

News Limited

Professional Conduct Policy

The policy of our newspapers

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This policy applies to editorial employees of the newspaper operating divisions of News Limited: Nationwide News Pty Ltd, H&WT Limited, Davies Bros Limited, Advertiser Newspapers Limited, Queensland Newspapers Limited and the regional and suburban newspaper operations around Australia

News Limited group publications aim for the highest editorial and ethical standards. Editorial employees and contributors should be open-minded, fair and respect the truth. To this end, all need to be familiar with the policy detailed in the following pages, to follow the rules they contain, and to apply their underlying principles.

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1. Accuracy

1.1 Facts must be reported impartially, accurately and with integrity.

1.2 Clear distinction must be made between fact, conjecture and comment.

1.3 Try always to tell all sides of the story in any kind of dispute.

1.4 Do not knowingly withhold or suppress essential facts.

1.5 Journalists should be reluctant to rely on only one source. Be careful not to recycle an error from one reference source to another. Check and check again.

1.6 Direct quotations should not be altered except to delete offensive language, protect against defamation, or to make minor changes for clarity.

1.7 Reports of new drugs or medical treatments must be considered with great caution. It is easy to raise false hopes or alarm among readers. Cross-check all claims with responsible and neutral sources.

1.8 Photographs may be enhanced to improve reproduction, but must not be altered in a way which could mislead readers. Care must be taken to ensure accuracy in captions. The editor must approve any alteration or manipulation of a digital photographic image, and the alteration must be explained in the caption before publication and archiving.

2. Mistakes

2.1 Serious factual errors should be admitted and corrected at the first opportunity, subject to legal advice where appropriate. Individuals or organisations that have been criticised in News group publications should be given a fair opportunity to respond.

2.2 No employee or contributor is allowed to commit the company to an admission of error, correction, or apology without reference to the editor. Senior editorial staff and/or company lawyers must be consulted about the wording of corrections and clarifications to determine their suitability and whether an "offer of amends" is an appropriate response in settlement of a complaint.

2.3 News Limited supports self-regulation in the newspaper industry and participates in the activities of the Australian Press Council. Editors are expected to publish all Council adjudications on complaints by the public in respect of their newspapers.

3. Misrepresentation

3.1 Do not use false names when representing a News Limited publication.

3.2 Do not try to get information or photographs by deception.

4. Privacy

4.1 All individuals, including public figures, have a right to privacy. Journalists have no general right to report the private behaviour of public figures unless public interest issues arise.

The right to privacy diminishes when the suitability of public figures to hold office or perform their duties is under scrutiny and such scrutiny is in the public interest.

"Public interest" is defined for this and other clauses as involving a matter capable of affecting the people at large so they might be legitimately interested in, or concerned about, what is going on, or what may happen to them or to others.

4.2 Unless it is in the public interest to do so, do not identify the family or friends of people accused of or convicted of a crime.

4.3 The publication of sensitive personal information – such as taxation details, Family Court records and health and welfare matters – may be prohibited by legislation. Seek legal advice.

5. Covert activities

5.1 Journalists and photographers may at times have to operate surreptitiously to expose crime, significantly anti-social conduct, public deception or some other matter in the public interest. All such operations must be approved in advance by the editor. This approval will be given only where good cause exists to suspect crime or deception has taken place, and after all other means of gathering the facts have been exhausted.

The editorial executive must be satisfied the importance of publishing the information sought outweighs any damage to trust and credibility which your newspaper might suffer by allowing employees to operate surreptitiously.

Where appropriate, the nature and reasons for operating covertly should be disclosed to readers.

5.2 News Limited does not condone illegal acts by employees.

6. Confidential sources

6.1 The sources of information must be identified, wherever possible.

When an informant insists on anonymity, verification of the information offered must be sought from other, preferably attributable, sources.

6.2 A promise of confidentiality to a source must, of course, be honoured. However, journalists must be aware of the possible consequences.

For example, a judge may order the source to be identified. Defiance of this order could lead to conviction for contempt of court, with the consequence being imprisonment or a heavy fine.

7. Harassment

7.1 Do not harass or try to intimidate people when seeking information or photographs.

7.2 Do not photograph people on their property without their consent unless the public interest in doing so is clear.

7.3 If asked to leave private property, do so promptly.

7.4 Do not persist in telephoning, pursuing, questioning, door-stopping or obstructing access after you have been asked by an authorised person to stop.

8. Discrimination

8.1 Do not make pejorative reference to a person's race, nationality, colour, religion, marital status, sex, sexual preferences, age, or physical or mental capacity.

No details of a person's race, nationality, colour, religion, marital status, sex, sexual preferences, age, or physical or mental incapacity should be included in a report unless they are relevant.

9. Grief and distress

9.1 Reporters and photographers must always behave with sensitivity and courtesy toward the public, and in particular towards those involved in tragic events.

No one should be put under pressure to be photographed or interviewed. Initial approaches might best be made through friends or relatives.

We should respect the wishes of the bereaved or grieving.

9.2 Do not go into non-public areas of hospitals, welfare institutions, funeral parlours, churches, etc, without identifying yourself or without permission of the people affected or their intermediaries.

9.3 Maintain sensitivity when recalling tragedy or crime. Anniversaries can be distressing reminders for survivors.

10. Children

10.1 Extreme care should be taken that children are not prompted in interviews, or offered inducements to cooperate.

10.2 Do not identify children in crime and court reports without legal advice.

10.3 For legal reasons, children under the age of 16 must not normally be photographed or interviewed about their welfare unless a parent or guardian is present and has given permission. Similarly, children must not be interviewed about their parents or siblings unless a parent or other legally responsible adult is present and has granted permission.

10.4 Do not approach children in schools without the permission of a school authority.

11. Suicide

11.1 Do not reveal graphic details of a suspected suicide. Avoid making judgments about the method of death which might suggest suicide is an acceptable means of resolving problems, particularly among young people.

11.2 Where possible, include in such articles the contact number of support groups where people with problems may seek help.

12. Illegal drugs

12.1 Do not report recipes for drug manufacture, details of distribution or descriptions of the use of other harmful substances unless justified by public safety considerations or at the request of authorities.

12.2 Do not suggest that illegal drug use or the misuse of illegal drugs is an acceptable means of resolving problems.

13. Weapons and threats

13.1 Do not report threats to use bombs or other weapons or threats of extortion unless public safety justifies it, or when the authorities request you to do so, or when it is necessary to explain severe and obvious public disruption caused by the authorities' reaction to such a threat.

13.2 Do not report details of the manufacture or methods of using explosives, ammunition, firearms, fireworks, crossbows, booby traps or any potentially lethal device.

14. Payment for information

14.1 As a general principle, payment must not be made for interviews or information. In the event that a demand for payment or other form of reward or compensation is made, agreement must not be given without the editor's approval.

The same principle applies to payments to criminals and their families and associates, witnesses in criminal proceedings and their families and associates.

15. Personal gain

15.1 Employees must not request or accept any money, travel, goods, discounts, entertainment or inducements of any kind outside the normal scope of business hospitality.

15.1 Bribes are to be rejected promptly and the editor informed immediately.

15.2 Only the editor or a nominee is authorised to accept offers of free or discounted travel, accommodation etc on behalf of a publication.

The editor has the absolute right to decide whether to accept an offer, who should be assigned and whether a report is published as a consequence. These conditions must be made clear to whoever made the offer.

16. Financial reporting

16.1 It is illegal for employees to make personal gain from financial information received in advance of general publication. It is illegal to pass this information to others.

16.2 Journalists must not write about shares, securities or companies in which they, their family or friends, have a financial interest without disclosing that interest to the editor.

A declaration of interest must be made if journalists have traded or intend to trade, directly or indirectly, in shares or securities about which they have written recently or intend to write soon.

16.3 Journalists should not write about prospectuses prior to their lodgment without confirming that regulations of the Australian Securities Commission are not breached.

17. Plagiarism

17.1 Plagiarism is theft. It will not be tolerated.

18. Interviews

18.1 In general, News Limited expects employees and contributors to co-operate with the authorities in investigations. However, requests by police or other authorities for work-related interviews must be referred to the editor.

18.2 No employee of News Limited should speak in that capacity to another media organisation or at a public event without permission of the editor.

19. Advertising

19.1 Editorial material created as a condition of placing an advertisement (ie, for favourable consideration) must carry a clear label at the top of the page, or directly above an isolated item: "advertisement", "advertorial" or "advertising feature".

19.2 Where possible, news stories which inadvertently relate to an advertisement should not be carried on the same page.

20. Conflict of interest

20.1 Staff may join and participate in any lawful political or community organisations or activities but must avoid any potential conflict of interest with their employment, and notify the editor if such a potential exists.

20.2 The editor must be made aware as soon as possible if a reporter is assigned to a story that presents a possible or real conflict of interest.

20.3 Any employee wishing to perform paid or unpaid work for a rival publication, radio or television outlet must receive written approval from the editor before doing so.

20.4 Contributors must comply with provisions relating to conflicts and must declare any real or potential conflict of interest arising from material submitted for publication and supervisors must do their utmost to ensure no conflict exists. Any association which may have a bearing, or appear to have a bearing, on a contributor's view, must be identified with the published material.

20.5 Failure to notify the editor of any real or potential conflict of interest may result in dismissal.

21. Other obligations

21.1 Do not bring the reputation of the company, your newspaper or colleagues into disrepute.

21.2 Respect the confidences and sensitivities of your colleagues at all times.

21.3 Respect any corporate confidences to which you are given access in the course of your employment.

21.4 Familiarise yourself with the company policies regarding employees.

21.5 All employees are required to be neat and dressed appropriately for their particular job. We do not spell out strict guidelines, because dress may be a matter of cultural and religious influence as well as individual taste. We do expect, however, that staff will be groomed in a way which does not offend fellow employees, visitors to the office or any member of the public with whom they deal.

22. Breaches of policy

22.1 Group publications must regularly publish advice to readers on how to lodge a complaint about the conduct of an editorial employee or the content of a story.

22.2 A "help line" should be established and publicised to enable readers to lodge complaints to the publication. Such complaints should be reported to relevant managers and supervisors as soon as possible. Responses to complaints by an authorised officer of the company should be timely, subject to any legal considerations.

22.3 Complaints involving alleged breaches of this policy will be investigated by the managing editor of the newspaper concerned, or by an executive of equivalent status. Proven breaches will be dealt with in accordance with the company's disciplinary procedures.