

Chapter 6

How to report in a pandemic?

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Quick-Read

This chapter will equip journalists and students with tips and tricks for reporting in a pandemic, skills for mobile journalism and some wonder tools for creative productivity.

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How to report in a pandemic

70% of our respondents [journalists, editors and other newswriters] rated the psychological and emotional impacts of dealing with the Covid-19 crisis as the most difficult aspect of their work.

30% said their news organisations had not supplied a single piece of protective equipment for field reporting.

20% said their experience of online abuse, harassment, threats or attacks was “much worse than usual.”

These are some of the initial findings from the first large-scale global survey of journalists since the COVID-19 crisis began. The survey was conducted in 125 countries, including India, by the [Journalism and the Pandemic Project](#) - a collaborative research initiative from the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) and the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia University to study the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on journalism.

Journalists, like other essential workers, have been on the forefront during the pandemic reporting critical stories. While information is/was gathered on phone/online etc, journalists have also been on the field bringing critical voices that illustrate the multifold ramifications

of this pandemic: They have brought out stories on the unimaginable pressure on the public health infrastructure, the crisis of migrant workers, the state of the economy and the losses, as well as stories that show the unequal impact of this pandemic on people. All this is crucial, expected and difficult. Journalists have lost loved ones and colleagues. And journalists have died. The pandemic and its reverberations will continue to remain among the biggest journalistic endeavours for a long time to come. Keeping in mind that the situation is constantly evolving, we have collated safety and self-care tips for journalists on how to report safely during a pandemic.

The following tips have been collated from the Committee to Protect Journalists, International Centre for Journalists, Unicef, Centre for Diseases Control and Prevention and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, India.

Pre assignment tips

- Take COVID-19 vaccination in advance of any assignment.
- If you come under the [high-risk](#) category, avoid an assignment that puts you in direct contact with the general public.
- Plan for the equipment you will carry for reporting. These objects could potentially carry the virus back with you. More details on this are given below under the 'equipment safety' section.
- Travel and lockdown restrictions keep changing for states/countries with little to no warning. Before going for an assignment, discuss your plans with the management/HR team. Figure out how they will assist you should you fall ill on assignment.

Staying safe in the field

- Maintain the recommended safe physical distance with everybody. You should be especially careful around those who show signs or symptoms such as coughing and sneezing.
- Wear a tightly fitted mask at all times. Double masking or an N95 mask is recommended. [CDC](#) has a helpful guide on how to wear your mask properly.
- If the nature of the assignment requires you to wear personal protective equipment (PPE), ensure that you follow best safety practices for putting on (donning) and taking off (doffing) the PPE. Make sure that donning and doffing are done under the supervision of a trained professional. [Please click here for general guidance from the CDC.](#)
- Try to interview people in an open space. If you do need to do an interview indoors, select a location with some kind of airflow (e.g. open windows) and avoid small confined spaces.

- Wash your hands regularly, properly, and thoroughly, for at least 20 seconds. If there is no water, carry wet wipes and then use an alcohol-based sanitizer. Wash your hands as soon as you are done with reporting. .



- All hair should be covered. Long hair should be tied up and tucked away. Remove all jewellery and watches before any assignment.
- If you wear glasses, carefully clean them on a regular basis with an alcohol-based sanitizer. Wear a face shield, if available. If possible, avoid wearing contact lenses on assignment; it is likely that you might touch your eyes and potentially increase your chances of infection.
- If possible, try to avoid using cash on assignment, and ensure you clean your credit/debit cards, wallet, and/or purse on a regular basis. Avoid putting your hands in your pockets as much as possible.
- Consider your mode of transportation to and from the assignment. Where possible avoid travelling on public transportation during peak travel periods, and make sure to use an alcohol-based sanitizer on your hands after disembarking.
- If traveling in a personal or company vehicle, be aware that an infected passenger could pass on the virus inside the vehicle. Travel with the windows down to ensure good airflow throughout the vehicle, and consider using face coverings or face masks while in the vehicle.
- All clothing should be carefully removed and washed at a high temperature with detergent after any assignment.

Equipment safety

- Avoid clip-on mics to avoid physical contact and to maintain appropriate distance. Use directional mics as far as possible, and hold them at a distance.
- Use long sight lenses to help maintain a safe distance on location.
- Wherever possible, use mobile equipment rather than those with cables.

- Consider how you will store your equipment on assignment. Don't leave anything lying around and put everything back in its case and close it (i.e. some kind of hard-sided flight case, which is much easier to wipe down and keep clean).
- If possible and practical, put some kind of plastic wrapping/protection around the equipment when using it. This will minimise the surface area of the equipment that could become contaminated, and will be easier to clean and disinfect.
- Carry fully charged spare batteries with you and avoid charging anything on site, as this might become an additional source of contamination. .
- Ensure all equipment is decontaminated again when returning it to base.
- If disinfecting your equipment, always check guidelines by the manufacturer, as disinfectants could damage your device. More detailed guidance [in this article](#).

Post-assignment tips

- Continually monitor your health for any signs of symptoms.
- Self-isolate for at least 14 days after coming from an assignment. The latest guidelines from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare state the following: "Patient under home isolation will stand discharged and end isolation after at least 10 days have passed from onset of symptoms (or from date of sampling for asymptomatic cases) and no fever for 3 days."
- If you develop or have [symptoms of COVID-19](#), however mild, inform your team. Seek medical attention as soon as possible.

Self-care and mental well-being

- Consider the psychological and emotional impact of reporting on your mental health.
- Take time off work whenever possible. Turn off notifications on the phone if need be.
- Exercise and eat properly. Get enough sleep.
- Make time for activities that you like.
- Reach out to family and friends. Talk to people you are comfortable with. Seek professional help if needed.
- Here are some self-care tips for news media from [Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma](#).

How to do Mobile Journalism?

A major part of reporting in the pandemic has been juggling with recording interviews, attending virtual meetings, managing to-do lists at home on smartphones and laptops. To boost your production, here is a list of basic technical details, tools and apps that you might find useful.

Please note that the following sections have been curated keeping in mind the need and use of tools/apps in a work-from-home structure during a pandemic.

Setting up home studio

Home studio is basically a recording space you create in your home dedicated to shooting or recording your content.

Objective: Make a list of activities that you would need the studio for, the frequency of output and your working budget. Consider platforms you will post it on and recording format (vertical/landscape). Consider also whether you will be sitting or standing, if the location will be fixed or evolving and so on. All these answers will help you nail down the space most appropriate for your work.

Recording space: Choose a space best suited for your content, type and duration. If your content is of a longer duration (30 minutes or more), you might want to opt for a [desk-style shot](#) with a sitting space. If your content is of a short or medium duration (5-15minutes), you can opt for [a space](#) where you can stand. Either way, choose what you are comfortable with and have space for.

Lighting: While selecting the space, decide if you want natural or artificial light. Natural light would mean you stand or sit near or opposite a natural light source like a window. This would also mean that you record your content mostly during the day. Artificial light would mean you use a light source like a tubelight or a lamp or a ring light. In that case, the source should be behind the camera, in front of your face and not behind your frame. For better results, you can test both the options by clicking selfie photos and comparing them.

Background: Avoid background with distracting patterns and cluttered objects. Avoid walls with flashy colours like bright yellow or green. Opt for neutral toned walls like navy blue, off white, light gray. A light source, like a lamp or bulb in the background may create a distraction. Choose a simple and minimalist background.

Recording a remote video interview

Best practices:

- Prepare an outline and framework for the interview. Keep talking points or a script handy if you are recording your own video.
- Explain the basic outline of the interview, format and duration to the interviewee beforehand.

- Send a list of expectations to the interviewee in terms of background, clothes, microphone and so on so they come prepared.
- Turn off mobile phones and other devices in the room during the interview.
- Close the door so that nobody disturbs you or barges into the room while you're recording.
- Budget time to fix the video shot and audio before the interview.
- Don't interrupt the interviewee with continuous 'hmm' sound. You can respond by nodding.
- Give a gap of a few seconds before asking the next question, in case that section needs to be edited.
- Try to have a backup recording, if possible.

Equipment checklist:

- Microphone ([Boya](#), [Rode Smartlav](#), [more](#)).
- Laptop/mobile.
- Tripod or [monopod](#) or [gorilla pod](#) (if recording on phone).
- Mobile teleprompter, if you are recording yourself. You can check [Parrot](#), [Teleprompter](#), [more](#).
- Good internet connection.
- A backup recording, if possible.

Apps:

- [Skype for PC/Mac](#): In-app recording via [Call Recorder App](#).
- [Zoom for PC/Mac](#): New app with cloud recording included.
- [WhatsApp \(Android/iOS\)](#): No in-app recording function. Interview to be saved via screen recording.
- [WeChat \(Android/iOS\)](#): No in-app recording function. Interview to be saved via screen recording.
- [FaceTime \(iOS only\)](#): No in-app recording function. Interview to be saved via screen recording.
- [Restream](#): This site can be used for both recording and live streaming on social media platforms. It gives options to put basic design assets to your live stream like name, designation and text strap over the video.

Editing videos

Best practices:

- Storyboarding: A storyboard is essentially two columns each of audio/text and video where you clearly state what visuals will go with each part of the audio or voice over. Make a storyboard for your script with a clear list of time codes of interviews you would include, shots and b-rolls you would need.

- Format: Decide on the format before starting the edit so that you collate b-roll shots and photographs accordingly.
- B-roll footage: Since it is difficult to shoot b-roll shots during a pandemic, you can ask the source to send shots from the location. You can share a list of shots and format you would need them in.

Apps:

- [Quik pro](#) (Android/IOS): This is a very basic app with limited editing options. Here is a [tutorial](#) on how to edit on Quik app.
- [Kinemaster](#) (Android/IOS): This is for editing professional videos and has more features like adding multiple layers, audio editing features, transitions, effects. Here is a [tutorial](#) on how to edit on Kinemaster.

If you are more comfortable editing on the laptop/desktop rather than the smartphone, then you can try:

- [Kapwing](#): It is a free and easy-to-use editing platform with intuitive user-interface. You can create GIFs, videos, photo montage, audio slides and more. You can also edit audio on this platform with its MP3 editor and create waveform videos for podcast distribution. Here is a [tutorial](#).
- [Lumen5](#): It is an easy-to-use video editing platform with customisable templates, free stock footage, royalty-free music. Watch the [tutorial](#) to know more.

For more video editing apps, you can check articles by [ijinet](#), mobile journalist [Robb Montogemery](#).

Wonder tools

Apart from recording and editing on the phone, there are many easy-to-use apps that can help you with productivity and creativity for products you are building, be they social media posts or presentations. Here is a list of some creative tools curated from the newsletter '[Wonder tools](#)' run by educator and journalist Jeremy Caplan.

Transcription:

- [Otter.ai](#): Otter is instant and accurate and gives up to 600 minutes a month for free. Here is a [tutorial](#).
- [Google live transcribe](#): According to this article that reviewed the app, “the transcription accuracy was almost 95% in English, 98% in Hindi and 90% in Tamil...it supports seven regional languages—from Hindi and Urdu to Bengali, Marathi, Tamil and Telugu.”
- You can find more transcription tools [here](#) and [here](#).

Free music for videos/podcasts:

- [Youtube Music Library](#): You can get royalty-free music and sound effects from the Youtube library. It is organised by genre, mood, instrument and attribution
- [Bensound](#): It has a good collection of stock music categorised by genre.
- [Free Music Archive](#): You can search for safe-to-use, royalty-free music licensed under Creative Commons for free.
- [Uppbeat](#): The catalogue is neatly organised by mood. You can also search by song duration.

Data visualization:

- [Datawrapper](#): It is a simple data visualisation tool. It has options to visualise data in charts, maps and tables.
- [Infogram](#): It has engaging templates for infographics, social media posts, banners, dashboards, and slides among others.
- [Flourish](#): It is free and easy to use. It comes with a wide range of templates.
- You can check more data visualisation tools [here](#).

Designing:

- [Canva](#): Canva has ready-made free templates for social media posts, short videos, presentations, thumbnails, banners, animated gifs among others. It is easy even for people with no design or editing background. Here is a [tutorial](#) on how to use Canva.
- [Adobe Spark Post](#): It has templates and free basic features for graphics design. It is not as good as Canva but works well enough for web design, social graphics and short videos.

Presentations:

- [Pitch](#): Pitch is made for collaboration. You can assign a slide to someone, label slides that need something, exchange comments, or assign a status to a slide.
- [Projector](#): Projector and Canva are unique in that they're not just for slides. Both can be used to create posts for social media platforms as well. It has a library of free gifs and videos you can weave into your slides.
- [Google slides](#): Always free; a simple, classic tool that works reliably.
- Check this [article](#) for more apps on presentations.

Wasting less time:

- [Self-control](#): It is a free and open-source Mac app. You can pick a list of sites to block yourself from visiting. Set a timer for your focused work period. During that time period you won't be able to use Facebook, email, or whatever else you've blacklisted, even if you restart your computer.

- [Cold Turkey](#): For Windows users, or Mac users who prefer it, Cold Turkey is a freemium alternative. The basic software is completely free. You can get some extra features for \$39, like scheduling website blocks in advance or blocking applications (not just sites).
- [Forest app](#): Rather than blocking sites or apps, Forest encourages you to avoid doomscrolling or otherwise wasting time on your phone by letting you grow virtual trees by leaving your phone alone. If you pick up your phone and switch apps, your tree dies.
- Find more tools in [this](#) article.

You can check more useful wonder tools [here](#).

RESOURCES | INSPIRATIONS

- ◆ [Best mobile video gear](#) | Robb Montgomery
- ◆ [Mobile Journalism Guide](#) | GIJN
- ◆ [Safety guidelines for journalists covering covid-19](#)
- ◆ [Journalism and the Pandemic: A global snapshot of impacts](#)
- ◆ [The coalition for women in journalism | Covid-19](#)
- ◆ [Staying safe while reporting on COVID-19](#)
- ◆ [Podcast resources](#)

PEOPLE TO FOLLOW

- ◆ [Yusuf Omar](#)
- ◆ [Jeremy Caplan](#)
- ◆ [Robb Montgomery](#)

- ◆ [The Dart Centre for Journalism & Trauma](#)
- ◆ [Facebook Journalism Project India](#)