

AVOIDING (OR SURVIVING) CONFRONTATIONS WHILE COVERING PROTESTS

1. **Wear conspicuous press credentials**, even if they are just created by your publication. Make contact with officers when you arrive at the scene to identify yourself as a journalist.
2. **Never escalate a confrontation** by laying hands on a police officer, physically resisting the seizure of your camera or directly disobeying an order; a calm and respectful counter-argument is much more likely to succeed than a defiant one.
3. **Upload photos regularly** if your camera is wireless-enabled. Your cameras will be seized if you are arrested, and even if the memory cards are returned, images may have been (unlawfully) deleted.
4. **Consider buying disposable phones** to cover the event. If confiscated, you will not lose professional and personal contacts. In any event, back-up your device first. Turn off your phone's fingerprint scanner when covering protests and refuse to give your password. Memorize or write important phone numbers on your arm in Sharpie. Have numbers of people you'll call in an emergency, including several editors' cell phones. Carry quarters in case the jail provides only a payphone.
5. **Inventory your belongings** (cellphone, camera, audio recorder) in advance — you'll need as much detail as possible if you are trying to reclaim an item at the jail that's been taken from you.
6. **Call someone trusted** (editor, advisers, parent, spouse) the moment that it appears you're about to get arrested, because it may be hours before you can get access to a phone if you're jailed. Use Twitter and other publicly accessible channels to get the word out widely so people will know where to look for you. If a confrontation appears inevitable, consider starting a livestream. You risk sharing unblurred images of protest participants and bystanders, which could potentially endanger them.
7. **Gather all the information** you can about your arrest — record or videotape the arrest if you can, make sure you know which police agency made the arrest and, if possible, get the names of all officers involved and of any witnesses.
8. **Ask for legal representation** if you are being interrogated while at the jail — and then stop the conversation completely.
9. **Read the fine print** of anything you are asked to sign — and think very carefully before you sign a "post and forfeit" bond, because that means you are agreeing to admit what you're charged with and waive a court appearance.
10. **Demand a court appearance** if you have been held for more than 24 hours without being taken before a judge or magistrate.

([Muckrack](#) and the [Columbia Journalism Review](#) also have helpful guides to covering protests.)

Contact the SPLC hotline for
legal advice: splc.org/legalhelp

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 Student Press Law Center

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