



Letters to a Young Journalist

Samuel G. Freedman

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Over the course of a thirty-year career, Samuel Freedman has excelled both at doing journalism and teaching it, and he passionately engages both of these endeavors in the pages of this book. As an author and journalist, Freedman has produced award-winning books, investigative series, opinion columns, and feature stories and has become a specialist in a wide variety of fields. As a teacher, he has shared his expertise and experience with hundreds of students, who have gone on to succeed in both print and broadcast media. In *Letters to a Young Journalist*, Freedman conducts an extended conversation with young journalists—from kids on the high school paper to graduates starting their first jobs. Whether he's talking about radio documentaries or TV news shows, Internet blogs, or backwater beats, shoeleather research or elegant prose, his goal is to explore the habits of mind that make an excellent journalist. It is no secret that journalism's mission is seriously imperiled these days, and Freedman's provocative ideas and fascinating stories offer students and journalists at all levels of experience wise guidance and professional inspiration.

Letters to a Young Journalist Details

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Fabiola Carletti says

Samuel G. Freedman's sage if sentimental book *Letters to a Young Journalist* is a meditation on what it takes and what it means to be a journalist.

His intention is not to provide the "specific, situational guidance" of a gifted editor, but rather to discuss the habits of mind, the work ethic and the moral ethos necessary for journalistic excellence.

Those looking for a practical how-to guide should look elsewhere. As suggested by the title, the book reads like a series of letters from an old hand to an eager rookie. (Think *Sophie's World* for cub reporters.)

Freedman states his intentions early on: "I want you to believe, as I believe, that you have chosen a profession of consequence and value, a profession that requires no apology, a profession that can make you happy."

For the most part, I liked his literary references but I can see how others might lose patience with his more meandering passages. What is lateral thinking to some may seem pointless detours to others.

I would recommend this book to journalists with artistic ambitions, and to those who appreciate not only the lasting relevance but also the dissimilarity of their elder's experience.

Finding meaning in the worldview of another person, especially those of other backgrounds and generations, is one of the cardinal skills of journalism – and there are enough kernels of wisdom in this relatively short text to make it plenty worth your while.

If you're interested in detailed notes on this book, I've put together a summary that includes several quotations on my blog: <http://efcarletti.wordpress.com/2012/...>

Grace says

This was the first book I ever borrowed from the library, then loved so much I hunted it down in stores, and when I couldn't find it, proceeded to buy from Book Depository. There are some loves you return to time and again, and journalism is at the top of my list. This book is optimistic but not naive, sobering but not cynical, and provides me equal amounts of idealism and realism to continue pursuing this career choice with astounding awareness about the nature of the industry and my motivations for entering.

Best says

There will be disappointments enough over the course of your career; your initial idealism must be a pilot light, flickering at times, but never extinguished.

Almost two years into my journalism career, I find myself struggling more than ever with overwhelming

self-doubt and a crippling sense of inadequacy. I love my job, and I know I've done good work, but on most days I am gripped by fears of being found out - of my colleagues realizing I'm a failure, of my bosses realizing I'm a fraud.

I'm glad I picked up this book at this time of unprecedented vulnerability. In a newsroom full of award-winning journalists, it's *so* easy to forget just how totally green I am, and it's easier still to beat myself up for being nowhere near as sharp or eloquent in reporting and writing as these veterans, all the while failing to see the bigger picture, the immensity of real experience that must be fed into the growth of a great journalist.

Perspective - I know now - was what I sorely lacked. Without perspective, every mistake I make gets blown up to epic proportion, every imperfection becomes an elephant in the room, every passing month where I'm not producing an enterprise story is another indicator I will never, ever get my big break.

But slow down, Freedman says, don't be in such a hurry to succeed.

Perspective, among other things, is what Freedman offers in this wonderful book. Wise but never condescending, Freedman draws from his own experience and that of others in the field to illustrate what makes a good journalist, and in doing so gives advice on reporting, writing, storytelling, while also giving insight on journalistic attitude, ethics, and values - patience, patience, patience.

In my darkest time, this book reignites my hopes and dreams, breathes a new life into my semi-dead ambitions, and reminds me why I chose journalism.

Diana180 says

As journalism sermons go, this is a pretty good sermon and I am making it required reading this term. Freedman has the right values and doesn't cut them to fit current business models.

Carla says

It's funny to reread this book four years later and realize how much has already changed in journalism the short time since its publication. Freedman makes no mention of social media, because Facebook was still newish and Twitter was just about to launch. He uses the old AP style convention "Web site" instead of the updated "website." (Though I love AP style, I may never understand the motivation behind "Web site.")

But his advice and motivation have outlasted these few changes, and I'm sure will endure for decades to come. I first read this book as a small-town reporter and editor who was frustrated by her job. It was a welcome reminder why I had chosen my career. Returning to it now, as a magazine editor who loves her career, *Letters to a Young Journalist* remains an encouraging book for a young journalist making her way in the ever-changing field.

Rahadyan says

I read this a year in late 2006 and I wish I'd had this to read twenty years ago. I gave my copy to my brother,

a metro reporter, and highly recommend it to all people just starting out in their careers -- or who are considering a career in the field. Samuel Freedman's *Letters to a Young Journalist* is to journalism in the same way *One L* is to the practice of law.

Elle says

Outdated. Arrogant. Self-important. Bloated. Useless.

Aziff says

Freedman's *Letters to a Young Journalist* may seem slightly outdated, having written right before the social media boom. But the anecdotes and advices he shares in this insightful book is no less but still applicable to any budding journalist out there who's just stepping into the industry. Freedman's narrative is easy to follow and is very guiding, like how a mentor would to his student. Though this book is not a guide to journalism is anywhere resembling a textbook, Freedman's wisdom and insight into the grueling industry can be taken for tips, tricks and what to realistically expect. Outdated as it may, the basic principles apply and that's the point Freedman implies in his book.

Joe says

One of the better books I have read in recent memory, not despite the humbling smash to the face, but because of it. Freedman puts a lot into perspective using a matter of fact tone that makes this reader thrilled with apprehension to enter the field of journalism. Even now, I find it difficult to type with steady hands, fearful that prose too purple might infect my keyboard. He has made such sense of this under appreciated calling that I almost feel as if I owe it to him to succeed more than I fail.

Dani Kass says

I regret ever going near this book. Freedman is condescending, self-pitying and incredibly pretentious in every line. He over uses examples and fails to supply the relevance of half of them. And most significantly, I learned absolutely nothing new about journalism.

Henry says

Idealistic without being naive, Freedman's book is often corny, but just as often enlightening and/or encouraging. With thirty years of experience in the field under his belt, he imparts his acquired wisdom largely through anecdotes. It's an esoteric subject with limited interest, I'm sure, but should you be a young journalist it's a quick read so you might as well. There is *some* knowledge to be gained...

Jerry says

This is an interesting book; there's little in the way of the nuts and bolts of Don Campbell's book, and the insights are often contradictory. He's a product of his generation, and he, perhaps subconsciously, subscribes to the view of the anointed that permeates modern journalism. And yet he does see through it enough that the advice given here is worth taking. Hard work and honesty may not win the acclaim that comes to walkers of the easy path, but that is the right path to take. Young journalists could do worse than read Letters to a Young Journalist.

Caroline says

If you are at all interested in journalism, I recommend this book. Freedman focuses on journalism as an act (interviewing, writing, editing) not as a profession (he left out details of the boring assignments, poor pay, and rejection letters). His use of specific journalists and their work as examples conveys his meaning clearly. Siting his own numerous mistakes as well -- he's been in the business since it was dictating your story over the phone and typewriters, to small world, high speed internet. Freedman even includes a chapter on book writing. A "How Not To" fount of experience to set you in the right journalism direction. "Be clear, be formally correct, show instead of tell. All the rest is execution. Now go and practice."

Julia says

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Aaron Lozano says

This was a really fun an interesting read for a non-journalist. A cynical book with an optimistic ending, great fodder for debates, and interestig facts and opinions all throughout.
