

- [Home](#)
- [Search this Web site](#)
- [Agendae & Minutes](#)
- [Aims & By-Laws](#)
- [Board of Directors](#)
- [CAJ Awards](#)
- [CAJ Directory](#)
- [Caucuses](#)
- [Chapters](#)
- [Events](#)
- [Fellowships](#)
- [Guidelines and Principles](#)
- [History](#)
- [Jobs](#)
- [Links](#)
- [Media Magazine](#)
- [Membership](#)
- [News](#)
- [Services](#)
- [Sponsorship & Advertising](#)

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Canadian Association of Journalists *Statement of Principles for Investigative Journalism*

Approved at 2004 Annual General Meeting

Preamble

Our privilege and duty as investigative journalists is to defend free speech, inform self-governing citizens, encourage deliberation on public policy and serve the public interest.

These duties sometimes require that journalists reveal criminal activity, investigate abuses of power, expose wrong-doing, protecting the public's health and safety and support the open administration of justice and government.

Investigative journalism employs special methods that raise ethical and legal issues. The stories of investigative journalism have serious consequences for individuals, organizations and society. Investigative journalism, therefore, has distinct responsibilities.

Truthfulness

Our primary duty is to seek and report the truth as completely and independently as possible. We will make every effort to ensure the accuracy of our reports.

We will act as an independent voice for the public at large. We will not be intimidated by power or influenced by special interests, advertisers or news sources. We will not allow the independence of our journalism to be compromised by conflicts of interest.

We will use confidential sources who are in a position to know and whose evidence is verified by other independent sources. We will be wary of sources who may be motivated by malice or bias.

Transparency

We will be transparent in our actions, especially where our stories are controversial, have far-reaching impact, or require special

the information.

We will identify clearly the judicious use of simulations to the audience in both script and on-air.

Use of confidential and anonymous sources

A. When is it appropriate to use them:

We should strive to fully identify the sources in our stories – for credibility and accountability. When sources are secret, the reader or audience has less information on which to judge the reliability of the source's comments. Also, anonymity might encourage the source to make irresponsible statements.

However, confidential sources can be a vital tool in the free flow of information. There can be clear and pressing reasons to protect anonymity. In print media, we may conceal the identity of interview subjects by changing their names or by not naming the source. In broadcast, we may protect identities through digital or other technical methods, such as concealing an interviewee's face or distorting their voice.

We should use such methods only when the participation of the subject puts them at risk of harm or personal hardship (i.e., a whistleblower who might lose his/her job, or a mole within organized crime.)

B. How they should be identified:

We will explain the need for anonymity to our readers and audiences. Confidential sources should be identified as accurately as possible by affiliation or status. (For example, a "senior military source" must be both senior and in the military.)

We will identify a source from a critical or opposing side of a controversy as such. Any vested interest or potential bias on the part of a source must be revealed.

C. How they should be checked:

Use of anonymous sources requires the prior approval of at least one senior editorial person (or manager) who knows the full identity of the source. This ensures editorial control, verification and honesty. The disclosure of sources among journalists within a news organization is not the same as the public disclosure of sources.

We must know the full identity of the anonymous source (e.g., full name, phone number, method of contact, history and background). "Anonymous" does not mean we know little about the person. It means we know everything, and are offering an agreed-upon level of protection.

More than one source should be used to verify a story or fact. If only one source is available, we must say so.

We will not allow anonymous sources to take cheap shots at individuals or organizations. We will independently corroborate facts, if we get them from a source we do not name.

D. How they should be protected:

Promising sources that we will keep their identities confidential is not enough. We must spell out, precisely, two things:

- what the level of confidentiality is
- how far you are willing to go to protect the source

There are three levels of confidentiality:

Not for attribution: We may quote statements directly but the source may not be named, although a general description of his or her position may be given ("a government official," or "a party insider"). In TV and radio, the identity may be shielded by changing the voice or appearance.

On background: We may use the thrust of statements and generally describe the source, but we may not use direct quotes.

Off the record: We may not report the information, which can be used solely to help our own understanding or perspective. There is not much point in knowing something if it can't be reported, so this undertaking should be used sparingly, if at all.

We will make it clear from the start how far we are willing to go in protecting a source.

We may be ordered by a court or judicial inquiry to divulge confidential sources upon threat of jail. If you are willing to go to jail to protect a source, say so. Otherwise, spell out the conditions. To protect your credibility or your company's finances, you may tell the source you will have to reveal their identity in order to win a damaging lawsuit.

Make it clear that if a source lies or misleads you, all agreements are off.

We should not make any commitments to anonymous sources without consultation with senior management. Journalists should be wary about entering into arrangements that they cannot fulfill. Sometimes sources request additional protection. For example, they may ask for legal assistance or protection if they are revealed or endangered. If you and your employer agree this is reasonable, spell out the terms.

When promising confidentiality we should bear in mind that Canadian journalists are not protected by "shield laws," as in the United States. However, an Ontario Superior Court judge has recognized that forcing journalists to break promises of confidentiality would seriously harm the media's constitutional right to gather and disseminate information.