

“Off the record?”

COM 315 CAR

Journalism JARGON, What does it mean?

“On the record”

- You can USE the information, and NAME and QUOTE the source.
- After I identify myself as a reporter, I **ALWAYS ASSUME** that the conversation is “on the record”

Journalism JARGON, What does it mean?

“Off the record”

- This is an **AGREEMENT** between the source and journalist.
- A source can’t just say “This is off the record” and start blabbing. You must **AGREE FIRST**. (email can’t declare off the record & blab)
- Off the record means you **CAN NOT** report it in any way OR try to track it down another way.

Journalism JARGON, What does it mean?

“On background”

- You can **USE** the information, but can **NOT NAME** the source. **INSTEAD**, you should **AGREE** on how you will clearly describe the source in the attribution:
 - A Rider University public safety officer
 - A Rider University trustee
 - A student in Professor Jane Doe’s class
 - A member of the TKE fraternity at Rider

Journalism JARGON, What does it mean?

“On deep background”

- You can **USE** the information, but can **NOT** identify the source in any way...
- An ethical challenge for news organizations

SOURCE MOTIVES:

- ALWAYS consider the source’s **MOTIVES** for their request not to be completely “on the record”
 - Are they trying to smear someone?
 - Are they trying to influence news coverage?

ADVICE: When someone asks to go “off the record”

- **TALK** with the source ... try to understand **WHY** they want to go off the record
- IF LEGIT REQUEST: **ASK** if instead they would be willing to go “on background” and offer some ways they could be attributed.
- **EXPLAIN** “off the record” to source; Strongly consider **refusing** (Off the record ties your hands)

Washington, D.C. ... Off the record...

- Washington is rife with sources wanting to go “Off the record” ... sometimes, official govt. briefings are “off the record.”
- Many journalists **REFUSE** to go off the record, or attend off the record briefings.
 - Would rather work sources than have hands tied by something they can’t use
- Some news orgs **FORBID** OTR with President

BREAKING an “off the record” agreement

- If a source is PROVEN to be LYING, the agreement is not valid
- If the source discusses the conversation ON THE RECORD, the agreement is no longer valid
- If the source RELEASES the reporter from the agreement

TRUMP, NYT .. Off the record...



Following

Had a very good and interesting meeting at the White House with A.G. Sulzberger, Publisher of the New York Times. Spent much time talking about the vast amounts of Fake News being put out by the media & how that Fake News has morphed into phrase, “Enemy of the People.” Sad!

7:30 AM · 29 Jul 2018

NYTimes response:

Earlier this month, [NYTimes Publisher] A.G. [Sulzberger] received a request from the White House to meet with President Trump. This was not unusual; there has been a long tradition of New York Times publishers holding such meetings with presidents and other public figures who have concerns about coverage.

On July 20th, A.G. went to the White House, accompanied by James Bennet, who oversees the editorial page of The Times. Mr. Trump’s aides requested that the meeting be off the record, which has also been the practice for such meetings in the past.

But with Mr. Trump’s tweet this morning, he has put the meeting on the record, so A.G. has decided to respond to the president’s characterization of their conversation, based on detailed notes A.G. and James took.

Sulzberger response in NYTimes:

My main purpose for accepting the meeting was to raise concerns about the president’s deeply troubling anti-press rhetoric.

I told the president directly that I thought that his language was not just divisive but increasingly dangerous.

I told him that although the phrase “fake news” is untrue and harmful, I am far more concerned about his labeling journalists “the enemy of the people.” I warned that this inflammatory language is contributing to a rise in threats against journalists and will lead to violence.