

# Annenberg Media Ethics and Guidelines

# What are get these / where do I find them?

- Standards and principles for all members of Annenberg Media.
- What defines us as a media organization.
- Inspired by premiere news outlets: e.g. AP News and Buzzfeed
- Find our full principles here on the Annenberg Media website:  
<http://interactives.uscannenbergmedia.com/projects/about-annenberg-media/ethics.html>



The screenshot shows the homepage of USC Annenberg Media. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links to "Our Ethics", "Our Funding & Oversight", "How We Write", "Join Our Team", and "Submit a Correction". Below the navigation bar is a large red banner with white text that reads "This is what guides us." and "Our ethics policies help ensure that our reporting is trustworthy and fair." Below the banner is a search bar with the placeholder "Type what you're looking for..." and a "Reset" button. To the right of the search bar is a sidebar titled "About our ethics" which contains a paragraph of text about the source of their policies. The main content area below the banner is currently empty.

# By the end of this presentation, you should be able to answer the following:

- Can you be political and be a member of Annenberg Media?
- Does Annenberg Media report on suicide?
- Can you swear in an Annenberg Media piece?
- Do you identify people by race, age in an Annenberg Media piece?
- Do we publish articles that USC News sends to us as a positive piece of PR?
- Does Annenberg Media publish user-generated content?
- **AND MORE**

# BASIC PRINCIPLES

# Anonymous Sources

Only quote anonymous sources when it's absolutely necessary. In general, all quotes should have attribution. If a source does request anonymity for the purpose of safety or another reason, first consult with your editor as to if the story warrants it.

If you both decide that the source should remain anonymous, this should always be explained in the piece you have published.

Some examples of where an anonymous source is necessary would be those regarding **sexual assault, violence, harassment**, or a story that would put the source in **imminent danger**.

# Corrections, Clarification and Deletion

- All corrections to factual or grammatical errors require an explanation.
- These explanations should be just as visible as the corrections to the piece: i.e. being written into an article, in a post's description or read on a podcast.
- For Twitter, corrections will be issued in a comment to the incorrect Tweet.

# Conflicts of interest

If you're in a class, organization, club, team or some other form of group on campus, don't report a story about them - especially not one for personal gain or recognition.

We're all excited about the work that we do here on campus, but understand when a story is a conflict of interest -- there are many more on our staff who are available to report on the same story if need be.

If there is an unavoidable conflict of interest or personal connection to a story, we will say so in the piece.

# Outside Reporting / Requests for Media

- Do not accept someone else's story for submission just because they've submitted it -- make sure the piece is newsworthy and fits on our platform.
  - Annenberg Media is not a platform for professors to promote projects or USC to run PR campaigns. Again, our content is for our audience.
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- None of our raw footage should be given to another organization or person without proper vetting.
  - If a major news outlet (NBC, CBS, etc.) requests raw footage from us, the request will be analyzed on a case-by-case basis and must come with some type of accreditation to USC Annenberg Media.

# Privacy Rights

- In many cases, **we protect the privacy of minors** who may not understand why they're being filmed or what we do, which means not publishing their names or faces.
- We also respect the privacy of minors who are either accused, or were witnesses to, a crime.
- For non-minor individuals involved in a crime, be as specific as possible when referring to them. Focus on the information that is known, especially if the investigation is ongoing -- e.g. "John Doe was arrested **on suspicion** of robbery."
- Always follow up on cases where someone has been either charged/acquitted.
- In some cases, take extra care to protect victim identities (i.e. sexual assault)

# Profanity

- Don't swear in headlines.
- You may use profane words in a quote or if there is a good reason for it.
- No images or video will be shown or gratuitous violence, nudity, or other harsh content.
- Don't use the n-word or c-word in any context - spoken or written - ever.
- Some exceptions may be made for works of art or footage of human rights abuses.

# Politics

- Annenberg Media can't interfere with any political ambitions or contributions that students may have outside of their positions in the newsroom.
- Annenberg Media, however, will never endorse political candidates - including for student government.
- Following our Conflict of Interests policy, students should not report on candidates or issues that they have a stake in.
- If a reporter does have some kind of interest or involvement in a political event / representative, we will say so and clearly explain what that connection is.

# Race, Ethnicity or Other Descriptions of Identity (I)

- We do not focus on an individual's identity unless it is central or pertinent to the story -- e.g. "the first black, gay country music star"
- These include descriptions of race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, sexual identity, gender, disability and immigration status.
- Often, for suspects sought by police, race or identity will be used to describe the suspect. This information can be reported, but be careful: this can sometimes defame a large group of people without providing helpful information. Err on the side of omission.

# Race, Ethnicity or Other Descriptions of Identity (II)

- From AP:
  - Gender and sex are not synonymous. *Gender* refers to a person's social identity while *sex* refers to their biological characteristics.
  - Refer to people by the pronouns they prefer.
  - Do not use “transgender” as a noun - refer to someone as “transgender” or use the term “transgendered”
  - Capitalize the proper names of nationalities: Arab, African, American, Caribbean, Caucasian, Chinese, French, etc.
    - Keep “black” and “white” lowercase.
  - African-American is acceptable for an American black person who is of African descent. Black is also acceptable. Asian-American is acceptable for a person of Asian birth or descent who lives in America. When possible, refer to someone's country of origin (e.g. Filipino-American), but always ask the person for their preference. Be more specific when possible (e.g. Cuban, Puerto-Rican, Brazilian, etc.)

# Race, Ethnicity or Other Descriptions of Identity (II)

For more info:

**Guide to thoughtful language:**

[http://resources.uscannenbergmedia.com/2018/08/guide-to-thoughtful-lan  
guage/](http://resources.uscannenbergmedia.com/2018/08/guide-to-thoughtful-language/)

# Suicide

**Anthony Bourdain's death is part of a disturbing trend in the US that's getting much worse**

- Bad reporting on suicide can lead to more lives lost.
- Reporting on suicide can have the danger of inspiring others.
- We will not report on suicide unless it involves someone important to the campus community.
- If the person is not already well-known, we will take extra steps to protect their identity.
- We will not report on the nature of the suicide.
- If you or any of your reporters are experiencing distress or mental health issues, please talk to an Annenberg advisor or editor.
- Do not compromise your own health or mental well-being for reporting on a story.
- Help create a mental health environment where other students feel safe.

# User-generated content

- Annenberg Media will sometimes incorporate user-generated content -- i.e. content that was produced by people outside of our newsroom -- into our stories.
- Always credit the originators of the content and provide transparency to our audience as to how the footage was obtained.
- Only access public posts or USG content.

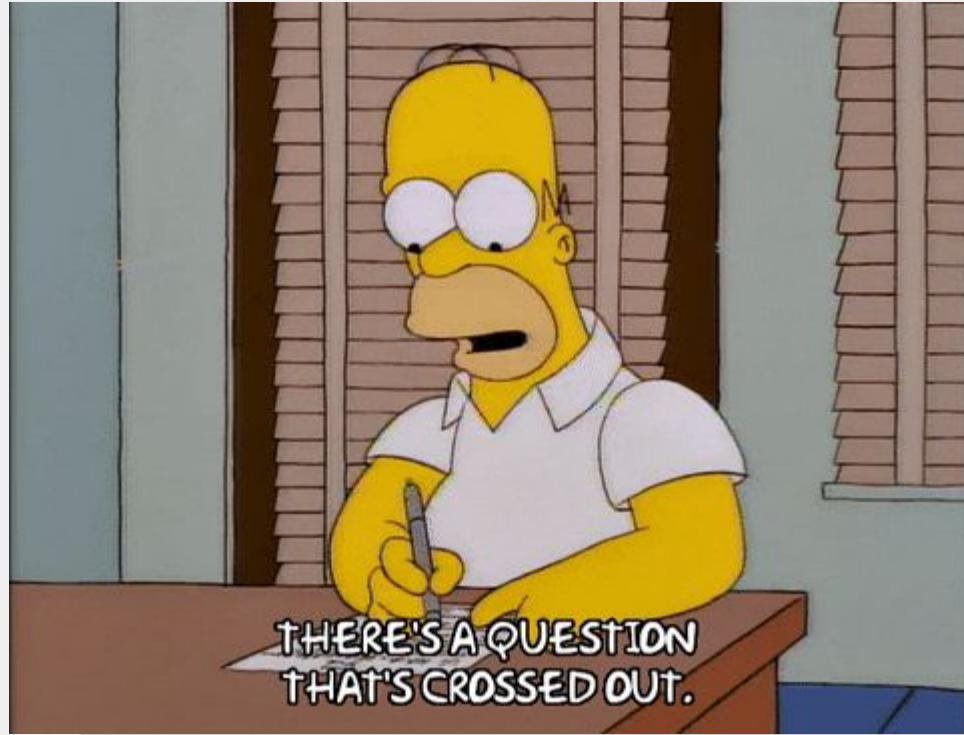
# Verification (I)

- **We only publish information that is true or comes from valid sources -- i.e. experts, officials, or primary source documents.**
- Rule of thumb: cite information from **three or more sources** in a story.
- Always attribute breaking news information.
- Able to use information from AP News or The LA Times when the news is pertinent to our audience. Again, attribute.
- Only use all other reporting to verify information, and do not use reporting from another student publication.
- If USC issues a response to an accusation that we cannot verify, that response is reportable and may be newsworthy on its own.
- **It is better to report less information that is accurate than more information that may or may not be true.**

# Verification -- sexual assault accusations

- Exercise extreme caution in instances of sexual assault accusations.
- Use language carefully -- be sure to not use words that imply guilt or accusations when neither are apparent.
- Only report on sexual assault when the accused is a well-known figure or we have done our best to verify the accusers' accounts.
- In some cases, we must do our best to protect the identity of those involved.
- If someone is arrested, their name is public information and can be published, if newsworthy.
- Whenever possible, our reporting should incorporate information from official sources such as court documents and info from law enforcement

# QUIZ



**Can you be  
political and be a  
member of  
Annenberg Media?**

**Kinda.**

**Does Annenberg  
Media report on  
suicide?**

**No, except in  
certain cases.**

**Do we publish  
articles that USC  
News sends us for  
PR?**

No.

**How would you identify  
the following person:**

James Wu was born in  
China, but lives in America,  
and his biology at birth does  
not match his gender.

**Is identity  
important to the  
story? If so, ask  
him. Otherwise, his  
name is James Wu.**

# DONE!

