



HOW JOURNALISTS AND THE PUBLIC SHAPE OUR DEMOCRACY

FROM SOCIAL MEDIA AND “FAKE NEWS” TO REPORTING JUST THE FACTS

What is the role of a journalist?

In their book *The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect*, journalists Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel point to the truth as the first obligation of journalism. What they term “journalistic truth” is about more than accuracy. It is a “sorting-out process that takes place between the initial story and the interaction among the public, newsmakers, and journalists.” According to Kovach and Rosenstiel, “This first principle of journalism—its disinterested pursuit of truth—is ultimately what sets journalism apart from other forms of communication.”

Four Principles of Ethical Journalism

- **Seek Truth and Report It**
Ethical journalism should be accurate and fair. Journalists should be honest and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information.
- **Minimize Harm**
Ethical journalism treats sources, subjects, colleagues and members of the public as human beings deserving of respect.
- **Act Independently**
The highest and primary obligation of ethical journalism is to serve the public.
- **Be Accountable and Transparent**
Ethical journalism means taking responsibility for one’s work and explaining one’s decisions to the public.

From Society of Professional Journalists, www.SPJ.org

Is It News or Opinion?

Many news organizations are divided into two parts. 1) **News**: Journalists report the news, providing objective facts with context and analysis. 2) **Editorial**: Editorial writers, columnists and contributors express their personal opinions.

- In **print and online**, many news outlets clearly separate the news and editorials to help the reader distinguish the two.
- On **TV and radio**, it can be more difficult to determine what is news and what is opinion. Journalists still report the facts, but individuals who provide their opinions on certain matters may be called “commentators,” “analysts” or “contributors.”

Tips for Determining “Real” News from “Fake” News

- Is information from a reliable and well-known source of news?
- Did the journalist clarify where the information came from? This is called “attribution,” and “fake” news often has no attribution.
- Did the article provide a reputable source or expert that you can easily verify with an online search?
- Look for quotes in the story. Legitimate articles should have quotes and sources provided.
- Pay attention to the domain and web address of online articles. Established websites have trusted domains, such as “.org” and “.com.” Sites that should not be trusted may have unusual domains, such as “.com.co.”
- Read the “About Us” section of a website to learn more about the organization.
- Check the comments section. Often, readers will call out articles that are “fake” in the comments section.
- Use Google Image to search the photo being used. If the image is used in many articles on different topics, it may not be an image of what the article claims it is.

What Is My Role and Responsibility?

- Do your research to make sure the story is true.
- Follow a variety of sources to get the full perspective of a story – not just your favorite news sites or stations.
- Don’t share news stories if you’re not sure of the source.
- If you see someone sharing something that make be “fake news,” speak up!

FACT-CHECKING SITES

Center for Responsive Politics:

opensecrets.org

FactCheck: Factcheck.org

Fact Checker:

washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker

Google Images reverse image search:

images.google.com

PolitiFact: politifact.com or

politifact.com/Georgia

Snopes: snopes.com

TinEye reverse image search:

tineye.com

For more information: GeorgiaHumanities.org/programs/democracy-and-the-informed-citizen/



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