importance of practice - when you are submitting work for real, you want it to be the very best that you can produce and practice makes perfect.

### Where to start?

The internet provides the perfect arena for you to get this initial writing experience and you will also start to build an online profile of yourself as a fashion journalist. To start with, you may like to submit your work to a free online article directory or perhaps set up your own blog.

Once you have become more comfortable and confident in your writing and your opinions, approach your local newspaper, magazine or if you are a student, your university or college newspaper and ask if you can submit some work, ideally fashion related, for publication. If they ask you to write something else, on a topic unrelated to fashion (such as a restaurant review, for example), don't turn it down just because it isn't 'fashion' - remember, first get your foot through the door. It's much easier to move sideways once you are in.

### Fashion Magazines

Your next step is to approach real fashion magazines and the fashion departments of newspapers with your ideas. It is probably best to start off with

smaller publications, such as online fashion magazines or specialist titles, and build up a body of published work before knocking on the door of Condé Nast.

Remember that these magazines and newspapers receive literally hundreds of ideas for articles every week, so be patient and persevere - your work will get published. Most magazine and newspaper editors prefer to be approached with ideas in writing first (rather than sending off a completed article), along with your CV and examples of your previous work.

### **Writer's Markets**

Another way to find work is to register with a writer's market. Just like a real marketplace, editors post their requirements for articles and invite writers to get in touch.

### **Freelancer or Staff Writer?**

What's the difference between a staff fashion writer and a freelance fashion writer? A staff fashion writer is a full time employee of the magazine, whilst a freelance writer is hired on a project by project basis. Most modern magazines operate with only a skeleton staff, with most of their work being commissioned to freelance writers and editors.

### **How much will I get paid?**

The all important question! Freelance fashion journalists are typically paid between £300 and £600 per piece whilst staff fashion writers earn between £10,000 and £35,000 a year depending upon experience and seniority. A senior fashion editor could earn from between £30,000 a year to over £50,000.

### **Should I always look to be paid for my work?**

If you want a career in fashion journalism, then the ultimate answer is 'yes' - you will need to have an income to survive. But if you are just beginning your career as a fashion journalist then don't overlook publications which don't offer payment for your work. Not only will you be gaining valuable experience and feedback from real editors about your work, as well as that all important cutting for your portfolio, but many of these publications have a wide readership among the fashion industry and any exposure of your name and your work will be of benefit to your career.

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