

# IMMJ-MA Code of Ethics (Short Version)

As an IMMJ-MA student multimedia journalist you are obliged to understand and apply industry standard professional ethical standards. We want you to tell compelling, visual, creative stories. However we also require that your stories are underpinned by established professional ethical good practice. That includes being accurate, balanced, honest and fair at all times and in all stages of reporting and storytelling from your research to news-gathering to editing and publishing.

You must at all times, treat sources, subjects, audience, colleagues, and yourselves as human beings deserving of respect and safety. We have a common sense guideline for this. Imagine the subject you are working with is your cousin, your mum, your brother, a friend - would you film them in the same manner and would you ask them the same questions. If not, then don't do it. That's not to say we can't capture difficult moments on film or ask difficult questions - that's reality and sometimes part of our work. But we must always maintain due care and respect for our subjects.

Read these guidelines in full and before you go to the field you must sign the bottom to testify that you understand and will comply with IMMJ-MA ethical standards during your study. If you have any questions about any of the topics covered ask your tutor in class or privately, no questions is a silly question especially when it comes to risks and ethics. You will also need to abide by these guidelines when considering the risk and ethics sections of your projects forms in Terms 2 & 3.

Please note: This code of ethics has largely borrowed from and condensed the Reuters handbook of Journalism. We've tried to focus on key points and put things into simple language for non-native speakers. This guide is not intended as a set of "rules". Some ethical breaches are obvious, such as plagiarism, fabrication or bribe taking, however, journalism is a profession governed by guiding ethical principles rather than by rigid rules. These guidelines are an attempt to help guide you to make good decisions and act in the best interests of your sources, audience and the profession. Always speak with your tutors if you are in doubt.

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# IMMJ-MA TOP TEN RULES

## Minimise Harm

1. **Protect** sources, translators and yourself. Never put anyone's physical well-being in danger for a story.
2. If there are any potential risks or harms that may impact any persons - negotiate with your tutor and ensure **informed consent**.
3. Avoid **stereotyping** by race, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, geography, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance or social status.

## Seek and report the truth

1. Be as **accurate, honest, fair** and **comprehensive** in your research, news gathering, reporting and editing as possible.
2. Never **assume** that the collection of facts and the point of view that you have arrived at, is "the truth." always aim to dig deeper.
3. Strive for **balance and freedom from bias**.
4. Don't **lie** or **fabricate** information and never **plagiarise**.
5. Never **manipulate** a still or moving image beyond the requirements of World Press Photo image manipulation guidance.
6. Never **pay** for a story and never accept a **bribe**.
7. Always reveal a **conflict of interest** to a tutor. If in doubt, ask!

# General Guidelines

## Accuracy

Accuracy is at the core of journalism. It is your job to get information quickly but it is MUCH more important to get it right. Accuracy, as well as balance, always take precedence over speed. In today's world of information overload, it is very easy to find "information" quickly, especially online. A good journalist, however, must never publish any facts, data or information without first verifying them. You typically verify or 'fact check' information by checking facts by two reliable sources. Another important part of accuracy is understanding the context in which events and issues occur. Nothing happens in a vacuum — This is why researching the wider context of your topic is imperative. If you don't have a grasp of the context you won't be able to make good judgments regarding your story.

### ACCURACY & VERIFICATION READING & RESOURCES:

- **READ: ACCURACY CHECKLIST - PRINT AND FOLLOW [NPR'S SET OF QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU CALL ANY STORY COMPLETE](#):**
- Is every name and title correctly spelled?
- Are the quotes accurate and properly attributed?
- Have I reviewed my spelling and grammar?
- Is every number and calculation correct?
- Do I need to check a source's "fact" against what others are saying? Advocates can skew things in their favour.
- Is the story fair? Read, listen or watch one more time. Pretend you are the audience not the reporter. Are conclusions supported by facts. Have answered all the key questions that can be answered. If important questions can't be resolved, make sure your audience knows what they are
- Underline or highlight all the facts in your script, photo captions, text and graphics. Go through and fact check each one. Then switch with a friend and do the same for a final check.

### Need more resources? Try these

- **[THE JOURNALISTIC METHOD: FIVE PRINCIPLES FOR BLENDING ANALYSIS AND NARRATIVE BY JOURNALIST'S RESOURCE](#)**
- **[VERIFICATION HANDBOOK: HOMEPAGE \[VERIFICATIONHANDBOOK.COM/\]\(#\) A DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO VERIFYING DIGITAL CONTENT. \[HTTP://VERIFICATIONHANDBOOK.COM/BOOK\]\(http://verificationhandbook.com/book\)](#)**
- **[TOOLS FOR VERIFYING AND ASSESSING THE VALIDITY OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND USER-GENERATED CONTENT BY JOURNALISTS RESOURCE](#)**

## Sourcing & Interviews

Accuracy and freedom from bias relies on good, credible, diverse sourcing. A named source is always better than an unnamed source. Do not use anonymous sources without checking with your tutors first.

- Use named sources wherever possible because they are accountable for the information they provide. Ask your sources to go on the record. Only use unnamed sources when necessary - that is when they provide information of public interest that is not available on the record elsewhere. If they are unnamed, question their motivations carefully.
- When talking to sources, always make sure the ground rules are clear. Take notes and record interviews for accuracy.
- There are different levels of attribution. **On The Record** - The reporter may quote the source and include name and title. **On Background** The reporter may use direct quotes, but may not attribute the statements to the source by exact name. You can protect anonymity by attributing quotes less specifically, for example instead of her exact name call the source "a staff of an local environmental NGO" or another agreed-upon identification. The attribution is an important part of the ground rules for an on-background interview. It should be clear enough to establish credibility but vague enough that it doesn't reveal your sources identity. On-background interviews are

usually used in situations where a source's information contains details that might cause harm or discrimination. **Off the Record** The reporter cannot quote or use any of the information a source provides without independently verifying it elsewhere. Off-the-record interviews help reporters advance particularly sensitive stories. By granting their source complete anonymity, journalists can get the real, undiluted story and have a better idea of where their investigation should lead. It's highly unlikely as a student that you'll ever do an off the record interview. If you plan to do so, you must consult with a tutor first.

- Cross-check and verify information wherever possible. Two or more sources are better than one. In assessing information from named and unnamed sources, weigh the source's track record, position and motive. Use your common sense. If it sounds wrong, check further. Talk to or get information from sources on all sides of a deal, dispute, negotiation or conflict.

## SOURCES & INTERVIEWING READING & RESOURCES:

### INTERVIEWING PRINCIPLES

- Identify yourself at the outset of the interview.
- State the purpose of the interview.
- Make it clear to subjects and sources how the material will be used.
- Tell the source how much time the interview will take.
- Ask specific questions that the source is competent to answer.
- Give the source plenty of time to reply.
- Ask the source to clarify complex or vague answers. This is very important and the thing that our students most often get wrong - they do not follow up on vague answers.
- Avoid lecturing the source, arguing or debating.
- Don't accept requests for non-attribution, background only or off-the-record unless the source is at risk or makes this a condition of the interview or of a statement (and you can't get that information elsewhere).

### Quotes

Quotes must never be altered other than to delete a redundant word, and then only if the deletion does not change the meaning of the quote in any way. We can't use entire interviews and must be selective, however, selective use of quotes can be unbalanced. So be sure that the quotes you use are representative of what the speaker is saying. Accuracy means that choices of quotes, images and stories must reflect reality. It can be tempting for journalists to "cherry pick" in order to exaggerate or sensationalise material. Don't.

When translating quotes, you do not need to make literal translations - however you must not change the meaning. Stick as closely as possible to the original delivery. When subtitling video you may need to shorten sentences a little, again you may make things more concise just don't change meaning and stay true to the interviewee.

### Attribution

Accuracy means proper attribution to the source of information or material that is not yours. It is essential for transparency that any material you did not gather yourself is clearly attributed within stories to the source. Attribution differs to citation in an academic paper. You do not write a bibliography at the end. However, you may use quotation marks and/or hyperlink to the original source. Failure to attribute so is plagiarism. **Plagiarism may lead to a module fail or students being ejected from the IMMJ-MA programme entirely.** If you want to use a quote from a blog, news report, academic report, or another newspaper report, **ATTRIBUTE IT**, better still hyperlink to it too.

Do not quote "analysts" or "experts". Specify their area of expertise e.g. "a strategic affairs analyst with the U.S. Council on Foreign Relations in New York".

You also need to attribute any music or other assets you use. You may only use other creators assets if you are permitted or licensed to do so. That means either using creative commons assets, seeking permission or paying for use.

## Need more resources? Try these

- **COPYRIGHT FOR DIGITAL MEDIA - [HTTPS://BEIJINGIMMJ.WORDPRESS.COM/COPYRIGHT-FOR-DIGITAL-MEDIA/](https://beijingimmj.wordpress.com/copyright-for-digital-media/)**

## Freedom from bias & conflict of interests

Journalists must remain independent and free of commitments to businesses, organisations or individuals. It is therefore, necessary to avoid payment or gifts in exchange for covering a story, or for covering a particular angle of a story. Also, if a person has a personal relationship with a subject of the story, it's difficult to remain objective. On the other hand, gift-giving is common in China, the gift should never be of any real value. a bag of fruit is a nice gift, or some local but inexpensive tea, an expensive pen is not OK! Lunch at a local noodle place is fine, an expensive lunch in a fancy restaurant is not.

Discuss:

- You are shooting a story in a school and the headmaster allows you to board in the dorms for free — it's going to be great for your story, what do you do?
- On another story, you are offered a dinner in a 5 star restaurant by the boss of the company you are reporting on — what do you do?
- An NGO offers to provide you with access and transportation to where you need to go, what do you do?
- You should generally pay your own travel. Sometimes, however, you may travel with other organisations as it is the only way to access or get to a story safely. If, for example, you have gone to the scene of a story as part of a military embed or with an aid agency going to a disaster, you must say so in the script: e.g. "... in a trip organised by the Israeli military, journalists were taken to..."

When in doubt over whether a gift or a personal relationship creates a conflict of interest in writing or reporting, ask a teacher.

## Discriminatory language and stereotypes

Journalists should avoid inappropriate references to gender, ethnicity, religion, culture, appearance, age, and sexual orientation. Journalists must be also be sensitive to unconscious stereotyping and assumptions. Is it really relevant that the person in the news is disabled, black, blonde, female, overweight or gay? Sometimes these descriptions are used, however we don't feel the need to point out if someone is able-bodied, white or straight unless specifically story relevant. If it is relevant, does the fact belong in the lead or should it be woven in lower down? Reporters must resist the assumption that their cultural values, religious beliefs or social mores are the norm. We should also be suspicious of country stereotypes — the usually negative notions about a national character. These can be offensive and inaccurate.

Discuss:

- Can you think of a specific report when a foreign media used a misleading stereotype about China? Or perhaps when Chinese media used a stereotype about another country?

## Independence

Checking back with sources: Will you submit stories, scripts or images to sources to check before publication. This breaches independence. You may, however, sometimes check back with a source to verify a quote or information. Some organisations or companies sometimes ask to see the quotes you plan to publish or broadcast. Resist such requests where possible - not always possible in China.

## Bribes

This is one of the very clear-cut rules — Never take money or a bribe, never give money or pay for a picture or interview. In some situations, for example, if you are working with somebody for a long

time or they are taking time out to host you a token gift may be acceptable. However, the gift should be nominal. A box of tea from your home country, cookies or so forth — never give or receive anything of value.

### Integrity

Identifying yourself: If you are just asking around for simple information you do not need to identify yourself as a student journalist to everyone you meet on a story, in fact in many countries it may be a bad idea to broadcast that you are a journalist as it may compromise your work and your sources — however if a chat crosses over into interview territory, and you intend to actually use their quotes or photograph or film someone as an identifiable character then you must identify yourself clearly. You are students studying journalism and you intend to publish your projects online. You need to make this clear. When dealing with sources, we encourage you to cultivate sources but also expect you to be conscious of the need to maintain a detachment from them. Do not exceed the bounds of proper, professional contact. While it can be appropriate to be friendly and spend time with sources, including outside working hours, spending too much leisure time with a source may raise a potential conflict or a perception of bias. If in doubt, seek guidance from your tutor.

### Protecting people

You need to seek to minimise any harm to the public through your actions. The people who make the news are vulnerable to the impact of our stories. In extreme cases, their lives or their reputations could depend on our reporting. If in doubt ask your tutor.

### A Brief Guide to Standards, Photoshop / Lightroom and Captions

The IMMJ program adheres to the code of ethics and entry rules set by the World Press Photo Contest. Please see <https://www.worldpressphoto.org/activities/photo-contest/verification-process/what-counts-as-manipulation>

The code of ethics set by the World Press Photo focus on two main things:

The first thing that counts as manipulation is **staging or re-enacting** events.

- The code of ethics says photographers must not intentionally contribute to, or alter, the scene they picture by re-enacting or staging events.
- Staging means deliberately arranging something in order to mislead the audience.
- Deliberately arranging something includes setting up a scene or re-enacting a scene. Setting up or re-enacting a scene means directing the subject(s) to do things, or asking them to repeat things they were doing prior to the photographer's arrival.

Staging and re-enacting are different from posing portraits. Portraits are a special genre of photography. They are made through a relationship between the subject and the photographer in which the subject poses for the photographer. Photographers may direct the subjects. The caption must not mislead the reader into believing these images are spontaneous.

The second thing that counts as manipulation is adding or removing content from the image. So no additions or deletions to the subject matter of the original image. (because that means changing the original content and compromising the journalistic integrity of an image).

You may crop images but you may not crop images that eliminate important information to mislead viewers

Altering the content of a picture by “adding, rearranging, reversing, distorting or removing people and/or objects from within the frame” is manipulation will not be permitted.

Watch the WPP videos at: <https://www.worldpressphoto.org/activities/photo-contest/verification-process/what-counts-as-manipulation> - to see visual examples of processing that are and are not permitted.

## Accuracy in Captions

Adhere to the basic rules of accuracy and freedom from bias. Captions must answer the basic questions of good journalism. Who is in the picture? Where was it taken? When was it taken? What does it show? Why is a subject doing a particular thing? Captions are written in the present tense and should use concise, simple English. They generally consist of a single sentence but a second sentence can be added if additional context or explanation is required. Captions should never make assumptions about what a person is thinking or feeling. e.g. England captain David Beckham ponders his future after his team was knocked out of the World Cup soccer finals ... Stick to what the photo shows and what you know to be true.

## Understand that Video journalism & Photojournalism have different ethical standards.

The rules of photojournalism are more codified than video journalism, I (Sharron) personally believe there is a lack of discussion and clarity on this topic in contemporary visual journalism. Photojournalism's ethical guidelines are very clear and universally shared. This is not the case in video journalism, to make things even more confusing short form documentary has now become mainstream for news outlets. Many news outlets who previously did not produce documentary now do, many even have designated 'film units'. The rules for video journalism and documentary are also different. The rules for documentary are more flexible.

Please understand this is a huge area and this is a discussion that we are going to return to in the latter half of Term 2 - we'll be able to use any mistakes in the first projects to reflect upon. For now we can deal with things on a case by case basis. So just schedule a call with us in the field if in doubt.

The main thing you should bear in mind is never to **mislead** your audience. If you are in doubt, simply follow the rules you know for photojournalism. But there is one major difference that is important to know and is accepted by the video journalism and documentary industry. Unlike photo journalism you may ask someone in a video to do something (so long as they would typically do it) at a different time.

For an example, perhaps I just have one day to film a farmer and his family but the day I visit he wasn't planning to tend to his fields. It's not ideal and usually you'd want to plan better to capture a day when he was planning to go to the farm. But in this case you could ask the farmer to tend his fields today rather than the next day so you can film. Then you go to the farm and he really tends his crops and you film the action. This would not be ideal but it would be ok. You could not however say - hey can we quickly go to your field for ten minutes and you hold a hoe and pretend to farm while I film, that's plain fabrication.

For another example, if your character is a boxer and usually goes for a morning run 5 times a week. You are scheduled to shoot on the weekend, you might ask them to do their morning run, exactly as they normally would and follow along. You also might ask someone to hold an action for a few moments so that you can get into a room to film them enter for example. **A photo journalist would NOT do this.**

In most cases, if you are filming an action **DO NOT ASK YOUR SUBJECT TO REPEAT THE ACTION SO THAT YOU CAN FILM A NICE SEQUENCE.** Some video journalists and documentarians will do this and in a stylised documentary it may be ok. While it is a grey area we believe in most cases this crosses a line. If you do this, it must be obvious and not mislead viewer. In general if you are filming quick action where you'd like more angles for better sequencing ask a friend to operate a second camera.

To avoid any blurring of the lines in terms of ethics, we suggest you avoid shooting stills and video at the same time.

## Social Media Verification

We will cover this in the latter part of Term 2. Remember verification can be a major issue. Textual, video or photographic material might not be what it purports to be, either due to sloppy information from the person posting it or to deliberate deceit. Check with your tutor if in doubt.

## Further selected links:

- [SPJ CODE OF ETHICS](#)
- [BBC EDITORIAL GUIDELINES](#)
- [LOS ANGELES TIMES ETHICS GUIDELINES FOR REPORTERS, EDITORS](#)
- [NATIONAL PRESS PHOTOGRAPHERS ASSOCIATION CODE OF ETHICS](#)
- [NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO ETHICS CODE](#)
- [CHIP BERLET – ETHICS](#)

## Declaration

No set of rules can possibly address all situations that may arise. The IMMJ-MA programme reserves the right to find that other conduct not specified in this Code constitutes violation of academic or journalistic integrity. If situations arise that seem ambiguous, please talk to the appropriate faculty member and/or program leader. Your full disclosure is very important in all matters of integrity.

By entering your name & signature, you acknowledge that you have read the Code of Ethics for IMMJ-MA students and agree to comply with it in letter and spirit.

I ..... hereby certify that I have read, understood and will follow the IMMJ-MA code of ethics.

Date.....