

Good journalists live in fear of making mistakes, and they work very hard to avoid them. Mistakes do happen, however, so news organizations make an effort to correct them as soon as possible. The willingness to correct mistakes is another mark of credibility.

There are many day-to-day situations in which journalists have to make ethical decisions. Some people try to **influence** reporters, or persuade the journalists to write favorably about certain people or businesses. Some ethical decisions are small, such as whether they should let a community leader pay for the lunch they have together. Some are larger, such as whether they should take a free trip offered by the resort about which they will write a travel story. The Society of Professional Journalists has a broad Code of Ethics, but opinions may differ on how to handle some specific situations.

Not so many years ago, a columnist at the *San Francisco Chronicle* turned down a free trip she won in a random drawing at a trade show hosted by the British consul. She had put her business card into a bowl with others, not realizing at first that it was for a drawing. When she won the trip, worth about \$20,000, she turned it down immediately. To her, accepting the trip would have compromised her credibility. What if in the future she would have to write about the airline? Would she look free of influence? It also would have violated her own newspaper's policy against accepting gifts of any kind.

Not everyone thought the journalist made the right decision. The British consul was definitely surprised, though another winner was drawn immediately. The columnist's action even made the news. She might not have made news if she had turned down dinner or free tickets to a concert. But it's the same thing. Issues concerning influence arrive in packages big and small. Good journalists must say no to them all.



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TEAMWORK

Work with three other students to write a Code of Ethics for journalists in your school. Once you have completed writing your code, compare it with the codes other groups in your class wrote. Then, as a class, combine the codes to make one Code of Ethics for your class. Post it in the room.

TEAMWORK

Work with students to create a complete Code of Ethics the journalists in your school may use. Have a few students create a large poster of the agreed-upon Code of Ethics and post it in the classroom.

THINK CRITICALLY THROUGH VISUALS

There are many day-to-day situations in which journalists have to make ethical decisions. Some people try to influence reporters, or persuade the journalists to write favorably about certain people or businesses. Some ethical decisions are small, such as whether a reporter should let a community leader pay for the lunch they have together. Some are larger, such as whether journalists should take a free trip offered by the resort about which they will write a travel story.

What are some ethical decisions that a journalist might have to make?