

The Virginian-Pilot

Code of Ethics and Professionalism (Revised March 2011)

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This policy was crafted with the assistance of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, whose Web site contains policies of several newspapers. Of particular assistance were the Roanoke Times, Seattle Times, New York Times, Chicago Tribune, Kansas City Star, Los Angeles Times and Tampa Tribune.

“THE DUTY OF LANDMARK NEWSPAPERS” By Frank Batten Sr.

Newspapers live entirely on the bounty of the public. The ability of journalists to report and to comment is based upon a unique grant of freedom from the public. Thus our duty is clear: It is to serve the public with skill and character, and to exercise First Amendment freedoms with vigor and responsibility.

Our news reports should never be influenced by the private interests of the owners or of any other group. Our editorials should exhibit vigor and courage, always respectful of contrary opinion, never tailored to the whims of the editor or publisher.

We aim to build a tradition of excellence for our newspapers. We must be aggressive in publishing the news. The independence of our editors, reporters and photographers is not for sale. There are no sacred cows. No territory of legitimate public interest is off limits to fair and competent reporting and comments.

Freedom makes a place for excellence. That place must be filled with professional discipline, with respect for the public we serve, and with a keen sense of fairness to all individuals. We must never pander to passions or forget for a moment the power of the printed word to do wrong as well as to right wrong.

Let us forget old slogans of dead days. Instead of "Get it first and get it right," let our rule be: "First, get it right." When mistakes occur, we should correct them promptly and forthrightly. Excellence cannot flourish without criticism. We need criticism and should seek it. Lacking trust, a newspaper cannot serve or advance any worthy purpose.

The first priority of Landmark newspapers is to present a faithful and accurate picture of the life of their communities. This requires detailed coverage of local events, institutions and people's activities.

Warts and problems are at the core of news, but they are not all of the news. Even against the tide of modern life, people and institutions make progress. We should be generous in coverage of achievement; our pages should reflect the grit, devotion and durability of the human spirit. Let us nourish hope. While exposure of wrongdoing is a proper function and on occasion a required function of newspapers, it is not the main purpose. Problems are shaped more often by circumstance than by venality. Corruption and conflicts of interest, in most communities, have little to do with the important things that are not working. Most of our communities' failures are rooted in complex problems. A truly excellent newspaper will spend most of its investigative skills on explaining those circumstances. We misdirect readers if we concentrate on narrow problems and inflate their significance.

A great newspaper is distinguished by the balance, fairness and authority of its reporting and editing. Such a newspaper searches as hard for strengths and accomplishment as for weakness and failure. Rather than demoralize its community, the great newspaper will, by honest and intelligent journalism, inspire people to do better.

Frank Batten became publisher of The Virginian-Pilot in 1954 and served as chairman of Landmark Communications from 1967 to 1998. This statement was written in the 1970s.

WHO IS COVERED BY THIS POLICY?

STAFF MEMBERS

The ethics policy applies to all News and Editorial employees, full and part time.

FREELANCERS

As independent contractors, freelance contributors cannot legally be required to adhere to the ethics policy; however, assigning editors will judge freelance work based on the standards in the Pilot's ethics policy. Assigning editors should present freelancers with a written copy of this policy when they sign a contract to write, edit or otherwise work for us independently.

It is the freelancer's responsibility to inform editors of potential conflicts, such as a personal or business relationship with the subject of a story. If the editor determines a conflict exists, the freelancer will be taken off an assignment, or the contribution refused.

ACCURACY

“The first priority of Landmark newspapers is to present a faithful and accurate picture of the life of their communities...”

CORRECTIONS

We will protect our credibility with a vigorous commitment to accuracy. We will remedy, in a timely manner, all errors of fact with a correction or clarification. If you become aware of an error in your own or others’ published work, you have a responsibility to notify the author or the team leader as soon as possible.

Online Corrections

Errors must be corrected online as soon as they’re discovered.

Depending on the severity of the error and how long the error was posted, it may warrant an editor’s note to the story stating that “a previous version was incorrect” with necessary details. A team leader should consult with the staffer and online producer before writing an online note.

For serious errors, especially in headlines, a staffer should see an online producer, who may be able to keep the story from being widely distributed by search engines.

Staffers who commit errors that result in published corrections need to file a corrections form with the editor’s assistant. Online mistakes - though fleeting - can be serious enough to warrant filing a corrections form, as judged by a team leader.

? GUIDING QUESTIONS

Does a story merit an editor’s note?

- Does the mistake change the meaning of the story or headline?
- How many page views has the story had?
- Is the mistake in the headline? If so, many more readers could have seen the incorrect information.
- Is it a “static” story or is it a fluid, constantly changing breaking news story?

❶ For more information, consult our fact-checking “cq” policy on the Intranet.

PLAGIARISM AND QUOTES

We do not use words or phrases from other sources without giving credit.

“Approximate” quotations can undermine readers’ trust. Therefore, quotes should reflect exactly what a source said. If the source’s grammar or language is unsuitable, paraphrase.

When we paraphrase, we remain faithful to the original statement.

Quotes should fairly reflect the context of the conversation.

We shouldn’t attempt to capture dialect or mangled pronunciation, unless it is an essential element of a story. If someone says “gimme” instead of “give me,” it’s OK to write “give me” because that’s the correct pronunciation.

DIVERSITY

We will accurately and fairly reflect the diversity of gender, color, ethnicity, class, generation, geography and other attributes that distinguish our communities.

This standard requires our staff to go beyond the usual suspects when seeking sources. The ideal is to have the community's diverse groups represented in whom we cite, regardless of the theme or topic being covered. For example, there are minority health care professionals in Hampton Roads; health and medical stories should, therefore, include such minorities among the sources consulted. The principle holds true for business, religion, education, consumer and political stories.

Reporters, editors and photographers will accomplish this by ensuring that their source lists include women, minorities and representatives of other communities. There is no easy way to do this. Staff writers must be as purposeful about it as they are now in ensuring that names are spelled correctly.

In the drive for diversity, avoid using minority sources as tokens.

WRITING TECHNIQUES

In rare instances, a reporter may use imaginary characters or situations, but their fictitious nature must be immediately clear to the average reader. Other fiction writing techniques to avoid:

- The telescoping of time so that, for example, events that actually happened during several days are reported as happening in a single day.
- Vivid descriptions of scenes that the writer could not have seen, unless supported by in-depth reporting.
- Passages conveying that the reporter knew what an individual was thinking or feeling without having been told.

On occasion, a fictional name may be used for a real person when there is good reason to believe that public identification would cause severe embarrassment or harm to that person. Approval must be obtained from a senior editor. Readers should be informed of the fictional name.

INTERNET ACTIVITIES

Use of Internet sources

- Verify all facts reported from an online site unless you are confident of its source. For instance, the official Pulitzer Prize Web site can be regarded as a reliable source for names of past winners; a trade association site may not be.
- If using a source via Internet or e-mail, verify the source by phone or in person. Make certain a communication is genuine before using it.
- Generally, credit photos and graphics downloaded from the Internet. Usually, generic mug shots and icons do not need credits.

Researching the Internet

- Internet-derived information should be attributed, just as we would information from any book, magazine or other publication. Our prohibition against plagiarism applies to this information.

Linking to Web sites from a story

- Always review Web sites listed in stories. If you have concerns about including a site in a story because of inappropriate content, check with an editor.

Internet communication

- Use the same standards of representation as you would using the telephone or in person. Using deceptive methods to gain information, including the failure to reveal one's identity as a journalist while using a computer or the use of false identification to obtain access to computer systems, is corrosive to truth telling. Interviews via email should be labeled as such in stories (i.e. "... he wrote in an e-mail interview.")

Posting stories to The Virginian-Pilot Media Companies Web sites

Publishing stories online brings additional responsibilities and challenges. As with our print edition, the paper strives to be accurate and competitive in our online reporting. Posting inaccurate or improperly altered stories can damage The Pilot's reputation as a reliable, ethical news source.

- Reporters should not edit or change in any way any stories except their own.
- Reporters should consult with team leaders before making changes to their own stories. If a team leader is unavailable, reporters should consult another editor or online producer. (This may not be possible on weekends or holidays.)
- Team leaders should not edit or change in any way any stories except those written by reporters they supervise. Copy editors and online producers may make minor changes for clarity and accuracy.
- If a correction must be made to an online story that's already been published in print, staffers must follow established rules for reporting corrections.

Editors or reporters might need to change or update other staffers' stories in order to meet our competitive goals. If you need to "break" one of the rules above, please consult first with a manager.

VISUAL ACCURACY

Documentary photo

This is a candid or unposed photo that records news, features or sports. The spirit of the documentary photo is to be honest and above board with readers. Any appearance or suspicion of manipulation of documentary photos strikes against our core values. Submitted photos should meet these same standards.

For questions about photo authenticity, check with a photo editor.

Posing or re-enacting a documentary photograph is unacceptable. Altering a documentary photo is also unacceptable. This includes eliminating or adding material to the photo.

Examples:

- Do not ask someone to repeat an action for a documentary photo. The photographer would not ask a wife to again hug her husband at a ship homecoming because he missed it the first time.
- Do not cut out a "live" news photo. Cutouts can make a news photo look like a feature photo. Let the reader have full information.

- A photographer, photo editor or designer should not eliminate a telephone line from a photo to “clean up” the scene. Clouds, sky, grass or other elements should not be added to make room for type or make the photo fit a hole.

Adding type to a documentary photo is permissible under “Type in Photo” guidelines, which are part of the design styleguide. See the Director of Presentation or News Editor.

❗ For more information, consult our “Type in Photo” policy, available from the Director of Presentation.

Portrait photo

This photo is usually posed and it should be obvious to the reader if it is. A mug shot, a group photo or an environmental portrait with the subject looking at the camera are examples. With candid portraits follow the guidelines of documentary photos. Portrait photos shouldn’t be altered.

Photo illustration

This type of photograph turns 180 degrees from documentary photojournalism and uses the medium as an artist uses colored chalk to illustrate a story. In a successful and ethical photo illustration, it is obvious to the reader that the photo is not a candid documentary photo. A photo illustration credit line should reinforce the fact that the photo is not a real situation.

Icon photos

This category is much like the photo illustration -- almost anything goes. It includes simple photos that illustrate or label stories. Examples include photos of planes, ships, money, hockey sticks, hands, buildings, etc. Cutout photos would be included in this. It is not necessary to credit these photos.

To use or not to use

When in doubt, use common sense. Know privacy rules and laws. Shooting the photo usually is not the problem. Publishing the photo may be. Using sound judgement, the photographer should almost always shoot the picture. The editing process will determine whether the photo will be used. The photo editor, page editor and news editor will also help determine publication. Some photos should be approved by a senior editor, managing editor or the editor.

Some red flags:

- death
- nudity or sexual content
- exaggerated grief
- blood or other body fluids
- photo is too good to be true (it may be set up)
- vulgar words or gestures (these may be hidden in a photo)
- cheap shot (zipper open, food on the face)
- unflattering expression not related to the event or situation
- people performing dangerous acts
- violence

- racial stereotypes
- photos that may otherwise shock or appall readers

? GUIDING QUESTIONS

- Is the photo appropriate to the story?
- Is the news value worth upsetting the reader?
- Is the photo from this community or from far away?
- What are the paper's general standards of taste?
- Do you need to pass the photo through the top editor?
- Does it pass the "breakfast table" test?

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

"The independence of our editors, reporters and photographers is not for sale...."

PUBLIC LIFE

Staff members are encouraged to participate in professional, civic and cultural activities. To ensure that our credibility is not damaged, staff members have a special responsibility to avoid conflicts of interest or any activity that would compromise their journalistic integrity.

Politics and social causes:

- Newsroom employees should not work for a political candidate or office-holder on a paid or voluntary basis. Attendance at public demonstrations for political causes is forbidden, unless permission is granted by the managing editor or editor. Participation in such demonstrations is forbidden.

- Taking a public stand on controversial social, religious or political issues is prohibited. Such expression is also prohibited on personal Web sites, social networks and other online forums. This includes signing of petitions, either on paper or online. Staff members may not write letters to the editor.

- Holding public office or accepting political appointment is prohibited, unless specifically approved by the editor or publisher.

- If a staff member has a close relative or friend working in a political campaign or organization, the staffer should refrain from covering or making news judgments about that campaign or organization. A loved one's activities can create a real or potential conflict for a staff member. In those cases, inform a team leader and take steps to avoid conflicts.

- Donating money to political campaigns and parties is prohibited. Donations to or memberships in organizations with political agendas should be carefully considered.

- Staff members should use common sense when displaying bumper stickers, pins, badges and other signs. We should avoid items that promote causes.

Civic activities:

- Membership in a social or civic organization normally does not result in a conflict; however, staff members should not cover or make news decisions about groups they belong to. Such activities should be disclosed to a team leader.

- Paid or volunteer public relations work for any organization whose operations are covered by the newspaper is prohibited.

- Membership on boards of charitable or cultural organizations that are covered by our newspaper – the SPCA, United Way, theater groups, etc. – should be approved by a senior editor.

- It is inappropriate for staff members to appear publicly on behalf of a civic group or themselves. An exception can be made when an organization’s policy or action directly affects the employee. In this case, talk with your team leader.

? GUIDING QUESTIONS

- Could your action, comments, donation or display cause people to reasonably doubt your objectivity or that of the newspaper?

- If an organization identifies you as a supporter, volunteer or staff member – and also notes that you work for The Pilot – would it appear as if the group has a connection with the paper?

- Could it be construed that the newspaper and its staff are giving special treatment to the group?

- Does your public role intersect with your work? If so, does your team leader know about the potential conflict?

PERSONAL LIFE

Business conflicts:

- Staff members may not have financial investments in companies they cover. This is particularly important with regard to local companies. In general, mutual funds are excluded from this prohibition because they hold stock packages rather than individual investments. Reporters and editors who regularly handle mutual-fund stories should consult their team leader.

- Investments, loans or other outside business activities that could conflict with the newspaper’s ability to report news must be avoided.

- Use of inside knowledge for personal gain is prohibited. Staff members should not enter into a business relationship with news sources.

Gifts, favors, events:

Employees must never become obligated to news sources, advertisers, suppliers or any person or organization by receiving gifts or favors. Situations will arise that call for judgment. We need not be reduced to arguing with sources over who will pay for a cup of coffee or a hot dog. If you have any doubt, check with your team leader.

- We do not accept free or discounted trips, dinners, entertainment, gifts or admission to events, including from our own advertising representatives.

- When there is a clear journalistic purpose in attending an event, a staff member should buy a ticket and obtain company reimbursement.
- Newsroom employees may take advantage of discounts formally provided to the company through corporate partnerships with The Pilot or Landmark Media Enterprises. In cases where questions might arise, the editor or managing editor will decide.
- Use of press passes is limited to those assigned to cover an event and other staff members with a clear journalistic purpose for attending. Team leaders will determine appropriate staffing. Extra passes should not be given to friends or family.
- Staff members can attend media-day events only if they are involved in news coverage.
- Items delivered to staff members should be returned, donated to charity or sold through company events that benefit charity. Review copies of books, movies, computer software and music may be kept by the reviewer. Material not scheduled for review falls under the return-or-donate rule. When possible, let gift-givers know their gifts were donated.
- Items of no significant value – desk trinkets, pens, etc. – may be kept.

? GUIDING QUESTIONS

- Do you have a clear journalistic purpose in using a press pass for an event? If you had to buy a ticket and obtain reimbursement, could you justify it as a company expense?
- If a source offers lunch or a cup of coffee, can you arrange to split the bill, or treat next time?
- In declining a gift, did you explain our policy to the gift-giver?

Special privileges:

- Company identification cards are not to be used for personal purposes, to gain admission to an event, to solicit favors or to avoid enforcement of a law.
- Employees also must not use their position on the newspaper staff in private business matters. Staff members should neither verbally invoke a position with the newspaper nor use company stationery or e-mail for such purposes.
- Newsroom employees should not use their Pilot news sources to obtain tickets to entertainment events or parking passes for personal use.

Family considerations

We recognize that spouses and immediate family members have lives of their own to lead. However, when loved ones' activities might become newsworthy, employees are encouraged to make them aware of policies requiring us to avoid a conflict of interest or the appearance of one. Employees must inform their supervisors of personal relationships that may conflict with their job responsibilities.

Assigning editors shouldn't contract with a relative or close friend to work directly for them as a freelancer without approval of a senior editor.

? GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- Could a family member or the newspaper publicly disclose the situation without fear of embarrassment or legitimate criticism?
- Could it damage the newspaper's credibility?

Our goal is to write about the community, not ourselves. Staffers should avoid quoting, featuring or photographing their own family members and those of other Virginian-Pilot employees. The use of family members or relatives in photo illustrations is discouraged when the person is identifiable in the photo.

? GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- Is this person an essential part of the story?
- Could the picture or quote just as logically come from another source?

ON THE JOB

Campaign, government and political coverage:

- The Pilot pays for travel, meals, lodging and other expenses for newsroom employees covering political campaigns, candidates and public officials.
- If a campaign or office of an elected official has provided group transportation, dining or lodging for the media, The Pilot will pay its share of the expenses.
- Good manners and common sense prevail. For example, an impromptu opportunity to interview a candidate in a car between campaign stops need not result in an offer to chip in for gas.

Military travel:

The military customarily provides free transportation for journalists on a space-available basis on vehicles traveling in the course of their duties. Staffers on assignment can accept free travel on military vehicles when:

- There's no other way of gaining access;
- Traveling on our own would be dangerous;
- We have made a good-faith effort to ascertain the cost and arrange payment.

Special trips provided by the military with the intent of increasing public understanding of its mission will be allowed in some instances, but they should be approved by the team leader or senior editor.

Freelance, outside work:

We work for no one except The Virginian-Pilot, including other Virginia-Pilot Media Companies' publications, without the express permission of the editor, managing editor or a senior editor. Depending on the story, our paper could compete on a local, regional, national or even international basis.

- Freelance work for print or electronic media not in direct competition with The Pilot may be permissible, as long as it does not constitute a conflict of interest or otherwise interfere with the performance of a staff member's job. Permission can more easily be granted when an article, photo or piece of artwork has been published or offered for publication first in our newspaper or on our Web site.

- Company resources, such as computers and cameras, should not be used in the pursuit of outside work.

Electronic appearances and blogs:

- With the exception of Pilot Online, staff members should clear any request with their senior editor for participation in a radio, Internet or television program or news broadcast. While on the air, staff members should demonstrate a high standard of impartiality, just as in our news pages. Opinions and speculation should be avoided. Generally, a staff member should not say anything on radio, TV or the Internet that could not appear under his or her byline in The Pilot.
- The same principles of professionalism apply to blogs that news staffers create. Such blogs should not contain opinion or speculation on topics the newspaper covers, unless those opinions and speculations could also appear under the staffer's byline. Staff members who blog as an extension of their news coverage should identify themselves. Personal blogs under assumed identities are permissible on topics other than the newspaper and coverage.

? Guiding questions

- Could your TV, Internet or other activities cause readers to reasonably doubt the newspaper's objectivity?
- If your blogging identity became known, could it embarrass you or the newspaper?

Cooperation with authorities:

- Journalists are not required to turn over to any authorities their notes or film unless directed to do so by a court. If you receive such a request, contact your senior editor immediately.
- Staff members should avoid being confrontational or hostile in resisting an authority's demand for materials. If you are arrested solely because of your refusal to turn over material, the newspaper will be supportive and provide legal representation.
- During coverage of a news event, reporters and photographers often discuss basic information with law enforcement personnel, but journalists should not actively cooperate.
- It is our practice not to provide photographs, information or copies of published articles to attorneys in civil or criminal matters. Refer such requests to the public library, Pilot Online archives or the Photography Department's reprint service.
- Staff members are forbidden from working for the CIA, FBI or any other governmental intelligence or law enforcement agency. If you are approached, inform your team leader.

? GUIDING QUESTIONS:

We have a three-part test to determine whether we should turn over source material to a court.

- Can the material be obtained elsewhere? Is this the last resort?
- Is there a compelling public interest?
- Is the request relevant to the issue at hand?

FAIRNESS

“A great newspaper is distinguished by the balance, fairness and authority of its reporting and editing...”

FAIR PLAY

In our commitment to fair play, we:

- Treat all sources the same, whether friendly or hostile. We evaluate all sources based on the newsworthiness of their information. We report stories involving The Pilot, Landmark Media Enterprises and its executives as rigorously as any other.
- Report all sides of a story. We are upfront with readers about what we don't know and about evidence that contradicts the main finding of a news story.
- Give people accused of wrongdoing a full and immediate opportunity to respond to all charges. We also report the final outcome of such allegations — for example, the verdict after an arrest — and give the outcome comparable play to the original story.
- Do not make promises to sources about where, whether or when we will run a story or photo.

? GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What if the person accused of wrongdoing in a story were your mother? Would you feel the story was fair?
- What if Columbia Journalism Review wanted to interview you about the methods you used to get a story or photo? Would you be comfortable defending your conduct?

❶ For more information, consult The Pilot's libel detection system and profanity policy on the News Department section of the Intranet.

CRIME REPORTING

- We identify criminal suspects only after arrest warrants have been issued, they have been arrested or they have been formally charged. When we write about people accused of wrongdoing, we provide them an opportunity to respond. That effort should include seeking comments from defense attorneys, family members and friends.
- As a rule, we do not name juvenile suspects. We do identify suspects 14 or older who are charged with committing crimes serious enough to warrant their prosecution as adults. We name suspects younger than 14 when the act is public, particularly brutal or of legitimate concern to the community.
- We use sparingly such phrases as “unavailable for comment” or “could not be reached.” We do so only after we have worked hard to reach suspects, their attorneys and others with a stake in the story.
- Using “allegedly” does not protect us from libel. Instead, cite multiple official sources, court records and testimony to make stories credible.
- Generally we try to name everyone involved in a crime serious enough to warrant a story. Names of victims or witnesses may be withheld if there's a legitimate concern for

- their safety. We do not name victims of sexual crimes unless they request it. Decisions to publish or withhold a name should be approved by a senior editor.
- When we identify suspects, we use differentiating details, such as full name, middle initial, age, street and occupation. Providing these details helps ensure accuracy and prevents innocent people with the same name from being implicated.
 - Reporting bomb threats and similar hoaxes may lead to "copycat" threats. We generally avoid reporting these, except when many lives are disrupted for extended periods or when the threat attracts considerable community attention.
 - When a public safety incident involves a public figure, we should apply our usual standards for determining whether a story is warranted. Ask this question: Does the incident conflict with the person's public role? For example, we would write about a politician with a long record of opposing drugs who is arrested for cocaine use.
 - When a public safety incident involves someone closely connected to a public figure, we should apply our usual standards for determining whether a story is warranted. Ask this question: Is the public figure involved in the incident? When in doubt, do not implicate the public figure. For example, a school principal's name probably would not be included in a story about a spouse's drug arrest.

? GUIDING QUESTIONS

- Have we given accused persons a chance to defend themselves? Have we made serious efforts to reach a defense attorney? Have we also sought comments and reaction from relatives, co-workers and friends?
 - Are we withholding the name of suspect, victim or witness because of age, safety concerns, the nature of the crime or other privacy concerns? Has a senior editor approved withholding the name?
 - Are the allegations provably true? Are we attributing allegations to records or testimony, and have we accurately represented the material?
- ① **See the libel detection system on the Intranet.**
- Are we writing about an incident only because the suspect is a public figure or connected to a public figure? Does this incident say something about the public figure that the community should know?

Suicide

When we report on a death we should state the cause - including suicide - whether the person is a public or private individual. We also should say whether a death is being investigated as a suicide.

Suicide itself is not automatically newsworthy, but reporters and editors should not shy away from investigating and writing about the issue and its impact on a community. Avoiding stories about suicide could contribute to a stigma that shrouds its prevalence. In short, if a death is deemed newsworthy and it's a suicide, we will report it as such.

Nothing should take precedence over news judgment. But staff members should be aware of possible copycat effects of suicide coverage. We should carefully consider whether to include the method of suicide and should avoid repetitive quotes that offer an idealized portrait of the subject.

Hesitate to include speculation from friends and relatives about why the individual committed suicide.

Reporters, editors and online producers should weigh whether to include resources such as suicide hot line numbers. Treat this as the same as any story about a death or an illness. We would not automatically put the number for an AIDS hotline with an AIDS story, but there are times when we might.

An article should not be displayed more or less prominently because it involves suicide.

Online coverage of suicide

The fast pace of newsgathering may require us to report a death online before details are available about the cause. In such cases, we should always follow up with that information online when it is known. This might lead us to publish information about a suicide online though it wouldn't be considered worthy of print coverage.

If online comments on suicide stories are allowed, they should be closely monitored to avoid circulating inflammatory statements.

SOURCES

First and foremost: Treat every source fairly and with respect. Always identify yourself as a journalist so sources know their comments could be published. Any exception must be approved by the managing editor or the editor.

Types of sources:

On the record: The source's identity and information can be used.

Not for attribution: A source provides information that can be used in a story but the source cannot be identified. The source and reporter must agree on this before the information is shared.

Off the record: This information cannot be published and the source's identity cannot be disclosed. Reporters can use the information to develop other sources for the story without revealing the off-the-record source.

Anonymous Sources

Restricting the use of anonymous sources is essential for protecting our integrity and credibility. However, delaying or withholding stories because of an anonymous source issue may deny the public the information it needs and deserves, which poses another threat to our integrity and credibility.

This issue is more pertinent now than ever before because there are more obstacles to gathering information. Government agencies and private institutions at national, state and local levels are increasingly secretive and inclined to refuse access to information. That places a greater burden on news organizations to find alternative – and sometimes anonymous – sources of information.

While anonymous sourcing has become a standard journalistic technique, The Virginian-Pilot strives to limit its use. Every effort should be made to get the information on the record. Pledges of confidentiality by reporters should be given only as a last resort. Any promise of

confidentiality is an agreement between the source and the newspaper, not an individual staff member.

The use of an anonymous source must be approved by a senior editor, the managing editor or the editor. The source's identity must be disclosed to the team leader and at least one senior editor to ensure the source is reliable and knowledgeable. Reporters cannot promise that they will not share the source's identity with their editor. Anyone in the company who learns the identity of an anonymous source is bound by the terms of the confidentiality extended to the source. If a reporter cannot disclose the source's identity to editors as required, the information will not be published. Any exception must be approved by the managing editor or the editor.

We will not permit an unnamed source to attack a person or institution. Exceptions will be very rare and must be approved by a senior editor, the managing editor or the editor on the basis of carefully considered reasons. Opinions of unnamed sources may be used to help a reporter shape a more complete picture of a person or institution, but should not be a guiding force or portrayed as such, except with approval of a senior editor, the managing editor or the editor.

? GUIDING QUESTIONS

- Is on-the-record sourcing available for this information?
- Have you made several attempts to persuade the source to go on the record?
- Is the information crucial to public understanding of an important matter?
- Does the source have a legitimate reason for wanting to be shielded? Will identification put the source in physical danger or jeopardize his/her career or result in some other serious form of retribution?
- Have you skeptically analyzed the source's motives?

When we decide that sources' identities will be shielded, we must tell the readers as much as possible about the unnamed sources, short of revealing their identities, including the reason for anonymity. We will avoid attributions like "key officials said" and "informed sources said." Instead attempt to give readers a better idea of who the individuals are and why their information might be significant enough for us to hide their identities. For example, use attributions like "a lawyer involved in the case," "a government official involved in the matter," "a Chesapeake City Council member," "a Norfolk Southern executive" or "a legislator and supporter of the bill."

Reporters should work out with their sources how they will be identified, subject to approval by their supervising editor. Negotiate this. They typically will want as little identifying information as possible. Push back. Explain that the legitimacy of their information in the readers' minds depends on as much disclosure as possible.

We must be honest with our readers. They expect it of us and it's our contract with them. Our legitimacy and reputation depend on it.

We will never use a plural such as "sources," "officials," "experts" or "aides" when there is only one source. An anonymous source should never be another reporter in the Pilot newsroom. Citing a reporter from another news organization anonymously must be approved by the managing editor or the editor.

We will avoid citing a source anonymously who is quoted by name elsewhere in the story. We also will avoid saying a source had "no comment" or couldn't be reached for comment when that person is quoted anonymously in the story.

If you can't be honest, leave the information out.

When you agree to shield sources, make sure they clearly understand the ground rules.

? GUIDING QUESTIONS

- If the source is lying will you keep the promise of anonymity?
- Will you go to jail for the source?
- Will the source come forward if you or the newspaper is subpoenaed?
- What if the source later discloses the information publicly?

If you make a promise to shield a source, you must keep it.

These guidelines also can apply to less sensitive, routine stories. Single benign comments from unidentified people may be used to add ambiance to a story. For example, a story about a Thanksgiving parade may read, "The crowd ooh'ed and ah'ed as the float passed their station on Granby Street. 'Look at the turkey.' 'I like the pilgrim best.' 'When's dinner?'" Generally, though, if someone refuses to be identified, don't use the quote.

Shielding identities

We strongly discourage shielding the identities of people who appear in our stories. There are a few exceptions. We do not reveal the identities of sexual assault or child abuse victims without their permission.

Withholding identity in other situations – out of compassion, for instance – generally requires the approval of a senior editor, the managing editor or editor. For example, we may protect witnesses to crimes who fear retribution, and we would consider concealing the identity of illegal immigrants who fear legal repercussions.

We are mindful that our newspaper may provide the only permanent, public record of a juvenile's involvement in the criminal justice system or the foster care system. We may consider concealing the identity of a child or adolescent whose involvement in these systems is the subject of a story.

In the rare instances when we publish a source's first name only, we will explain to readers why a full name does not appear. We do not publish fictional names for real people as a means of shielding identity.

Reporters should know the names of all individuals whose identities are being protected and how to reach them. And those identities must be shared with their editor.

Blog and Web sources

Anonymous comments from Web logs and other Internet sites should not be used. The same standards apply to these sources as to other sources. If blogged comments are used, the sources should be identified by their full name. Every effort should be made to verify the identification of the source to ensure accuracy.

Wire policy

Wire stories that use anonymous sources will be viewed with a critical eye. However, we recognize that many important news stories, especially from Washington, depend on such sources. We may choose to run such stories from news providers that are known to have strong anonymous-source policies to prevent error and abuse - such as The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Associated Press and The Wall Street Journal. Anonymously sourced stories from other news providers will be reviewed more rigorously, but we may choose to run them, as well, depending on the provider's reputation and track record with The Pilot, and the importance of the story. If a wire story uses anonymous sources and we deem that material non-essential, we may cut it and run the rest of the story.

Pre-publication review

We encourage reporters to call sources to verify quotes or information. For accuracy's sake, you may read back passages of a story. However, we do not allow sources to approve stories for publication.

RACIAL AND ETHNIC IDENTIFICATION

We identify someone's race or ethnicity only when it is important to understanding the story.

Identify race evenly. Stories that deal with racial conflict or identify people by race because that's the topic should identify all the characters in the story by race.

? GUIDING QUESTIONS

- Is race or ethnic identity relevant? Can I explain the relevance in the story?
- How will this information help readers understand this story?
- Am I stereotyping a race or ethnic group, or just catering to some readers' idle curiosity?

Crime stories: Two basic tenets of good journalism – accuracy and precision – require us to identify a suspect's race only as part of a detailed physical description.

A suspect's identifying information should exclude that suspect from all but a narrow group of people. We should ask authorities to provide more meaningful details.

Poor examples: "A 6-foot tall Hispanic man in his 20s"; "A 5-foot-8 black male of medium build." These vague descriptions don't provide valuable information to help readers assist police.

Good example: "An olive-skinned male, 25 to 30 years old, 5 feet 7 inches, weighing 130 pounds, with thinning hair, wearing blue jeans and a Dallas Cowboys hat and driving a black Caravan."

"Hispanic," "Latino" and "Filipino" should never be used as a physical description. Those words describe ethnicity – not color. Imagine describing someone as "Italian-looking" or "Jewish-looking."

? GUIDING QUESTION

- Is the physical description specific enough to help a reader identify a suspect?

IMPLEMENTATION & ENFORCEMENT

“We need criticism and should seek it. Lacking trust, a newspaper cannot serve or advance any worthy purpose...”

TRAINING

New employees: Every new News and Editorial employee will receive a copy of this policy when completing new-employee paperwork. Team leaders will review the policy with new employees to make sure that the policies are fully understood.

Current employees: It’s important for every newsroom employee to know the Ethics Policy and use it when making decisions. Team leaders will review the policy with team members as part of the annual PIP process. Each newsroom employee will annually attest in writing they have read the ethics policy in the preceding 12 months.

ENFORCEMENT

- If you believe you may have inadvertently violated any of these guidelines, or a family member's activities may have created a conflict or the appearance of conflict for you, notify your team leader as quickly as possible.
- Intentional or flagrant violations of the ethics policy may result in disciplinary action: reprimand, suspension or, in the most serious cases, termination.
- We understand the reluctance to judge others’ ethical behavior. But we also recognize that we have a responsibility to our readers and to the credibility of the newspaper that outweighs personal loyalties and friendship. For that reason, any staff member who becomes aware of possible ethical violations by others is encouraged to bring it to the attention of a senior editor, the managing editor or editor.

ENGAGING THE PUBLIC

- We will publish our code of ethics on our Web site and Pilot’s Intranet.
- We will use a regular box on the editorial page or elsewhere in the paper referring readers to the ethics policy on the Web site.
- The editor will introduce to the public the Pilot’s adoption of an updated code of ethics and professionalism. The editor also may write subsequent columns that revisit the code and give examples of how it was used.