



Using a notebook

Taking an accurate record of a conversation is an essential part of the reporter's job. A good shorthand note can play an important part in defending a story against claims of inaccuracy. And in the event of an action for libel the notebook can play a crucial role in court, with the notes taken at the time almost certain to be used as evidence. Notebooks should always be neat and only contain information relevant to your job. A notebook which contains shopping lists and other personal notes will not attract the same respect as that which is purely business.

Dates and times

Every notebook you start should have your name, paper and the dates it covers at the start.

Rule a margin on each page in which you can note anything you wish to make a special point about. For instance, it can be handy to remind you of a key quote. Date and title each story so that if you need to refer back several months later you will be able to find information quickly.

Accuracy is key

Keep good, accurate, clear notes with an obvious indication of who was speaking. A shorthand note that you can read back is essential.

Record 'no comments'

As well as making notes of what is said, it is equally important to record what wasn't said. Always note the date and time when you visited someone or called them. If they are out or refuse to comment it is important to note this as well.

If you ever need to go to court to defend a defamation claim it could be crucial for you to show that you attempted to contact someone several times in your efforts to get a balanced story.

File the books

Our lawyers also recommend that you file notebooks safely and keep them for at least 18 months. If complaints are made about a story it is a good idea to attach the notebook to the original copy and keep it in a safe place.