



JOURNALISTIC PRINCIPLES

Chapter 14

“All the News: Writing and Reporting for Convergent Media”

Multimedia Reporting Course

CORNERSTONES OF JOURNALISM

▶ Traditional Values:

- ▶ Accuracy
- ▶ Fairness
- ▶ Objectivity
- ▶ Impartiality
- ▶ Balance

▶ Shifting Values:

- ▶ Accuracy
- ▶ Fairness
- ▶ Thoroughness
- ▶ Transparency

FAIRNESS AND ACCURACY

- ▶ You always want to treat news stories and sources in a fair, reasonable, professional manner
- ▶ Present all sides of the story
- ▶ Make every effort to present opposing and contrasting points of view
- ▶ Explain if and why sides and/or people are not represented, won't comment, and/or cannot be reached to comment
- ▶ Avoid slanted, biased reporting that favors one side unfairly
- ▶ Reporters must be sticklers for accuracy because accurate information is the core product of journalism
- ▶ Accuracy errors undermine your and your news organization's credibility with the public
- ▶ People are skeptical enough about the news media- don't add fuel to the fire with careless, sloppy misquotes, typos, and context errors
- ▶ Double check all spellings, pronunciations (for broadcast), allegations, questionable assertions,
- ▶ When in doubt, leave it out!

OBJECTIVITY AND BALANCE UNDER FIRE

- ▶ This principle is defined, in the journalistic context, as reporters sticking to observable facts, and avoiding injecting their own opinions into their reports
- ▶ Today there's a school of thought that reporters need to better be able to connect the dots, to find out what the truth really is, to go beyond just reporting "facts," which may in fact be misleading in order to advance a viewpoint, in politics, for example
- ▶ The truth of the story is more important than the facts of the story
- ▶ "Facts, sadly, are often messy, difficult to isolate, dependent on context, and subject to interpretation." (Mitchell Stephens, journalism analyst and author)
- ▶ Objectivity promotes the views of the powerful at the expense of their critics and the powerless
- ▶ Time pressures lead many reporters to dig less, instead relying on "official" sources who may have own agendas, plus are accomplished at shaping media messages

“HE SAID/SHE SAID” REPORTING- BALANCED OR UNBALANCED?

- ▶ Reporters should do more than just seek comments from two opposing parties
- ▶ Reporters need to do more and better analysis of what each side is saying to determine if what is said is actually true- and withhold reporting on the issue until comments are checked out more, or do timely follow-up stories challenging claims that don't check out
- ▶ “Reporters seem to think they've done an adequate job just because they give both sides the chance to state their case...But if that's all you do, you may have satisfied the imagined constraints of objectivity, but often you haven't told the reader anything.” (Steve Lovelady, CampaignDesk.org)
- ▶ Some organizations are addressing this issue by doing more hard-hitting analysis of, for example, political ads to determine if a candidate's claims are accurate about his/her positions/successes and criticisms of an opponents record

TODAY'S "CLIMATE OF ABUNDANCE"

- ▶ When mass news media became a fixture in the U.S. the prevailing view among publishers, and later broadcasters, was that to attract the widest possible audiences, biases needed to be avoided
- ▶ Today's news media do not operate in a climate of scarcity- news is everywhere, all the time, and the emergence of bloggers has added countless new "journalists" and commentators to the mix
- ▶ In this climate of abundance, no one source of news has to be all things to all people
- ▶ News outlets today may find that having a clear point of view is the key to drawing people
- ▶ Fox News Channel has found that many people prefer to get their news from clearly partisan news outlets that seem to share their views
- ▶ Despite its credo of "Fair and Balanced" Fox News, few would argue, is generally regarded as leaning toward a conservative Republican perspective

THOROUGHNESS AS AN IDEAL

- ▶ Thorough reporting requires more than tapping the “usual suspects” sources
- ▶ It requires the time to track down and talk with the best sources, find the best documentation, records, etc.
- ▶ The goal is to give people as much evidence as possible so they can better understand what is happening and make informed decisions based on that information
- ▶ “Ultimately, it’s best for reporting to strive to be neither ‘analytic’ nor ‘neutral,’ but simply to be fair-minded and truthful based on a detailed examination of the matter at hand.” (Timothy Noah, *The New Republic*)

TRANSPARENCY- BE OPEN AND HONEST

- ▶ To gain and maintain public trust, journalists must be open as possible about what biases they bring to the job, how they get their information and how they make decisions on choosing and reporting stories
- ▶ Being more open, even about mistakes, can foster better trust with the public, it can soften criticism, kill rumors
- ▶ The Internet allows for linking to other sources, providing audiences with the information reporters used and other related and pertinent material
- ▶ At a minimum, being transparent requires that a reporter answer:
 - ▶ How do you know what you know?
 - ▶ Who are your sources?
 - ▶ How direct is their knowledge?
 - ▶ Are there conflicting accounts?
 - ▶ What don't you know?
 - ▶ Why was this story, photo or name published?
 - ▶ Why were other words, photos and names withheld from publication?

STRIVING FOR ACCURACY

- ▶ Once a story has been written, it's important to do one more round of fact checking, such as:
 - ▶ Have you double-checked all names, titles, and places mentioned in your story?
 - ▶ Have you tested and checked all phone numbers and Web addresses?
 - ▶ Have you checked the math?
 - ▶ Are the quotes accurate and properly attributed? Have you run spell check?
 - ▶ Make sure quotes and soundbites fully capture what the speakers meant and that you did not distort meaning or take out context by how you edit quotes/soundbites.
 - ▶ Also make sure photos and video clips don't distort or misrepresent
 - ▶ Have you fact-checked your information given to graphics or photography? Have you seen the completed graphic or photo?
 - ▶ News photos should never be altered; feature photos that are altered should be published only if accompanied by a clear disclaimer (such as photo illustration)