



Carleton
UNIVERSITY

Ethics and Professional Standards for the School of Journalism and Communication

Revised August 2011

Students should read sections of the Carleton University calendars dealing with educational equity and instructional offences.

Appended to this document is the University's Policy on Discrimination and Sexual Harassment.

What follows is a statement of ethical policy and practice. Adherence to it will be one of the measures upon which a journalism student's work and performance may be evaluated. Deviations must first be discussed with an instructor.

Fundamental Principles

- In a democracy, **all** people must be encouraged to exert influence and be involved.
- A free society offers choices. Information and understanding are essential for meaningful participation and informed decision-making.
- The role of journalism and of the journalist is to collect and disseminate information and opinion in order to foster understanding, so that people may enjoy the rights and discharge the responsibilities of full citizenship.
- The public trust implicit in journalism calls for a high degree of independence and impartiality. This public trust is not a right. It is a privilege to be earned and sustained through daily practice. Never compromise your independence. The journalist's mandate calls for the highest degree of ethical behaviour, professionalism and judgment.

Guidelines

1. Be honest with the audience and sources.
2. Be accurate and reliable.
3. Be fair. When reports contain opinions, and other opinions are probable, those other opinions should be sought out and presented.

Sources

1. Journalists constantly have to balance the individual's right to privacy against the public's need for information. Where an individual's need for privacy is an issue, **do** weigh it against the value of the information to the audience. If the weight is clearly on the side of the individual or the audience, the decision is easy. When the balance seems even, the journalist's first obligation is to the audience. If in doubt, consult your instructor.
2. **Do** identify yourself as a journalist. On investigative assignments, if doing so is likely to result in the withholding of information essential to the story, exceptions may be made with the approval of the instructor.
3. Keep professional promises to sources who have been honest with you.
4. **Don't** solicit or accept information from sources on the understanding that you are a student and it will not be published. That's not journalism. Identify yourself as student, but state that, if at all possible, you hope to publish the article.
5. **Don't** solicit or accept information on the undertaking that the source will have any right of approval or control over what is written or broadcast, or the right to see or hear, in advance, what will be published or broadcast.

6. **Do** inform interviewees about the general subject matter, and explain what may be done with their answers. **Don't** provide a list of questions in advance, either for information or approval, without the approval of the instructor. In such a case, do make it clear that you will not be limited in the interview to the questions on the list.
7. **Don't** pay sources or give gifts or favours to sources, or accept special treatment, money, favours or gifts of value from sources. Use your common sense. A cup of coffee is not a bribe. But a free trip, lavish entertainment or a bottle of liquor may be seen as one. Not only should you not be bought, but you should not be seen as having been bought.
8. Unless approved by your instructor, **don't** tape or videotape a source for broadcast without first having explained that you will do so.
9. Reporting without direct attribution is sometimes essential to go beyond the apparent and superficial in covering public affairs. **Do**, however, identify sources and attribute information as a general rule. Journalists making a commitment of confidentiality should be aware that, in law, they have no legal privilege with sources and may be convicted of contempt of court, a criminal offence, for honouring their commitment.
10. **Unnamed sources may be used in stories only with the permission of the instructor**, and the source must agree to have his or her name and contact information given to the instructor.
11. **Do** confirm with sources exactly what is meant when they provide information on the understanding that it is "off the record," "background" or "not for attribution." **Do** ask if "off the record" information may be used to get it on the record.
12. Many people are not accustomed to dealing with the media, to the point of being naive and extremely vulnerable. In many cases, they find themselves "in the news" through no actions of their own. **Don't** take advantage of such naiveté or vulnerability, or manipulate such a person.
13. **Do** quote sources precisely, and fairly reflect the context of conversations. While some instructors may impose a stricter standard, there may be no harm in altering a quote to:
 - correct grammar that could make the statement confusing or make the speaker appear foolish.
 - avoid dialect that is not essential to the story.
14. **Don't** fabricate or plagiarize. (This includes faking on-location actuality sound, film\video or photographs; or fabricating sound bytes, or clips, in any way.) Both may result in disciplinary action up to and including suspension from the journalism program. Faculty members must report to the director of the School, as quickly as possible, allegations of fabrication or plagiarism.
15. Second-hand information, beyond that which is general background and uncontroversial, must be checked independently. The basic principle: Do your own research.
16. If erroneous information is disseminated, **do** admit and correct the error(s) as soon as possible.

17. Opinion, interpretative or analytical pieces should be clearly labeled in a way that is easily understood by the audience.
18. Offensive language, including profanity and insulting comment, should be included only when clearly relevant to the story.

Conflict of Interest

1. **Do** avoid direct conflicts of interest and be aware that the appearance of conflict should also be considered.
2. **Don't** interview your friends or family unless you make the relationship clear to the audience. Where, because of personal or family relationships, your objectivity or impartiality may be called into question, **don't** undertake a reporting or editing assignment. The integrity of the journalist-source relationship varies inversely with their personal closeness.
3. Journalists should not be denied the rights of citizenship, but exercising these rights in a partisan way may conflict with journalistic integrity. The journalist is disqualified from writing or editing news about matters in which he/she is specifically involved.
4. **Don't** abuse your journalistic role for personal benefit or gain or for the benefit or gain of a family member, friend or acquaintance.

Policy on Discrimination and Sexual Harassment

Carleton University is a community of faculty, staff and students who are engaged in teaching, learning and research. Its members are part of the community at large and are governed by the law common to all persons. But membership in the academic community also entails certain rights and responsibilities. The University respects the rights of speech, assembly and dissent; it prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, national origin, creed, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, family status, political affiliation or belief, or handicap that is defined as such in the Ontario *Human Rights Code*; it requires tolerance and respect for the rights of others; and it promotes an environment conducive to personal and intellectual growth.

(Please refer to the Offences of Conduct section of the current Carleton University Calendars.)