Society of Professional Journalists

Improving and protecting journalism since 1909

# Code of Ethics

Members of the Society of Professional Journalists believe ethical journalism strives to ensure the free exchange of information is accurate, fair, and thorough. An ethical journalist acts with integrity.  
  
The Society declares these four principles as the foundation of ethical journalism and encourages their use in its practice by all people in all media.

## Seek Truth and Report It

Ethical journalism should be accurate and fair. Journalists should be honest and courageous in gathering, reporting, and interpreting information.

Journalists should:

* Take responsibility for the accuracy of their work. Verify information before releasing it.
* Remember that neither speed nor format excuses inaccuracy.
* Provide context.
* Gather, update, and correct information throughout the life of a news story.
* Identify sources clearly.
* Diligently seek subjects of news coverage to allow them to respond to criticism or allegations of wrongdoing.
* Avoid undercover or other surreptitious methods of gathering information unless traditional, open methods will not yield information vital to the public.
* Be vigilant and courageous about holding those with power accountable. Give voice to the voiceless.
* Support the open and civil exchange of views, even views they find repugnant.
* Provide access to source material when it is relevant and appropriate.
* Avoid stereotyping. Journalists should examine the ways their values and experiences may shape their reporting.
* Never deliberately distort facts or context, including visual information.

## Minimize Harm

Ethical journalism treats sources, subjects, colleagues, and members of the public as human beings deserving of respect.

Journalists should:

* Balance the public’s need for information against potential harm or discomfort. Pursuit of the news is not a license for arrogance or undue intrusiveness.
* Show compassion for those who may be affected by news coverage.
* Recognize that legal access to information differs from an ethical justification to publish or broadcast.
* Weigh the consequences of publishing or broadcasting personal information.
* Balance a suspect’s right to a fair trial with the public’s right to know. Consider the implications of identifying criminal suspects before they face legal charges.
* Consider the long-term implications of the extended reach and permanence of publication. Provide updated and more complete information as appropriate.

## Act Independently

The highest and primary obligation of ethical journalism is to serve the public.

Journalists should:

* Avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived. Disclose unavoidable conflicts.
* Refuse gifts, favors, fees, free travel, and special treatment, and avoid political and other outside activities that may compromise integrity or impartiality or may damage credibility.
* Be wary of sources offering information for favors or money; do not pay for access to news. Identify content provided by outside sources, whether paid or not.
* Deny favored treatment to advertisers, donors, or any other special interests, and resist internal and external pressure to influence coverage.
* Distinguish news from advertising and shun hybrids that blur the lines between the two.

## Be Accountable and Transparent

Ethical journalism means taking responsibility for one’s work and explaining one’s decisions to the public.

Journalists should:

* Respond quickly to questions about accuracy, clarity, and fairness.
* Acknowledge mistakes and correct them promptly and prominently.
* Expose unethical conduct in journalism, including within their organizations.
* Abide by the same high standards they expect of others.