Internship report
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Introduction

I have always been interested in working abroad. It’s why I choose the English taught version of the Journalism MA program instead of the Dutch track. Having developed a keen interest in Indonesia, I came to know about The Jakarta Post because it was one of few local news companies that reports in English. Through The Jakarta Post I kept up to date with the news in Indonesia, finding the local insights valuable compared to the coverage of international media. For example, the newspaper’s reporting on the blasphemy trial of former Jakarta governor, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, inspired me to create my own radio story on that event for my studies, which was well received.

Having decided to try my luck and move to Indonesia, I needed to find an internship that would suit both my skills and the university’s requirements. I discussed the possibility of interning at The Jakarta Post with several members of the faculty, as well as with an acquaintance who used to work for the company. Their testimonies confirmed my expectations that applying for an internship at The Jakarta Post would be a good idea.

At The Jakarta Post I hoped to find a company in which I could further develop the skills I was taught during the course of the MA program, as well as learn news skill and experience how it is to operate in a large newsroom. While further developing the skills the university had taught me was a benefit, I was mostly interested in experiencing and learning from how journalism is done in practice. Also, I was curious to find out what obstacles there are when one does journalism in a country with a foreign language, and how to overcome those obstacles.

The Jakarta Post

The Jakarta Post is an English-language, daily newspaper in Indonesia, with an average circulation of around 40,000. The paper was founded as recently as 1983, as a collaborative project by four Indonesian media companies, and was one of the few newspapers to survive the 1997 Asian financial crisis. Apart from the physical newspaper, The Jakarta Post also offers news online and has a magazine supplement focused more on lifestyle and entertainment topics. The main readership of the paper are expats and higher educated Indonesians, of which the majority is of a higher socioeconomic class.

The newspaper has a large number of employees, spread over the multiple floors of its own building. On the first floor one can find the marketing department, the second floor is where most of the desks of the newspaper reporters are found and where editorial meetings are held, and on the third floor is where one finds the online section, the video producers, and some more reporters and editors. Furthermore, the newspapers has an IT department and support staff. During my time at the newspaper, I was assigned a desk on the second floor, and my supervisor and her deputy editors were based on the third.

During the mornings, the newsroom was mostly empty apart from the support staff. During the course of the afternoon, the reporters would come trickling in, having been out on assignments during the morning or headed out later in the afternoon. The editors usually come in later in the afternoon as well. Every day, the editors come together for an editorial meeting around 2 PM.

On my first day I was allowed to sit in during one of those meetings. The meeting is led by one of the managing editors, and desk by desk, each editor gives a brief summary of the articles he or she has planned for publishing on the next day. Those articles are then discussed, and the articles deemed most important are assigned a headline. Furthermore, during the meetings, news trends are discussed as well as the coverage of the competition.
At these editorial meetings, some topics for future coverage were discussed, but it seemed that the different editors had the most influence on what reporting came from their respective desks. Being assigned to the features desk, my editor encouraged me to find my own stories but mostly kept me busy with assignments.

After being sent out to report on an event, I would write up the article and send to my editor, along with any photographs. If no major changes were made, I would not hear anything about it any further. If a story needed some clarification, edits, or if edits were made by my editor, I would be told and asked to give my ok before the piece would be sent along to the copy editors – “the checking desk.” The newspaper’s copy editors are all native English-speakers, who make sure the reporting is up to par. Occasionally, an editor will ask for a final fact-check after receiving the article back from the copy-editors, before sending it off to be published on the next day.

**Main Tasks**

When I started the internship, I was assigned to the features desk. For the first couple of weeks, I shared that desk with two other interns, both from Australia, and thus had a relatively light workload which allowed me to acclimatize to the operations of the newsroom. However, after the first two weeks the other interns left and I remained as the sole intern for the rest of my stay.

In total, I wrote 16 articles that were published in The Jakarta Post, alongside photographs I had taken. My first assignment was given to me on the very first day, and as time progressed I got more and more work assigned to me as I proved I was able to keep up with the work and maintained a high standard. While as previously mentioned most of the work I did was assigned to me, I was encouraged to also pitch my own ideas or explore any interests I might have. However, due to being in a foreign country and having to deal with a language barrier, I found this quite difficult. In the end I only managed to work out 1 story that was led from a pitch of mine, but it is a story I was quite proud of, as it turned out to be a bit of a scoop.

In the lead up to the Java Jazz Festival, a big, annual festival which draws crowds from all over the region, I came across an artist in the line-up that stood out to me. One of the performers was a local from Jakarta that had just turned 17 – not really the age expected of jazz singers. Furthermore, after doing a bit of research I found out he also had two songs in a recently released Indonesian film, *Eiffel I’m In Love 2*. I took up contact with him and landed an interview, which turned out to be his first one ever. I like how the article turned out and it was published as a pretty big spread in the newspaper.

Being assigned to the features desk resulted in me being assigned a wide variety of articles to write. Apart from profile stories on musicians, I also wrote concert reviews, I wrote about tech and fashion, and I was even assigned to review a restaurant. For my stories I was usually given a press invitation or some contact details, and was left to sort out the rest myself: I had to set up the interviews, get the pictures, and write the stories.

However, this measure of freedom led to a little spot of trouble when I just started out the internship. For the second article I was told to cover an event called Bridestory, which was a huge wedding fair which spanned over a weekend. To prepare I was told to look up some of The Jakarta Post’s previous coverage, as the event returns every year. After having done so I thought I had a good idea of what was expected of me. At the event I interviewed the organization of the event, spoke to vendors that were selling, and got a few snippets of vox-pop from some couples browsing the goods – but nothing in depth.
However, after writing the article and sending it to my editor, it turned out that she had expected me to focus more on the customer and asked me to rewrite after I spoke to some couples planning to be married. This miscommunication led me to practically having to bend over backwards to achieve something I could have done from the get go, and I would have done if it was clear to start with. In the end I did manage to pull it off, but after that I made sure to ask pointed questions to what my editor expected every time I got a new assignment. That tactic worked and was appreciated, as it never happened again.

Apart from one time being asked to rewrite an article a bit more in a feature-style, which I retrospectively completely agreed with, I was never asked to make any big changes by my editor. However, I did find out that at times, articles of mine would be printed with some pretty big changes to it. This was new to me and it took me a bit to swallow my pride and accept it. However, this usually only happened when one of the two deputy editors looked over my work. My supervisor would practically always send the article back to me for confirmation if she had made any changes.

All in all I found it easy to accept when changes did get made. After all I was only an intern and my editors knew better how my article would fit the style of the newspaper. However, on a few occasions, my articles were edited in such a way that grammatical errors were introduced, or that sentences I wrote changed in meaning. Even though this only happened once or twice, this left a sour taste in my mouth as now my name was printed in the by-line of an article with a glaring error in it.

During my reporting itself I rarely ran into any trouble. It was very clear that newspaper is held in high regard here. On two occasions, the person I liaised with before an event even told me straight up how difficult it was to get someone from The Jakarta Post to attend. I was always treated with the utmost respect and helped along to interview people. For example, in my second week I landed an interview with Maudy Ayunda, a big Indonesian popstar, after an album-release event. From what I could tell, it was only me and a TV-crew that got that opportunity.

Furthermore, the most extreme example of this took place in the final week. I attended an event hosted by Samsung to showcase new technology that was designed to help people with a visual impairment. However, the entire event was in Bahasa Indonesia, a language I do not master. When the event drew to a close and all journalists present were invited to a press-dinner, I was pulled apart and told that the representatives from Samsung asked if they could be interviewed by me, as they wanted to make sure I had all the information I needed. If that is not special treatment I don’t know what is.

Mostly though I had to fight perhaps a bit more than local journalists to get useful information. While some events hosted by, for example, embassies were usually in English, a lot of event I attended had press releases and conferences that were in Bahasa Indonesia. I usually sat through these dutifully, recording them just in case, and afterwards bounded towards the most interesting panel members to basically ask them to repeat themselves, after apologizing I don’t speak the language.

While usually the people at the events I covered spoke decent English, I did find that on occasion I did run into some language barriers. Especially when asking the public at a certain events for a quote, it usually took some time before I found someone that actually understood what I was asking and was able to reply in good fashion. However, these instances were rare and in general not central to my reporting.

Culturally I did not run into any problems. Actually, I would say that the Indonesian culture helped my reporting – as said I was always welcomed with open arms and helped in any way possible at the events I attended. I found people here to be generally very forthcoming. I did experience some
difficulty in writing some articles in which I wrote about the culture. I most of all did not want to come across as the typical orientalist critiquing the local culture. This led to me struggling quite a bit when writing a film review about the Indonesian film *Kenapa Harus Bule?*. In the end, while I found it quite difficult, I think being aware of this cultural difference helped me in writing a good article.

**Evaluation**

**My Skills**

During the internship I got a real chance to apply my skills. When I first got word that I was assigned to the features desk I was a bit worried, because I always felt that writing features was not my strong suit. Looking back now, getting to practice my skills in that sense was actually a good thing as I feel I have improved a lot during my time at The Jakarta Post.

The most important thing I learned during my internship was how to negotiate a cultural difference in my reporting. While in my first articles I did not really yet take this into account and wrote how I would normally do. However, as time progressed, I got a sense of how to deal with these differences and write in a more nuanced way. This not only reflected itself in my writing, but also in my way of reporting – in my interviews and how I presented myself. I think that this experience has helped me to write articles in a more objective manner, with less prejudice from the get go.

Furthermore, I learnt how to operate in a newsroom and most of all how to make myself valuable asset to my editor. While at first I was not getting assigned a lot of work, presumably also due to sharing the desk with other interns, later on I was almost getting overwhelmed. This pressure taught me to be efficient with my time, and I got the sense that my editor appreciated the work I was delivering and the tempo in which I did so.

Last but not least, I feel that this internship has considerably increased my skill as a feature writer. While the MA program prepared us for most scenarios, it did not cover the wide variety of topics I was sent to cover for The Jakarta Post. Apart from writing profiles, I wrote concert reviews, restaurant reviews, film reviews, and even wrote about fashion. I think being assigned to write on topics of such a wide variety was especially valuable.

However, what I still find difficult and would certainly have liked to improve is finding stories myself. Especially considering the fact that most reporters nowadays are operating on a freelance basis, this is an invaluable skill to have. During the studies I found it very difficult to find topics or people to write about, but figured that was mostly due to Groningen just being a small city.

While I realise being in a new environment, especially in a foreign country and in a city like Jakarta, this would be more difficult, there is still a lot more going on. In Jakarta there is no shortage potential stories and I was assigned to cover events and interview people all over the city. However, while I did find one topic on my own, I would still find it very difficult to find stories to write about even after having completed my internship.

**Supervision**

The supervision I enjoyed at The Jakarta Post was all in all very helpful. From the get go, I really felt as if I was trusted to do what I was there to do; they did not try to hold my hand through the entire process. In fact, they expected I’d be able to swim off right after throwing me in the deep end. I got my first assignment on my first day.
However, the supervision was not in any sense lax. If I did not do well, they were sure to let me know – and they did. Twice I was asked to rewrite a story. Once to add in extra material, and once because I didn’t write my article like a feature but more like a hard news story.

As mentioned, I found it a bit difficult to gather what was expected for certain stories in the beginning, I soon remedied this by asking pointed questions every time I got an assignment. My editor and the deputy editors seemed to appreciate this and over time our communication became a lot smoother.

If I did ever run into trouble, my supervisor would offer me suggestions on how to remedy a situation. In general, my supervisor let me do my work independently and did not unnecessarily watch over me, which I duly appreciated.

On the university end, I really enjoyed the phone call I had with my supervisor halfway during the internship. At the time I was quite worried I was not producing enough items to be satisfactory for the university. Especially in comparison to the work some fellow MA students were doing on their internships, I felt I was lacking in output. However, during the call I was reassured that I was actually doing well, especially considering the cultural differences and not knowing the local language.

Furthermore, my supervisor offered me some helpful tips to overcome language barriers and other aspects of reporting from a foreign country, based on her own experience, which I found very helpful and did apply later. The replies I received on my journal entries were very helpful.

MA Program
I honestly feel that the MA program could not have done much more than they did to prepare me for the internship. While I did write new kinds of articles that I had not written before, that is hardly to blame on the program. In fact, I think it is due to the MA program that my internship was so successful. The skills I learned about writing features, about interviewing, about finding sources, and practicing it all really made it easy to hit the ground running, even in a foreign environment. Also, the brief lesson on photography really came in handy, as I was asked to take my own photographs wherever possible.

While in the end I was kept busy with assignments, I do think it could be an improvement if a little bit more time was spent on how to locate story ideas, and how to pitch them to your editor or to a news outlet. While the MA does cover the basics of both coming up with stories and writing a pitch, and, for example, recommends students to focus on a niche, I think it could help future journalists to learn more about how to sniff out these topics and then pitch them to outlets as a freelancer.

Conclusion
During my time at The Jakarta Post, I did everything I set out to do and gained valuable experience. I was given ample opportunity to show what I could do and to put the skills I learnt in the MA into practice. In the end I wrote 16 features of various kinds for The Jakarta Post, of which 15 have been published as of yet. A number of those that have been published enjoyed large spreads, with pictures including those I took myself. Seeing my name in the byline of articles that cover almost an entire back page was very rewarding to say the least.

During the internship I was made to feel like a valuable asset, which I owe to the skills I gained during the MA studies. I feel that the high level of the practical skills teachers certainly made a difference. Being a part of The Jakarta Post was also a nice experience. Whenever I was out on reporting, I really got the sense that the newspaper is held in high regard, and being as an extension of it, I was as well.
I would definitely recommend other MA students to apply for an internship at The Jakarta Post, if they are up for the challenge. Being in Jakarta can be quite a culture shock, and the change of pace compared to Europe takes some getting used it, but it makes the internship challenging and thus rewarding. However, it is not the best internship if one is looking for future employment as the newspaper only hires foreigners as copyeditors, and the wages are not as high as in Europe.

Attachments
Below links to online versions of the 15 published articles I wrote can be found.

The visual effects shaping our reality

Wedding trends: Tech-inspired or intimate?
http://www.thejakartapost.com/life/2018/02/14/wedding-trends-tech-inspired-or-intimate.html

Maudy Ayunda's journey of self-discovery

Adikara Fardy a teenage jazz virtuoso

RI mothers nurturing e-commerce growth
(Full version: http://annx.asianews.network/content/indonesian-mothers-nurturing-e-commerce-growth-67823)

One piano and 200 candles with pianist David Gómez

Countering hoaxes in Indonesia
(Full version not freely available online)

Alessandro Colombo's: Designs against destruction

Ananda Sukarlan plays for inclusivity
http://www.thejakartapost.com/life/2018/03/14/ananda-sukarlan-plays-for-inclusivity.html

Variety that sells
http://www.thejakartapost.com/life/2018/03/16/variety-that-sells.html

El Machote Texas-style barbecue
(Full version not freely available online)

'Kenapa Harus Bule?': Using comedy to combat prejudice
A touch of rasa to cure intolerance

Big Bad Wolf book sale gets bigger, badder in 2018
(Full version not freely available online)

Relúmino: A sight to behold