

Lesson 1: Journalism

Time Needed: 1-2 class periods depending on the activity options you choose

Materials: *(optional but recommended)*

- Web Activity link found on the teacher web page for this lesson
- Student internet access -OR- a classroom computer and projector with internet access

Handouts:

- Reading (4 pages; class set)
- Practice Activity (4 pages; class set)
- Web Activity (1 page; class set)
- Independent Investigation (2 pages; class set)

Objectives: Students will be able to...

- Recognize standards-based journalism
- Identify markers of verification, transparency, accountability, and independence in a news story
- Evaluate the reliability of an anonymous source

Fillable PDF handouts are available as an alternative to paper. Find them on the web page for this lesson.

Step by Step

- ANTICIPATE** by asking students how they decide whether a news story is reliable. What criteria do they use? Come up with a class list and write it on the board.
- DISTRIBUTE** the reading to the class.
- READ** with the class, pausing to discuss. Alternatively, have students read in groups or independently. Refer to the class criteria list and discuss similarities and differences.
- DISTRIBUTE** the Practice Activity and review the directions as appropriate.
- ALLOW** students time to complete the Practice Activity.
- DISCUSS** the answers with the class for a deeper analysis of the material.

WEB ACTIVITY (INDIVIDUAL OR WHOLE CLASS)

- ARRANGE** for student online access -OR- set up a computer and projector in your classroom.
- COPY** the Web Activity student access link so you can send students there if they are working individually. If you're using this as a whole-class activity, be sure to follow the student access link to access the slides.
- DISTRIBUTE** the Web Activity handout to the class.

WHOLE CLASS:

- PROJECT** the Web Activity. Follow the link on each slide and read or analyze the website material as a class. Discuss answers to the questions on the slide and have students fill out their handouts as you work through the activity slides together.

INDIVIDUAL:

- ASSIGN** students to complete the web activity and handout independently or in pairs.

INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATION (OPTIONAL)

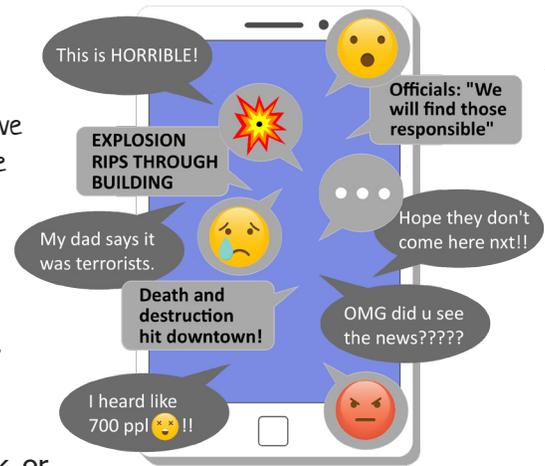
- ARRANGE** for student online access.
- DISTRIBUTE** the Independent Investigation handout and review instructions as appropriate.
- ASSIGN** students to complete the investigation individually or in pairs.
- DISCUSS** what students found and the answers they came up with.



You're on your phone, and your social media apps start lighting up with shares about an explosion in a city five states away from you. It happened about fifteen minutes ago. Most of the shares include video posted by witnesses and people at the scene. A few of your online friends who live there post that they're okay. They heard the blast but weren't near the explosion when it happened. News outlets are just learning about the explosion, and you're starting to see shares with links to news stories.

Nowhere to Hide

There's no getting away from news. It finds you whether you're looking for it or not. Helpful? Annoying? That depends. But the fact that you can't avoid news means you can't avoid its effect on you, either. It doesn't matter whether you click or scroll by—even glancing at the headline on a post tells you something:



Dozens Feared Dead in Massive Explosion

Bloody Pandemonium After Bomb Rocks City

Explosion Reported, Casualties Expected

Possible Terror Attack, Suspects at Large

If you saw all four of these articles posted but didn't click on any of them, you would already be drawing conclusions about what's going on. You might even be freaking out: "OMG. Terrorists? If it was a bomb, it has to be terrorists, right?" Maybe. Or maybe you're just getting played by news providers who want you to click on their article instead of someone else's. (We'll talk about why in another lesson.) Even if you're not freaking out, you're still wondering if it was really a terror attack and whether dozens of people are really dead. You can't help it—the headlines planted those seeds. Unless you want every message you see to influence how you think, you're going to need some skills.

News Know-How

- RECOGNIZE HIGH-STANDARDS REPORTING WHEN YOU SEE IT
- CHECK FACTS AND IDENTIFY MISINFORMATION
- SPOT MARKERS OF BIAS IN NEWS STORIES
- DIFFERENTIATE OPINION AND ANALYSIS FROM NEWS REPORTING
- DISTINGUISH SATIRE FROM MISINFORMATION
- UNDERSTAND THAT NEWS REPORTING IS A BUSINESS

Mad News Skills

Have you ever watched a show that goes through a movie scene by scene and points out all the little flaws and mistakes? You may have watched that movie ten times and never noticed any of those things, but once someone points them out, you can't un-see them. News skills are like that. Once you know what to look for, you can't not see it.

Together, these skills help you foolproof yourself against bogus info and manipulative messages. This doesn't mean that all news sources are completely suspect—they aren't. But with so many less-than-reliable organizations throwing content onto the web, and with no practical way to avoid it, the best strategy is to turn yourself into a news evaluation ninja. In this lesson, you'll learn to recognize what good reporting looks like.



Have Some Standards

In the world of news, there's an accepted practice that results in quality reporting. It's called **journalism**. The American Press Institute defines journalism as "the activity of gathering, assessing, creating, and presenting news and information"—but not just any information. Journalists work to provide *accurate, truthful* information. They want the public to know what the facts are and understand what's going on. They want to give people the tools to make their own decisions about life and the world around them.

As a profession, journalism has standards. Ask a true journalist from any reputable news organization what those are, and they'll tell you basically the same things:

- Verification (fact-checking; vetting sources)
- Transparency (being open about the process, biases, etc.)
- Accountability (naming the author, source of video/photo, etc.)
- Independence (staying free from influence by those being covered)

Reputable news organizations value these standards and insist that their journalists stick to them as much as possible. *Disreputable* news organizations? Not so much. But it's not that organizations either follow standards or they don't. There's a long continuum. Maybe a news organization generally follows these standards but doesn't say much about it publicly. Maybe a news organization follows them when they can, but when a story is really hot and could bring in a big audience—well, a little fudging won't hurt. Some outlets just don't care about standards, and the stories they generate aren't considered journalism at all.

Don't Take Our Word For It

Look again at those journalism standards. Do you see anything there about expecting people's blind trust? No? Reputable news organizations never expect you to take their word for something. In fact, they know you probably won't. Journalistic reporting is carefully designed to help *you* decide whether to trust the information it's giving you. How can you tell? Because the news story will be filled with markers of journalistic standards.

A few minutes after you see the posts on social media, you turn on the TV. A reporter, Sara, is at the scene talking with Bob, the news anchor in the studio. They've just shown some raw video footage.

Sara: Bob, the video we just saw was posted on Twitter just moments after the explosion, and you can see from the scene behind me right now that not much has changed. I'm seeing lots of people with injuries, lots of first responders rushing to help the wounded, and obviously those responders are much too busy to talk right now. Several victims I spoke with reported seeing people inside the building who did *not* appear to survive the blast, and I was able to talk with a senior law enforcement officer who told me there are five people confirmed dead so far. Those victims have not been identified. This officer also said law enforcement will be making an official statement shortly, but that it's too soon to have any information about whether the explosion was caused by a bomb. Bob, I'm also hearing rumors of two women seen running through an emergency exit door right before the blast. So far, those rumors have not been confirmed.

Bob: Thanks, Sara. And we should mention that our station's parent company does have offices in that building.





By now, the whole world would have a lot of questions: Who was killed? How many were injured? Was it really a bomb? If so, who was responsible? If you sat down to watch Sara’s report, you’d probably be looking for answers to those same questions. You might not even notice all the *other* questions Sara is answering: Where did the video they just showed come from? Why hasn’t Sara talked to any first responders? How do we know that some people did die in the explosion? Who said so? Were the sources reliable? Why don’t we know who died? Who said that an official statement was coming soon? Was that person a reliable source? Is there any evidence that it might have been a bomb? Do we know for sure? Do we know for sure if two women ran out the side exit right before the explosion? Should we draw any conclusions from that? Does the station have any financial interest or other ties to the explosion situation? What *don’t* we know at this point? Why don’t we know it?

Whew. That’s a lot of questions. But Sara answered them all, and those answers tell you about the journalism standards the station follows:



Sarah **verified** the reported deaths by seeking out a reliable source, and she told you who that source was. Not much else can be verified at this point, so...



Sara had to strike a balance between telling the audience nothing and giving out unconfirmed or incomplete info. She did that by explaining why she hadn’t talked with any first responders, why not much is known about the people who died, and why it’s too soon to know the cause of the explosion. She also made it clear that the rumor about the two women running out was just that—an unconfirmed rumor. All of these are markers of **transparency**. Sara is letting you know the how and why of her reporting as well as being up front about what *isn’t* known.



Sara held herself **accountable** for her own reporting by standing in front of the camera (most likely with her name at the bottom of the screen). She also helped the station stay accountable for the video they showed the audience by explaining where the video came from.



Bob showed that the station values **independence** by being transparent about the fact that the station has a financial and human connection to the building where the explosion took place.

Straight from the Source



Cityville – There’s new evidence that this morning’s explosion was caused by a bomb, according to a federal investigator at the scene. The investigator spoke on condition of anonymity because the FBI has not yet released an official statement. The evidence reportedly includes fragments of debris that appear to be part of an explosive device. The investigator would not go into more detail because analysis of the fragments is not yet complete.

Does this sound like standards-driven reporting? The author has verified the information with a reliable source and is being transparent about the status of the information. But wait... Reliable source? We don’t even know who this anonymous “investigator” is. This may seem like shady reporting, but it actually isn’t—as long as the reporter is transparent about it and gives as much information as possible about the source’s credibility. Notice the details: The author tells you the investigator is someone who is actually there at the scene of the explosion. The author tells you it’s someone



who works for the FBI. By explaining that the FBI hasn’t released an official statement, the author is telling you why the investigator doesn’t want to be named.

The point of journalism is to keep the public as informed as possible about what’s really going on. But a lot of people who know what’s going on either aren’t supposed to talk about it or are afraid to. In fact, journalists carefully develop relationships with sources inside the government or other organizations who are willing to share information as long as they aren’t named. Journalists are very protective of these sources, both as a supply of information and for the source’s safety. Some journalists would go to jail rather than reveal a source’s identity.

The Truth, the Whole Truth, Etc.

It’s fair to say that when something happens, people want to know the facts. They want the straight skinny. And yet, the last two examples each included information that hadn’t been confirmed as true. Does that mean the reporting was untruthful? Inaccurate? If your gut is saying “no” but you’re not sure why, here’s the answer: Journalists strive to tell the truth, to be

honest, and to deliver correct information, and that’s exactly what was happening in both of those examples. Even though the information wasn’t confirmed, both Sara and the article’s author were being transparent and truthful about the status of the information and where it came from. They will almost certainly update their stories as more verified information becomes available. If something they reported turns out to be false, they’ll correct it. If you’re seeing these kinds of updates or **corrections** from a news organization, recognize them as indicators of reliable reporting.



A. Anonymous Sources! A journalist is investigating allegations that a chemical processing company has been committing massive chemical safety and disposal violations. During and after a visit to the company’s processing plant, several employees reach out with information—but nobody wants their name used. The journalist wonders, is it okay to use these sources without giving their names? If so, how should they be described? He turns to the Reuters Handbook for answers:

“Reuters uses anonymous sources when we believe they are providing accurate, reliable and newsworthy information that we could not obtain any other way. ... Unnamed sources must have direct knowledge of the information they are giving us, or must represent an authority with direct knowledge. ...

We should convey to readers as clearly as possible why we believe the source is reliable, and what steps we have taken to ensure we are not being manipulated. This is done most effectively by the way we describe the source. The more removed the source is from a subject, the less reliable the source is likely to be. ...

Be as specific as possible. Negotiate hard with your source to agree on a description that is sufficiently precise to enable readers to trust the reliability of our anonymous sourcing. ...

Stories based on anonymous sources require particularly rigorous cross-checking. We should normally have two or three sources for such information.”

- a. Read the excerpt from the Handbook.
- b. For each situation described in the activity below, use the guidance in the handbook excerpt to decide...
 - Whether the journalist should use this source at all, and
 - If so, which description do you think is both descriptive enough for readers and protective enough that the source would agree to it?

Choose what you think is the best answer for each situation.

c. Explain your reasoning.

1. A janitor at the company meets the journalist after work to talk about chemical safety violations he’s seen throughout the processing plant, but he can’t afford to lose his job if the company finds out he talked.

- A) Don’t use this source
- B) “a company employee with first-hand knowledge of the processing plant”
- C) “a company janitor who routinely works inside the processing plant”



Explain why you did NOT choose the other two answers:

- _____
- _____

2. A person slips a note to the journalist under a bathroom stall. The note makes serious allegations against the company president, but there’s no name, and when the journalist comes out, the person is gone.

- A) Don’t use this source
- B) “a source with knowledge inside the company”
- C) “a source close to the company president”



Explain why you did NOT choose the other two answers:

- _____
- _____

3. An unnamed executive assistant forwards the journalist a company email that details an illegal chemical disposal scheme, but the email address is anonymous and names in the original email have been deleted.

- A) "an executive assistant with access to high-level corporate emails"
- B) "a source with knowledge of executive-level communications"
- C) Don't use this source



Explain why you did NOT choose the other two answers:

- _____
- _____

4. A company executive tells the journalist that in a recent meeting the company president said "I don't care how you get rid of that stuff—just make sure it doesn't cost anything," but he demands anonymity because the president is known for her creative approach to personal revenge.

- A) "a company executive who asked that his name be withheld for fear of reprisal"
- B) "a source close to the company's president"
- C) Don't use this source



Explain why you did NOT choose the other two answers:

- _____
- _____

5. A forklift driver tells the journalist she was told to load drums of chemical waste onto an "old farm-style flatbed" driven by a guy who got paid in cash, but she doesn't want to incriminate herself as an accessory to a crime.

- A) "a source familiar with the company's chemical waste disposal procedures"
- B) "a forklift driver who fears being implicated if her name is revealed"
- C) Don't use this source



Explain why you did NOT choose the other two answers:

- _____
- _____

6. A person who says he's a company manager calls the journalist from an old-school pay phone to say the company sent an employee with chemical burns to an out-of-state clinic for treatment, but he hangs up without giving his name.

- A) "a company manager close to the situation"
- B) "an informed source inside the company"
- C) Don't use this source



Explain why you did NOT choose the other two answers:

- _____
- _____

The Miami Sentinel

Sumatran Tiger Shot, Killed at Zoo Miami

by Julian Rothstein, staff writer

Miami, FL — Authorities are investigating the fatal shooting of a female Sumatran tiger, Kalani, at Zoo Miami earlier today. According to eyewitnesses, a young girl fell into the tiger enclosure at 11:05am. Kalani then began circling the girl.



Jane Smith, a bystander, tweeted this photo moments after the shooting. We concealed the girl's face to protect her identity.

Longtime visitor of the zoo, Hilda Rodriguez, 57, saw the girl fall and immediately ran to alert zoo employees. Before she could reach them she heard a gun shot: "I saw the girl fall and people started screaming. I then noticed a tiger walking toward the girl. I ran to an area where I usually see zoo employees, but before I could even get there, I heard a gun shot."

According to Zoo Miami director John Acosta, it was not a zoo employee who shot the tiger. "There are still a lot of things we don't know, but I can say with certainty that the shot was not fired by an employee of Zoo Miami."

Miami-Dade Sheriff Carla Mendez says her investigators are still working to identify the shooter, whom some are hailing a hero. "At this point, we

know that the tiger was shot by a 9 mm pistol and that Miami Zoo employees do not have access to this kind of firearm. We also know that the weapon was fired from at least 100 yards away, meaning that it could not have come from inside the enclosure."

Citing an ongoing investigation, Sheriff Mendez wouldn't speculate if a zoo visitor with a concealed weapons permit shot the tiger.

The identity of the girl, a minor, has not been released, but Director Acosta reports that she sustained only minor cuts and bruises and has been reunited with her family.

Zoo Miami is owned and operated by Sunshine State Holdings, the parent company of *The Miami Sentinel*.

B. Mark the Markers. Practice your standards-identification skills with this fictional news article.

1. Read the article.
2. Underline or circle each phrase you find that shows the author is following journalistic standards.
3. Label each phrase to show which standard it's following: V for verification, T for transparency, A for accountability, and I for independence.

C. Telling the Truth. The first guiding principle in the SPJ Code of Ethics is “Seek truth and report it.” But what is “truth”? Explore these excerpts from the SPJ Code to get a deeper look.

“Take special care not to misrepresent or oversimplify in promoting, previewing or summarizing a story.”

What does oversimplifying have to do with “truth”?

Why do you think this guideline applies to “promoting, previewing or summarizing” a story?

“Avoid stereotyping. Journalists should examine the ways their values and experiences may shape their reporting.”

What does stereotyping have to do with “truth”?

Choose a topic and explain how your values and experiences might shape your reporting if you were a journalist covering that topic.

“Give voice to the voiceless.”

“Seek sources whose voices we seldom hear.”

How do these two guidelines relate to the idea of seeking and reporting truth?

“Be vigilant and courageous about holding those with power accountable.”

“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.”

Imagine how government might be held accountable without journalism. What alternative system could be the public’s “watchdog”? Why would it work? If you can’t think of anything, why is it so difficult?

WEB ACTIVITY

SLIDE 1: A CODE TO REPORT BY

1. Find the inset box that talks about the SPJ Code of Ethics. The box says the Code of Ethics is not a "set of rules." Explain the Code's purpose.

2. Scroll through the Code. (It's pretty short.) List the four guiding principles.

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

3. Think of an example of how a journalist could do harm.

4. How would you explain what the Code means by "independence"?

5. What does the Code mean by being "accountable"?

6. What does the Code mean by being "transparent"?

SLIDE 2: NOT SO EASY

1. Write your quiz score here: _____ / 9

2. Which question did you find the most difficult to decide? Why?

SLIDE 3: JOURNALISTIC INDEPENDENCE

Write the answers to the matching activity:

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____

SLIDE 4: THEY THOUGHT WHAT?

1. What did Ms. Walsh learn that surprised her?

2. Why do you think Ms. Walsh is concerned about unnamed sources becoming "the norm"?

3. What do you think she means by "the public deserves more than this"?

INTERNET INVESTIGATION

1. Go online and visit three (3) news sites: One you already think is reliable, one you've heard is UNreliable, and one you've never heard of. Open a different tab for each site. Keep the tabs open while you answer the questions.

For EACH news site, follow these instructions:

- Go to the organization's main page and look for an "about us" link. Click it and look for anything about standards, ethics, or professionalism.
- If you can't find anything on the news outlet's website, do an internet search for [organization name] journalism standards or ethics. Find anything?
- If you couldn't find anything, how significant do you think that is? How could you determine on your own whether the news outlet is reliable



News Website #1	Name: _____	Web Address: _____
	Can you find a page describing the journalistic standards or ethics the organization follows? <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No	
	If so, write the web address here: If not, what were you able to find on the internet about this organization's standards? If you found no standards for this organization, what do you think that means?	

Name: _____	Web Address: _____	News Website #2
Can you find a page describing the journalistic standards or ethics the organization follows? <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No		
If so, write the web address here: If not, what were you able to find on the internet about this organization's standards? If you found no standards for this organization, what do you think that means?		

News Website #3	Name: _____	Web Address: _____
	Can you find a page describing the journalistic standards or ethics the organization follows? <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No	
	If so, write the web address here: If not, what were you able to find on the internet about this organization's standards? If you found no standards for this organization, what do you think that means?	

INTERNET INVESTIGATION P.2

2. Choose a news provider that does follow journalism standards or ethics. Go to their website. (It can be one of the sites you visited in the last activity.) Choose a news article from the home page. Make sure the article is NOT an opinion or analysis piece. Read the article.

Name: _____ Web Address: _____

Article Title: _____

In the table below, list three sources the author used in the article. Write down how the sources are described. For each source, decide how reliable you think that person is for the information they are offering. Explain what influenced your decision.

Name of the source	Exactly how did the author describe this source?	Is this a reliable source for this information?
1.		
2.		
3.		

3. Choose a current news story that's getting lots of coverage. Read one article about it, then watch a story about it on television news. (If you can't see it live, local TV news stations often have video clips available on their websites.)

Story topic: _____ Source of article: _____ TV channel: _____

Compare the written coverage with the TV coverage. Write your observations below:

<p>Did you learn anything from one that you didn't learn from the other? Was one more or less comprehensive than the other?</p>	<p>Article</p> <hr style="border: 0.5px dashed black;"/>	<p>TV</p>
<p>Compare each format's strengths and weaknesses as a way of staying informed.</p>	<p>Article</p> <hr style="border: 0.5px dashed black;"/>	<p>TV</p>

A. Anonymous Sources! A journalist is investigating allegations that a chemical processing company has been committing massive chemical safety and disposal violations. During and after a visit to the company’s processing plant, several employees reach out with information—but nobody wants their name used. The journalist wonders, is it okay to use these sources without giving their names? If so, how should they be described? He turns to the Reuters Handbook for answers:

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 - Whether the journalist should use this source at all, and
 - If so, which description do you think is both descriptive enough for readers and protective enough that the source would agree to it?

Choose what you think is the best answer for each situation.
- c. Use the Handbook excerpt and your own reasoning to explain the two answers you did NOT choose.

1. A janitor at the company meets the journalist after work to talk about chemical safety violations he’s seen throughout the processing plant, but he can’t afford to lose his job if the company finds out he talked.

- A) Don’t use this source
- B) “a company employee with first-hand knowledge of the processing plant”
- C) “a company janitor who routinely works inside the processing plant”



Explain why you did NOT choose the other two answers:

- A) Janitor has direct knowledge of the violations; journalist personally met with him
- C) Too specific—Janitor could be identified from this description

2. A person slips a note to the journalist under a bathroom stall. The note makes serious allegations against the company president, but there’s no name, and when the journalist comes out, the person is gone.

- A) Don’t use this source
- B) “a source with knowledge inside the company”
- C) “a source close to the company president”



Explain why you did NOT choose the other two answers:

- B) Reporter has no idea whether this person has direct knowledge or not
- C) Reporter can’t verify whether the person is actually close to the company president

3. An unnamed executive assistant forwards the journalist a company email that details an illegal chemical disposal scheme, but the email address is anonymous and names in the original email have been deleted.

- A) Don't use this source
- B) "an executive assistant with access to high-level corporate emails"
- C) "a source with knowledge of executive-level communications"



Explain why you did NOT choose the other two answers:

- B) The person might not even be an executive assistant; who knows whether the email is real
- C) Can't verify whether this source really has direct knowledge or faked the email

4. A company executive tells the journalist that in a recent meeting the company president said "I don't care how you get rid of that stuff—just make sure it doesn't cost anything," but he demands anonymity because the president is known for her creative approach to personal revenge.

- A) Don't use this source
- B) "a company executive who asked that his name be withheld for fear of reprisal"
- C) "a source close to the company's president"



Explain why you did NOT choose the other two answers:

- A) The exec was personally in the meeting; has direct knowledge
- B) "Company executive" narrows the possibilities; president could possibly identify him

5. A forklift driver tells the journalist she was told to load drums of chemical waste onto an "old farm-style flatbed" driven by a guy who got paid in cash, but she doesn't want to incriminate herself as an accessory to a crime.

- A) Don't use this source
- B) "a source familiar with the company's chemical waste disposal procedures"
- C) "a forklift driver who fears being implicated if her name is revealed"



Explain why you did NOT choose the other two answers:

- A) The driver personally participated in the incident, so has direct knowledge
- C) Way too specific; source could easily be identified

6. A person who says he's a company manager calls the journalist from an old-school pay phone to say the company sent an employee with chemical burns to an out-of-state clinic for treatment, but he hangs up without giving his name.

- A) Don't use this source
- B) "a company manager close to the situation"
- C) "an informed source inside the company"



Explain why you did NOT choose the other two answers:

- B) The journalist can't verify it's really a company manager.
- C) The journalist can't even verify the person is really inside the company.

The Miami Sentinel

Sumatran Tiger Shot, Killed at Zoo Miami

A by Julian Rothstein, staff writer

Miami, FL — Authorities are investigating the fatal shooting of a female Sumatran tiger, Kalani, at Zoo Miami earlier today. According to eyewitnesses, a young girl fell into the tiger enclosure at 11:05am. Kalani then began circling the girl.



Jane Smith, a bystander, tweeted this photo moments after the shooting. We concealed the girl's face to protect her identity.

V Longtime visitor of the zoo, Hilda Rodriguez, 57, saw the girl fall and immediately ran to alert zoo employees. Before she could reach them she heard a gun shot: "I saw the girl fall and people started screaming. I then noticed a tiger walking toward the girl. I ran to an area where I usually see zoo employees, but before I could even get there, I heard a gun shot."

V According to Zoo Miami director John Acosta, it was not a zoo employee who shot the tiger. "There are still a lot of things we don't know, but I can say with certainty that the shot was not fired by an employee of Zoo Miami."

V Miami-Dade Sheriff Carla Mendez says her **T** investigators are still working to identify the shooter, whom some are hailing a hero. "At this point, we

know that the tiger was shot by a 9 mm pistol and that Miami Zoo employees do not have access to this kind of firearm. We also know that the weapon was fired from at least 100 yards away, meaning that it could not have come from inside the enclosure." **T**
Citing an ongoing investigation, Sheriff Mendez wouldn't speculate if a zoo visitor with a concealed weapons permit shot the tiger.

T
The identity of the girl, a minor, has not been released, but Director Acosta reports that she sustained only minor cuts and bruises and has been reunited with her family.

Zoo Miami is owned and operated by Sunshine State Holdings, the parent company of The Miami Sentinel. **I**

B. Mark the Markers. Practice your standards-identification skills with this fictional news article.

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3. Label each phrase to show which standard it's following: V for verification, T for transparency, A for accountability, and I for independence.

Students might point to more instances than those shown.

C. Telling the Truth. The first guiding principle in the SPJ Code of Ethics is “Seek truth and report it.” But what is “truth”? Explore these excerpts from the SPJ Code to get a deeper look.

“Take special care not to misrepresent or oversimplify in promoting, previewing or summarizing a story.”

What does oversimplifying have to do with “truth”?

Leaving out too many details can make a situation so barebones that it isn’t accurate anymore.

Why do you think this guideline applies to “promoting, previewing or summarizing” a story?

Those are all places where a story must be summarized / captured in a nutshell.

“Avoid stereotyping. Journalists should examine the ways their values and experiences may shape their reporting.”

What does stereotyping have to do with “truth”?

Stereotypes are never accurate; each individual is unique, and there will always be factors that are specific to a particular situation. This affects accuracy, which is that truth in reporting is based on.

Choose a topic and explain how your values and experiences might shape your reporting if you were a journalist covering that topic.

Accept any reasonable answer.

“Give voice to the voiceless.”

“Seek sources whose voices we seldom hear.”

How do these two guidelines relate to the idea of seeking and reporting truth?

The truth of anything involves the complete picture of what is going on. The picture isn’t complete without all perspectives, even those we don’t normally hear from.

“Be vigilant and courageous about holding those with power accountable.”

“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.”

Imagine how government might be held accountable without journalism. What alternative system could be the public’s “watchdog”? Why would it work? If you can’t think of anything, why is it so difficult?

Students will imagine different possibilities, so accept any reasonable answer.

WEB ACTIVITY

SLIDE 1: A CODE TO REPORT BY

1. Find the inset box that talks about the SPJ Code of Ethics. The box says the Code of Ethics is not a "set of rules." Explain the Code's purpose.

The SPJ describes its Code as "a guide that encourages all who engage in journalism to take responsibility for the information they provide, regardless of medium."

2. Scroll through the Code. (It's pretty short.) List the four guiding principles.

- Seek Truth and Report It
- Minimize Harm
- Act Independently
- Be Accountable and Transparent

3. Think of an example of how a journalist could do harm.

Answers will vary, but students might say that journalists could cause pain by unnecessarily exposing someone's personal business; revealing a crime victim's identity could retraumatize the person by exposing them to publicity; influencing public opinion against someone who is accused of a crime before that person has been conflicted, affecting their standing in society even if they end up being innocent, and many other possibilities.

4. How would you explain what the Code means by "independence"?

Answers will vary, but students should succinctly summarize the gist of that whole section. When the Code says "independence," it means a journalist not letting his or her reporting be influenced by money, favors, or relationships.

5. What does the Code mean by being "accountable"?

Being accountable refers to a journalist taking responsibility for his or her work.

6. What does the Code mean by being "transparent"?

Being transparent refers to a journalist explaining his or her choices and processes to the public.

SLIDE 2: NOT SO EASY

1. Write your quiz score here: _____ / 9
2. Which question did you find the most difficult to decide? Why?

Answers will vary.

SLIDE 3: JOURNALISTIC INDEPENDENCE

Write the answers to the matching activity:

- | | |
|-------------|-------------|
| 1. <u>B</u> | 3. <u>D</u> |
| 2. <u>C</u> | 4. <u>A</u> |

SLIDE 4: THEY THOUGHT WHAT?

1. What did Ms. Walsh learn that surprised her?

She learned that most people in the crowd thought that journalists have no idea who their anonymous sources are.

2. Why do you think Ms. Walsh is concerned about unnamed sources becoming "the norm"?

Answers will vary, but she believes the general ethical principle that named sources are best and anonymous ones should only be used as a last resort.

3. What do you think she means by "the public deserves more than this"?

Answers will vary, but she probably means that journalism is supposed to inform the public, and using anonymous sources doesn't give the public enough information to judge how reliable the source is.