

JOURNALISM *frequently asked questions*

What kind of person should apply?

Generally speaking, journalists are people who want to know more. Sometimes, they want to know everything there is to know about something specific, like sports or movies. Sometimes, they're just people who are curious about the world. They ask, "Why?" and "How?" and "Does it have to be that way?"

The job of The Whirlwind is to cover the issues, events, and stories of the entire student body at West, which means that we need a diverse group of contributors in order to pitch and tell all of the stories that abound here. Think of it like making a baseball team. Even if they're all really good at what they do, a team full of pitchers isn't going to win games. Think about what unique perspective you might bring to the staff and highlight that in your application.

Do I have to have an A in English?

Nope! Journalists usually like to write, though they may not like to write in the traditional, academic way we often do in English class. In fact, many journalists are more driven by the questions and the interviews than the actual writing; the writing is just the vehicle to convey what they've learned through reporting. You will be writing, though, and you'll be writing for a real audience of your peers, teachers, and community members, so keep that in mind.

Does this require time outside of class? How much homework is there?

The good news: no homework and no tests. At least, not in the traditional sense. You'll take story assignments, you'll have deadlines, and it will be up to you to manage your time and do the reporting and writing you need to get assignments done. You will have time in class to work, but of course, much of the reporting you do will happen outside of class.

One week of each six-week production cycle is production week, when we stay late to put the actual pages together and get it ready to send to the printer. During that week, we will have 1-2 work nights and the lab will be open into the late afternoons that week to get pages ready.

Can I write about whatever I want?

Yes and no. You'll pitch stories of interest to you. Yet, in order to push you to explore all of the aspects of journalism and to ensure that the coverage of campus is diverse and complete, you'll likely take some stories that aren't what you came into Journalism planning to write about, but sometimes those turn out to be the best.

I don't want to be a journalist, so why should I take Journalism?

Journalism is fun, exciting, and rewarding. Thousands of kids across the nation do journalism not because they necessarily want a career in journalism (though many do go pro!), but because it gives them an opportunity to develop research and critical thinking skills, to make a meaningful contribution to their school communities, to work in an environment that is as close to a real-world job as it gets in high school, to become better communicators and leaders, and to explore a passion or interest. Strong thinkers and writers make better doctors, lawyers, teachers, business owners, and citizens.

I don't read print newspapers, so why are we making one?

Though it might be on newsprint paper, The Whirlwind is more magazine than newspaper. The focus is not on breaking news but processing it. It's not so much what happened, but why and how. While print newspapers might be fading, magazines are going strong, and that's especially true of niche magazines. Your niche is West Albany High

School, and you have a captive audience of over a thousand readers who, if told compelling stories about themselves and their peers, will be engaged, active readers.

What if I want to do photography/graphic design/illustration/advertising?

Please join. Visual journalism is essential to the success of this publication. In your application, please specify your area of interest and describe any relevant experience you may have.

Doesn't everybody hate the media right now? I don't want people to hate me.

A free and independent press is essential – vital – to a strong democracy. While you might hear a lot about the terrible "fake news" of the moment, most journalists follow a strict code of ethics and professional guidelines as they perform a service for their communities. And really, that's what journalism is – a service. Your audience will appreciate strong, thorough, ethical reporting, the kind of journalism that makes them think and feel.

Why is it called The Whirlwind?

Not sure. Maybe you can research it and write about it in the paper! But there are copies of The Whirlwind in the library that date back to 1904, before there were two high schools in Albany, so there's a lot of history there.

Do we get to go on any field trips?

We usually attend the fall and spring media days in October and March, and the National High School Journalism Convention in the spring. With a great deal of fundraising, there may be an opportunity to attend a convention in New York City as well. We may make local trips to businesses or do a few reporting trips to local sports and entertainment events, too. In addition, there are lots of journalism summer camp opportunities.