

# The NewStandard Contributors' Handbook

Second Edition (2006)

by the PeoplesNetWorks Collective

<b>Part One: About <i>The NewStandard</i></b> .....	<b>3</b>
1.1: Why We Exist.....	3
1.2: How we differ from corporate media .....	5
1.3: What We Publish .....	6
<b>Part Two: Journalistic Principles</b> .....	<b>8</b>
2.1 Public vs. Private Interest .....	8
2.2 Public Interest vs. Public Fascination.....	9
2.3 Familiarity and Distance .....	9
2.4 Conflicts of Interest.....	9
2.5 Plagiarism .....	10
2.6 Libel .....	11
2.7 Correcting Errors .....	12
<b>Part Three: Pre-Reporting.....</b>	<b>14</b>
3.1 Background Research .....	14
3.2 The Query .....	14
3.3 Discussion with Primary Editor .....	15
3.4 Finding a Focus .....	15
3.5 Choosing Sources .....	15
<b>Part Four: The Newsgathering Process .....</b>	<b>17</b>
4.1 General Guideposts .....	17
4.2 Interviews .....	18
4.3 Documentary Research .....	24
<b>Part Five: Putting Together the Article .....</b>	<b>26</b>
5.1 Form and Structure .....	26
5.2 Accuracy .....	29
5.3 Choosing Whom to Quote and How.....	30
5.4 How to Use Data.....	35
5.5 Presenting Quotes in an Article .....	35
5.6 Attribution .....	38
<b>Part Six: Other Content Guidelines.....</b>	<b>41</b>
6.1 News Reports .....	41
6.2 Feature Articles .....	41
6.3 Media Analysis .....	41
6.5 Blog Entries .....	42
<b>Part Seven: What to Expect from the Editing Process.....</b>	<b>43</b>
7.1 Direction .....	43
7.2 Reviewing Drafts .....	43
7.3 Fact-checking .....	44
7.4 Content Integrity .....	44
7.5 Decision to hold or reject a story.....	44
7.6 Rigorous Defense .....	44
7.7 Metadata Influence .....	45

# Part One: About *The NewStandard*

- 1.1 Why We Exist
- 1.2 How We Differ from Corporate Media
- 1.3 What We Publish

---

## 1.1: Why We Exist

*The NewStandard* is an independent online news source that provides frequent, primary-source coverage of events and policies in the United States. It is published by the PeoplesNetWorks Collective, a nonprofit communications organization. *The NewStandard* was created according to the following principles:

### **News should be non-profit**

Providing news is a service that should not be driven by greed. We use all revenue to pay our staff and contributors and expand our ability to produce news and organizing tools. We do not exploit our readers, contributors or staff for anyone's profit or political gain.

### **News should be independent**

We are committed to keeping our news advertisement-free. Because none of our funding is contingent on advertisements, we have no incentive to modify our news to target a particular class of consumers. Similarly, we have no investors. *The NewStandard's* revenue comes only from reader donations. That way we ensure our primary motivation remains serving our readers with relevant news.

### **News should be relevant**

*The NewStandard* publishes stories that expose wrongdoing and inequities and hold government, corporations, and other special interest groups accountable to the public; it provides news and information to help readers understand issues of public interest and work for change.

### **News should be accessible**

We are aware that news over the Internet is inaccessible to the portion of the population without Net access, yet we can't now afford to mass produce and distribute *The NewStandard* in print and continue to pay our writers and editors for their work. With our few resources, we see the Internet as the most cost-effective way to reach the largest number of people. Nevertheless, our long-term goal is to create a paper version of TNS and make our content fully accessible to people with visual impairments. We encourage grassroots organizations and local print media to use print-outs of articles as stuffers in newsletters or local newspapers. In addition, we encourage other nonprofit publications to reprint content from *The NewStandard*, and ask only strict adherence to our reprint policy in return.

## **News should be affordable**

All of the news content published on *The NewStandard* website is free and open to the public. As an incentive to our donors, we offer a few “perks” to paying members, but these are accessory items such as e-store credits and a weekend edition containing non-news content.

## **News should motivate**

Modern news outlets treat their audiences as objects. Readers and viewers are expected to passively absorb information sandwiched between offensive advertisements and almost invariably are made to feel disconnected from the very events being described to them. We believe news should be delivered in a context that enables people to be the makers of news instead of mere information sponges. With that in mind, PeoplesNetWorks strives to provide connections between important current events and the people and groups working for social change.

## **Workplaces should be empowering for everyone involved**

The PeoplesNetWorks Collective operates on the principles of *participatory economics*, an organizational model designed to promote equity, solidarity, diversity and self-management. These principles include:

**Payment based on effort and sacrifice.** We do not offer pay hierarchies based on job title, investment capital, educational background, race, age, gender or other essentially arbitrary criteria commonly rewarded or penalized in the corporate world. We believe in equal pay for equal effort. All collective members receive the same salary for comparable work (see “Balanced Job Complexes,” next).

For journalists, this means that our compensation rate for articles is based on the effort that goes into gathering and writing a story. Some factors that go into determining the compensation rate include: number of sources consulted, risks taken and turn-around time. All full-time collective members employed by PeoplesNetWorks are paid the same salary for comparable hours and types of work.

**Balanced job complexes.** We ensure that everyone in the staff collective does a proportionate amount of various types of work, including managerial, editorial, clerical and janitorial.

**Collective and empowered decision-making.** We use democratic procedures that ensure each staff member has decision-making power reflective of how much a given decision impacts them. For freelance writers this comes in the form of significant control over their own manuscripts and venues for feedback, suggestions, and policy influence in the overall organization.

**Diversity.** We value and actively seek the participation of people from a variety of backgrounds and perspectives, and our collective processes foster outcomes

that appeal to a broad range of audiences. We seek to publish the work of as diverse a group of writers as possible.

---

## **1.2: How we differ from corporate media**

In today's profit-dominated world, most news is controlled by commercial or governmental interests and produced by hierarchical capitalist methods. The result is inaccurate or irrelevant news stories, frustrated journalists, and a misinformed and disempowered public. Often, the corporate and governmental bias in mainstream news is covered up with claims of journalistic objectivity, obscuring public understanding of how governmental and corporate interests affect the news.

*The NewStandard* is designed to combat these trends. All news outlets have biases. The difference between us and other daily sources is that ours are explicit. Rather than hide behind the label of "objectivity" while serving the interests of investors and advertisers, our mission is to portray news from the perspective of people who are impacted by it.

*The NewStandard* is organized so as to foster the creation of content that is both as accurate and transparent as possible and conveys in-depth understanding of public interest issues. It is also geared to maximize journalist empowerment by giving journalists as much control over their work and the final product as possible.

We offer a personal touch, a level of interaction and a kind of appreciation you're not going to get at a corporate shop, and we're firmly committed to maintaining these attributes as we grow. Below is a summary of benefits we offer or will offer when funding is available to journalists and artists who contribute to *The NewStandard*:

### **Valued relationships with publication staff**

Everyone in the PeoplesNetWorks Collective is an editor, a designer, a secretary, a janitor and a writer. We respect our contributors as the core of our enterprise. We give you the time, attention and resources you need to make sure your story is presented as clearly and accurately as possible while maintaining your voice.

### **Pay that values effort beyond word counts**

To the best of our ability, we offer remuneration for writers that reflects the effort we know you invest in your work. Without placing judgments on what products are "better" than others, as a general rule we pay more for work that requires more effort. Our unique invoicing system enables you to tell us how much research went into your articles..

### **An audience that respects and appreciates your independence**

Our readers appreciate that our news content is not compromised by corporate or government interests. They want their news just the way you want to provide it: No sugar-coating or whitewashing, no references to what celebrities think, and no pro-corporate or pro-state biases. Our readership wants news that matters, not news that is "safe" or "palatable."

## Quality editing and proofreading

No fewer than two editors work on every article we publish, and the editing process entails at least three stages of revision. We don't expect writers to produce perfect content, but we will work toward it collectively in a way that is rewarding and educational for all involved.

## Affirmative action

We consider retaining a diverse and dynamic group of contributors to be a crucial element in maintaining a quality publication. Therefore, we have established policies favoring content from voices marginalized elsewhere. People of color, youth, women, LGBTQ individuals and people with disabilities are given special consideration.

## Union non-interference

*The NewStandard* is pro-union. We will not interfere with any attempts among freelancers to organize as a union or otherwise collectively bargain.

---

## 1.3: What We Publish

As a public advocate, TNS strives to expose unreported or underreported news. Our coverage includes all topics that help the public make better decisions and foster understanding of socially relevant issues.

### Hard news

The bulk of *The NewStandard's* content is hard news – meaning strict reporting that does not contain writers' commentary or analysis. This type of content falls into three categories: news articles, feature stories, and news reports.

**News Reports.** These are articles covering current events that are generally based on primary documents, press releases and other news articles. They are usually about 200-1600 words in length. *TNS* currently pays between \$15 and \$100 for news reports depending on the number of sources consulted and other factors. (See Parts 3-5 and Section 6.1 for more information on writing news reports for *TNS*.)

**News Articles.** These are full-length pieces, usually about 800-1600 words in length, covering current events. News articles are based on first-hand sources (interviews, direct access to documents, etc) and field research. They are compensated at higher rates than news reports. *TNS* currently pays between \$80 and \$250 for news articles, depending on the number of sources consulted and other factors. (See Parts 3-5 for more information on writing news articles for *TNS*.)

**Feature Stories.** Between 1600-2600 words in length, features take in-depth looks at subjects and are often based on investigative reporting. They are often accompanied by sidebars, visual aids or photos. Whenever possible, features cover otherwise untouched stories from unique angles. *TNS* currently pays up to

\$250 for feature stories, depending on the number of sources consulted and other factors. (See Parts 3-5 and Section 6.2 for more information on writing features for TNS.)

## **Editorial content and analysis**

*The NewStandard* is primarily a news publication, rather than a commentary or analysis publication. It currently produces little opinion-based content, with the exception of media analysis, blog entries by journalists and staff, and daily cartoons (most of which are syndicated reprints).

**Blog Entries.** The *TNS* staff often uses its blog to give readers a “behind-the-scenes” look at the publication. Blog entries range from updates about the organization’s growth and progress, to explanations of editorial policy and its implementation, to more general analysis of media issues. As a journalist, you are encouraged to submit blog posts about the articles you write or about writing for *TNS* more generally. *TNS* pays writers \$5–15 for each blog entry produced to accompany an article or report. (See section 6.5 for guidelines about blogging on the *TNS* website)

**Media Analyses.** While not the focus on our publication, *TNS* occasionally publishes analysis that evaluates and dissects news published by for-profit, governmental and alternative outlets, critiquing them from a truly independent perspective. Media analysis pieces should be between 600-1000 words long. (See section 6.3 for more guidelines on writing media analysis)

## **Images**

**Cartoons.** Recognizing the value of editorial cartoons, *The NewStandard* runs several every week. Most cartoons are reviewed on a case-by-case basis, but we are developing regular relationships with a handful of cartoonists. *TNS* pays \$5 for cartoon reprints and \$50 for original work.

**Photographs.** *TNS* is not currently accepting freelance photography submissions, though reporters are encouraged to submit photography along with their stories. These photographs can be taken by the reporter or solicited from other sources and published with permission. *TNS* cannot currently pay for photography.

## Part Two: Journalistic Principles

- 2.1 Public vs. Private Interest
- 2.2 Public Interest vs. Public Fascination
- 2.3 Familiarity and Distance
- 2.4 Conflicts of Interest
- 2.5 Plagiarism
- 2.6 Libel
- 2.7 Correcting Errors

Though many news outlets and journalists claim to be objective conveyers of the truth, *The NewStandard* does not claim objectivity. *The NewStandard* recognizes that journalists and editors of any news publication continuously make choices about which stories to pursue; which facts, quotes, and sources to include in a story; and which to exclude. In addition, reporters and editors make decisions about the placement and weight given to these facts and perspectives, the length and placement a story deserves, etc.

Therefore, as a substitute for false objectivity claims, we encourage fairness, transparency and accuracy. Readers should know where the information in a story came from and should be able to trust that the writers and editors took great care to include all relevant voices and to avoid misleading or manipulating them with inaccurate or insufficient information.

Below are guidelines for how to make the choices that affect the story's balance, including an article's context, focus and sources.

---

### 2.1 Public vs. Private Interest

When weighing the interests of different stakeholders, you should emphasize the interests of those most affected by the policies or events in the story. As a general rule, *The NewStandard* covers news from an angle that represents the public interest.

The public interest does not include interests that cater to the motives of private individuals or institutions. On the other hand, we recognize that there is no absolute definition of the public interest and believe that our role as a news organization is to stimulate debate and dialogue on what constitutes society's best interests.

Adopting a public-interest perspective is not the same as advocating for a specific policy, action or cause. Instead, it means weighing generally important issues that have discernable implications for the public.

For example, *The NewStandard* focuses heavily on poverty and firmly believes poverty is bad. *TNS* does not, however, take specific stances on particular reforms or other changes,



but instead reports on policies, actions and objectives with an eye for their relative impact on the alleviation or elimination of poverty.

---

## 2.2 Public Interest vs. Public Fascination

The term “public interest” does not mean “what members of the public finds interesting.” Human-interest stories often masquerade as public interest in modern news journalism. They are a commercial mechanism that runs counter to the public interest. In every *NewStandard* news story, the public impact of an event or issue must remain unobscured by attention-grabbing angles or side issues.

For instance, when covering a coal-mine disaster, journalists should focus on the systemic issues of workplace safety and employer accountability over the dramatic moment-to-moment developments of the tragedy. As real and important as the specific story is, it is best covered by local media, whereas the big picture is what truly bears meaning for the public at large.

---

## 2.3 Familiarity and Distance

You should choose subject matter with which you are reasonably familiar or that you have the ability to comprehensively research during the reporting process.

While complete objectivity is impossible, to the extent that it is necessary to uphold the highest standard of fairness, you should leave maximal distance between yourself and your subject matter. Do not insert yourself into stories or try to influence the news. Your role is to be a conduit for public concerns and voices and to filter information and facts.

---

## 2.4 Conflicts of Interest

In order to uphold the highest standards of fairness and accuracy and to maintain reader trust, you should make sure your independence is not compromised by any conflicts of interest. Even the appearance of a conflict of interest can undermine an important news story, so when you suspect such conflict or appearance, discuss the matter with your assignment editor.

### **To avoid conflicts of interest, you should:**

- Remain free of associations and activities that may compromise integrity or undermine credibility.
- Be wary of sources offering information for favors or money and avoid bidding for source material.
- Refuse fees, gifts and personal favors from sources.
- Avoid special services or treatment from sources unless essential to the reporting of the article. Any such treatment – including housing, transportation or side-arrangements irrespective of gathering the story – must be disclosed to your assignment editor who may at the discretion of the editorial collective reveal the relationship to readers. You must also disclose

to your assignment editor any personal or financial interests that potentially present a conflict of interest when covering a story.

TNS recognizes that there will sometimes be unavoidable conflicts of interest. Generally, TNS prohibits journalists from writing about institutions (political parties, labor unions, social organizations, etc) where they are employees, active members or consultants. In the case that such relationships exist, such information should be disclosed to the assignment editor before you begin pursuing a story.

Ex. For a story reported by a person active in the low-power radio movement, the writer would notify editors about this relationship during the query process, discuss guidelines for reporting conduct, and add a note such as the following note to the final article: *The reporter is a member of the Columbus Community Radio Foundation, a non-profit media advocacy group that is launching a low-power radio station in Columbus, Ohio.*

**A pre-existing viewpoint is not a conflict of interest.** The reporting process will not necessarily be compromised just because you have strong beliefs and opinions. If you are aware of holding a previously formed stance on the issue; are open-minded during the news-gathering process and consider positions and claims from diverse perspectives; and take care to test claims by all parties against evidence, then you can report fairly on that topic.

**At any point in the process, you should bring any questions or doubts you have about your ability to fairly and accurately portray a topic to your assignment editor's attention.**

---

## 2.5 Plagiarism

Plagiarism -- the stealing of phrases or quotations without due attribution -- runs counter to the founding principles of *TNS* and is not tolerated.

Below are guidelines for avoiding plagiarism, adapted from the *Detroit Free Press* ethics guide (available at:

<http://www.journalism.org/resources/tools/ethics/plagiarism/excerpts.asp?from=print>):

- When material is used in a story from sources other than the writer's own reporting, those sources -- other publications, previous *TNS* stories, radio or TV newscasts, etc. -- should be indicated in the story.
- *TNS* articles sometimes use quotes gathered by other reporters and publications, when we lack the resources to carry out in-house research and the content adds a critical element to the story. In this event, proper attribution is required, and should follow this model:

Ex. "This is a logistical nightmare," County Supervisor Lou Correa told the LA Times.

- Using someone else's work without attribution – whether deliberately or out of carelessness – is a serious ethical breach. Journalists should be alert to the potential for even small, unintentional acts of plagiarism. This is especially true for the reporting of complicated stories involving many sources, but it is also imperative in cases of banal narrative based heavily on common source material.
- Borrowing ideas from elsewhere, however, is considered fair journalistic practice. Problems arise in the gray areas between the acceptable borrowing of inspiration and the unacceptable stealing of another's work. Our standards:

Words directly quoted from sources other than the writer's own reporting elsewhere in *The NewStandard* must be attributed. That may mean noting the material came from a previous *TNS* story, from a television interview, from a magazine or book or wire service report.

When other work is used as the source of ideas or stylistic inspiration, the result must be clearly your own work. In other words, what is acceptable to learn from another are the elements of style and approach: tone, rhythm, vocabulary, and topic ideas. What is unacceptable are specific words, phrases, and images.

---

## 2.6 Libel

False statements about individuals can sometimes lead to libel and slander accusations and litigation. The Media Law Resource Center (MLRC) provides the following definitions of libel and slander. (More information can be found at: [http://www.medialaw.org/Content/NavigationMenu/Public\\_Resources/Libel\\_FAQs/Libel\\_FAQs.htm](http://www.medialaw.org/Content/NavigationMenu/Public_Resources/Libel_FAQs/Libel_FAQs.htm))

Libel and slander are legal claims for false statements of fact about a person that are printed, broadcast, spoken or otherwise communicated to others. Libel generally refers to statements or visual depictions in written or other permanent form, while slander refers to oral statements and gestures. The term defamation is often used to encompass both libel and slander.

In order for the person about whom a statement is made to recover for libel, the false statement must be defamatory, meaning that it actually harms the reputation of the other person, as opposed to being merely insulting or offensive.

The statement(s) alleged to be defamatory must also be a false statement of fact. Since name-calling, hyperbole, or exaggerated and heated words cannot be proven true or false, they cannot be the subject of a libel or slander claim.

The defamatory statement must also have been made with fault. The extent of the fault depends primarily on the status of the plaintiff. Public figures, such as government officials, celebrities, well-known individuals, and people involved in

specific public controversies, are required to prove actual malice, a legal term which means the defendant knew his statement was false or recklessly disregarded the truth or falsity of his statement. In general, most jurisdictions require private individuals to show only that the defendant was negligent, that he failed to act with due care in the situation.

---

## 2.7 Correcting Errors

The correction of factual errors and clarification of misleading content are among the most important responsibilities of *TNS* reporters and editors – second perhaps only to the accurate reporting of facts in the first place.

**Any factual published error, regardless of its nature or the means by which editors learn of it, will be corrected in all existing versions of the article.** A note at the top of the article will state that there has been a correction, and the correction itself will be explained at the bottom of the article and in a separate, permanently available archive of corrections made to all *TNS* stories. Separately, in the case of major errors, the correction will be prominently displayed on the website's front page for no less than six days.

An editor not involved directly with the error, will review the correction to help ensure its accuracy.

Journalists should be receptive to complaints about inaccuracies and follow up on them. Upon discovery of a possible error, reporters should immediately inform the appropriate editor – be it the assignment editor for major corrections or the copy editor for misprints, misquotes, improper paraphrases, or other line-level problems.

Errors in nuance, context or tone will, when appropriate, be corrected with published notes. In cases where editors disagree with a reasonable critique about an error, they will provide the critic the opportunity to write a letter to the editor.

Published corrections fall into three categories, broadly defined here but subject to discretion and amendment by editors:

- **Major changes** result from errors that substantially impact the tone or informational value of an article or passage. These include but are not limited to misrepresentations of the facts of a story; misrepresentation or misidentification of sources; and failures to disclose conflicts of interest or otherwise relevant relationships between sources and the reporter.
- **Minor changes** correct errors that are more technical in nature and do not substantially impact the tone or informational value of an article or passage. These include but are not limited to significant errors in dates, names, statistics, mathematics or typography that may confuse the reader or improperly illustrate otherwise accurate reporting.

- **Clarifications** are notes that the editors issue to address post-publishing changes in the text that do not directly relate to specific reporting errors per se, but which clarify language that could have led to substantial misinterpretation or misinformation among readers.
- **Minute errors** that do not require posted corrections may include: minor typographical errors, minor statistical rounding errors, spelling corrections, stylistic and grammatical changes, etc.

Article texts should not be changed unilaterally, even for minor amendments. When an author or editor wants to change the text of an article to address a minute error and has access to the site's content management system, the proposed change must first be vetted by one of the editors who worked on the article.

The decision on whether to post a formal correction ultimately rests with the editors.

## Part Three: Pre-Reporting

- 3.1 Background Research
- 3.2 The Query
- 3.3 Discussion with Primary Editor
- 3.4 Finding a Focus
- 3.5 Choosing Sources

---

### 3.1 Background Research

When you begin looking into a story idea, long before writing the story or even choosing its exact focus, seek general comprehension of the overarching issues and historical context. Much of this background information will not be included in the story, but being conscious of it will facilitate the news gathering process, instill confidence in your editors and strengthen the final product of your reporting.

---

### 3.2 The Query

A query is a story proposal that a journalist submits to the editors containing:

1. **A brief description of the topic, context and focus/angle** of the proposed article. This will be based on the background research.
2. **A proposed nutgraph:** a paragraph that summarizes the main points the article will cover. (It is likely that this nutgraph will change during the reporting process, but it is helpful to start thinking about it ahead of time.) The nutgraph is best placed near the beginning of the article, but does not have to lead the article.

3.

Ex. 1. The controversy over torture is approaching an equally controversial milestone as Congress and the White House finalize legislation governing the treatment of captives held in US custody. While celebrating the so-called 'torture ban' as a legislative victory, civil liberties groups are questioning caveats attached to the final version that could condone or even encourage abusive practices under government authority.

Ex. 2. After three days of deliberations, a California jury yesterday found Wal-Mart guilty of illegally denying workers lunch breaks. The jury awarded \$172 million to about 116,000 current and former employees of the retail behemoth after plaintiffs argued that the company had violated their rights on some 8 million occasions.

4. **A list of potential sources.** This can include actual names of people or documents, or general descriptions of the types of sources you plan to seek out.

5. **A proposed word count**, which should fall within the specific guidelines for the content item type (report, article, feature).
6. **A proposed deadline.**
7. **The date you plan to begin reporting.**
8. **Any other relevant information**, such as potential conflicts of interest, travel needs, expenses, etc.

---

### 3.3 Discussion with Primary Editor

A “primary editor” or “assignment editor” is assigned to each story before the news-gathering process begins. That editor will discuss the query with other editors and refine the query with you before the reporting process begins. The primary editor is your main contact with the editorial committee from that point forward.

---

### 3.4 Finding a Focus

The focus of the story is a conscious decision. Together, you and the editors must decide on the main topic and angle of the story and choose the perspectives that will be most prominent. When determining a story’s focus, it will be helpful to ask: *Who does the policy or event most affect and how? What are the most recent developments in the story? What voices or angles have not been represented in other media coverage of this issue?* Your initial ideas about the issue and the story’s focus may change in response to newly uncovered information or new developments. All changes in focus must be discussed with your assignment editor.

---

### 3.5 Choosing Sources

When seeking information for a story, you must speak with a variety of stakeholders and convey contrasting positions and perspectives judiciously.

When deciding which sources to consult for an article, you should consider first and foremost who is most affected by the issue or situation at the center of the story.

### Interview Subjects

- **Protagonists.** Whenever possible, you should interview people most affected by the issue or event.
- **Advocates.** This category includes but is not limited to:
  - People personally connected to those most affected who speak on their behalf or about their individual situation (e.g., a family member or legal counsel).

- People who work at organizations or who are involved in social movements that serve or represent the interests of those most affected and provide insight into the social context of the topic.
- **Independent Analysts.** It will often be useful to consult people knowledgeable about the topic, but whose interests are mainly focused on study and public education, rather than direct interaction with or assistance to the people most affected (e.g., researchers at universities and think tanks)
- **Institutional Actors.** This includes people who represent the institutions responsible for the policies, activities, situations and/or the events that are the focus of the story.
- **Witnesses.** These are people who observe an event or are personally familiar with one or more individuals or events at the center of the story, but did not participate in or impact the news being covered.
- **Participants.** These are people who take part in an event.
- **Experiential subjects.** It may sometimes be useful to interview people who can provide insight into how a similar situation or issue affected them or their community, class or demographic.

The above are general definitions. You may find some overlap among different categories of sources. Moreover, it will not always be feasible or helpful to consult every type. For more information on how to evaluate and present information from different sources, see section 5.3 on using sources.

## Documents/data

In addition to interviewing live subjects, you will often need to consult documents to provide the words of people unavailable for interview, or to provide evidence and more precise information than could (or really should) be gathered through a personal interview. Some examples include:

- written testimony
- legal documents
- transcripts
- research and studies
- audio/video media
- legislative documents
- public records
- internal documents
- photographs
- press releases
- other news reports



## Part Four: The Newsgathering Process

- 4.1 General Guideposts
- 4.2 Interviews
- 4.3 Documentary Research

---

### 4.1 General Guideposts

#### **Do not prioritize speed over accuracy**

The integrity of the information we present is *The NewStandard's* highest priority. While deadlines and efficiency are important considerations, at no point in the reporting process can you sacrifice accuracy or fairness simply in the interest of speed or convenience. *TNS* editors prioritize “getting the facts straight” over “making deadline.” As such, the gathering of news requires a balance of quick thinking and careful deliberation.

#### **Approach the article with an open mind.**

Do not seek out only information that corroborates your preconceived notions. Do not manipulate the information you receive to fit with a desired outcome or any kind of pre-determined agenda.

#### **Go straight to the source**

To the greatest extent possible, gather news straight from the people or institutions at the center of the story. When researching for context and statistics, find original documents. Secondary sources – such as other news articles or commentaries – are often useful places to look for information, but they should only substitute for primary research and original insights when the sources used are unavailable to you due to time, access or other constraints. Any information gleaned from secondary sources must be tracked back to the original source or corroborated with another secondary source, and the citation properly attributed.

#### **Question authority and maintain skepticism**

Go beyond information offered through official or commercial channels. To avoid becoming a government or corporate stenographer, you should make every effort to take a critical view of the statements and activities of public officials and corporate leaders. Access to information from such a figure or institution should not govern the reporter's choice of how or whether to cover a story.

Similarly, question all information from sources and look for corroborating and contradictory evidence, hidden biases and ulterior motives. Remember that all of your sources will see you as a conduit to convey their views and agenda to the broader public. Your job is to resist becoming a tool for any source, no matter how sympathetic you may be to their cause or interests, and to make sure that the information you convey is accurate, fair and representative.

## Look for institutional forces

Reporting issues and events in context requires tracing the story back to its roots. We all know stories do not occur in a vacuum, but it is often inconvenient to determine the forces that bring a story into being. You should always look for interview sources who are willing to talk about the institutions – not just the individuals – behind newsworthy events and issues.

Though specific policies, rules, actions or laws do not typically qualify as institutions – each of these invariably has institutional roots.

Institutions are not just organizations; they often include ideologies, pacts, alignments, underground networks (e.g., black market economies) and various kind of formal relationships. And institutions themselves often have their own, deeper roots.

Examples of uncovering institutional forces:

Ex. 1. When the Abu Ghraib prison scandal broke, some reporters and editors were satisfied with the “few bad apples” story and hardly looked beyond it. Others were willing to entertain sources’ accusations that higher-ranking officers played a role. But very few found people who raised the idea that such extreme is a normal and predictable byproduct of organized warfare, as decades of anthropological and sociological research have suggested. Furthermore, an institutional analysis might have explored whether the hierarchical nature and massive scale of modern militaries lends itself exceptionally well to gross abuses of even the strictest regulations. Or, a deeper look might have probed the nature of prisons and detention in general and whether they lend themselves to power abuses. And so on.

Ex. 2. Illegal immigration is another issue on which institutional analysis is rare but crucial. Any story that portends to delve into the causes of illegal immigration from Latin America and elsewhere must offer frank discussion of the US economy and foreign economies, as well as the cause-and-effect relationship between them. No honest story can leave the reader believing that the cause of immigration is that people are poor there, and can make more money here. It’s important to ask what specifically causes the poverty driving people away from their home communities. Another hidden institution behind the immigration conflict is racist ideology. White supremacy and systemic racism should never be overlooked in pieces addressing US or European immigration.

---

## 4.2 Interviews

When deciding whom to interview – whether a private individual or a representative of an institution – seek out someone directly involved with or knowledgeable about the events, issues or people central to the story.

When making initial contact with the interview subject, you may introduce yourself as a “reporter for *The NewStandard*.” Explain briefly the subject of the article and what type of information you are seeking. You do not have to fully disclose your angle or reveal the other sources you are consulting. E-mail is sometimes a good way to frame your initial query when arranging an interview. If you are not confident about the value of a potential source to your story, conduct a brief pre-interview by e-mail or phone.

### **Give sources time to schedule an interview**

Many of the sources you want to consult for your article will not be able to talk with you the first time you call them. Make sure that you leave enough time between initial contact and your deadline for scheduling an interview.

### **Do not conduct an interview “cold”**

When preparing for an interview, learn as much as possible about your subject’s background. If you are speaking with an academic or author, try to read some of their writings. If you are speaking to an elected official, learn about relevant bills they’ve voted for or against. Plan a list of questions beforehand. However, do not show or send your questions to your source ahead of time.

### **Electronically record conversations with sources whenever possible**

When audio recordings are available of conversations with sources, the sources cannot deny or substantively modify their statements. There are state and federal laws regulating the recording of telephone calls. Tell sources ahead of time that you would like to record the conversation if it is not clear that you are doing so. If you plan to submit sound bytes from your interview to *TNS* Radio, obtain permission from your source to use their voice “on the air.” Tell them sound bytes “may be” transmitted over the Internet and broadcast by radio stations around the country.

### **Give sources the option of approving quotes and paraphrases**

If you did not record the interviews, you should contact your sources before publication by phone or email and allow them to review the quotes *you intend to use* in the article to ensure your notes are accurate. Quotes that will use ellipses must be read or written as they will appear. If a source denies saying something you’ve written down, give him/her the benefit of the doubt. If there is substantial dispute between you and a source over what was said, contact your editor. If a source believes you have taken his or her words or of context, allow them to add context, within reason.

**Do not under any circumstances show sources your entire article or your narrative before publication**, and do not offer to do so at any time during the pre-interview or interview process. Sources may only review their own quotes, or passages containing information gleaned from an interview, for accuracy.

### **Interview tips**

Interviewing is a reporting tool as well as an interpersonal skill. Below are guideposts adapted from the journalism clearinghouse, Poynter Institute. They are intended as

touchstones, not strict rules. More insights on interviewing can be found at [http://www.poynter.org/content/content\\_view.asp?id=60317](http://www.poynter.org/content/content_view.asp?id=60317):

- Before your interview begins, it is helpful to **review what type of source you are interviewing**. How you guide the conversation will vary depending on your subject's personality, their connection to the issue, and their style of communicating. When crafting questions, keep in mind that some people have been interviewed hundreds of times, some hardly at all; some people will willingly offer details and information, others have things to hide and need to be pressed.
- It is often useful to **set “ground rules” for the interview**: reach an agreement with the subject on recording the interview and whether (or what parts of) the interview will be “on the record” (quotable) or “on background” (not for direct attribution), and address any other possible concerns about the use of the interview.
- Aside from committing to ground rules, **do not make promises about the coverage** you will be giving the source. (For instance, do not say the story will put a positive spin on an issue just to get the person to talk. Do not promise the source that they will be quoted at all.)
- At the onset of the interview, **work to build trust with your subject**. To make the subject feel more comfortable, start with less complex questions and progress to more challenging ones.
- Keep an open mind. **Do not approach the interview with an agenda** (other than getting the story), and never give the impression that you are doing so.
- If you are broaching a sensitive topic, **give the subject a chance to express concerns** or expectations before you begin the formal Q&A. **Respect personal privacy**.
- **Maintain at least the appearance of emotional detachment** from your interviewee and the subject matter being discussed, whether you are sympathetic, impartial or adversarial. Even if you personally object to or passionately support their ideas, actions or affiliated group, conduct yourself in a civil and professional manner. Your respectfulness and integrity will be remembered when you need to call on this source in the future.
- **Be responsive**. Though you should maintain a reasonable distance from the subject, respond to questions that the person poses to you. If you sense that the subject is suspicious about your motives, be as transparent as possible to allay their apprehensions. Even if your subject suspects you are hostile to their interests, assure them that you will respect their point of view and that they are their own best chance to see it reflected in the final story.
- **Give your subject time to think about your questions**. Don't be afraid of pauses.
- **Maintain skepticism**. Ask all sources to back up their claims, even when speaking with people or groups you personally favor or experts who are well-versed on an issue.
- **Do not ask “softball” questions** when interviewing people with whom you sympathize personally or politically.

- **Do not ask “loaded” questions** that affirm your beliefs and opinions, or that goad the source. Listen respectfully and avoid putting words into people’s mouths.
- **Confront, but don’t be confrontational.** You should always challenge your subject on an intellectual level. Acting hostile, however, will probably not yield much useful information. Remember your primary goal is to get information from your interview subject, not to express your own opinions. Do not aim to provoke anger or otherwise influence the person’s responses in a way that might lead to a dishonest or inaccurate portrayal.
- **Avoid making assumptions.** Do not assume you know the meaning of what your interview subject is telling you. Even if you are familiar with an issue, let your source explain their experience with or interpretation of it.
- It’s okay to **tell your interviewee if you don’t understand** – or if you suspect readers will not readily comprehend – what they are telling you. Ask them to repeat or rephrase ideas and statements, or relay to them your paraphrasing of their words to ensure accuracy.
- **Ask for specifics and details.** Make sure to ask for relevant names, dates, places and other information necessary for filling in the who, what, when, where, and why of the story. Ask for examples that can be used to illustrate their assertions. When interviewing about statistics or obscure subject matter, ask subjects to put information in context, or to draw comparisons to things more familiar to readers.
- **Ask for supporting documentation.** If your subject cites a study, ask for a copy. If your subject refers to something in a law, a court case, an email or any other document, ask for the document or a link to it. Opinions are one thing, but you will not later be able to include asserted facts – even between quotation marks – unless the facts can be independently corroborated.
- **Always give people the chance to answer any charges or accusations leveled at them, reading back quotes or charges verbatim to ensure accuracy.**
- **Let your curiosity guide you.** If the person makes a generalization or statement that you think a reader would question if it were presented in the article, ask the subject why they said what they said. If the subject says something that is objectionable, or seems inconsistent with information you have gathered from other sources, question the statement. Ask for an explanation and/or evidence. Keep in mind that, if you don’t get necessary information during an initial interview, your editors may instruct you to follow up with the source.
- **Do not interrupt your interviewee.** If you have an urge to interject, make a note of it and come back to the issue later.
- As a general rule, **don’t just ask “yes or no” questions**, as doing so can curtail responses. However, these types of questions are important if you are trying to get an interviewee to commit to a position or accept responsibility for an action.
- **Avoid letting the conversation digress.** Keep in mind your original query and the main questions guiding your research.
- **Before you close the interview, ask if the person has anything to add.** There might be an important aspect to the story that you were unaware of, or information on a related issue for a future story.

- For major subjects of feature stories, or when such things are otherwise relevant, **take notes on the interviewee’s appearance, tone of voice, mannerisms and other details** to add “color” to the article. If the setting of the interview is relevant to the story, record a description of the surrounding environment.
- At the end of the interview, **make sure you have as much contact information for your interviewee as possible**, in case you or an editor need to follow up with the source at the last minute to clarify or add details under deadline pressure.

## Anonymous sources

While sources should always be encouraged to go on the record, there may be circumstances in which they cannot. In these circumstances therefore, you may negotiate to protect their identities within the guidelines outlined below.

Be clear with your sources about exactly how far you are willing to go to protect their identities. You must then keep your obligations to them.

Information gleaned from sources who will only speak under conditions of anonymity can have great public value. However, there is also a risk of misinformation due to lack of accountability of the source. Sources who can provide the same information, but do not require anonymity, should be sought and favored.

Because promises of anonymity should be upheld at all costs, they should not be given lightly. All promises for anonymity must be cleared with your assignment editor in advance. You must be prepared to disclose the name of an anonymous source to at least one editor and to provide the editor with enough information to verify the source’s identity and, to the extent possible, the veracity of the information.

*The NewStandard* will not keep promises of anonymity if the source has knowingly lied to or misled the publication or used the publication to leak information for reasons that go against the public interest. If a source’s motives seem suspicious, avoid making any promises.

Potential anonymous sources generally fall into four categories:

- Whistleblowers who want to reveal sensitive information to the public but fear that they will be fired or face some sort of reprisal if their identity is revealed
- Common people in crisis situations and/or who are especially vulnerable to harm or repression if their contribution to a news story become known to authorities or others in position to threaten harm.
- Officials, public figures, special-interest groups or their agents who want to release information anonymously primarily to promote their agenda or embarrass and discredit opponents.

- People expressing opinions who simply don't want their names used, even though there is no identifiable risk involved with being identified.

When deciding under what conditions to gather and publicize information, keep in mind that identity-protection should be limited to credible whistleblowers or others with genuine concerns about personal safety or retaliation. Under normal circumstances, sources must stand strongly enough behind their views to be identified.

As with other sources, background and contact information for anonymous sources must be provided to the editors, and editors reserve the right to contact anonymous sources independently to conduct vetting or to verify documents, or remarks.

After interviewing a source who you plan to quote anonymously in your story, try to check through other means any verifiable information you gathered. For instance, if a source tells you that the agency they are involved in is stalled on making a policy because the head of the agency keeps firing people, call the agency's spokesperson and ask them if people have been recently fired and why. Your editors will not allow you to use anonymous sources for information that can be verified through other means, but those sources can be an important guide to help you ask the right questions.

## Ethical considerations for human sources

**Honesty and openness.** Avoid deceptive or undercover (surreptitious) methods of gathering information except when traditional open methods will not yield information vital to the public. Use of such methods should be thoroughly discussed in advance with your assignment editor and explained in the story.

### **Interacting humanely with individuals.**

- Show compassion for those who may be affected adversely by news coverage. Use special sensitivity when dealing with people who are particularly vulnerable or inexperienced as sources or subjects.
- Be sensitive and respectful when seeking or using interviews or photographs of those affected by tragedy or grief. Defer to requests for privacy.
- Recognize that private people have a greater right to control information about themselves than do public officials and others who seek power, influence or attention.
- Be cautious about identifying juvenile suspects or crime victims and people potentially endangered by a story's publication.
- Be judicious about naming criminal suspects before the formal filing of charges.
- Balance a criminal suspect's privacy and due process rights with the public's right to know.

**Aiding the Injured and Doing No Harm.** *The NewStandard* will not publish any story if participants in an event are harmed due to a journalist’s unreasonable decision to remain outside of an event. This is particularly applicable to crisis and war coverage. A journalist must, whenever reasonably possible and where the safety of the journalist will not be compromised, prioritize aiding injured people above covering the event.

Similarly, at no point in the reporting process may a journalist employed by or on contract with *TNS* deliberately place or allow to be placed human sources in a position in which they are vulnerable to harm.

---

## 4.3 Documentary Research

### Primary vs. secondary sources

When conducting research, the journalist should **prioritize primary sources over secondary sources**. Primary documents include interviews, written testimony, legal documents, transcripts, studies, legislative documents, public records, internal documents, personal correspondence, photographs, press releases, etc.

All hard data and reprinted or facsimiled documents must be traced back to their original source if they are to be used to inform a news story. Quotes gathered by other reputable news outlets can be cited in the article with proper attribution if the journalist is unable to interview the subject directly.

### Working with data

Scrutinize all data. Look behind the numbers at the credibility and biases of the source and the soundness of the research methodology. Check to see if there is contradictory or supporting data from other sources. When working with surveys, you must review the exact questions asked and look for potential manipulation.

Qualitative social science studies or surveys can only be used if they:

- Are statistically sound and scientifically based
- Measure something beyond mere approval/disapproval or “gut reaction” to policy.
- Do not oversimplify the opinion of the respondent
- Do not run the risk of leading the reader to oversimplify an issue.

*Examples of useless surveys:*

- *A USA Today presidential approval-rating poll*
- *A pre-election voter poll*
- *A Zogby poll that gauges public opinion on the death penalty*

*Examples of useful surveys:*



- *An academic study on the voting habits of African Americans that uses surveys to ask questions about behavior*
- *A controlled research study using surveys and interviews that gauges perceptions of racial discrimination among members of a certain ethnic community*
- *A blind study based on questionnaires that measure knowledge of quantifiably evaluative information (for example, “What is the local minimum wage?”)*
- *Exit polls employing proven methodology*
- *Epidemiological studies using proven scientific methodology and thoroughly peer-reviewed*

## Part Five: Putting Together the Article

- 5.1 Form and Structure
- 5.2 Accuracy
- 5.3 Choosing Who to Quote and How
- 5.4 How to Use Data
- 5.5 Presenting Quotes in an Article
- 5.6 Attribution

If you did a thorough job during the gathering process, you will end up with a wealth of information, claims and observations from a variety of sources. Now you must sort through it. Do not feel compelled to relate every piece of information you have gathered just because you have obtained it. You need to find a way to supply readers with vital information, yet not waste their time.

---

### 5.1 Form and Structure

When writing an article, the goal is to maximize the amount of important information the reader will retain while maintaining the reader's attention. Content should be accessible, clear, coherent and concise. It is helpful to transcribe interviews, identify key themes and quotes, and develop an outline before you begin writing.

#### Order of information

An article should have a beginning, a middle and an end.

- **Keep important information toward the top.** Readers should immediately understand what the focus of the article is and why it matters.  
**Keep sub-stories together.** Summarize sub-stories in the nutgraph, and keep the sub-stories themselves together in the rest of the body. **Do not use the pyramid** newswriting structure.
- **Elements of the story should flow together.** Ideally, each paragraph should transition smoothly and logically into the next by drawing connections between ideas and events.
- **List relevant hyperlinks at the bottom.** As necessary for the reader's full understanding of an issue, include online sources and websites where readers can find more information relevant to the article.

#### Paragraph structure

As a general rule, concise paragraphs promote readability. However, too many one-sentence paragraphs in a row lead to choppy, distracting writing. The goal is to convey as much information as possible to the reader, without losing their attention.

#### Sentence structure

Keep sentences as short as possible. The average news article sentence is 18 words.

## Nutgraph

Almost every article will need to include a “nutgraph”: a paragraph that includes a basic outline of the topics to be discussed in the article. If the nutgraph is not the first paragraph of the article, it should be included as close to the top as possible. The nutgraph is crucial for letting readers know what they can expect out of your article.

## Word count

Remember that readers’ attention span on the web is short. You must balance the need to include crucial information with keeping articles as brief as possible. Keep the main focus of your article in mind as you choose which information to include and avoid pursuing tangents. Referring back to your nutgraph can be a useful way to keep your articles succinct. If the information you are considering does not relate directly to the plan you mapped out in the nutgraph, you should probably not include it in the article. Remember that you can sometimes write follow-up or related articles if there are bigger topics that you would like to pursue, and you can always link to further information at the end of the article.

Another place to put supplemental information or details is a **sidebar**, which could take the form of a mini-sub-article. Sidebars can include excerpts from documents you consulted in the article, graphics showing statistics, longer narratives about or profiles of individuals at the center of the article, and in-depth looks at specific-but-tangential topics touched upon or related to the article.

## Diction

Words are powerful. Do not abuse or waste them.

**Avoid filler words.** When describing a certain viewpoint, type of individual or other entity, try to minimize political jargon, excessive adverbs and flowery descriptive terms that are not actually informative and can editorialize the article.

**Beware of so-called “weasel words,”** like “many,” “some,” “often” etc., which tend to be baseless in fact and meaningless to the reader (e.g. “many people enjoy vanilla, but many others prefer chocolate”). It is often necessary to use these terms, but they must be applied with caution, and never to manipulate readers’ perception.

**Avoid using the passive voice.** In the active voice, the subject performs the action expressed in the verb. In the passive voice, the subject is acted upon by some other agent or by something unnamed. Passive voice can obscure the relationship between subject, verb, and object and makes difficult assigning or discerning responsibility for an action.

Ex.

**Passive Voice:** *At least 11 Palestinians were killed and more than 135 were injured Monday in five attacks by Israeli military aircraft on Palestinian militant targets in the Gaza Strip.*

**Active Voice:** *Israeli forces, firing from military aircraft, killed at least 11 Palestinians in five separate attacks on targets in the Gaza Strip.*

## Technical and stylistic standards

In most cases, industry standards, such as those found in the Associated Press *Stylebook*, will serve as an adequate guide for grammar, abbreviation, spelling, etc. However, *TNS* has also developed its own rules that differ from corporate media standards. Your editor will alert you to these during the editing process, and a complete *TNS Stylebook* is in the works.

Articles should be written in US English. It is permissible to use terms, phrases or quotes in other languages within the article, but they should be translated or explained.

When relevant to the article, note whether an interview or source was gathered through a translator or interpreter.

## Voice

**Do not editorialize.** All commentary/opinion must be other people’s opinion. Hard news is not a forum for disguised editorials.

**Do not sensationalize.** Do not present preliminary reports on issues as though they are conclusive or almost conclusive. Be wary of reporting anything in a way intended to arouse baseless hopes or fears in a reader. Unlike the corporate media, we treat news as news, not as a commercial product. Accordingly, we present relevant news as straightforwardly as possible. Do not draw conclusions for the readers, but allow them to draw their own based on the information provided.

**Do not oversimplify.** Do not try to “dumb down” a subject to make it easier for readers to understand. Complex topics deserve nuanced coverage. Do not portray actors in a story in a way that tokenizes them or makes them seem one-dimensional. For instance, do not demonize alleged perpetrators of a crime, or describe victims as utterly helpless and passive.

**Make every effort to be culturally competent.** Do not assume that the reporter’s voice can substitute for the voice of someone whose culture, class, sexual orientation, gender, age, faith or ethnicity adds another layer of complexity to the story. On the other hand, do not automatically assume that certain social differences motivate the actions or cause phenomena in the story, unless the facts and statements you have gathered indicate as much. Avoid “essentializing” people based on their group or political affiliations in order to make for a “neater” storyline.

## Check yourself

Your draft will be edited, but before submitting it, you should edit your own work to ensure that it is engaging, succinct, informative, and compliant with the standards

established in this handbook. It helps to read the story aloud to yourself to check for flow and length. *NewStandard* editors and writers are professionals. Each deserves to have high expectations of the other, but neither should have to do the other's job.

---

## 5.2 Accuracy

Information from your various interview subjects will invariably differ. Your job includes negotiating these differences to get at the truth. For subjective or questionable claims, simply repeating the statements of each source as if each viewpoint were equally valid (“he said, she said”) does not constitute responsible journalism.

### Test all claims and arguments against evidence

All verifiable facts should be verified. If there is competing evidence, report this fact along with relevant information about the quality and biases of the various sources.

**Claims that are inconsistent with or contradict solid evidence should not be left unchallenged** in the narrative or in people's quotes. In most instances, such claims should be left out, unless one of the goals of the article is to debunk a common belief, prevent public misinformation, or expose the motivations of people making the claims. In those cases, include the dubious statement but expose it as false or unsubstantiated in the narrative by including context or placing it alongside the counter-claim or evidence that undercuts it.

Similarly, do not expect that the reader will accept a true claim on face value. **Back up credible statements or views with supporting evidence.**

### Use sources only on areas of expertise

When determining which parts of interview transcripts to include or whose voice to use to convey each piece of information, consider the proper role in the story for each type of source and avoid allowing sources to convey information they are not in a position to be truly knowledgeable about.

Ex. You are writing a story about cuts to childcare subsidies for mothers on public assistance. In general, you will want to use interviews with people directly affected by the policy (mothers on public assistance) to convey personal stories to the reader about what life is like on public assistance. Since advocates work with hundreds of mothers likely to be affected by the policy change, they can be used to put personal stories into a broader context. Independent analysts provide another layer of context based on more objective study. You would not want to quote a mother giving statistics on how much each person on public assistance stands to lose from the policy, unless that mother also happens to be a researcher. Likewise, you would not want to quote an analyst on how it feels to leave a child in substandard daycare, unless the analyst has had that experience.

---

## 5.3 Choosing Whom to Quote and How

During the writing process, you will make dozens of decisions about which voices to include, how many words you will give to each player in the story and where those words will be placed.

Note that there is no hard-and-fast rule for determining how much coverage a certain element of a story deserves. Expect that one participant may warrant more weight than others according to one criterion, but less according to another criterion. The reporter should embrace such discrepancies and take them into consideration holistically when deciding what and how to report. **It is likely, and encouraged, that the facts warrant at least some coverage of all parties involved.**

Below are guidelines for determining how to use various kinds of sources in *NewStandard* articles:

### **Protagonist**

*Someone who is personally affected by the issues or events you are reporting about.*

In articles for which you are able to interview people most affected by the issue or policy you are reporting on, your narrative should, in most cases, include the voices and life situations of those sources. Since a main goal of *TNS* reporting is to explain how policies, events and issues affect people's lives, these interviews are your best source for the human details that will bring your story to life and make the topic real to readers.

### **Advocate**

*Someone who works on behalf of those most affected by the issues or events you are reporting on.*

Advocates who are personally connected to those most affected (such as family members, spokespeople or legal counsel) can sometimes be interviewed to relay largely the same types of information as the people most affected themselves.

Advocates who work at organizations or are involved in social movements that serve or represent the interests of those most affected are good sources for more general information about the lives of the people they interact with. They can take the personalized stories you gather from people most affected and put them into a larger context. Since such advocates are often closely following legislation and other policies or events that affect people in their interest group, they are also often the best place to find out about new developments in an issue.

When citing advocates:

- Note when advocates have or may have their own separate agenda, especially in the case of legal counsel, lobbyists and other professional advocates. (For instance, American Civil Liberties Union lawyers will advocate on behalf of a client whose constitutional rights have been violated, but the group has a larger

agenda that may influence how they present the facts and issues of the case.) Typically, this notation best takes the simple form of identifying the advocate's title or affiliation as part of an institution or movement with an agenda, without invalidating his/her stated motive (i.e., authentic advocacy).

- In cases where the advocate works for an organization – whether the affiliation introduces potential bias or not – identify the affiliation and briefly describe the purpose of the group.

Ex. Paul Rieckhoff, founder of the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans Association, an advocacy organization for soldiers, called the McCain amendment "a net gain" – at least as a political maneuver.

### **Independent analyst**

*Someone who is being consulted/quoted because of research or specialized knowledge in a particular field.*

Independent analysts often provide a numerical or historical context to your story. Professors with specialized areas of expertise in history, policy, law, etc. can often explain trends or precedents. They can also help you interpret difficult texts (such as legal code, legislation, etc). Researchers at think tanks are often good sources for detailed information about how policies will affect different segments of the population.

When choosing how much validation to give a certain analyst, examine and take into account the person's background, track record and potential bias, when possible. It will often be appropriate to include this information in the article. Remember that as more university research is funded by corporate grants, some professors and faculty are beginning to straddle or cross the line between independent analyst and institutional actor. Likewise, many think tanks are funded by foundations with specific policy goals and interests.

When citing analysts:

- Define their area of knowledge as specifically as possible. When referring to sources with specific areas of expertise, avoid using vague terms such as "expert."
- When looking to analysts for predictions, use analysts with proven track records unless they are only being used to give voice to a common opinion and no one available with a proven track record holds that opinion.
- Consult analysts about hard facts and analysis only. Do not use analysts to represent public opinion. Consultants' personal opinions on issues are of no more value than any other person's opinion. Do not favor them when using statements of opinion.
- Be specific when referring to analysts, and avoid giving the impression that all analysts hold a particular belief. When reporting on a point of view held by some, but not all of one type of analyst, use a descriptor to modify the group.

Ex. 1. “Some analysts say...”

If you have not consulted all analysts for the story, you are not qualified to say “most” or “all” or “few analysts.”

Ex. 2. “Economists opposing the Bush tax cut argue...”

This shows that you are referring to a specific subset of economists.

## **Witness**

*Someone who observes an event at the center of the story, but did not participate in or impact the news being covered.*

To ensure the integrity of the story and to maintain reader trust, an article about an incident should include the accounts of various witnesses – especially if there are conflicting accounts. Do not seek out only those sources that corroborate your own suspicions or assumptions about what happened. Likewise, seek out witnesses that represent different ages, genders and ethnicities – or different sides of a conflict.

- Try to corroborate the accounts of witnesses by checking them against other information sources, such as legal documents, photos or video, and other public records, and balancing them against each other.
- Be skeptical and reflective. If a witness’s statement is internally contradictory or counter-intuitive, dig for more details and satisfy any suspicions. Follow your gut when a claim doesn’t seem right.

## **Institutional actor**

*Someone who represents an institution responsible for making or driving the policy, activity or situation you are reporting on.*

Just as it is critical to relay the voices of people being affected by a situation, it is important to relay to readers the responses and explanations of those responsible for the situation.

When citing institutional actors:

- Be aware of agendas, public or undisclosed, that may be influencing the amount of information they provide or way they present it. Keep the reader informed of any relevant background affiliations or allegiances that factor into the actor’s stance.
- Be aware of trends in the institution or institutional actor’s past activities, and note when the situation you are reporting on demonstrates a pattern.
- Similarly, note when the action or situation is *inconsistent* with previous policies, legal precedents, or other past practices or established positions.
- Be careful when deciding how to attribute a statement. Do background research on whether the subject you are citing is representing the views of him or herself, a subset within a group, or the institution as a whole.



## Experiential subject

*Someone who represents in some way the situation you are reporting on, or its potential consequences, but who is not necessarily directly tied to the facts of the specific story you are writing.*

For instance, when writing on a new drug-abuse treatment plan in a certain community, you can cite a recovered addict from another community to provide insight into an analogous treatment experience – even though topic of your story will not impact this subject’s life personally.

When citing experiential subjects:

- Generally, make them supplemental to the story, and do not stray from the other actors at the core of the issue. Such subjects are helpful to fresh news stories mainly in that they help the reader understand a situation and make predictions about forthcoming developments.
- Choose people who are as analogous to or reflective of the group you are writing about as possible.
- Be mindful of differences in demographics, time, setting, etc. that might undercut experiential subjects’ representative value with respect to your topic.

## Participant

*Someone actively involved in an event or situation.*

In many cases, the central characters of a story will “jump out” as the principal actors or instigators, and their key roles will naturally attract your investigation and reporting. However, you will also encounter story topics in which a variety of actors influence, or are affected by, a situation, and you must make judgments on how much coverage to give each agent.

And bear in mind that although the reporter’s role is not to influence events, in some cases, the presence of a reporter, the act of reporting, and/or the degree of media coverage can all impact the public attention and reaction to a story, as well as the events that follow it. While remaining within the confines of your professional role, you should strive to advocate for the public interest when choosing a perspective and focus.

When reporting on an incident or situation involving multiple actors – especially a political or public event – give weight to the voices of participants according to the following criteria.

**Instrumentality:** The reporter must be mindful of the participant’s role in causing, sustaining or influencing the public impact of the event.

Ex. An act of civil disobedience by anti-corporate globalization activists shuts down a ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organization.

Though the protesters constitute a relatively small portion of those present at the scene, the collective impact of their individual actions on important public policies – and their importance, person-for-person, relative to their overall impact – deserve special consideration.

**Newsworthiness:** Pay special attention to actions that are anomalous, unprecedented, representative of a broader movement or issue, or otherwise noteworthy from a public-interest perspective.

Ex. Thousands of spectators attend a beauty pageant. During the event, a handful of activists sneak in and hang a banner that challenges the pageant as sexist. Though there are hundreds of times as many audience members as protesters, and the event continued despite their efforts to disrupt it, the protesters should be the focus of the story because they 1) represented a broader social movement, and 2) incited noteworthy tension among audience members and those administering the event, which made their actions newsworthy.

**Number of like-minded participants.**

Ex. In response to the antiwar demonstration, there is a counter-demonstration of about 20 pro-war activists. The article's focus should center on the 100,000 anti-war demonstrators. The overwhelming majority of the quotes should come from antiwar activists. All other factors being equal, coverage of the counter-demonstration should be proportional, so, in this case, any mention of the pro-war demonstrators should be small.

**Effort, sacrifice and risk:** If some participants exert a high amount of effort and sacrifice or take a high amount of risk to participate in an event, it should be noted in the article. This type of effort should be given special consideration in the article as it speaks to a high degree of passion.

Ex. At the aforementioned beauty pageant, the protesters are exerting a special amount of effort, risk, and sacrifice compared to the audience members. It is not news that a beauty pageant happens and there are thousands in attendance. It may be news, however, when a small group of passionate people risk arrest to get their message across.

**Personal motives versus financial or selfish interest.** If some participants in an event are paid and others are not, this should be noted when giving voice to those who are professionals. In addition, people who participate without financial motivation should be given special consideration.

Ex. 1. There is an anti-war demonstration with 10,000 participants. The law-enforcement presence at the demonstration is massive, with about 5,000 police at hand. Since the police are on the job and are

getting paid to be at the event and the demonstrators are there voluntarily, coverage should not be split at a 2-to-1 ratio simply based on the turnout of each group. Reporters should also spend more time with volunteers and everyday protesters who show up, rather than professional organizers or spokespeople.

Ex. 2. The US Senate is considering a controversial energy bill. Environmentalists calling and visiting their senators are volunteering their time and the lobbyists for the energy corporations are paid. In the article, the affiliations of the lobbyists from both sides and any personal financial motivations should be included in the article. Furthermore, volunteer activists should be given special focus since their motives are more likely personal or morally based, and they are more likely to represent the interests and values of a broad audience.

---

## 5.4 How to Use Data

When working with data, use the most representative numbers available, put information into context for the reader, and when relevant, explain the methods used to collect it. The goal is to report data accurately and make it easy for readers to comprehend.

Ex. When reporting the area of an oil spill it would be useful to compare to the size of something the reader is familiar with, such as the number of football fields that would fit inside the area of the spill. Likewise, since most people do not know the exact size of a barrel of oil, for American audiences a gallon is a more comfortable unit of measurement.

Analysis of statistics should start by posing one or more questions central to the article.

Ex. The government announces that the unemployment rate has dropped, the questions an article should answer include: “What is the real meaning of this particular change in the economy?” and “What does this mean for working people?” There are many factors that must be taken into account in order to answer these questions, such as the number of jobs created over the period, estimates of the number of discouraged workers, etc.

---

## 5.5 Presenting Quotes in an Article

Quotes are fundamental to most in-depth news articles, yet are easily misused. Generally, narrative should be used to convey fact, while quotes should be reserved for parts of the story that warrant emphasis through a direct comment from a source.

When deciding which quotes to use and how, keep in mind the following criteria:

- Choose quotes from people who are key players in a story and are speaking about an element relevant to the story.
- Quotes from multiple people show the reader the breadth of the sources you spoke with on record, and underscore the diligence and fairness of your reporting job.

- Quote when a person’s direct voice is the most effective means (compared to the reporter’s narrative) to set the tone of the story, relate an image or emotion, or otherwise give the reader insight into the issue.

When quoting sources, the goal is to make them read as clearly as possible and to accurately convey the true voice and perspective of the person or document you are quoting. This means both accurately transcribing a quote and protecting the statement’s intent and spirit. Also, the voice of the narrating journalist should be easily discernible from the voice of the quoted or paraphrased source.

If an actor in the story is unavailable for comment before the article is published, indicate in the article that they were contacted, but did not respond and explain why with appropriate detail. That person or institution should be allowed to respond – both to the topic of the story and the article’s portrayal of it – either in a follow-up article, or in a published letter to the editor.

### Guidelines for editing quotes

- As a general rule, quotes should remain as **unchanged as possible**.
- **Do not remove or alter profanity, epithets and other potentially offensive language** when quoting sources.
- To the extent that they are comprehensible to the general readership, **do not change quotes that use slang or non-standard English dialects**. Quotes should add different voices to the story, so you need to appreciate and respect the difference between what a person says and how you think it could have been said better. Reporters should avoid “correcting” grammatical errors unless they would potentially distract the reader from the story, or make the quote hard to understand.

Some exceptions:

- **Erase words and fragments that fill pauses**, such as “umm,” “ah,” and “like,” and “you know.” Such phrases add nothing to content and are distracting. Similarly, you may delete false starts if they interfere with the flow of the quote.
- **Correct awkward grammar** for people who are being interviewed in English, but who have a different first language.

If you must edit a quote:

- Use **ellipses (...)** to replace substantial cuts in content.
- Use **bracketed information ([ ])** to replace pronouns that are otherwise ambiguous and to introduce required clarity.

### Contextualizing quotes

As with all elements of reporting, describe the context in which the quote was given when this information is essential for the reader’s comprehension. Make sure that you

include enough information around the quote to let the reader know what the interview subject was talking about. Do not use quotes that misrepresent or obscure your source's position without including the rest of the crucial information in your narrative.

Use extraordinary caution when quoting an assessment that cannot be corroborated. Indicate when a quote is an opinion or an otherwise non-verifiable or unsupported statement.

Ex. An interview subject proclaims that the size of a social movement has doubled, but there are no public records indicating this. The reporter should strongly consider cutting the quote. But if the quote is somehow valuable to the story, it should be couched as the subject's personal impression only.

For non-face-to-face interviews, when the tone of the quote or the nature of the information gathered is substantially influenced by the medium – phone, e-mail, written communication – the article should disclose the medium.

## Paraphrasing

When you choose to paraphrase, be aware that because a paraphrase is the voice of the journalist and thus carries a more authoritative tone, this tool should be used judiciously.

When paraphrasing people's stories, make sure unverifiable claims are couched as such.

Ex. You relay the story of a woman who says she has had to turn down her thermostat dramatically in the winter because of the high cost of heat. Unless you were living in her house that winter, you cannot know for sure that she has been living in 50-degree temperatures. You should not write: *Jane Doe keeps her thermostat at 50 degrees Fahrenheit because she cannot afford more gas.* Instead, you should write: *Jane Doe says she keeps her thermostat at 50 degrees Fahrenheit because she cannot afford more gas.*

When mixing quotes with paraphrasing, do not cite subjects out of context or manipulate their words to give the comment a certain "spin." Furthermore, do not use quotation marks specifically to cast doubt on a word that does not deserve to be the focus of particular attention, and in a passage directly referring to a source, *never* place quotation marks around a word that was not actually spoken by the source.

Even if an exact word was used by the source, it only deserves quotation marks if it is (a) a particularly odd, novel or awkward use of terminology, (b) an objectively questionable label for a highly controversial subject or (c) a highly partisan or personalized usage of the term.

Take this sentence: *President Bush explained his "grand" new "strategy" for "victory" in Iraq.* Even if Bush used the all three quoted terms in his speech, only two of them could reasonably be placed in quotation marks. Without placing quotes around the word *grand*, the reporter is implying that he or she, as well as reasonable members of the

audience, would all agree with the president that the strategy is grand. Meanwhile, though the strategy may be bad in the reporter's eyes, unless it is not actually a strategy, the quotes are superfluous. However, because the "victory" Bush seeks in Iraq is itself what he is defining, and since whether or not his stated goals could be considered "victory" is broadly questioned, it is fair to place the victory in quotation marks.

As a first rule of thumb, ask yourself if it is safe to assume that readers and the source share a definition of the term in question. If it is not a safe assumption, use quotation marks to differentiate.

As a second rule of thumb, consider whether you yourself feel comfortable keeping a term in the narrative voice, since that implies your acceptance of the terminology.

All other considerations aside, since cited information nevertheless represents both the voice of a source and that person's ideas, chosen quotes or paraphrases should be faithful to both.

Finally, with some stylistic exceptions, **attribution should precede, not follow paraphrases**. This prevents confusion between a speaker's voice and the reporter's voice.

Ex. Instead of: *The Palestinian Authority must undergo extensive reform and cease all acts of terrorism before peace negotiations can proceed, said Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon on Tuesday*, write: *Last Tuesday, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said that the Palestinian Authority must undergo extensive reform...*

---

## 5.6 Attribution

A news article should cite and attribute both human and documentary sources clearly and transparently. Where no source for a statement or fact is attributed, the reader should safely be able to believe the fact is (a) generally accepted as true and not reasonably disputed or (b) directly observed and verified by the reporter or editors themselves.

Therefore, even a quotation of a primary source that is drawn from a secondary source requires attribution.

Ex. "There was nothing we could do about the problem," Gen. Notsosharp told CNN. In this sentence, the quotation is attributed to the general, but since a TNS reporter did not hear it, credit for the citation must be given to the secondary source, CNN.

Every fact has a source, but not every fact needs attribution to a primary source. Generally accepted facts do not need attribution, but editors make the final determination of what facts qualify as "generally accepted." When there is any doubt, attribute your source and let editors cut the attribution if they think it superfluous.

Ex. This is undeniably excessive attribution: *The earth is round, according to the National Academies of Science*. Meanwhile, many facts that the corporate media leave unattributed are not above dispute. For instance: *The Bush administration's original motive for the Iraq war – the elimination of Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction – turned out to be less urgent than originally thought*. It cannot be taken as given that the government's (nor essentially anybody else's) motives are as stated.

Some statements or claims require more general or vague attribution, as they are held by groups of people but are not demonstrably true or false in any accepted, objective manner. Many more nuanced evaluations of fact – especially where science and political or religious considerations are at play – are harder to handle. In such cases, it is best to attribute.

Ex. Demonstrably true: *Cigarette smoking increases the risk of cancer*. Not demonstrably true, and thus in need of general attribution: *Life begins at birth, not at conception*. Therefore, this sentence should be written: *Many secular pro-choice activists believe that life begins at birth*. (Note the placement of attribution before the paraphrased belief, not after, so the voice is differentiated from that of the narrator. And in this latter example, we see a case of a generally accepted and easily tested truism: the belief held by *many pro-choice activists* is not attributed to a source such as an expert in pro-choice activist beliefs. You can see where these rules could become unwieldy if not for exceptions.

Exceptions aside, claims, quotes and assertions should be attributed to a named person or institution, along with title, descriptive or biographical information.

Additionally, in almost all cases, secondary sources must be cited in the body of the article. Exceptions include when citing a statement from a press conference or other well-attended event where (1) no TNS reporter was present, (2) no transcript, broadcast or recording is available, but (3) the statement being cited is widely quoted by reporters who were present when the words were spoken and do not appear to be referring to a secondary source.

Ex. Three reporters who attended a press conference all quote the same two sentences from a public official, but no TNS journalist was present; there is no reason to choose one secondary source to credit with having relayed the quote.

As a general guideline, attribution must be given when:

- There is any reasonable controversy surrounding a statement/fact
- Information from a report by another news source is used.
- There are statements regarding projections and explanations.
- A reader is likely to question the accuracy of an assertion.

- A story about a non-event is being published. It is excessively difficult to evaluate or corroborate that something did not happen, especially on any kind of large scale, so things that do not happen deserve to be treated with utmost skepticism.

Ex. At least according to the Pentagon, for the first time in months, there have been no attacks on US soldiers in Iraq today.

- There is any doubt among reporter or editors as to whether a source for a statement should be cited; always err on the safe side.

Whenever possible and necessary for the reader’s understanding of the subject, include links to both primary and secondary documents online at the bottom of the article.

When a document is obtained through a leak or unofficial channels, and its credibility is likely to be questioned, the editors and writer should provide readers with a direct excerpt from the source material, or an entire copy, on the website alongside the article.

If you choose to quote an anonymous source (see section on “Anonymous Sources” under 4.2), supply as much information as possible about the source without divulging the source’s identity.

Consider the following guidelines when using anonymous quotes:

- **Verify source’s name and relationship to the events or subjects.** You cannot quote any source, anonymous or otherwise, unless the source’s connection to the story and identity is traceable, even if it is not fully revealed to the reader.
- Avoid the meaningless stock phrase “sources said” and provide more specific information.
- The article must provide the reader with an explanation of why the source and the reporter agreed not to disclose the source.

Ex. According to an aide in Congress member Sam Yellow’s office involved with the development of the policy, executives at Slick Oil Company were responsible for writing the legislation that provided them with \$100 million in tax breaks. The aide spoke on condition of anonymity due to concerns about possible retaliation for disclosing internal information.



## Part Six: Other Content Guidelines

- 6.1 News Reports
- 6.2 Feature Articles
- 6.3 Media Analysis
- 6.4 Cartoons
- 6.5 Blog Entries

For the most part, the guiding principles for writing a news article apply to all other types of content for *The NewStandard*. But there are some key differences:

---

### 6.1 News Reports

The guidelines for articles and reports are basically the same. The elements of brevity and clarity are even more applicable to reports because they tend to be shorter.

The best news reports typically rely more on primary documentary sources than on news articles. Because staff limitations prevent us from being “on the scene” for every story we want to cover, reports do not require the journalist to conduct interviews, but other types of primary research is usually necessary. Internet-based research will suffice in most cases. Most often, reports will consist of primary data gleaned from reputable researchers and organizations accompanied by quotes taken from press releases and other news articles. All quotes must be attributed to their original point of publication and cited to any secondary sources. All online sources used in news reports should be linked to alongside the report.

---

### 6.2 Feature Articles

A feature article is generally longer and less tightly focused on an isolated event or policy. Feature articles highlight the long-term implications of issues, place them in a broader context, and allow for more creativity in terms of narrative and voice. Examples of feature articles include investigative reports about corporate corruption, or a series of articles focusing on how different communities are coping with social-welfare rollbacks. Features often require more research than a news article, and while it is not an opinion piece, it might warrant a stronger editorial voice and more creative linguistic style.

---

### 6.3 Media Analysis

The main difference between media analysis pieces and news articles is editorial leeway. Media analysis is written in order to point out trends and biases in media. The analyst may insert opinions about the practical application of journalism into the writing and the writing can include colorful language and weighted terminology. However, the accuracy of the analysis must not be compromised, and analysts’ opinions about the subject-matter covered in the article should not be directly stated. All quotes from people or media

sources must be attributed to their source and must be precise and used in appropriate context.

When submitting media analysis for consideration, you must disclose to the editors any affiliations with all media or media-reform organizations, and you must refrain from mentioning affiliated groups or their work in the piece. If you own or are in any way financially invested in a news-media organization, you cannot mention the group or company in pieces published by *TNS*. All such potential conflicts of interest must be shared with *TNS* prior publication.

When writing a media analysis, follow these guidelines. Media analysis should:

- be 600-1000 words;
- focus on mainstream/liberal/alternative coverage of a specific issue or event;
- survey several stories on the issue/event, or make an in-depth evaluation of a single story that is representative of a trend or a specific bias;
- include links to all articles cited, whenever online versions are available;
- be based on relatively exhaustive searches to ensure the articles cited are truly representative/indicative of trends/themes discussed in the analysis.

---

## 6.5 Blog Entries

All reporters and editors are welcome to contribute entries to the *NewStandard's* staff weblog. Entries can cover a range of media-related subjects, though freelance reporters are encouraged to write on topics directly associated with their work on a particular article. Neither editors nor reporters are permitted to reveal their opinions of the particular subject-matter of any *NewStandard* content. However, everything from style choices to heated arguments between reporter and editor are fair game. PeoplesNetWorks collective members reserve the right to copyedit for grammar, clarity, etc., and reserve final say over what material is appropriate for the weblog.

# Part Seven: What to Expect from the Editing Process

---

## 7.1 Direction

You should consult heavily with editors when developing a story idea and setting a focus for the story. Editors will do their best to provide you with contacts and source ideas as well as help with the structure, style and content of your article. Feel free to ask editors questions related to any stage of the query, reporting and writing processes.

All editors at *The NewStandard* are required to make themselves accessible to reporters, and as a general rule they prefer issues to come up earlier in the gathering-writing-editing process than later, so do not hesitate to consult as soon as possible with your editor on any issue or concern that might arise at a less opportune time.

---

## 7.2 Reviewing Drafts

Drafts will be subject to primary, secondary and copy edits – with additional exchanges of drafts as needed. Primary editing focuses on the basic structure and content, and the rest of the editing process will focus progressively less on content, more on style and clarity.

No fewer than two editors will review your article. If an editor has made substantive changes to your article, you will, whenever possible, be given an opportunity to review and comment on the changes. Editors may return with questions that require you to consult more sources or revise the draft. They also may send the pre-publication article in whole or part to independent experts on the topic or those with reporting experience to review the piece for accuracy with a more critical eye.

### Tracking changes

While exchanging drafts of your article with *NewStandard* editors, you will be required to use Microsoft Word as your word-processing software. Word's **Track Changes** and **Reviewing** features are the best we've found. Also, for better or worse, Word is a nearly ubiquitous program that nearly all *TNS* contributors have available to them. If you do not have a copy of word, inform your editor prior to the editing process and she or he will provide you with a Windows- or Mac-compatible installation.

You and your editors will use these features to highlight changes made to the manuscript and insert comments explain changes, ask questions and so forth. For a simple yet comprehensive tutorial on using these features, see “Track Changes to a Microsoft Word File by Jane. F. James”:

[http://www.swarthmore.edu/Humanities/wa/WA\\_Program/OWL/Tracking\\_Changes.pdf](http://www.swarthmore.edu/Humanities/wa/WA_Program/OWL/Tracking_Changes.pdf)

---

### 7.3 Fact-checking

Reporters are first and foremost responsible for the veracity of the information in the article. However, editors will fact-check every article. Early in your relationship with *The NewStandard*, you can expect your work to be evaluated almost word-for-word heavily by editors, and expect all your sources to receive phone calls to verify the accuracy and context of quotations used. Once a relationship of trust is developed, editors will spot-check your work and call sources only randomly.

A list of interview subjects, primary documents, websites, and other sources must be submitted along with each first article draft. Editors should be able to fact check and vet your work without contacting you, so complete citations, contact information and other details must be included with your first draft, unless your assignment editor informs you otherwise. Use footnotes in the text if possible. When submitting a list of interview subjects, include telephone numbers and e-mail addresses.

All statistics gathered from previous news media coverage must be traced back to their original sources, which should in turn be cited in the article instead of the media coverage when appropriate.

Ex. The Washington Post is not an appropriate source for labor statistics unless the Post gathered and analyzed the raw data itself. Go to the documentation the Post used. If the source material is not available, consult your assignment editor.

---

### 7.4 Content Integrity

Editors will respect the thrust and integrity of all submitted items. They will not distort or misrepresent content, nor alter it substantially so as to knowingly change the meaning of an item submitted for publication, except to correct it for accuracy. If you feel that an editor has distorted the meaning of your manuscript, you can withdraw it at any point in the editing process. You can also request that your name be removed from an article before publication.

---

### 7.5 Decision to hold or reject a story

At any point during the reporting and editing process, editors reserve the right to postpone the publishing date of a story or decide not to publish it at all. However, as a policy, TNS pays a “kill fee” or otherwise compensates contributors for unpublished work, and your assignment editor will always consult with at least two other collective members before finalizing a decision to kill a story.

---

### 7.6 Rigorous Defense

Whenever content contributors have followed these guidelines thoroughly and acted in the public interest, they can expect the editors to steadfastly stand by them in disputes and

challenges, legal or otherwise. That is, where journalists have acted honestly and in good faith, editors will return such good faith.

---

## **7.7 Metadata Influence**

All of the descriptive, categorical and peripheral information about a content item is called “meta data.” This includes title, topic, teaser, pull-quotes, etc. Editors will always encourage contributors to suggest meta data, but editors reserve the prerogative to edit all meta data.