EDITORIAL POLICIES

Inline with the constitution of the Republic of South Africa and other media law rules, The Post News is hereby to adopt this document as its official editorial policy guidelines, subject to amendment - adopted 02/01/2024

PRINCIPLES

The policy is to underline our ethical approach towards story telling. We understand South Africa is a multi-racial society built on the principle of Ubuntu (I am because of you). This principle underpins South Africans' religion, racial and ethical tolerance. It is this reason that section 16 of South African’s constitution was inserted to support the role of the media and freedom of speech in general. The media play a pivotal role in nation-building and social cohesion.

Our goal is to focus and report on stories that have human interest, stories that change people’s lives. It's worth mentioning, like any other news organization, the role of the media in society is to inform, educate and entertain.

Although our role continues to evolve, the principles that guide our work are unchanged. We were funded on principles of honesty, integrity, fairness, good ethical conduct, inclusive, unbiased, non-racial and non-sexist.

Accuracy is fundamental at the helm of reporting. Where we make a mistake, we stand firmly to rectify such a mistake. We believe that a mistake calls for immediate correction. Corrections to stories already published must not be a difficult task. Defamation is not best in the development of knowledge and story telling.

Editorial accountability

Responsibility for upholding The Post News decision-making rests with the editor-in-chief and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The editor-in-chief is the head of news, while others play a role making sure that media rules and ethics are correctly followed. The context and content is supervised by the editor-in-chief and the editorial team. The CEO is responsible for managing the agency's day-to-day functions and leadership coaching. He/She is expected to have knowledge of the editorial decision. Such a decision places the agency at the helm of failure or success. A reasonable CEO must at all times consult with the editorial team on its decision-making.

Journalists', editorial team and the CEO are jointly held liable for misconduct reporting by the reporter/s. Collectively, they must at all times verify the facts and accuracy of the information provided by reporters and sources alike.

**Facts to consider at all times**

1. Investigate fully all the facts, names, place/s, allegation made, all parties mentioned in the article must interviewed. If parties refuse to comment it must be stated clear “no comment” or “refused to comment”.
2. All interviews with sources (Analysts, academic, public officials, public figure and layman) must be audio recorded, video taped or have a documented prof.
3. Be impartial when handling any news affecting parties or matters in controversy. Give fair representation to all sides at issue.
4. Stick to the facts without editorial opinion or comment. Reporters’ opinions are not wanted in copy. Their observations are. So are accurate backgrounding and authoritative interpretation essential to the reader’s understanding of complicated issues.
5. Admit errors promptly, frankly. Public distrust of the media is profound and troubling. The distrust is fed by inaccuracy, carelessness, indifference to public sentiment, automatic cynicism about those in public life, perceived bias or unfairness and other sins suggesting arrogance.
6. The Post News can help overcome such public attitudes through scrupulous care for facts and unwavering dedication to fairness. We must not be quick to dismiss criticism and complaints, a trait that journalists refuse to accept in others.
7. The power of news stories to injure can reach both the ordinary citizen and the corporate giant. The Post News’s integrity and sensitivity demand that supervisors and staff respond sympathetically and quickly when an error has been made. It doesn’t matter whether the complaint comes from a timid citizen acting alone or from a powerful figure’s battery of lawyers.
8. Every story shown to be erroneous and involving a corrective must be drawn to the attention of supervisory staff.

**ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR**

Part of our responsibility as the agency is to ensure we don’t do anything that demeans the craft or weakens our credibility. Because we deliver the bad news about politicians who turn dirty, caregivers who abuse their trust and business people who discard ethics for gain, we must observe stringent ethical practices, and be seen to be doing so.

It is impossible to raise all potential ethical challenges in this guideline. But the following guiding principles are offered in the spirit of wanting to advance, not restrain, our work.

1. Pride in yourself and in the practice of journalism nourishes ethical behaviour.
2. The Post News pays its own way. Staff should not accept anything that might compromise our integrity or credibility.
3. The Post News does not pay newsmakers for interviews, to take their pictures or to film or record them.
4. The Post News reporters do not misrepresent themselves to get a story. They always identify themselves as journalists.

**IMPARTIALITY**

Impartiality is somewhat like exercise. You have to work out regularly to build tone and strength.

The best exercise for impartiality is to stop regularly and ask yourself: “Am I being as impartial, honest and fair as I can be?”

Some other guides to impartiality:

Parties in controversy, whether in politics or law or otherwise, receive fair consideration. Statements issued by conflicting interests merit equal prominence, whether combined in a single story or used at separate times.

But always try to get opposing sides for simultaneous publication.

If an attack by one group or person on another has been covered, any authoritative answer is also carried. If a proper source cannot be reached, say so, and keep trying.

When a comparative unknown expresses controversial views, question his or her expertise on the subject. If there is no expertise, or the individual does not have an official position that puts weight behind the views, consider carefully whether the report should be carried.

**QUOTATIONS**

Quotes are the lifeblood of any story. They put rosiness into the cheeks of the palest stories. They add credibility, immediacy and punch.

They can also bring grief to writers and editors who play loose with them. Some news organizations permit liberties with quotes. The Post News takes a somewhat stern approach to any tampering with just what was said.

In general, we quote people verbatim and in standard English. We correct slips of grammar that are obvious slips and that would be needlessly embarrassing. We remove verbal mannerisms such as ah’s, routine vulgarities and meaningless repetitions. We fix careless spelling mistakes and other typos in emails and text messages. Otherwise we do not revise quotations.

While we don’t routinely use abnormal spellings and grammar to indicate dialects or mispronunciations, they can have a place in helping to convey atmosphere.

Cleaning up or paraphrasing this tweet from a teenage fan in a story about pop singer Justin Bieber's use of Twitter would have taken a revealing element out of the story:

**“i wonder if @justinbieber ever sees my tweets, probably not, but im never gonna stop trying<3”**

Quotes containing bafflegab are routinely paraphrased in plain English, no matter how eminent the speaker.

**Other points to remember about handling quotes:**

1. Whenever possible, interviews should be recorded. When there is risk that a quote is not exact, for whatever reason, a paraphrase is safest.
2. When exactness is essential — if it’s one person’s word against another’s — quote verbatim.
3. When a speaker uses what is obviously a wrong word, check back when possible. When a quote does not make sense, check back with the speaker or ditch it.
4. Misquotes result not only from tampering or carelessness. Failure to place a quote in context can have the same eroding effect on credibility. For instance: **“If our tax revenues allow it, I’ll repave all secondary highways”** should not be parlayed into the bare reported statement that the speaker promised to repave all secondary highways. Similarly, failure to indicate tone can skew a quote. A speaker’s jocular comment may need to be reported with an explanatory **she said with a smile**. There are other occasions when the bare words benefit from addition of a brief description: **“I’m not guilty,” he said, glowering at the judge.**
5. When clear and concise, a full quote is preferred to a partial quote. But a partial quote can be useful for spicing a lead, setting off a controversial statement or giving the flavour of a speaker.
6. Make only cosmetic changes to quotations from a text: changing spelling and capitalization to Canadian Press style, for example, or fixing typos and other small errors in spelling and punctuation.
7. If words are left out of a text or middle of a quotation, show the omission with an ellipsis. **Note: Ellipses are best avoided. Prefer other devices, such as paraphrases or partial quotes.**
8. Long bracketed explanations and paraphrases should not be inserted at the beginning or end of a quote. **Not: “(The new program) is imaginative, realistic and worth the time and money invested,” Scott said.**

**But: The new program “is imaginative, realistic and worth the time and money invested,” Scott said.**

1. Guard against attributing one person’s quote to several speakers. **Not: Most retailers surveyed condemned the new tax, saying that “it will mean working half a day a week for the government.”**
2. Do not include in a quote words that the speaker could not have spoken. **Not: Davis said he “was delighted that the prize is going to the South African.”**

**But: Davis said he was “delighted that the prize is going to the South African.”**

Davis's words were **"I'm** (not **was**) **delighted."**

1. If the quotations are coming from an email, text message, chat room or some other online service where it is virtually impossible to verify the source, make that clear in the story. Always push for an interview in person or on the phone. Gathering comments this way should be a last resort. Anonymous quotes from a chat room are useless except to provide colour or humour.
2. Do not alter audio or video clips except to make sound clearer and reduce line noise. Within a clip, edit only to remove pauses and stumbles.
3. On rare occasions, audio and video is sometimes distorted to protect the identity of someone, such as a minor. This should only be done after consulting with a supervisor.

 **LANGUAGE**

A reminder to be careful with translations. We should not imply that someone is speaking English when he is not.

In interviews and speeches, make clear what language is being used unless it is obvious. At a news conference where both French and English are used, specify when French was the original language. When reporting the shouts of a crowd or the wording of protest signs that are in other languages, specify that a translation is involved.

Readers are entitled to know when a direct or indirect quote is based on translation rather than the exact words used.

**OBSCENITY**

The transition of The Post News to an online news provider has given the news report a broader reach than ever before. Stories no longer travel through multiple editors before becoming available for public consumption. Technology has reduced the role of the middleman, allowing our content to be sent directly to readers and viewers unfettered and unfiltered.

At the same time, subscribers to our service have come to represent a wide spectrum of users, from small-market broadcasters to big-city newspapers to fledgling online news portals. Each one has a different policy when it comes to the use of obscenity in their reports.

That means it is more vital than ever that The Post News have a clear and unequivocal policy on the use of obscenity — one that is clearly understood by staff and strictly enforced by supervisors.

Obscenity has no place in the news report, whether in print, audio, or video — except under some very specific and exceedingly rare circumstances.

Four-letter words shouted from a crowd or printed on the sign of an angry demonstrator add nothing useful to a story. Profanity that is used for its own sake does not enlighten a reader, or viewer.

There are few exceptions where obscene language should be part of our news report. A prominent figure cursing in public could be one. On other occasions, a profanity might be essential to an accurate understanding of the facts or emotions that are driving a story.

Such instances are, however, extremely rare.

Journalists should always consider other means of communicating the situation in question without using obscenities. In the rare case where an obscenity is fundamental to the story, an editor in chief must be consulted in advance of transmitting any story, audio, photos or video.

While inelegant, using dashes or asterisks to delete letters in an obscenity can be an effective means of communicating the word to readers without actually using it. Consult the editor in chief when considering such a strategy.

Stories and photos that contain obscenities or vulgar language should always be transmitted in such a way that they don’t reach online readers automatically. Where possible, a version of the story should be crafted without the obscenity in order for it to be used online.

When such language must be part of audio or video reports, it is carefully flagged and an alternative version that does not include the offensive material is provided. The Post News does not digitally alter images where offensive language appears in a picture or video.

For stories that contain an obscenity, put the questionable language in a separate paragraph that can be readily deleted by editors who do not want to use it. Such stories should also always be flagged with an Editor’s Note that identifies the obscenity in question, and includes the word **CAUTION** in all-caps: **CAUTION: Note language (fuck) in para 3.**

Note: When such a note is required on The Post News copy moving to publishing, include it on the Update line so it appears on the publishing.

When the obscenity is part of an audio or video clip, discuss its handling with the editor. It may be possible to send two versions of the clip to subscribers — one that ends or begins before the obscene word. Any audio (or video) clip that includes an obscenity should include a CAUTION: Note contents warning beside the slug line that the language may be offensive to listeners.

**SENSITIVE SUBJECTS**

Potential for offence lurks in every news story. Age, race, sex, disabilities, religion – all are sometimes pertinent to the news but must be handled thoughtfully.

Use fairness, sensitivity and good taste when identifying age, colour, creed, nationality, personal appearance, religion, sex, sexual orientation and any other heading under which a person or group may feel slighted.

**AGE**

Often age is relevant as part of a personal description or for identification. Ages also help readers to relate to people in news stories.

In general, give a person’s age rather than imprecise and possibly derogatory terms such as **senior citizen, retiree, elderly** or **middle-aged**.

Put the age in the lead only when it is significant, such as in obituaries or when an 85-year-old is cycling across the country, or when a three-year-old child is missing. Guard against the formula lead — **a 30-year-old dentist; a 52-year-old fisherman; a 23-year-old convict...**

Writing **Mario Lalonde, 30,** is usually preferable to the more cumbersome **30-year-old Mario Lalonde**.

If age is unavailable for an obituary, give an indication of it from the person’s activities, such as year of graduation or year of retirement.

**Infant** describes a baby that is no more than a few months old; a **baby** is a child who is not yet walking. **Toddler** describes a child around the age of two, while a **preschooler** is between the ages of three and five. Males up to 16 are called **boys** and females to that age are **girls**. Use a phrase like **young people** for those of both sexes who are somewhat older.

First names may be used in subsequent references for those under 18, except in sports stories.

**Youth** in general includes both sexes: **the youth of South Africa**. Applied to individuals, it usually means males. Try to avoid the latter use.

**DISABILITIES**

Be accurate, clear and sensitive when describing a person with a disability, handicap, illness or disease. They are people first; their disability is only one part of their humanity and most would say it is the least important part.

Mention a disability only if it is pertinent. Never dismiss someone with an unqualified **disabled, crippled** or the like. Write **Romanov, whose hands are twisted with arthritis, . . .** And perhaps indicate to what extent a person has overcome a disability or how she copes with it: **Girushi uses a wheelchair once she leaves her studio.**

Be specific. **Afflicted with** suggests pain and suffering. It doesn’t always apply. Nor does **suffering**. People who use wheelchairs are not necessarily confined to them. **Crippling** can be a temporary or permanent condition. People may be **deaf, slightly deaf** or **hard of hearing**; **blind** or have **poor eyesight**. A **patient** is someone under a doctor’s care or in hospital. **Victim** connotes helplessness. A child who is **mentally handicapped** (slow) is not necessarily **mentally disturbed** (ill). People with epilepsy have **seizures**, not **fits**.

While it is important to be specific for clarity, there are also some terms that may be used in the scientific community that are not as acceptable in casual use. **Mentally retarded** is a valid clinical description often found in medical journals, yet many dislike it because of the schoolyard insults associated with the term. Use **mentally challenged** or **mentally handicapped** instead.

Don’t define people by their disorders: **the disabled, the blind, the handicapped**. Writing **people with disabilities** emphasizes the human beings and not the disabilities.

**RACE AND ETHNICITY**

The Post News reporting should reflect the ethnic diversity of the country in a natural way, free of explicit or unconscious racism.

Identify a person by race, colour, national origin or immigration status only when it is truly pertinent. It is appropriate to report that a woman facing deportation is Polish. Similarly, the victim of hate mail may be referred to as a Jew. A full description, including but not limited to colour, may be used if a person wanted by police is at large.

The appearance of racial minorities in news reports should not be confined to accounts of cultural events, racial tension or crime. Comments on subjects that are a matter of public interest should come from a wide variety of people of different backgrounds.

Remember that what is obvious to a university-educated Christian whose parents were born in Britain might need explanation for persons from a variety of other backgrounds. It should not be taken for granted that a Muslim ceremony needs explanation while a Roman Catholic mass does not. Too often journalists – a profession that is only slowly starting to reflect the many faces of South Africa– assume their readers share their WASP background. Watch the labels – labelling a fruit as “exotic” might make sense to someone raised in rural Saskatchewan but would not ring true to many foreign-born readers in Toronto who grew up eating it for breakfast.

Race and ethnicity are pertinent when it motivates an incident or when it helps explain the emotions of those in confrontation. Thus references to race or ethnic background are relevant in reports of racial controversy, immigration difficulties, language discussions and so on.

When an incident cuts across ethnic lines, say so, as when a sizable number of South African-born individuals join Chinese immigrants demonstrating against immigration procedures.

The ethnicity of a person found guilty of shoplifting is usually irrelevant and should not be included.

Race is pertinent in reporting an accomplishment unusual in a particular race: for example, if a South African of Chinese origin is named to the South African Football Awards.

Beware of playing up inflammatory statements at the expense of the main story. Be certain that a spokesman indeed speaks for a community or organization, and give a brief description of that organization, its aims and number of members.

Don’t always turn to the same minority spokespeople and organizations for reaction. This can give unwarranted standing to groups that don’t necessarily reflect the full range of views of their communities.

Arguing that humour was intended is no defence for a racial slur.

Always consult the editor before using racially derogatory terms, and only in a direct quotation and when essential to the story. Flag such a story:

**CAUTION: Note racial slur in para 15.**

**Names of races**

1. Capitalize the proper names of nationalities, peoples, races and tribes.

**Indigenous Peoples, Black, Whites, Coloured and Indian/ Asiana etc.**

**SEXISM**

Treat the sexes equally and without stereotyping. A woman’s marital or family status — single, married, divorced, grandmother — is pertinent only to explain a personal reference or to round out a profile. The test always is: Would this information be used if the subject were a man?

Referring to a woman gratuitously as **attractive, leggy** or **sexy** is as inappropriate as describing a man as hot, **well-muscled** or **having great buns**. But there are stories beyond the routine in which it is appropriate to describe someone’s appearance.

Never assume that **a family of four** always consists of a man, a woman and their two children. Don’t write as if every **married couple** consists of a man and a woman.

**Shoppers** (not **housewives**) are paying more.

When writing in general terms prefer **police officer** or **constable** to **policeman, firefighter** to **fireman**, **mail carrier** to **mailman**, **flight attendant** to **stewardess**.

But if sex is pertinent, masculine and feminine forms are proper: **postman, policewoman, air steward**.

Use only established feminine variants ending in **-woman**.

Write **businesswoman, South African woman, spokeswoman but not journeywoman, linewoman, defencewoman**.

Avoid other feminine variants unless they are so well established that a substitute rings false.

Thus it is proper to describe a woman as a **hostess, masseuse, princess, seamstress** or as an **author, comedian, Jew, murderer, poet, sculptor**. **Actor** and **actress** are both acceptable.

Avoid cumbersome coinages like **alderperson. Chairperson, salesperson** and **spokesperson** are in general use and can be used.

There is not an entirely satisfactory substitute for **fisherman**, although **fisher, fish harvester, fish industry worker, fishing licensees** or the phrase **fishermen and women** are all possibilities.

Some readers find the use of he (him, his) as a word of common or indeterminate gender to be sexist. His or her and the like can be used but may prove awkward. In that case reword the sentence if possible. Instead of: Whoever is promoted will have R50 added to his or her pay, write: Whoever is promoted will get a R50 raise. As a last resort, they (them, their) is an increasingly acceptable alternative to he (him, his).

Often a plural construction solves the sex problem:

Retired officers are not usually referred to by their former rank.

Not: A retired officer is not usually referred to by his or her former rank.

The generic man is regarded by some as excluding women. Instead of man or mankind, you can write people, human beings, humanity, human race. Alternatives to manmade include artificial, constructed, manufactured, synthetic. But don’t get carried away. To write human energy or human resources to avoid manpower, or person-eating tiger to avoid man-eating tiger is being hypersensitive.

**SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY**

The issue of gender identity and expression has evolved rapidly in recent years, testing and reinventing some of society’s most basic boundaries and norms in the process and making the best way to report on gender issues a moving target, to say the least.

Because the standards are fluid and ever-changing, the most fundamentally important advice is to tread carefully, remaining flexible and open-minded, and to be guided by the personal preferences of the people you’re writing about. Some guidelines:

A person’s sexual orientation should be never mentioned unless relevant to the story.

**Gay** and **lesbian** are the preferred terms to describe people attracted to the same sex; **homosexual** is considered offensive by some. Avoid except in clinical contexts and quotations. **Lesbian woman** is redundant. Don’t use **gay** as a noun. Although many gay people use the expression **queer**, avoid except in quotations as some readers might construe it as offensive.

Use **sexual orientation**, not **sexual preference**; sexuality is not an option. Don’t refer to a gay **lifestyle** or suggest that the majority of gay men and lesbians routinely live unorthodox lives; most don’t. Don't use **admitted homosexual** or similar, which suggests criminality; use **openly gay** or **openly lesbian**, but only if it is necessary to use a modifier for clarity.

Language is still evolving on what to call the individuals in a same-sex relationship or marriage. Follow their preference if it is known. **Boyfriend, girlfriend, partner, husband** and **wife** are all acceptable options depending on situation and preference.

**Gender identity** refers to an individual’s own personal sense of their gender, and may not match the sex they were assigned at birth — a situation known as **transgender** (not "transgendered.") Avoid using the shortened form trans except in a quote or when the meaning is spelled out in copy, as its definition is often not well understood.

**Gender expression**, on the other hand, refers to how an individual chooses to outwardly express their gender identity. The two do not always align perfectly, so avoid assumptions. Take care not to confuse gender identity or gender expression with sexual orientation. Transgender people may be straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer.

The term **transsexual** has a clinical definition as someone who identifies as a member of the sex opposite to that assigned at birth, and so as such should not be confused with the broader term transgender. When in doubt, ask.

It’s important to note that while some transgender people might be undergoing hormone therapy or surgery as part of their transition efforts, not all will choose to go to such lengths, nor should their identity as transgender be defined in that way.

In some cases, one’s gender identity may be neither male nor female — a circumstance known variously as **non-binary, gender non-conforming** or **genderqueer.** Use such lesser-known terms advisedly and always with a definition, as their meanings can be amorphous or poorly understood.

The term **two-spirit** (not "two-spirited") is often used to represent various gender identities and sexual orientations within the Indigenous community. It is a broad term with a number of definitions; some use it in a literal sense to reflect an identity that is both male and female, while others use it in a metaphorical sense. Seek clarity from a subject before using it, and avoid its various abbreviations in order to prevent confusion.

Whenever possible, confirm with the person how they wish to be described in print, including their preferred pronouns — male, female or gender-neutral pronouns like **they** and **them**. Such pronouns can be used sparingly to refer to a single individual who expresses such a preference, but be careful — it can get confusing for a reader. Always explain the person’s preference in copy, and make generous use of the person’s chosen name as an alternative in order to foster as much clarity as possible.

Other terms that have come into vogue include **cisgender**, the opposite of transgender; however, it’s not widely understood and should be avoided. Use **non-transgender** instead.

Derogatory terms should be avoided whenever possible, even when part of a direct quotation. Consult the editor in those exceedingly rare cases where the use of the term might be absolutely necessary. In such cases, flag the story with a Caution note spelling out where in the story the slur is contained.

**SOURCES**

Cultivating knowledgeable sources who can provide the background and insight necessary for delivering a complete story is the trademark of the excellent reporter.

Without good sources — be they the town clerk in the small northern mining town, or the fast-moving executive assistant to a cabinet minister — The Post News cannot hope to craft a comprehensive daily picture of life in South Africa and the world.

Getting and keeping good sources is hard work. It involves patient telephone work plus breaking free from our desks to get out and meet people.

Reporters and editors are encouraged to pull back from the front lines occasionally to spend time with people who know what’s happening in the world beyond our own limited horizons. Special efforts should be made to develop contacts in non-urban areas and other places beyond the bright spotlight of big-city journalism.

It is the job of journalists to meet a variety of people. We should all take a special interest in people and listen to what they have to say. Developing good sources is a way of living to the committed journalist.

When dealing with sources, remember that many people are not used to dealing with the media. Ensure they understand they are being quoted, and their words or picture may appear in many newspapers.

A cardinal rule with sources is to avoid close personal involvement. There is nothing wrong with social contact with sources, but close personal relationships can lead to conflicts of interest.

**UNNAMED SOURCES**

The public interest is best served when someone with facts or opinions to make public is identified by the press by name and qualifications. Readers need to see named sources to help them decide on the credibility and importance of the information.

Regular use of unnamed sources weakens our news reports. The Post News firmly discourages the quoting of sources who want to hide their identities. Leaks, especially in government and business, are often designed to undermine new policies or to damage rivals.

There are of course many situations when people with information important to the public insist on concealing their identity for understandable reasons. The Post News would be foolish, and in some cases irresponsible, never to grant anonymity in news copy, but it can show leadership in working to stop misuse of unnamed sources.

Some guidelines:

1. The use of unnamed sources is only permissible if the material is information — not speculation or opinion — that’s vital to the report and available for use only under the condition of anonymity.
2. Such material should always be accompanied by an explanation of how The Post News justified the decision to refrain from identifying the source:

**One of the first rescue workers to arrive on the scene, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss the case publicly, described a horrific sight inside the apartment where the killings allegedly took place.**

**One MP, granted anonymity because of the risk of reprisals from the Minister’s Office, described the mood of the caucus meeting as sombre and tense.**

**The resident of the neighbourhood where the suspect went missing spoke on condition of anonymity out of fear for her personal safety.**

Whenever possible, additional details about the source’s credibility should be included, taking care not to reveal identifying details.

1. Push sources hard to understand that putting their names to what they say is important to freedom of information. This is especially important in dealings with public servants who ask for anonymity in routine circumstances.
2. Beat reporters should regularly test the willingness of their sources to be named.
3. Information from unnamed sources should be confirmed whenever possible by one or two other sources (always respecting the original source’s anonymity, of course). Try to get supporting documentation.
4. When confirmation via other sources or documents is impossible, reporters need to learn more about how the source came to know the information. Did they witness the arrest of the suspect in person? Were they in the caucus room when the shouting erupted? Or are they relaying second-hand information? Such details can help The Post News decide how to proceed.
5. The editor must be consulted before a story with unnamed sources is released. Names of sources will be given to Head Office when requested.
6. Direct quotes should be avoided unless the actual words have particular significance.
7. If the source is presenting one side of a controversy, the opposing side’s views must be sought and presented fairly in the original story.
8. Do not say a person declined comment if the same person is also an unnamed source in the story.

We don’t have to tie every bit of information to a named source. Naming the airline employee who hands out a list of dead and injured in a plane crash adds nothing to the story. The government official who provides routine background or uncontestable fact need not always be named.

But always note names, just in case. For confidential sources, don't put the name or other identifying information in a notebook used for the story and never put it in an email. Documents, including emails and notebooks, can be picked up in a search warrant. Emails, in particular, are a dangerous place to mention confidential sources as they can be accidentally forwarded to wrong addresses.

It is prudent to store notes and recordings in safekeeping for one year at least. In extremely important matters, notes and recordings should be kept indefinitely.

Government officials often insist on anonymity at information briefings, such as in the locked room where reporters write federal or provincial budget stories in advance of delivery. The Post News abides by such restrictions if necessary, but will not go along with deliberate misrepresentation, such as when a cabinet minister wishes to pass as a civil servant.

Statements from such briefings should not be passed off as general knowledge or undisputed fact. The reader should be told as much as possible about the source and the circumstances should be described.

It is not unheard of for a source to give information confidentially, then deny it by name. If The Post News feels obliged to carry such a denial, it will identify the original source as the person denying it, provided we are confident the original story accurately reflected the source’s information. Consult Head Office before proceeding.

**ETHICS AND SOURCES**

When we do promise anonymity we must scrupulously respect that pledge. But it cannot be absolute and it is only fair to tell potential sources so. The courts may require reporters to disclose sources.

Verbal contracts with sources are enforceable in court. Make sure both you and your source understand precisely what that agreement is before you get the information. Do not make promises you cannot keep.

For instance, you can promise not to identify the source in your story and to not willingly make the identity known beyond your employer. You cannot promise to protect the source from any damages that result if the name does become known, through accident or through court order.

The Post News will not require or advise an employee to balk at the court’s direction. It will provide counsel who can advise the employee and who will seek to persuade the court that the public interest does not require disclosure, or who will plead for a closed hearing.

Sources also should know that reporters must identify their sources to their supervisors. This could include anyone from a bureau News Editor to the President. This does not mean that everyone in the chain of command must know. A staffer in a delicate circumstance may go directly to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

If a source must be disclosed beyond the level of the CEO, senior management will make a concerted effort to advise the originating staffer in advance.

There may be cases where 100 per cent confidentiality is essential on an extremely sensitive news tip and The Post News is unable to confirm the information with other sources. In such a case senior management will consult the originating staffer. If the problem is insurmountable, we will not carry the material.

Good reporting dictates that readers be given as much information as possible about the unnamed source’s background. This helps readers judge why the story is worth their attention. Qualifications ascribed to the unnamed source must never be misleading. A bit of thought should produce a description helpful to the reader yet protective of the source.

It may be necessary to consult the source about the wording of such a description so the story can inform the reader without revealing the identity.

Other details should be clarified with sources. May all material be used, or must some be treated as only for the reporter’s information and guidance (called background or deep background in the jargon of officialdom)? Are direct quotes permissible or only paraphrases?

Some phrases like off the record can have different meanings to different people. Be sure everyone is operating under the same meanings. Consult the editor in some case the CEO when someone proposes unusual restraints.

Some informants may provide information that may be attributed by name, then insist on anonymity for additional information. Attributing this confidential information is tricky: it would be misleading to specify that it came from someone else (**another Finance Department official, who asked for anonymity, said**). Usually it is preferable to rely on phrasing such as It **was also learned.**

Other guides to dealing with unnamed sources:

1. Don’t use the unnamed sources of others as if they were those of The Post News. Unnamed sources in stories picked up from newspapers or broadcast should be specifically tied to the paper or broadcaster: The News quoted an unidentified official in the Energy Department as saying . . .
2. Stories should specify that the source requested anonymity and explain why.
3. Spokespeople and officials should not be confused. A spokesperson puts forward the position of others; an official actually helps formulate that position.
4. Where a fictitious name is being used — for instance, in the case of a juvenile in trouble or a family on welfare — or where a composite person is created to represent a variety of similar individuals, the artifice must be explained promptly. It is a device that cannot be used often without losing impact. The editor must be consulted before it is used.

**INVOLVING THE CEO**

Stories from unnamed sources pack much potential for harm against an individual or an institution. Thoughtless journalism damages careers, personal lives, companies and public faith in the media. It also can hurt The Post New’s reputation and its legal position in any suits that might arise.

Safeguards have been designed to help ensure that major stories with potential for harm get plenty of thoughtful evaluation before being rushed into print.

Bureaus with major news breaks involving unnamed sources and with legal and ethical implications must follow these steps:

1. In consultation with the editor have counsel review the story.
2. Consult with the Editor-in-Chief and a Main Desk editor to answer such questions as:
	1. Who are the sources? How credible are they? What motives exist for a leak of information? Can further verification be obtained?
	2. What public good will the story serve? What are the legal risks? What ethical considerations are involved?
3. Every opportunity to respond must be given to the person or institution involved. Where conscientious effort does not produce a response, the story must detail the attempts made and the reasons why no response was provided.

A final caution: The source who does not want to be named in copy will rarely be available to defend The Post News in the event of court action. This could leave us with no defence and lacking any ability to prove what we distributed for public consumption.

**INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA SOURCES**

The internet and social networking sites such as Facebook, where individuals can exchange information, have changed newsgathering. The internet is usually the first stop for journalists looking for information. It is particularly effective in tracking down people who may have direct knowledge of a news event, identifying news tips or trends, finding new sources and confirming factual background.

The same principles used in vetting a source found any other way must be applied to online sources. But there are extra challenges online. How do you know for sure the person who is answering your emails is the defence minister or the defence minister’s communications chief? Some rules to follow:

1. If the main source for your story refuses to do a personal interview, try to find someone else. Only agree to email interviews as a last resort. Specify in your story that the quotes came from an email, text message or blog – otherwise you leave the impression that you talked to the source in person or by phone.
2. Never use unsolicited emails without checking their source.
3. If an online source claims to be an official spokesperson or representative of an organization, confirm that is the case by calling the organization.
4. Material from websites must be fully credited. Stick to authoritative sites.
5. It has become acceptable to use Facebook and Twitter to give a general sense of how people are reacting to a news event – a modern-day man-in-the-street interview, if you will. If a Facebook page is set up to gather reaction to a news event, then using comments from the page is acceptable.
6. Social media sites should not be used as the sole source of factual information. And since you cannot know for sure who is saying the words, it is best to try to establish direct contact by sending a message through the site and asking for a phone interview before reporting comments from someone claiming to have special knowledge of the story. For example, it is OK to quote general comments from a Facebook site set up to mourn someone who has been murdered, but beware of quoting someone purporting to be the mother of the victim. Ask for a direct interview. If such material must be used, make clear that it is from the site.
7. Information from Wikipedia, which describes itself as a site “anyone can edit,” should be confirmed through another source, such as a government or professional website.

The same copyright rules apply to material from websites as print publications. Material must be fully credited when paraphrased and enclosed in quotation marks when carried word for word. Guard against accidentally cutting and pasting words that are not your own into copy with proper attribution.

**TASTE AND TOUGH CALLS**

The media should do their work with compassion, good taste and respect for individual privacy. On the other hand, some media are only too happy to feed the appetite from some segments of the public for gore and salacious detail.

How far to go in informing the public is a dilemma faced every day.

Do we publish the photos of people jumping off the top floors of the burning World Trade Center? Some news agencies did, arguing that the dramatic illustrations made the enormity of the tragedy real on a human level. Others did not, arguing the pictures were just too horrific.

Were the bounds of decency overstepped by publishing the photos of U.S. soldiers abusing Iraqi prisoners at the Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad?

Was it offensive to publish pictures of the burned bodies of four foreigners hung from a bridge in Iraq? Was there any journalistic justification for carrying photos showing body parts strewn on the ground after the bombing of a train in Spain?

What about republishing an editorial cartoon that many Muslims consider an insult to their religion but that was also the catalyst for violent protests?

These are tough calls, with strongly felt opinions on each side.

At The Post News we approach each tough call thoughtfully, relying on our experience, good taste and news judgment to help us make the right decision. We weigh carefully what the public needs to know and wants to know against what some might consider repugnant.

The Post News acts as both retailer and wholesaler of news, and this can sometimes influence how such decisions are made. We reach the public directly through some of our services, such as our online news reports. Here, our decisions directly affect what is seen and heard and we must act accordingly. We also provide material to newspapers and broadcasters and expect that their staff will apply their own standards before deciding whether to publish it. We must not act as their censors, rejecting material based on standards that are more stringent than they, or their reading public, are willing to accept.

That said, it is our job to select and edit, and we must not abandon journalistic standards and principles on the premise that the final gatekeepers are other editors.

**Some guidelines:**

* 1. An individual’s grief is private. The Post News respects privacy and does not exploit grief to enhance the news.
	2. Before covering any funeral, we must ask ourselves: What possible important information will we gain for the public by intruding on this intensely private event?
	3. Flag questionable stories and photos with a Cautionnote that the material might offend some readers.
1. CAUTION: Note contents in paras 5-8 may be considered offensive.
	1. When dealing with grieving sources, be respectful and understanding. Don’t push your way in. Most people are willing to share their thoughts in situations involving grief, provided there is legitimate public interest. Don’t ask people how they feel about a loss.
	2. Public interest must also be carefully weighed when deciding whether to publish the identity of a victim. Details of some crimes are so graphic that naming the victim can only cause more anguish to the innocent party. This can be especially harmful when publishing the victim’s name serves no public purpose and adds nothing to the story.

**TERRORISM, HOSTAGE-TAKINGS**

No news story is worth someone’s life. Going for the scoop at any cost when lives are at stake belongs to a time long past.

That’s why we treat terrorist incidents and hostage-takings with extreme caution: They are life-and-death situations.

We have a responsibility to report the news but we have an even greater responsibility to ensure that our actions in news-gathering and reporting do not endanger human lives.

We do not want to become an open publicity line for lawbreakers or give unwitting support to destructive or violent causes.

**Some guidelines:**

1. Notify police immediately when you receive a phone call, fax or note about an unpublicized hostage-taking or other threatening act. Make all information available to police.
2. Do not move a story before checking with a editorial supervisors.
3. If the story is approved, consult with The CEO before naming The Post News as the news organization that received the information.
4. Never telephone the terrorists or their hostages without the approval of a editorial supervisors with CEO’s consultation. If approval is received, consult the same editor again before moving a story.
5. Do not detail police or security countermeasures or any other information that might aid the terrorists.
6. We will not tailor or distribute demands or platforms from organizations without CEO approval. The CEO will not give approval without consulting police or government, or both.
7. Translate the language of terrorists and police for readers: use plain English such as **note** and **kill** for **communique** and **execute**.
8. Terrorism is an international phenomenon, and there can be pressure on The Post News to match extensive coverage provided by American and other foreign networks or news agencies. Carefully weigh the need to inform the public against the risk of encouraging more such acts. Consult supervisors about the quantity of material moved, especially on services that go directly to the public, and the detail that should be provided.
9. Check with a the CEO and the editor before moving an initial story dealing with a South African kidnapped and held hostage abroad. The Post News supervisors need to evaluate the specifics of a particular case in the context of a number of complex considerations before deciding when to publish a story and what details to include. As with a domestic hostage-taking, the news service sometimes will know more than it chooses to publish while an incident is continuing. Extra thought and scrutiny is called for in regards to stories to be published while a person is held overseas for political demands or ransom, whether it is Day 1 or Day 50 of the hostage-taking.
10. Photo coverage from South Africa and abroad should be monitored carefully to ensure that terrorists are not being glamorized, that victims are not being endangered and that the incidents are not being sensationalized.
11. News of ongoing hostage-taking or other terrorist incidents in South Africa should not be transmitted on our online services without the approval of the CEO, to guard against the possibility that such reports are being monitored by those involved.
12. Keep newspapers and other clients informed through non-publishable advisories when these policy restraints affect coverage of an incident.

 **Defining terrorism**

For decades the United Nations has been attempting to agree on what exactly the term should mean. The events of Sept. 11, 2001, put the issue on front pages. Slamming hijacked passenger jets into office towers seems to be accepted by almost everyone as terrorism. But there are often discrepancies in the way the media define and interpret other activities. Sometimes the word terrorist is used; other times militant, guerrilla or even freedom fighter. The perceptions of an activity can certainly be influenced by the choice of language – “One person’s terrorist is another person’s freedom fighter,” as the saying goes.

Most definitions of terrorism incorporate the idea that it involves the use of violence or threat of violence to attain political, ideological or religious goals. Some specify that it is perpetuated against civilian, not military, targets. For journalists, the best advice is to be specific in the choice of terms used, and to guard against automatically labelling one side the terrorists, which makes the other side automatically the good guys. We do not shy away from the word terrorist, but we do use it with caution. There are always more neutral words available. Terms such as bombers, gunmen and killers also offer the advantage of being more specific.

 **Scare stories**

The number of terror scare stories took a quantum leap after Sept. 11, 2001 – buildings evacuated, border points closed, flights cancelled, sometimes over such things as a package left unattended. Many of these incidents were not news.

Before treating such a story as news, ask:

1. Is there anything to the scare? If an office building is cleared for a suspicious package that turns out to be someone’s forgotten lunch, then there is no story. If the suspicious package turns out to contain a dangerous substance, then there is likely a story. Wait to see which it is.
2. Is the reaction to a scare such as a bomb threat newsworthy in itself? A plant being evacuated for a short time is not news. An airport that is shut down for hours is.

**CORRECTIONS AND CORRECTIVES**

Mistakes happen. Misinformation gets reported. When it does, the first priority is always to get it fixed, quickly and properly.

Stories exist in continuous publication online for at least 24 hours, though some types of items can be online much longer. Although there are contractual limits on how long websites can archive The Post News content, often these stories are kept online much longer. Unlike a newspaper version, online stories aren't frozen in one form. They can be changed at any time in their life as current online news. This means the window for doing a Writethru to correct a mistake is much larger than the traditional deadline cycle for newspapers.

The Post News uses the following forms to deal with problems or potential problems with stories:

**Writethru Correction** — makes a change in fact or wording.

**Kill** — eliminates a story that is wrong, legally dangerous or damaging.

**Writethru Correction Sub** — replaces a story that has been killed.

**Corrective** — used to catch up with an error that has probably already been published. It is specifically designed to face the error head on and set the record straight frankly. It deals only with information shown to be in error.

**WRITETHRU CORRECTIONS**

If a story that has been filed within the previous 24 hours or so is discovered to have an error, a **Writethru Correction** fixing the story should be sent immediately. This is the best way to correct erroneous details, including online services where the story is still being carried.

Precise details on where and what the error was should be detailed in a **Correction note** that is included with the story, either at the bottom (for online readers) or at the top (for newspaper or broadcast editors). It should be written in a readable style (no journalistic shorthand) that clearly but briefly explains what was wrong with the previous story.

**This is a corrected story. A previous version misspelled Raphael Bruhwiler's last name.**

The only circumstance where a **Writethru Correction** would not automatically move a day after a story originally moved would be if a story with the same slug was developing afresh. A **Corrective** would then likely be the best option. Discuss with the editor

If a story is a standup item with a long shelf life, the time period for filing a Writethru Correction could be extended well beyond 24 hours. Thursday-for-weekend stories and stories sent to wire with advance publication dates could have Writethru Corrections several days after being filed. In these cases, include when the story originally moved:

**This is a corrected version of a story originally published Sept. 17. The earlier story erroneously reported the coldest spot on Pluto was 297 degrees below zero.**

**Legal considerations**

When a story is corrected because it could pose a legal risk, don't include this information in the publishable Correction note. Instead, use a non-publishable Editors note on the story to alert editors that there is a legal issue involved. To avoid compromising the agency’s legal position through use of casual language that may be trying to explain a complex situation in few words, keep the explanation basic and factual.

**LEGAL: Edited for legal reasons to remove identity of driver of pickup truck.**

As well, put the usual publishable Correction note on the story to tell online readers what has changed, but leave out any reference to legal issues:

**This is a corrected story. An earlier version included an incorrect name.**

**Other considerations**

1. Writethru Corrections should be sent with exactly the same coding as the story they are correcting so they are delivered to the same clients who received the incorrect version.
2. An additional tool for making clients aware that an important Correction has moved is to send an advisory, on the regular wires for newspaper and broadcast clients, and by email for web clients:

**EDITORS: Please note the important correction in Dog-Jumps-Fox, 2nd Writethru, moved at 17:15. It corrects earlier copy that erroneously said the fox jumped the dog. In fact it was the dog that jumped the fox.**

Such an advisory should move with the same coding and index categories as the original story did, as well with an Advisories index.

1. Never try to fudge a mistake in a developing story by overtaking it with a Writethru that includes a clarifying statement or skates around the original error completely. All mistakes should be acknowledged with a note in the Correction box that specifies a previous mistake is being fixed.

**KILLS, SUBS**

Sometimes the mistake is of such a serious nature that a Correction Writethru alone is inadequate. In that case The Post News moves a Kill advisory on the wire to newspaper and broadcast clients, and by email to online clients.

**Kills** identify the story by placeline and slug, specify the reason and say whether a substitute story is planned. They should be moved with the same rankings and other metadata as the original story to ensure they reach the same online clients.

**Bus-Crash-Inquest, Kill**

Editors: KILL South Africa Bus-Crash-Inquest for LEGAL reasons. Story names 17-year-old juvenile and says he is charged with auto theft. Will be sub.

**Note:** If there is reason to believe a story might be seriously wrong or legally dangerous, do an immediate Writethru Correction, removing the problematic details, while checks are made. This removes the dangerous material from online services until the facts are known. If the material later turns out to be accurate, another Writethru adding it back in can be moved.

Once a story is killed, a substitute Writethru Correction should move immediately. It is flagged at the top with a non-publishable Editors note explaining the reason for the correction. It must move with the same rankings and codings as the original story. (Newspapers and broadcasters will receive it on an automatically upgraded urgent priority.)

**Bus-Crash-Inquest, 1st Writethru Correction**

**Eds: Subs for South Africa Bus-Crash-Inquest previously killed. It eliminates for LEGAL reasons the name of the 17-year-old juvenile.**

**South Africa — A 17-year-old driver...**

**CLARIFICATIONS**

1. A Clarification is carried when a story is not essentially wrong but is incomplete or may have left room for a possible misunderstanding. It is a brief placelined item that carries the slug **CLARIFICATION** in the version field. Follow the handling steps set out for Correctives.
2. A Clarification should make clear that the original story — or in the case of a pickup, the story distributed by The Post News— left out important information or could be misinterpreted. The Clarification would then provide a fuller version or straighten out the possible misunderstanding.
3. A Clarification would be appropriate, for example, if a story gave only one side of an issue, or if the wording could be read two ways, or if someone felt unfairly treated, even though there were no errors of fact.

**Suspensions, Clarification**

**Clarification on story March 15 about suspension of municipal workers in Tshwane Municipality.**

Tshwane Municipality — The Post News reported March 15 that Tshwane city council had ordered two municipal employees suspended from their jobs for going fishing when they should have been inspecting sewage lines.

The story may have left the impression that the suspended workers had not disputed council’s action. In fact, both workers have been supported by their union and are contesting the suspensions.

They maintain they were on accumulated leave when they were spotted with fishing equipment on the banks of the Red River just outside Tshwane.