

Ethics in Journalism



Our Agenda

- To understand what it means to “minimize harm”
- To acknowledge the importance of personal responsibility in ethical decisions and behavior
- To review ethical dilemmas
- To talk specifically about ethics in digital journalism



What Is “Ethics”?

- **Ethics** (from the Ancient Greek ἠθικός *ēthikos*, the adjective of ἦθος *ēthos* "custom, habit")
 - A major branch of philosophy
 - The study of values and customs of a person or group. It covers the analysis and employment of concepts such as right and wrong, good and evil, and responsibility.
- Ethics : a standard of right and wrong based on analysis and thought

Law and Ethics

- Journalism is about “truth-seeking” and so is the law.
- Those who work in the news system (however defined) have a public responsibility
- Respect for law and ethics is the mark of “professionalism”
 - Professionalism is used to draw a boundary around the “reportorial community”

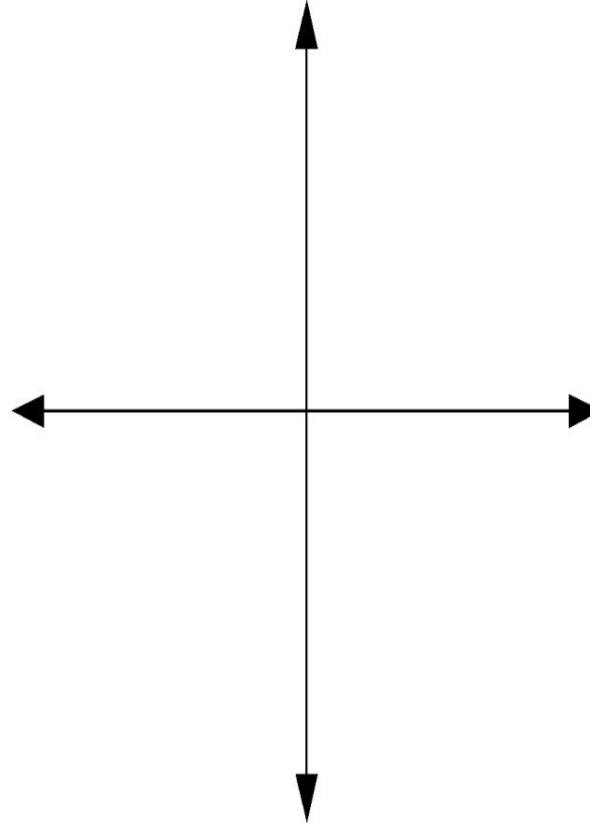


acceptable
by social norms

unacceptable by
legal standards
(e.g., copyright, fair
use, privacy)

acceptable by
legal standards
(e.g., copyright, fair
use, privacy)

unacceptable
by social norms





- **Seek truth and report it**
- **Minimize harm**
- **Act independently**
- **Be accountable**

From SPJ

Journalism Ethics 101

WE IN THE MEDIA PRESENT THIS HANDY GUIDE ON THE PROTECTION OF CONFIDENTIAL SOURCES.

SHOULD THE JOURNALIST REPORT THE SOURCE TO THE AUTHORITIES?

THE LEAK

HI, THIS IS JOHN SMITH AT THE WHITE HOUSE. I'VE GOT SOME INFO--WILL YOU KEEP MY IDENTITY CONFIDENTIAL?



YOU BET!

ANONYMOUS LEAKS ARE AN IMPORTANT WAY FOR INFORMATION TO GET OUT TO THE PUBLIC.

NO!

YOU KNOW THAT OUTSPOKEN CRITIC OF WHITE HOUSE POLICY? WELL, HIS WIFE IS A CIA OPERATIVE!



GOT IT.

TURNS OUT SHE'S A COVERT AGENT, AND REVEALING THAT IS A SERIOUS CRIME.

NO!

ALSO, I'VE GOT THIS IDIOT NEIGHBOR WHO DENTED MY CAR. HIS BROTHER IS A CIA MOLE WHO'S INFILTRATED AL QAEDA IN AFGHANISTAN.



OKAY.

THE SOURCE HAS AGAIN SHOWN HIMSELF TO BE A CRIMINAL, TALKING ABOUT HIS CRIME.

NO!

ALSO... I'M A SERIAL KILLER, AND I PLAN TO STRIKE AGAIN TOMORROW NIGHT!



YOUR SECRET'S SAFE WITH ME

IF SOURCES CAN'T TRUST THAT WE'LL KEEP THEIR IDENTITIES CONFIDENTIAL, THEY WON'T LEAK TO US!

NO!

WE'RE NEWS PROFESSIONALS! AND, AS YOU'LL READ OR HEAR EVERYWHERE ELSE IN THE NEWS, KEEPING SOURCES CONFIDENTIAL IS ALWAYS THE ETHICAL HIGH GROUND!

The 10 Questions (NewsU)

1. What do I know? What do I need to know?
2. What is my journalistic purpose?
3. What are my ethical concerns?
4. What organizational policies and professional guidelines should I consider?
5. How can I include other people, with different perspectives and diverse ideas, in the decision-making process?
6. Who are the stakeholders -- those affected by my decision? What are their motivations? Which are legitimate?
7. What if the roles were reversed? How would I feel if I were in the shoes of one of the stakeholders?
8. What are the possible consequences of my actions? Short term? Long term?
9. What are my alternatives to maximize my truth-telling responsibility and minimize harm?
10. Can I clearly and fully justify my thinking and my decision? To my colleagues? To the stakeholders? To the public?

"I was GOOGLED and I didn't feel a thing!"



Everything Has An Impact

- Think!
- Don't be cavalier
- Don't be malicious
- What are the risks to those you are writing about?
- What are the implications of what you write?

Some Rules Of Thumb





1. Don't Make Things Up

- *The most basic rule in journalism*
 - Mike Barnicle and Patricia Smith (Boston Globe), Jayson Blair (NYT), Janet Cooke and Mike Wise (WaPo), Stephen Glass (TNR), Jack Kelley (USA Today), and on and on and on
- Related: plagiarism is a no-no
 - Content gathered online is subject to the same attribution rules as other content.
~NPR News Social Media Guidelines
- Related: direct quotes are exact quotes

2. Avoid Conflicts of Interest

- Do not quote or interview your family members unless you're writing a personal essay
- Do not report on story in which you or family members are directly involved
- Do not accept gifts from sources
- What to do about “friends”?

“Our online data trails reflect on our professional reputations and those of The Washington Post. Be sure that your pattern of use does not suggest, for example, that you are interested only in people with one particular view of a topic or issue.”

~ Washington Post guidance on use of social media

LA Times updates social media policy

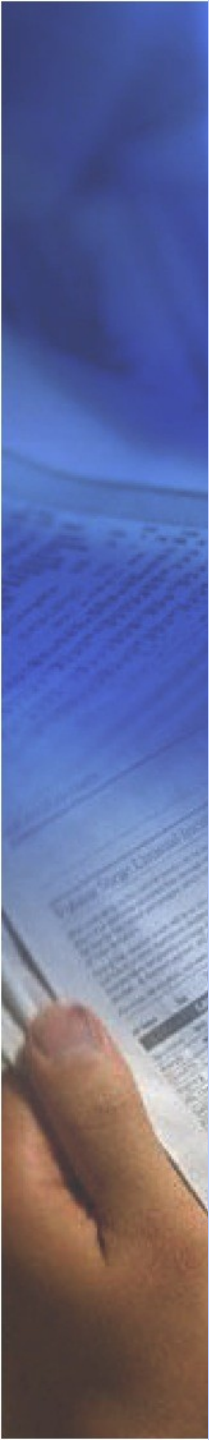


3. Be Fair and Neutral

- Seek out the truth and report all sides
- Always contact someone who is being criticized by others
- Write in the “objective” voice — keep your opinion to yourself
 - Exceptions?

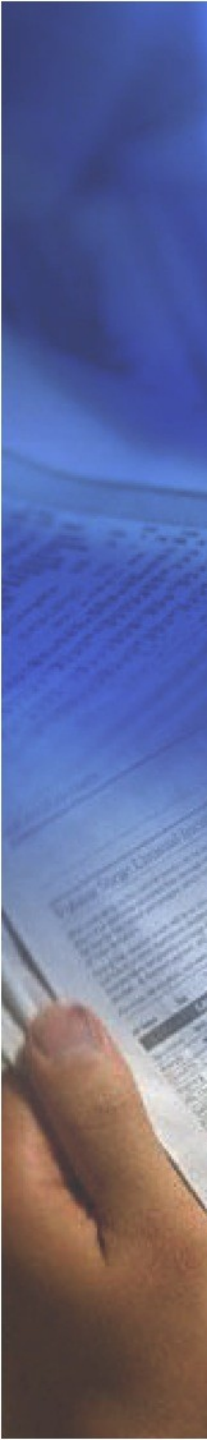
4. Identify Yourself

- Always tell a potential source that you're a reporter working on a story
- Never turn a conversation into an interview without permission



5. Admit Your Mistakes

- We all make them
- Prompt and willing correction
 - *Ways to do this?*
- Adds to your credibility



Evaluating Online Sources

- Archives: Internet archive
- Domain ownership: Whois, IP lookup
- Linking: Yahoo site explorer
- Hoax sites: Snopes, Urban Legends

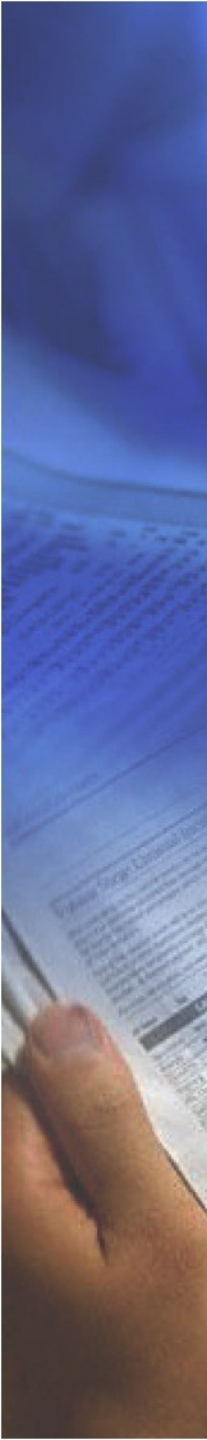


Evaluating Online Media

Identify who took the picture, what camera was used, where a digital picture was taken

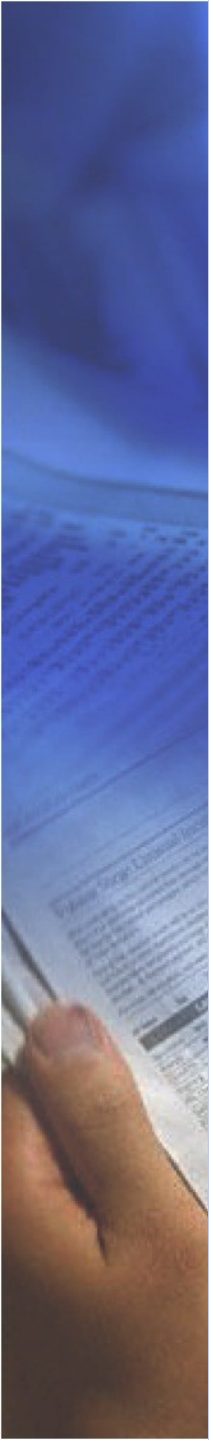
- Remember the “too good to be true” rule!
- Beware of Powerpoint
- Be wary of manipulation. Look for where tones touch
- “Read” EXIF data using applications (or Flickr)

Identify who created a Word document (DocScrubber)



Resources

- BBC editorial guidance on use of social networks
- BBC Guidance on UGC
- The Journalist's Guide to Facebook
- NPR News Social Media Guidelines
- How Social Media is Radically Changing the Newsroom
- Washington Post guidance on use of social media



Credits

Kathy E. Gill, @kegill, wiredpen.com

Creative Commons: attribution, non-commercial, share and share alike

Sources:

- [Ethical Encounters \(slideshare\)](#)
- [Ethics In Journalism -1 \(slideshare\)](#)
- [Ethics In Journalism - 2 \(slideshare\)](#)
- [Ethics Online \(slideshare\)](#)
- [NewsU tutorial on ethics](#)
- [Journalistic Ethics Online \(slideshare\)](#)
- [Visual Journalism Ethics \(slideshare\)](#)