

# SPJ Ethics Code revision: Draft 1

Learn more about the code revision and engage in the conversation at [www.spj.org](http://www.spj.org).  
Highlighted items are new, strikethroughs are to be removed.

## Preamble

~~Members of the Society of Professional Journalists believe that public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy. The duty of the journalist is to further those ends by seeking truth and providing a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues. Conscientious journalists from all media and specialties strive to serve the public with thoroughness and honesty. Professional integrity is the cornerstone of a journalist's credibility. Members of the Society share a dedication to ethical behavior and adopt this code to declare the Society's principles and standards of practice.~~

Members of the Society of Professional Journalists believe that justice and good government require an informed public. The journalist's duty is to provide that information, accurately, fairly and fully. Responsible journalists from all media, including nontraditional providers of news to a broad audience, should strive to serve the public with thoroughness and honesty. Responsible journalists think ethically before acting, and make every effort to get the story right the first time. Integrity is the foundation of a journalist's credibility, and above all, responsible journalists must be accurate. The purpose of this code is to declare the Society's principles and standards and to encourage their use in the practice of journalism in any and all media.

## Seek Truth and Report It

Journalists should be honest, fair and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information. Journalists should:

- Aggressively gather and update information as the story unfolds and work to avoid error. Deliberate distortion and reporting unconfirmed rumors are never permissible.
- Remember that neither speed nor brevity excuses inaccuracy or mitigates the damage of error.
- Journalists, not sources, are responsible for the accuracy of stories. Verify information from sources before publishing. Information taken from other news sources should be independently verified.
- Test the accuracy of information from all sources and exercise care to avoid inadvertent error. Deliberate distortion is never permissible.

- Work to put every story into context. In promoting, previewing or reporting a story live, take care not to misrepresent or oversimplify it.
- Clearly identify sources; the public is entitled to as much information as possible on a source's identity, reliability and possible motives. Seek alternative sources before granting anonymity. Reveal conditions attached to any promises made in exchange for information. Keep promises.
- Identify sources whenever feasible. The public is entitled to as much information as possible on sources' reliability. Always question sources' motives before promising anonymity. Clarify conditions attached to any promise made in exchange for information. Keep promises.
- Seek sources whose views are seldom used. Official and unofficial sources can be equally valid.
- Diligently seek out subjects of news stories to give them the opportunity to respond to criticism and to allegations of wrongdoing.
- Identify sources whenever feasible. The public is entitled to as much information as possible on sources' reliability.
- Always question sources' motives before promising anonymity. Clarify conditions attached to any promise made in exchange for information. Keep promises.
- Avoid publishing critical opinions by those seeking confidentiality.
- Make certain that headlines, news teases and promotional material, photos, video, audio, graphics, sound bites and quotations do not misrepresent. They should not oversimplify or highlight incidents out of context.
- Never alter or distort the content of news photos or video images. Image enhancement for technical clarity is always permissible. Clearly label montages and photo illustrations.
- Avoid misleading re-enactments or staged news events. If re-enactment is necessary to tell a story, label it.
- Avoid undercover or other surreptitious methods of gathering information except when traditional, open methods will not yield information vital to the public. Use of such methods should be explained as part of the story.
- Never plagiarize. Always attribute information not independently gathered.
- Boldly tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience. boldly, even when it is unpopular to do so.
- Examine their own cultural values and avoid imposing those values on others.
- Avoid stereotyping. by race, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, geography, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance or social status. Examine your own cultural values and avoid imposing those on others.

- Support the open exchange of views, even views they find repugnant.
  - Give voice to the voiceless; official and unofficial sources of information can be equally valid.
  - Distinguish between advocacy and news reporting. Analysis and commentary should be labeled. and not misrepresent fact or context.
  - Distinguish news from advertising and shun hybrids that blur the lines between the two.
  - Recognize a special obligation to ensure that the public's business is conducted in the open and that government records are open to inspection. Be vigilant and courageous about holding those with power accountable.
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## Minimize Harm

Ethical journalists treat sources, subjects, and colleagues and members of the public as human beings deserving of respect. Journalists should:

- Show compassion for those who may be affected adversely by news coverage. Use special sensitivity in dealing with children and inexperienced sources or subjects.
- Be sensitive when seeking or using interviews or photographs of those affected by tragedy or grief.
- Recognize that gathering and reporting information may cause harm or discomfort. Pursuit of the news is not a license for arrogance, irreverence or invasive behavior.
- Be sensitive when seeking or using information, interviews and images of people affected by tragedy or grief. Use special sensitivity when dealing with children and inexperienced sources or subjects.
- Recognize the harm in using photos or information, including any photos and data from social media forums, for which the source is unknown, or where there is uncertainty regarding the authenticity of the images or information.
- Recognize that legal access to information differs from ethical justification to publish. Journalists should balance the importance of information and potential effects on subjects and the public before publication.
- Recognize that private people have a greater right to control information about themselves than do public officials figures and others who seek power, influence or attention. Only an overriding public need can justify intrusion into anyone's privacy.
- Show good taste. Avoid pandering to lurid curiosity. Avoid following the lead of others who violate this tenet.
- Be cautious about identifying juvenile suspects, criminal suspects before the formal filing of charges, and victims of sex crimes. Balance a criminal suspect's fair trial rights with the public's right to be informed.
- Be cautious about identifying juvenile suspects or victims of sex crimes.
- Be judicious about naming criminal suspects before the formal filing of charges.
- Balance a criminal suspect's fair trial rights with the public's right to be informed.

- Consider the long-term implications of the extended reach and permanence of online publication. Provide updated and more complete information when appropriate.
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## Act Independently

Journalists should be free of obligation to any interest other than the public's right to know.

A journalist's highest and primary obligation is to the public's right to know.

Journalists should:

- Avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived. **Disclose unavoidable conflicts.**  
~~Remain free of associations and activities that may compromise integrity or damage credibility.~~  
Refuse gifts, favors, fees, free travel and special treatment, and shun secondary employment, political involvement, public office and service in community organizations **if they compromise journalistic integrity.** **that may conflict with an impartial approach to information-gathering.**
  - Be wary of sources offering information for favors or money; **avoid bidding for news. do not pay for news or access.** ~~Disclose unavoidable conflicts.~~
  - ~~Be vigilant and courageous about holding those with power accountable.~~  
Deny favored treatment to advertisers and **donors, or any other** special interests, and resist their pressure to influence news coverage
  - **Identify content provided by outside sources, whether paid or not. Distinguish news from advertising and marketing material. Shun hybrids that blur the lines between the two.**
  - Remain free of associations and activities that may compromise integrity or damage credibility.
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## Be Accountable

Journalists **should be open in their actions and accept responsibility for them.** ~~are accountable to their readers, listeners, viewers and each other.~~

Journalists should:

- Clarify and explain news coverage and invite **a civil** dialogue with the public over ~~journalistic conduct.~~ **practices.**
- ~~Encourage the public to voice grievances against the news media.~~
- Admit mistakes and correct them promptly **and prominently wherever they appeared, including archived material.**
- ~~Expose unethical practices of~~ **conduct in journalism.** ~~journalists and the news media.~~
- **Disclose sources of funding and relationships that might influence, or appear to influence, reporting.**
- Abide by the same high standards ~~to which they hold others~~ **they expect of others.**