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4 *Members of the Society of Professional Journalists believe that democracy, a just society and*  
5 *good government require an informed public. Ethical journalism strives to ensure the free*  
6 *exchange of information that is accurate, fair and thorough. An ethical journalist acts with*  
7 *integrity.*

8 *The Society declares these four principles as the foundation of ethical journalism and*  
9 *encourages their use in its practice by all people in all media.*

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## 11 **Seek Truth and Report It**

12 *Ethical journalism should be accurate and fair. Journalists should be honest and courageous in*  
13 *gathering, reporting and interpreting information.*

14 *Journalists should:*

15 ▶ Take responsibility for the accuracy of their work. Verify information before releasing it. Use  
16 original sources whenever possible.

17 ▶ Remember that neither speed nor format excuses inaccuracy.

18 ▶ Provide context. Take special care not to misrepresent or oversimplify in promoting,  
19 previewing or summarizing a story.

20 ▶ Gather, update and correct information throughout the life of a news story.

21 ▶ Be cautious when making promises, but keep the promises they make.

22 ▶ Identify sources clearly. The public is entitled to as much information as possible to judge the  
23 reliability and motivations of sources.

24 ▶ Consider sources' motives before promising anonymity. Reserve anonymity for sources who  
25 may face danger, retribution or other harm, and have information that cannot be obtained  
26 elsewhere. Explain why anonymity was granted.

27 ▶ Diligently seek subjects of news coverage to allow them to respond to criticism or allegations  
28 of wrongdoing.

29 ▶ Avoid undercover or other surreptitious methods of gathering information unless traditional,  
30 open methods will not yield information vital to the public.

- 31 ► Be vigilant and courageous about holding those with power accountable. Give voice to the  
32 voiceless.
- 33 ► Support the open and civil exchange of views, even views they find repugnant.
- 34 ► Recognize a special obligation to serve as watchdogs over public affairs and government.  
35 Seek to ensure that the public's business is conducted in the open, and that public records are  
36 open to inspection.
- 37 ► Provide access to source material when it is relevant and appropriate.
- 38 ► Boldly tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience. Seek sources  
39 whose voices we seldom hear.
- 40 ► Avoid stereotyping. Journalists should examine the ways their values and experiences may  
41 shape their reporting.
- 42 ► Label advocacy and commentary.
- 43 ► Never deliberately distort facts or context, including visual information. Clearly label  
44 illustrations and re-enactments.
- 45 ► Never plagiarize. Always attribute.

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## 47 **Minimize Harm**

48 *Ethical journalism treats sources, subjects, colleagues and members of the public as human*  
49 *beings deserving of respect.*

50 *Journalists should:*

- 51 ► Balance the public's need for information against potential harm or discomfort. Pursuit of the  
52 news is not a license for arrogance or undue intrusiveness.
- 53 ► Show compassion for those who may be affected by news coverage. Use heightened  
54 sensitivity when dealing with juveniles, victims of sex crimes, and sources or subjects who are  
55 inexperienced or unable to give consent. Consider cultural differences in approach and treatment.
- 56 ► Recognize that legal access to information differs from an ethical justification to publish or  
57 broadcast.
- 58 ► Realize that private people have a greater right to control information about themselves than  
59 public figures and others who seek power, influence or attention. Weigh the consequences of  
60 publishing or broadcasting personal information, including that from social media.

- 61 ▶ Avoid pandering to lurid curiosity, even if others do.
- 62 ▶ Balance a suspect's right to a fair trial with the public's right to know. Consider the  
63 implications of identifying criminal suspects before they face legal charges.
- 64 ▶ Consider the long-term implications of the extended reach and permanence of publication.  
65 Provide updated and more complete information as appropriate.

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## 67 **Act Independently**

68 *The highest and primary obligation of ethical journalism is to serve the public.*

69 *Journalists should:*

- 70 ▶ Avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived. Disclose unavoidable conflicts.
- 71 ▶ Refuse gifts, favors, fees, free travel and special treatment, and avoid political and other  
72 outside activities that may compromise integrity or impartiality, or may damage credibility.
- 73 ▶ Be wary of sources offering information for favors or money; do not pay for access to news.  
74 Identify content provided by outside sources, whether paid or not.
- 75 ▶ Deny favored treatment to advertisers, donors or any other special interests, and resist internal  
76 and external pressure to influence coverage.
- 77 ▶ Distinguish news from advertising and shun hybrids that blur the lines between the two.  
78 Prominently label sponsored content.

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## 80 **Be Accountable and Transparent**

81 *Ethical journalism means taking responsibility for ones work and explaining one's decisions to  
82 the public.*

83 *Journalists should:*

- 84 ▶ Explain ethical choices and processes to audiences. Encourage a civil dialogue with the public  
85 about journalistic practices, coverage and news content.
- 86 ▶ Respond quickly to questions about accuracy, clarity and fairness.
- 87 ▶ Acknowledge mistakes and correct them promptly and prominently. Explain corrections and  
88 clarifications carefully and clearly.

89 ► Expose unethical conduct in journalism, including within their organizations.

90 ► Abide by the same high standards they expect of others.

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92 *The SPJ Code of Ethics is a statement of abiding principles supported by additional explanations*  
93 *and position papers ([at spj.org](http://spj.org)) that address changing journalistic practices. It is not a set of*  
94 *rules, rather a guide that encourages all who engage in journalism to take responsibility for the*  
95 *information they provide, regardless of medium. The code should be read as a whole; individual*  
96 *principles should not be taken out of context. It is not, nor can it be under the First Amendment,*  
97 *legally enforceable.*