

Ethical Considerations



<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Aegean/6763>

Reporters have a responsibility to follow a code of ethics.

- **ETHICS:** The branch of philosophy dealing with values relating to human conduct, with respect to the rightness or wrongness of certain actions and to the goodness and badness of the motives and ends of such actions. Or...The rules of conduct of a particular class of human action (medical ethics, Christian ethics, journalistic ethics).
- **BELIEFS/CONVICTIONS:** Settled profound or earnest thought that something is right.
- **VALUES:** Ideals, customs, institutions, etc. that arouse an emotional response, for or against them, in a society or person.
- **MORALS:** Refers to the generally accepted customs of conduct and right living in a society.

Specific ways of operating ethically as a journalist include the following:

- Don't betray your credibility as a friend. Let a source know he is an interview and ask if you can use it in print.
Don't put conversations in print.
- When the coverage is for an organization, ask yourself: Is it news, or is it public relations? What is the purpose of the story?
- Never let deadline pressure keep you from checking and rechecking your facts for accuracy.
- While the First Amendment doesn't say a story has to be fair, impartial or balanced, your readers demand it. If all sides to a story are not printed in the same issue, hard feelings and contempt for the newspaper staff can build up before the next month's issue is printed.
- Beware of hurting unnamed persons. Also take into consideration the feelings of family and friends of a student interviewed. Be very careful not to invade the privacy of these people by quoting something questionable your interviewee has said.
- Is the language used in an article (a) **essential** to the quote and (b) **acceptable** in the classroom?

Freedom to publish carries a corresponding responsibility.

- Don't promise to keep something "off the record." You may not be able to keep that promise.
- Be very careful about accepting "freebies". Don't let yourself be accused of being "bought".
- If there is any way to avoid it, do not report on an activity you yourself are involved in. Let another reporter handle it.
- Do not let your personal likes and dislikes get in the way of your obligation to your readers. Expanding coverage of areas in which you have a great interest while squelching coverage of other areas is unethical.
- Acceptance of advertising should also be based on moral and ethical considerations.
- Be aware of community standards regarding obscenity and profanity.
- Press releases from outside sources must be verified for accuracy just as any other source.
- A story using one source tells only one side of a story.
- Anonymous sources severely damage the credibility of the newspaper staff. Unless it is absolutely unavoidable, use a source who is willing to be identified.