

Working the Assignment Desk in a newsroom

What we call “logistics” or the “breaking news desk”

By: Brittany Caldwell, a Content Creator for WFTV Channel 9 in Orlando, Fla.



What does an assignment editor do?





The assignment editor is part of the “command center” of the newsroom.

- When you think of the assignment desk, it's like the ER of the newsroom. They are the frontline to monitoring news on different platforms and the gatekeeper.
- Sometimes they give reporters story ideas - but most of the time, reporters pitch and ask for help moving their ideas along.
- They will research court documents and arrest records.
- It's also about thinking on your feet, using instincts and keeping a calm composure.



Additional duties

- On a daily basis, you will monitor emails, take phone calls and listen to scanners for breaking news stories.
- You could be asked to email or call contacts, PIOs (Public Information Officers), coordinate with public officials, schedule RSVPs and organize who will cover events.
- Depending on your station, you could interact with affiliates at other stations for sharing content.



Key things to know

- CAD: computer-aided dispatch, also referred to as a police or sheriff's offices' active calls-for-service pages
- Sheriff's offices are with counties, police departments are with cities
- Keep track of the competition
- Here in Florida, because of Sunshine Laws, most documents can be found on city and county clerk of courts websites
- Know the layout of your geographic area and designated market area (DMA)

You may be saying “I want to be a reporter” or “I want to be a producer.”

But even if you're not an assignment editor,
understanding their job is still good to know.

The trend for many newsrooms is the combination of roles.





Being a Content Creator: How we do both roles at WFTV

Assignment Editor and Digital Writer

Back in 2019, Channel 9 merged its two departments, becoming the “content center.”

You can really see the expectations of handling both digital and logistics on the weekends, when there are fewer staff members.

The best advice that I can give is to give yourself grace and manage your time.

When you’re writing a story, keep an ear out for breaking news. When you’re waiting for your video to process, look at the CADs.

Here's what other UCF students and alumni had to say about their experience on the assignment desk - and how they use it across stations and roles.



Nicolle Osorio

Tips from a former Content Creator at Channel 9, currently at Telemundo Orlando

- Don't overwhelm yourself. You'll see a lot everyday but you have to protect your mental health first.
- Be a 'sponge': Learn from your co-workers and managers, ask questions! Even if you want to be a photog/reporter/producer, the desk is the heart of every newsroom.
- LISTEN, don't just hear. When you're working at the assignment desk, you have to pay attention to everything that's happening (scanners, viewer's tips).
- If this is your first job, don't feel intimidated. Talk to your managers about your career goals and they might be able to help you gain further experience in your desired journalism field.
- Mistakes are OK, we're all humans. Even senior journalists make mistakes... Take everything as a learning opportunity.





Jackie Cardentey

Tips from a former Content Creator at Channel 9 and a training producer

- You're going to know **EVERYTHING** about Central Florida: Some of you may be lost when I say this....But, as you spend time on the desk, it'll really open your eyes to how many cities and counties we have, which people to contact for stories, where incidents happen...it seems overwhelming but once you learn, it sticks with you.
- The assignment desk really is the **heart of the newsroom!** If you have experience on there, it can help you as a producer, reporter, web writer...whatever position you take at a station.



Patricia Tolley

Tips from a current WKMG Assignment Editor, started May 2023

- The great Allison McGinley (WKMG News Director) said it perfectly, this job is all about ***filtering the noise***.
- We cover NINE COUNTIES at News 6, there are SO many car accidents, robberies, drug busts, etc. - the key is finding what is NOTABLE.
- Remember: Journalism is 70% reporting, 30% writing – being on the desk is helping out with that 70%.
- It is also a thankless job, you are not getting any bylines.
- I graduated on the Print/Digital track, this is a great way to get integrated in TV news world.

Here are Brittany's tips from 1 year at WFTV Channel 9





Tip 1: Ask questions

- Whenever you don't know something, ask. It's better to learn than to sit and pretend that you know how to do something.
- Be curious.
- When breaking news happens and you have to speak to dispatch or PIOs, asking questions helps get the information you need if they don't provide it to you. You're a detective. Who, what, where, when. The "why" and the "how" usually come later.
- Ask to confirm information.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions. It may seem simple now, but when you're in a newsroom, don't clam up. It shows initiative.

Tip 2: Speak with confidence

- Don't worry if you're not physically loud - find ways to use your voice.
- Present ideas when it's appropriate.
- I bought a megaphone after some managers said they did not get information because they couldn't hear me. What started out as a joke is now my personal tool in my journalism toolbox.
- Prepare what you're going to say, so that you're conveying information with confidence. Armor yourself with the facts, and if you don't know something, admit it - and then find the information.





Tip 3: Stay organized

- A lot of things can be going on - don't expect your brain to remember everything everywhere all at once.
- Write information down on a notepad, in a notebook or on your computer.
- Take things by priority. Breaking news comes first, then go back to what you were working on.
- Bookmark webpages, social media handles, etc.
- Know where to find information or contacts so you can act swiftly.



Tip 4: Treat people with respect

- It can be hectic and stressful, no doubt.
- Imagine a room with constant noise and people talking and you just got a tip that there's something going on.
- The PIOs and your co-workers are human. They're all doing their jobs.
- When you give people respect, they will respect you when you need it most.
- That builds trust and a bond over time.
- That goes especially for people you have to give tough information to. They know it's coming from a place of duty, because they know *you*.



Tip 5: Listen

- On my first day, my co-worker and logistics mentor, Matt Reeser, said the best thing you can do to get better at the assignment desk is to listen.
- Just like in an interview, listening is just as important - if not more - than what you say.
- Work on listening to scanners. Some newsrooms have multiple scanners going on at once, so be prepared.
- Over time, you'll develop a "scanner ear," as Matt told me.
- Listening can also help with communication between departments.