

2026 Skills Gap Guide

A practical roadmap for emerging journalists, built from interviews with Canada's top newsroom leaders and the inaugural NMAF Editorial Skills Lab




National Media
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NATIONAL MEDIA AWARDS FOUNDATION




What This Guide Is



This guide distills everything learned through the National Media Awards Foundation’s 2025 Editorial Skills Lab—our interviews with 13 newsroom leaders, feedback from students and recent graduates, and insights from three instructor-led workshops.



Our goal is simple: **identify the real skills gaps early-career journalists face** and provide clear, practical tools to help close them.



This guide supports journalism schools, instructors, early-career journalists, and employers who want stronger alignment between academic training and newsroom expectations.

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Canada 

The Skills Gap: What Editors Told Us

Across 13 interviews with editors and hiring managers at *The Globe and Mail*, *CBC*, *Maclean's*, *Toronto Life*, *Yahoo Canada* and others, several themes appeared again and again.

The Core Gaps

Editors did *not* say the biggest issue was digital literacy. Instead, they emphasized the fundamentals:

- News judgment and critical thinking
- Clear, concise writing
- Clean sentence structure
- Fact-checking and accuracy
- Canadian Press Style
- Headline writing
- Research and news scanning
- Meeting deadlines
- Maintaining relationships with sources
- Basic numeracy (percent vs. percentage change)

The Most Consistent Issue: Source Relationships

Many emerging journalists lack confidence in:

- Calling people
- Asking difficult questions
- Building rapport
- Maintaining relationships over time

Editors described this as one of the most serious gaps in early-career reporting and writing.

Why This Gap Matters

Foundational skills aren't optional—they're the starting point for every job in journalism, including digital. Editors told us repeatedly:

“Digital skills can be taught. But judgment, accuracy, and writing take years. That’s what we can’t build quickly.”

What the Editorial Skills Lab Covered

Each Lab session tackled a key skill area identified by editors and participants, offering practical, real-world guidance.

Cold Calling and Source Relationships – *Mary Vallis Cowan*

[Full webinar:](#)

What participants learned:

- How to prepare before making contact
- The structure of an effective call
- How to leave a voicemail that gets returned
- Relationship maintenance after publication
- Why voice-to-voice matters more than ever

Reporting in the Digital Age – *Hannah Yakobi*

[Full webinar:](#)

What she covered:

- Digital storytelling fundamentals
- How to write and refine pitches
- Examples of pitches she accepts and rejects
- How to use AI responsibly in reporting
- Visual, interactive, multi-platform storytelling

Career Management and Professional Growth – *Sandra E. Martin*

[Full webinar:](#)

Participants learned:

- What editors look for in early-career journalists
- How to pitch effectively (the “lede approach”)
- Networking strategies that actually work
- How to navigate transitions, layoffs, and skill gaps
- Building a professional brand that aligns with your goals

Core Skills Emerging Journalists Need Today

A. Foundational Reporting Skills

- Clear sentences, clean grammar
- CP Style proficiency
- Fact-checking and verification
- Cold calling and source development
- Headline writing
- Research and news scanning
- Basic numeracy

B. Digital-First Skills

- Multiplatform storytelling
- Understanding audience behaviour
- Attention-friendly structure
- Visual thinking
- Social listening
- Basic AI literacy and ethics

C. Professional and Career Readiness

- Pitching effectively
- Networking
- Understanding newsroom roles
- Time management and deadline discipline
- Career resilience and planning

D. Soft Skills

Editors consistently highlighted these:

- Curiosity
- Initiative
- Adaptability
- Judgment

Feedback From Editors, Participants, and Instructors

What Editors Say They Can't Teach Quickly

- News judgment
- Curiosity and persistence
- Clear writing
- Source care
- Accuracy
- Relationship building
- Confidence on the phone
- Understanding ethical nuances
- How to structure stories for clarity

These are the skills employers want candidates to already have.

What Early-Career Journalists Need Most

Themes that appeared repeatedly:

- Practical tips over theory
- Real examples (pitches, calls, edits)
- Honest expectations about hiring
- Confidence building
- Clarity on newsroom culture
- Networking guidance

Students valued the “hands-on, real-world guidance” that connected academic learning to professional expectations.

Industry Demand for More Training

All three instructors emphasized:

- The need for more practitioner-led, accessible workshops
- The importance of hybrid or virtual formats for national reach
- Growing interest in sessions on:
 - AI and technology
 - Multimedia reporting
 - Online verification
 - Business and commerce journalism
 - Freelancing and income-building

Additional NMAF Resources for Students, Educators, and Early-Career Journalists

Below is a selection of NMAF **resources** designed to support skill development, career exploration, and professional growth across the sector.

Publishing Internships and Placements

A national list of paid and unpaid opportunities.

<https://magazine-awards.com/en/canadian-publishing-internships-placements/>

Guide for Publications Funding Paid Internships

For editors looking to support early-career talent through funded positions.

<https://magazine-awards.com/en/guide-for-publications-funding-paid-internships/>

Guide to Canadian Literary Magazines

A directory of publications for pitching, internships, and freelance opportunities.

<https://magazine-awards.com/en/a-guide-to-canadian-literary-mags/>

Grants for Creators

A national list of funding options for freelancers and emerging writers.

<https://magazine-awards.com/en/grants-for-creators/>

Canadian Publishing Job Board (J-Launchpad)

Regularly updated opportunities across magazines, digital media, and related sectors.

<https://mediafoundation.ca/job-listings/>

Editorial Skills Lab Webinars (Three Labs)

<https://magazine-awards.com/en/editorial-skills-lab/>

Recommendations

The **Skills Gap Guide** highlights several practical changes that can help better prepare emerging journalists for today's industry expectations. These recommendations reflect the most consistent themes from editors, instructors, and early-career participants.

Recommendations for Journalism Schools

Based on the report's findings:

- Add required modules on cold calling, source management, and voice-to-voice interviewing
- Increase practical newsroom simulations
- Integrate fact-checking and CP Style into every course
- Develop assignments that mirror real deadlines
- Introduce starter AI literacy standards
- Build stronger bridges to the industry through guest editors, mentorship, and applied learning

Recommendations for Employers

- Provide clearer expectations to interns and new hires
- Offer short onboarding refreshers (CP Style, fact-checking, pitch formats)
- Encourage cold calling and source development early
- Create pathways for mentorship
- Use the Skills Gap Guide to shape internship roles and training expectations

Future Lab Topics: What We're Exploring Next

We'll continue shaping future Labs around the **skills that matter most to emerging journalists and the people who train and hire them**. Educators, editors, and students are encouraged to share their ideas and tell us what topics they'd like to see addressed next. We also welcome recommendations from instructors interested in leading upcoming sessions.

Here are a few ideas drawn from participant and instructor feedback:

- Self-editing
- Fact-checking
- Pitch refinement
- Business journalism basics
- Online source verification
- Multimedia storytelling
- Social listening
- Freelancing and self-promotion
- Newsroom culture deep dives
- AI ethics and tools
- Mid-career resilience and transition planning

