



The Road to a Solid Policy

To build a stronger foundation
for all student media,
establish the best legal and
ethical guidelines

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Fewer problems if everyone agrees....

- **Policy:** The principles that guide your student media; consistent across platforms and the legal framework under which you operate.
- They come in two types: **board- and media-levels.**
- The board-level policy does not change; consider it like a constitution, with only a few necessary amendments.
- The publications-level policy should at least have student review yearly.
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Foundations of journalism

- **Ethics guidelines:** Because ethics provide guidelines, not rules for your student media, they should not be included in a legal framework.
- Also, because they are simply guidelines and not rules, they should not be the cause of disciplinary action from anyone outside the staff.
- Ethics statements guide what students should do, but not what they must do.

Model policies and ethics project

- **Staff manual:** Once you have established your policy and ethics, you build your procedures to carry out that framework.
- These procedures might change depending on your role, your mission and even technology.

What's basic in a good policy:



- Status of forum is important to include:
- You want to be considered a “**Designated public forum for student expression**”
- This protects you from the Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier Supreme Court case that gave administrators more latitude to conduct prior review and maybe even demand changes.

In a good policy



- You also need to address prior review: **“Without prior review from school officials”**

In a good policy



- And add who makes final decisions: **“Students make all final decisions of content”**



Differences?

- **Board level policies:** what the board of education has the power to control or establish
- **Publications level policies:** what students and the publication have the power to control, establish or do

Changes we made in policy development



- Points like letters policies, covering death, advertising, “takedown” of content, use of others’ images, content ownership, photo manipulation and comments policy are needed in the publications level policy but not the board level.

Changes



- **Ethics principles** should be separate sections of the package so not to be misinterpreted as policy.
(Remember – law and ethics don't mix – and that's what we would have here if both were in your policy.)

Changes



- **Staff manuals:** Procedures would also separate sections of the package so not to be misinterpreted as policy.
- In our model we combined ethics and manuals.

Board policy model 1



- **Policy 1:** XXXXXX student media are designated public forums in which students make all decisions of content without prior review by school officials.

Board policy model 2



- **Policy 2:** XXXXXX student media are designated public forums in which students make all decisions of content without prior review by school officials.
- Freedom of expression and press freedom are fundamental values in a democratic society. The mission of any institution committed to preparing productive citizens must include teaching students these values, both by lesson and by example.
- As preservers of democracy, our schools shall protect, encourage and enhance free speech and the exchange of ideas as a means of protecting our American way of life.
- NAME OF PUBLICATION/PRODUCTION and its staff are protected by and bound to the principles of the First Amendment and other protections and limitations afforded by the Constitution and the various laws and court decisions implementing those principles.

Board policy model 3

- **Policy 3:** Freedom of expression and press freedom are fundamental values in a democratic society.
- The mission of any institution committed to preparing productive citizens must include teaching students these values, both by lesson and by example.
- For these purposes, as well as to teach students responsibility by empowering them to make and defend their own decisions, school-sponsored student news media, print or online, at XXXX High School are established as designated public forums for student expression in which students make all final decisions of content without prior review by school officials.



Board policy model 3



(con'd)

- Such news media will not be reviewed by school officials outside the adviser or restrained by school officials prior to, during, or after publication or distribution.
- Therefore, material published in school-sponsored news media may not necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of the XXXXXXXX District, and neither school officials nor the school are legally responsible for their content.
- Students are protected by and bound to the principles of the First Amendment and other protections and limitations afforded by the U. S. Constitution and the various court decisions reaffirming those principles.

Notes about ethics &

manual

- We tried to include ethics situations applicable for all types student media:
 - newspaper/newsmagazine
 - yearbook
 - broadcast
 - online
 - social media
 - hybrid
 - converged
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Items for ethics guides

- Using anonymous sources – or not
- Ownership of images/content
- Inclusion of profanity
- Advertising (considering age of readers?)
- Bylines and other story presentation guidelines
- Death coverage
- Portrait guidelines
- Letters-to-the-editor/comments
- Information gathering processes (including research/interviewing)

Possible procedural language



- No ads will be printed that promote products or services that do not meet community standards for good taste or that are illegal to the majority of the student audience.

Possible procedural language



- The editors, staff members, and adviser reserve the right to select content and determine priorities in both photographs and written material.

Possible procedural language



- Student journalists must verify all facts and must verify all quotations with the individuals quoted. News reporting should be free of bias, presenting all sides of an issue fairly. Student journalists should refrain from including any personal opinions in reporting or writing, except in editorials.

What makes a good staff manual?



- A good staff manual outlines the procedures through which students make operating decisions that carry out the policy and ethical framework of the medium.
- Staff manuals might be similar between platforms, but they should be designed to meet the needs of each platform.

Good staff manuals



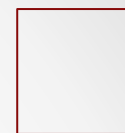
- Content of staff manuals can be updated and revised each year or remain constant. Such changes would be governed by the student editorial board and staff of each publication. The adviser can and should offer advice, but not make decisions.
- Content of each staff manual is platform specific and procedures might vary significantly from medium to medium even though policy and ethical guidelines are consistent.

Some ethics-manual guidelines:



- Some of the statements we have
- Handling letters to the editor, comments
- Social media posts from live events
- Editor-staff relationships
- Recording of sources in interviews
- Use of unnamed sources
- Advertising guidelines
- Takedown requests
- Content ownership
- Controversial coverage
- Copyright verification
- Content verification
- Sponsored content
- What might you add to this partial listing?

Use of profanity



- **Ethical guidelines**
- Profanity in student media should only be used after careful consideration. While profanity is not illegal, journalists should ask whether the use of profanity is absolutely essential to the content and context of the story. Will readers understand the story if the profanity is not used? Some people will not read or listen past any profanity. Students should consider other ways to indicate whether a profanity is intended without actually spelling it out (e.g. using asterisks or other symbols).

Use of profanity

- **Staff manual process**
- Student editors should develop a case-by-case process for deciding when to use profanity. Students should consider criteria, including whether the language is in context and necessary for the story and whether the profanity will overshadow the overall content of the story.
- Student media should be ready to justify their decision with compelling reasoning before printing profanity. In most cases, this means the staff editorial board should carefully weigh the pros and cons and consider all potential fallout.
- The staff manual should outline whether students will provide an editor's note alongside any content that contains a profanity.
- The staff manual should indicate whether students will use an "Explicit content warning" to alert readers/viewers to profanity (especially relevant in the case of multimedia).

Evaluating and critiquing content

- **Ethical guidelines**
- Students should engage in a consistent and ongoing process to evaluate content of their student media. Open, constructive, robust and healthy newsroom dialogue plays a vital role in a publication's ongoing development. Evaluating and critiquing content helps students to reflect on the process and outcome and allows them to identify areas for improvement. Such reflection is also critical to the overall learning process and mastery of journalistic skills.

Evaluating content



- **Staff manual process**
- Students should build an evaluation process into the publication cycle. The process should reflect regular input from all segments of the publication's audience, continually taking into account who is underserved. Students should consider coverage in terms of who was affected by it, outcomes and lessons learned. This process should also include a brainstorming session that considers how to apply these lessons in the future.

Evaluating content



- **Suggestions**
- Student editors should lead the evaluation process, seeking feedback from all media staff members. Questions to consider during this process could include:
- How are sources depicted? Are they quoted accurately and fairly? Are they depicted without bias? Do they authentically represent the audience?
- Does coverage include anything that wasn't really there?
- Does coverage deceive the audience in any way?
- Does coverage reflect any stereotypes? Does it make assumptions?
- Does coverage reflect transparency about reporting methods and motives?
- What is missing from the coverage? Is any follow-up necessary? If so, what will that look like?
- Does coverage reflect humility and honesty about the limits of knowledge