

## **Reporter's job description**

As a small independently-owned weekly, The Altamont Enterprise counts on a fair share of valued work from its employees.

Full-time reporters will typically file four or five stories a week. This is flexible: Sometimes, there will be a series of shorts instead of one of the stories; other times, an entire week will be dedicated to a single in-depth story.

Full-time reporters work an average of 40 hours per week. While the bulk of work is to be done in the office, weekdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., reporters, of course, are in the field often covering events, conducting interviews, or attending meetings. Hours are flexible to meet reporting needs. (For example, if a meeting or sporting event is to be covered in the evening, the reporter may come to work later that day.)

Reporters are given 10 days of paid vacation annually. Five of those days are the week of July 4 when the newspaper is closed. The other five days may be taken when the reporter chooses, cleared in advance with the editor. A reporter who has worked at The Enterprise for five years gets another five paid vacation days.

The Enterprise observes these holidays annually: Christmas, New Year's Day, Thanksgiving, Memorial Day, and Labor Day. Although the office is closed on these days, reporters may have to cover events on New Year's Day and Memorial Day, but hours spent working on those days may be taken off of work time on other days.

Each year, a reporter is entitled to three paid sick days and two paid personal days (for funerals, medical appointments and the like). Reporters should email these days to Marcello at [miaia@AltamontEnterprise.com](mailto:miaia@AltamontEnterprise.com) as far ahead as possible.

A reporter will be paid every two weeks.

If a reporter is leaving, two weeks of notice are required; more is appreciated.

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The Enterprise five-day workweek follows a pattern leading up to publication on Thursday mornings. A staff meeting is held every Thursday at noon in which reporters come prepared with ideas for stories for the upcoming week.

At this meeting, the publisher who oversees advertising will also give estimates on the number of pages anticipated when special sections are involved so that reporters may plan ahead to do stories.

Reporters will begin their work for the new week on Thursday or even Wednesday if the current week's stories are finished.

A reporter is expected to carry a camera to meetings and interviews and also to cover some events with photographs, which are paid for separately.

A reporter should strive to write a story each day and work away at larger projects. The story will be discussed in advance of reporting and writing with the editor to define its shape and scope. After the first draft is written, a reporter will go over the edits with the editor and make any additional calls or conduct needed research as well as making edited changes.

Once a story gets the final OK from the editor, a reporter will create a folder for the story and its photos in the shared Google Drive “publish” folder for the week.

Breaking news stories that are largely covered by other media are to be written up quickly from released material and filed for Marcello to post on the website, again after having received the editor’s OK.

Print stories, however, almost always involve more depth and research. The aim is to write as balanced and fair a story as humanly possible. Everyone has prejudices. The key is to recognize them and work to compensate for them when reporting. Enterprise reporters are observers of, not participants in, the news. (If for example, during a meeting, a reporter is called out by someone on the dais, the reporter’s response should be silence or a polite statement such as, “I’m here solely as an observer.”)

Accuracy counts. All names should be spelled out by the person being interviewed; never assume you know. (John Smith could really be Jon Smyth.)

The Enterprise does not use unnamed sources. In rare cases (when life or livelihood is threatened), a reporter, with the editor’s permission, will withhold a name. But that name must be known to the editor.

When someone asks to be “off the record,” a reporter should have a discussion with that person and preferably the editor to make sure there is a clear understanding of what is meant by that phrase.

Attending meetings is essential for finding out what the issues are as well as who the people involved in those issues are. This does not mean a story should read like meeting minutes. A reporter should come back from a meeting and discuss with the editor what happened and, through that discussion, arrive at what should be investigated for a story.

A meeting with little news value can be written about in a short article, to be posted on the website within 24 hours.

The reporters for Guilderland and New Scotland cover school board, town board, zoning board, and planning board meetings as well as other board meetings such as for libraries or industrial development, when warranted.

The Hilltown reporter covers town board meetings in each of four towns as well as the Berne-Knox-Westerlo School Board meetings and others as time allows and interest dictates.

A reporter should always ask who is affected by an issue, and seek out that viewpoint. Frequently, it will be someone not in power and not used to talking to the press, like a subsistence-level farmer or a bullied child.

Stories should be covered without fear or favor, solely with the goal of seeking the truth.

A reporter is a representative of the paper and should conduct himself or herself with decorum. A reporter may not accept gifts or favors. (We set a \$20 ceiling so as not to hurt the feelings of people who have delivered homemade cakes or flowers to a reporter, but even these should not be accepted from people who are regularly covered.)

A reporter should be familiar with both the state Open Meetings Law and the procedure for making a Freedom of Information Law request. Carry the law with you and present it politely if you feel you are being kept from a meeting that should be public. Never instigate or provoke.

When mistakes are made, a reporter tells the editor who talks to the aggrieved party. The editor consults with the reporter about the complaint and fashions a correction, which is shared with the aggrieved party before it is printed.

It is possible for a reporter to have accurately quoted someone while at the same time, that quote is not true. A correction will be made so that the truth is served.

To avoid this, reporters should always try to investigate to see if what they have been told — even by an official who is supposed to know — is true. Further, any time someone is mentioned by another as having a particular viewpoint or undertaking a certain action, that person should be called to see if it is true.

Subjects of or sources for stories are not allowed to review them before publication. A reporter before publication may read back quotes to a source for accuracy and go over basic facts.

Stories that may be libelous will be reviewed by the libel lawyers at Bond, Schoeneck & King. The reporter and the editor should listen together to the lawyer's advice, which will be followed.

A reporter is responsible for collecting arrest reports in the town he or she covers and for following up to get the court dispositions. For Guilderland, this includes Altamont and Guilderland police. For the Hilltowns and New Scotland, this is largely county sheriff's reports.

These reports should be obtained weekly and written up weekly. The reporter will discuss with the editor which, if any, arrests or trends of arrests should be a story.

A reporter is responsible for writing obituaries of people who die in that reporter's coverage area. These run free of charge and involve interviews with family members or friends.

The goal is to have an even workflow throughout the week, with Wednesday reporting being limited to Tuesday-night meetings or breaking news. Other stories are due on Tuesday at 5 p.m. This allows fine-tuning on Wednesday and an early-afternoon start for layout.

The editor runs her newsroom from the bottom up, not the top down. She respects that hardworking reporters will have their own ideas on both their beats and their writing, and she will work with them to produce the best stories possible.