

The Daily Free Press Code of Ethics
Reporting with respect, empathy and intention

PREAMBLE

As members of The Daily Free Press, we understand the importance of journalism as a constitutionally protected pillar of democracy. We recognize our responsibility to the student body and also the influence — both positive and negative — our coverage can have on Boston University.

With this responsibility, we are committed to upholding transparency in our newsroom operations and our integrity as journalists. We declare the following five guidelines as the foundations of our journalism standards, drawing on principles set forth by the Society of Professional Journalists.

The Daily Free Press feels it is necessary to expand upon the Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics because we believe it is outdated. It offers very little guidance on reporting in a manner that protects marginalized communities, does not take into account modern news-gathering and isn't stoutly against non-inclusive language. Any guidelines that were taken from the SPJ Code of Ethics that did not align with our principles have been bracketed and modified.

1. SEEK TRUTH AND REPORT IT

Per the SPJ Code of Ethics: “Ethical journalism should be accurate and fair. Journalists should be honest and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information.”

The SPJ Code Ethics advises journalists do the following:

- a. Take responsibility for the accuracy of their work. Verify information before releasing it. Use original sources whenever possible.
- b. Remember that neither speed nor format excuses inaccuracy.
- c. Provide context. Take special care not to misrepresent or oversimplify in promoting, previewing or summarizing a story.
- d. Gather, update and correct information throughout the life of a news story.
- e. Be cautious when making promises, but keep the promises they make.
- f. Identify sources clearly. The public is entitled to as much information as possible to judge the reliability and motivations of sources.
- g. Consider sources' motives before promising anonymity. Reserve anonymity for sources who may face danger, retribution or other harm, and have information that cannot be obtained elsewhere. Explain why anonymity was granted.

- h. Diligently seek [out] subjects of news coverage to allow them to respond to criticism or allegations of wrongdoing.
- i. Avoid undercover or other surreptitious methods of gathering information unless traditional, open methods will not yield information vital to the public.
- j. Be vigilant and courageous about holding those with power accountable. [Give a platform to communities that are often spoken over]
- k. Support the open and civil exchange of views, even views they find repugnant.
- l. Recognize a special obligation to serve as watchdogs over public affairs and government. Seek to ensure that the public's business is conducted in the open, and that public records are open to all.
- m. Provide access to source material when it is relevant and appropriate.
- n. Boldly tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience. Seek sources whose voices we seldom hear.
- o. [Do not stereotype.] Journalists should examine the ways their values and experiences may shape their reporting.
- p. Label advocacy and commentary.
- q. Never deliberately distort facts or context, including visual information. Clearly label illustrations and re-enactments.
- r. Never plagiarize. Always attribute.

In addition to the above principles, The Daily Free Press abides by the following standards:

- a. We will report on stories that are impactful and important to Boston University and its members.
- b. Through our fact-checking process, detailed in Section 4 Principle C, we verify all information that is published.
- c. Sources can only be granted anonymity in cases where they are in danger of physical, emotional or financial harm. Simply being uncomfortable appearing in an article is not enough reason to grant anonymity.
 - i. Writers and section editors cannot grant anonymity. Final approval must always go through the Editor-in-Chief and Managing Editor(s).
 - ii. When a request for anonymity is approved, it cannot be revoked unless the source requests it.
- d. We will always identify ourselves as journalists who write for The Daily Free Press.
- e. We will allow for the exchange of a wide range of beliefs at our publication. However, we will not give a platform to hateful or harmful speech.

2. MINIMIZE HARM

Per the SPJ Code of Ethics: “Ethical journalism treats sources, subjects, colleagues and members of the public as human beings deserving of respect.”

The SPJ Code Ethics advises journalists do the following:

- a. Balance the public’s need for information against potential harm or discomfort. Pursuit of the news is not a license for arrogance or undue intrusiveness.
- b. Show compassion for those who may be affected by news coverage. Use heightened sensitivity when dealing with [adolescents], victims of sex crimes, and sources or subjects who are inexperienced or unable to give consent. Consider cultural differences in approach and treatment.
- c. Recognize that legal access to information differs from an ethical justification to publish or broadcast.
- d. Realize that private people have a greater right to control information about themselves than public figures and others who seek power, influence or attention. Weigh the consequences of publishing or broadcasting personal information.
- e. Avoid pandering to lurid curiosity, even if others do.
- f. Balance a suspect’s right to a fair trial with the public’s right to know. Consider the implications of identifying criminal suspects before they face legal charges.
- g. Consider the long-term implications of the extended reach and permanence of publication. Provide updated and more complete information as appropriate.

In addition to the above principles, The Daily Free Press abides by the following standards:

- a. We have a commitment to equity and sensitivity when reporting, as further expanded on in principle five.
- b. We will publish balanced and fair coverage.
 - i. An individual mentioned in an article must be given the opportunity to respond and comment on the situation, unless the individual cannot realistically be reached (e.g. a high-class politician or celebrity.)
 - ii. We will always disclose if pertinent individuals declined to comment, could not be reached for comment or if did not respond to multiple requests for comment.
- c. Our reporting will be done respectfully, meaning we will treat all sources equally and with dignity when communicating with and interviewing them.
 - i. Our correspondence will remain professional and empathetic with sources.

3. ACT INDEPENDENTLY

Per the SPJ Code of Ethics: “The highest and primary obligation of ethical journalism is to serve the public.”

The SPJ Code Ethics advises journalists do the following:

- a. Avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived, disclose unavoidable conflicts.
- b. Refuse gifts, favors, fees, free travel and special treatment, and avoid political and other outside activities that may compromise integrity or impartiality, or may damage credibility.
- c. Be wary of sources offering information for favors or money. Do not pay for access to news. Identify content provided by outside sources, whether paid or not.
- d. Deny favored treatment to advertisers, donors or any other special interests, and resist internal and external pressure to influence coverage.
- e. Distinguish news from advertising and [avoid] hybrids that blur the lines between the two. Prominently label sponsored content.

In addition to the above principles, The Daily Free Press abides by the following standards:

- a. As in accordance with our independence, we do not accept any funding from the University.
 - i. Disclosure: The University pays for The Daily Free Press website and provides office maintenance for free.
- b. Though we do not require writers to limit their club activities outside of The Daily Free Press — in recognition that we are a student newspaper — we do prohibit writers from writing about organizations they are involved in. In addition, associates and editors are prohibited from editing articles concerning organizations they are or have previously been a part of. Writer, associate and editor affiliations with organizations will always be disclosed within the story.
 - i. A students' involvement in an organization is based on how many meetings they have attended and how extensive their involvement is.
- c. The Daily Free Press does not quote past FreeP writers that are current students in stories except in rare circumstances (e.g. if a past writer left the FreeP and now is in a position of authority at the University that makes them a necessary authoritative source).
 - i. This policy ensures that the FreeP always expands outside of its circle and covers all student life and also ensures that there is no bias in budgeting stories.
- d. As expanded upon in Section 2 Point B, we ensure every story has balance and that every person mentioned in the article or concerning a topic has a fair chance to comment.
 - i. Additionally, understanding our obligation to the public, we encourage any organization or individual who feels a story has misrepresented them or their views to reach out to the section editor and Editor-in-Chief to discuss openly.

4. BE ACCOUNTABLE AND TRANSPARENT

Per the SPJ Code of Ethics: “Ethical journalism means taking responsibility for one’s work and explaining one’s decisions to the public.”

The SPJ Code Ethics advises journalists do the following:

- a. Explain ethical choices and processes to audiences. Encourage a civil dialogue with the public about journalistic practices, coverage and news content.
- b. Respond quickly to questions about accuracy, clarity and fairness.
- c. Acknowledge mistakes and correct them promptly and prominently. Explain corrections and clarifications carefully and clearly.
- d. Expose unethical conduct in journalism, including within their organizations.
- e. Abide by the same high standards they expect of others.

In addition to the above principles, The Daily Free Press abides by the following standards:

- a. Recognizing that we are a student newspaper and that much of our audience may not know the journalistic process, we will make a stronger, more explicit effort to be transparent about our process and our principles.
 - i. In addition to the Code of Ethics, we will also publish on our website a Standards Document that lists the specific criteria we follow for each story.
- b. Writers ask for their interviewees consent to record the interview.
 - i. The transcript is used to fact-check quotes, paraphrases and facts in the story.
 - ii. At least one associate editor, the relevant section editor and either the Managing Editor or Editor-in-Chief listens to all spoken quotes in a story. Writers must ensure the accuracy of quotes.
 1. Written sources are verified via screenshots or a forwarding of the initial message to the editors involved in fact checking.
 - iii. It is understood that when a source speaks to us in an interview, unless otherwise stated, the source is on the record and all quotes are fair to use.
 1. Retroactive anonymity is not given except for extreme circumstances, such as if the source would be in physical danger if their name appeared in the story. The Editor-in-Chief and Managing Editor must approve this decision.
 - iv. We do not allow sources to review stories before publication, ever.
 1. Sources can ask to look at what quotes are going to be used, but the Editor-in-Chief and Managing Editor have to approve this decision.
 - v. If a source feels as though they have been misrepresented in a story, they can contact the section editor and Editor-in-Chief.
- c. Ensure each story goes through an extensive fact-checking process.
 - i. Every article, photo, comic and podcast is reviewed by 3-4 editors who check for factual accuracy, balance and fairness.
 1. After a writer turns in a story, the associate editor reviews the document and adds comments containing links, which will confirm the information (e.g. the transcript and time stamp for a quote, a website with event details, an official website with the name and title of a source, etc).

2. The section editor reviews this next who adds additional fact-checks if necessary.
 3. This is then reviewed by one of Editor-in-Chief or Managing Editor(s), who reviews and resolves the fact-check comments.
 4. It is finally reviewed by the other Top 2 editor, who approves the story for publication on the website.
- ii. In addition to accuracy, we will ensure that fairness, balance, inclusion and equity are at the forefront of editorial decisions.
 - iii. The Editor-in-Chief approves all editorial decisions and products with the Managing Editor and makes the call to hold or cut stories if they do not meet the above criteria.
 - iv. The Daily Free Press will not publish anything it cannot independently verify, and will never publish a story that has not attempted to contact all parties involved, except for extreme cases when we could not reasonably reach out to someone mentioned in the article, as further expanded upon in Principle 2 Section BI.
- d. The Daily Free Press will only edit articles after publication in the case of corrections or necessary clarity.
 - i. We understand our obligation to the student body to provide accurate, transparent information.
 - ii. We will specifically indicate when updates are made to a story in the case of a breaking or evolving story.
 - e. The Daily Free Press will always disclose conflict of interests if members of its staff are involved in an organization we are covering.
 - i. This staff member will not be involved in pitching, writing, editing or reviewing the story.
 - ii. If something of this nature does occur, we will put a disclaimer in the article.

5. EQUITY AND INCLUSION

The Daily Free Press is committed to making an inclusive environment for our staff and consumers of our coverage.

We advise our journalists to abide by the following:

- a. Prioritize equity and sensitivity when reporting.
 - i. We will provide historical context and explicitly acknowledge when situations harm marginalized communities.
 - ii. We will contextualize all stories properly in order to accurately represent the communities we're covering.
- b. Tell stories that are important on campus, which means valuing and amplifying the diversity of our student body and staff.

- c. Be open and accessible to meetings with campus organizations and students to talk about improvements to our coverage.
- d. We will serve as watchdogs of the University administration and cover student causes and struggles.
- e. We will not discriminate against writers based on their lived experience or identity.
 - i. A reporter's identity is not a conflict of interest and should not impact subject matters they can and cannot cover. However, as further expanded upon in Section 3, we will always remain objective as reporters and not allow staff to report directly on organizations and groups they are involved in.
- f. We will train our staff members on sensitivity and bias in the newsroom every semester to ensure our staff receives up-to-date training and guidance.
 - i. Staff training sources will be made available on our [website](#).
- g. We will hold demographic surveys every semester to understand our staff, their needs and how we can improve our newsroom.

CONTACT THE DAILY FREE PRESS

For more information on the Society of Professional Journalists or journalistic ethics, visit the SPJ website at spj.org. For more information on The Daily Free Press, visit dailyfreepress.com or email board@dailyfreepress.com with comments, questions or concerns.

For another avenue to voice your thoughts on our coverage, please fill out this anonymous [Google survey](#), where you can tell us your thoughts and set up a meeting with the Editor-in-Chief, diversity and inclusion chair, staff development chair, vice chair or chair.

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