

Ethics in Journalism

Journalistic ethics are the common values that guide reporters. They lay out both the aspirations and obligations that journalists, editors, and others working in the field should follow to execute their work responsibly.

Journalism ethics have evolved over time. Most news organisations have their own written codes of ethics, as do professional membership bodies. If a professional journalist or news organisation transgresses these ethical standards, they will lose credibility.

Honesty. Journalists have an obligation to seek out the truth and report it as accurately as possible. This requires diligence: this means making every effort to seek out all the facts relevant to a story. Journalists should also corroborate any information with multiple sources.

Independence. Journalists should avoid taking political sides and should not act on behalf of special interest groups. Any political affiliations or financial investments that might constitute a conflict of interest with the subject they are writing about should be declared to editors and readers. Some organizations characterize this principle as “objectivity,” while others, especially non-profit civic journalism projects, reject this term, as they position themselves explicitly on the side of public interest.

Fairness. In addition to being independent, journalists should show impartiality and balance in their reporting. Most news stories have more than one side, and journalists should capture this.

Public accountability. News organisations should listen to their audience. To enable the public to hold them accountable, journalists should write under their own bylines and accept responsibility for their words. When news outlets publish factual errors, they need to issue a correction.

Harm minimisation. Not every fact that can be published should be published. If the amount of harm that could come to private individuals—particularly children—as a result of disclosure exceeds the public good that would come of it, then news outlets might choose not to publish the story. This is less of a consideration when it comes to public figures. It is huge, however, in matters of national security, where lives could be on the line.

Avoiding libel. This is a legal as well as a moral imperative for journalists. Journalists cannot print false statements that damage a person's reputation. In most jurisdictions, true statements cannot be libelous, so journalists can protect themselves by rigorously checking facts.

Proper attribution. Journalists must never plagiarise. If they use information from another media outlet or journalist, they need to attribute it to them.

CODE OF ETHICS FOR JOURNALISTS

1. Report and interpret honestly, striving for accuracy, fairness and disclosure of all essential facts. Do not suppress relevant available

facts, or give distorting emphasis. Do your utmost to give a fair opportunity for reply.

2. Do not place unnecessary emphasis on personal characteristics, including race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, sexual orientation, family relationships, religious belief, or physical or intellectual disability.

3. Aim to attribute information to its source. Where a source seeks anonymity, do not agree without first considering the source's motives and any alternative attributable source. Where confidences are accepted, respect them in all circumstances.

4. Do not allow personal interest, or any belief, commitment, payment, gift or benefit, to undermine your accuracy, fairness or independence.

5. Disclose conflicts of interest that affect, or could be seen to affect, the accuracy, fairness or independence of your journalism. Do not improperly use a journalistic position for personal gain.

6. Do not allow advertising or other commercial considerations to undermine accuracy, fairness or independence.

7. Do your utmost to ensure disclosure of any direct or indirect payment made for interviews, pictures, information or stories.

8. Use fair, responsible and honest means to obtain material. Identify yourself and your employer before obtaining any interview for publication or broadcast. Never exploit a person's vulnerability or ignorance of media practice.

9. Present pictures and sound which are true and accurate. Any manipulation likely to mislead should be disclosed.

10. Do not plagiarise.

11. Respect private grief and personal privacy. Journalists have the right to resist compulsion to intrude.

12. Do your utmost to achieve fair correction of errors.