PJP SIX-STAGE JOURNALISM TRAINING PROGRESSION

PJP’s mission is to train incarcerated writers in the tools of journalism, so they can become correspondents and journalists for PJP and other mainstream publications.

We provide training, coaching and skill development according to a six stage progression described below. In consideration of writers’ varied educational backgrounds, volatility of their environment, limited means of communication, level of interest in learning journalism and risks to their safety, we take a measured and methodical long term approach to training writers and publishing their work.

So far, PJP has published over 500 incarcerated writers from more than 175 prisons across the country. We have hundreds more people in our database who have expressed interest in writing, and we are constantly receiving interest from others. We aim to identify writers with potential at an early stage and move at least 10% of them to Stage 3 Reporter within 12 to 18 months of their first published piece.

We define writers with potential as those who express strong interest in journalism in addition to those who show natural reporting or writing talent and those with previous publishing experience. The Reporter is what PJP considers to be the start of a writer’s training as a journalist and the first level at which we begin providing intentional journalism training and coaching. PJP aims to move 10% of those who reach Stage 3 to Stage 6 Correspondent within 18-24 months.

→ STAGE 0 Prospectives: Those who request submissions info, our print newspaper PJPxInside or training information.

→ STAGE 1 First Timers: Writers who submit a piece for the first time and one timers.
We welcome submissions by anyone who is touched by the criminal justice system. Many of our First Timers start by submitting personal essays, illustrative journalism or poems. Some writers start by submitting news stories. Every writer whose work is accepted has a portfolio page on our site, where all of their stories for PJP are displayed. At this stage, those whose work catches our attention for any reason (e.g., content, quality of submission, demographic, geography etc.) will receive a letter of encouragement from PJP.

→ STAGE 2 Regular Writers: Any writer who has published at least two pieces on PJP.
PJP editors will give their pieces a professional newsroom edit. If they don’t accept a story, they will explain why, so writers can try again. They will begin to work more closely with those who demonstrate their interest in journalism by incorporating feedback and training tips. Writers who only want to publish what they want to publish and do not have interest in participating in our training will remain at this level.
STAGE 3 Reporters: Reporters are those who are trying their hand at journalism and demonstrating talent, enthusiasm, dedication and a good eye. These are writers who we think could become contributing writers.

Our editors mentor Reporters by providing training resources and individualized feedback that is meant to help them develop these skills. They will start receiving calls for submissions for a particular topic or invitations to participate in a collaborative project or a community activity.

STAGE 4 Contributing Writers, Poets or Artists*: Those who are getting journalism work published frequently (minimum requirement: one story submitted and accepted every three months) on PJP, demonstrate dedication and passion for journalism, show talent and proven ability to accept constructive criticism.

Contributing Writers receive training/feedback in beat development, journalism ethics, attribution and accuracy. They are encouraged to work toward Stage 5, where we provide a PJP-sponsored membership in our chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ). If they aren’t already pitching stories to mainstream media, editors will work more intentionally with them to get articles co-published outside of PJP. They will be asked to pitch their feature ideas 100% of the time.

STAGE 5 SPJ Member*: Contributing writers who demonstrate an understanding and prove their ability to incorporate journalism ethics, attribution and accuracy into their stories.

Writing is a lifelong craft, and journalism is a serious endeavor that requires an understanding of ethics, responsibilities and tools for how to gather information through observation, research, interviews and their own experiences. SPJ members will be expected to produce stories that are accurate, carefully attributed and executed according to a high standard of journalism ethics. The PJP chapter of SPJ is an invitation-only chapter for experienced contributing writers, contributing illustrated journalists and prison newspaper editors-in-chief with established publications. Discounted membership fees are sponsored by PJP.

STAGE 6 Correspondent or Columnist*: Correspondents and columnists write regularly (same minimum requirement as Contributing Writers) for PJP and may develop subject-area expertise in a beat or a topic. They are starting to pitch stories and be published in mainstream publications, so they can shed even more light. PJP editors may send assignments that require deep reporting. They may bring them in on collaborative projects with other writers or with mainstream partner publications.

At this stage, they are a part of societal conversations about criminal justice. They will continue to build their portfolio and hone professional communications and writing skills that will help them when they leave prison.

*Stage 4-6 Writers who do not meet the minimum publishing requirement will be moved back to Reporter status.