

IMPARTIALITY

Journalists are expected to keep their distance from the people and organizations they cover so that they can be **impartial** when they write about them. Impartial means being objective, putting aside personal opinions, and not accepting gifts, meals, trips or anything else that could be seen as seeking to influence the news. It also means avoiding any **conflict of interest**. An example of conflict of interest would be reporters who write about companies in which they own stock, or an organization to which they belong, or even the schools their children attend.

Journalists often are sent *free* books, CDs, movies and other material by sources who would like the journalist to write about them. Are these items gifts that attempt to influence the reporters? Not usually. Most news organizations allow reporters to use and keep material that is clearly intended for mass press consumption, though some organizations strongly encourage employees to give such material to libraries or charitable organizations when their use for a story is complete. Critics and reporters on entertainment and sports beats often are offered tickets

NETBookmark

Click on the link for the Chapter 2 Net Bookmark at school.cengage.com/langarts/journalism. You will be directed to a Web page for the Poynter Institute page for Ethics, Student Research. Read the FAQs and then write a fact sheet on the information.

school.cengage.com/langarts/journalism

NET BOOKMARK

Fact sheets will vary, depending on which facts students pick up. Fact sheets should state that the Poynter Institute helps student journalists.



Code of Ethics

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.

Seek Truth and Report It

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

Journalists should:

- ▶ Test the accuracy of information from all sources and exercise care to avoid inadvertent error. Deliberate distortion is never permissible.
- ▶ Diligently seek out subjects of news stories to give them the opportunity to respond 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.
- ▶ 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.

Minimize Harm

Ethical journalists treat sources, subjects and colleagues as human beings deserving of respect.

Journalists should:

- ▶ Show compassion for those who may be affected adversely by news coverage. Use special sensitivity when 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.
- ▶ Recognize that private people have a greater right to control information about themselves than do public officials 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.
- ▶ 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.

Courtesy of Society of Professional Journalists