

San Francisco Chronicle

Standards and Practices

[Visual Ethics Guidelines](#) | [Anonymous Sources Policy](#) | [Correction Policy](#)

For more than 150 years, The Chronicle has built a reputation for truthful and responsible journalism. We aggressively seek out the news and unapologetically relay it to our community on a variety of platforms. This legacy is our newsroom's biggest competitive advantage — one each employee must fiercely protect.

We will perform our jobs with **integrity** and **honesty**, avoiding **conflicts of interest** or their appearance — either personal or professional — that may interfere with The Chronicle's ability to accurately and fairly report the news. When possible and appropriate, we will be **transparent** about how we cover the news.

These principles apply to every member of the newsroom regardless of job function or platform of communication. Any Chronicle journalist may be called upon at any time to cover the news in a variety of capacities, and it is important that every one of us be able to fulfill these duties consistent with the standards and practices detailed here. The very public nature of our work demands it.

Employees should feel free to discuss any potential issue with a senior editor. In weighing difficult issues, those editors are charged with striking the necessary balance of our pursuit of journalism in the public interest and our interest in maintaining and protecting our reputation. The following standards and practices are intended to lay out a starting place for the many informal discussions about stories that take place in the newsroom each day. Acting in a way that is inconsistent with these guidelines is a serious matter that may prompt disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

Hundreds of journalists have helped build this company, which plays a crucial role in one of the most important regions of the world. We owe it to ourselves and to future generations that our tenure in this newsroom upholds these principles so that we will continue to have the trust of our community.

Honesty

Honesty and accuracy are paramount. We strive to report the news as completely as possible, providing divergent viewpoints when it is possible and responsible to do so. When necessary, we will clarify how we know what we've reported as well as when facts may not be immediately clear.

Reporting credibility

Attribution

All language, research findings and images in The Chronicle should be the work of the company or attributed to an original source. Stories that include material from wire services should credit the service when specific language or quotes are borrowed, or should use an attributing phrase such as "the Associated Press reported" in the body of the story. It may at times be appropriate to attribute the original source of a story if it was broken by another media source.

Identification as a journalist

In all forms of newsgathering, representatives of The Chronicle should not purposefully mislead subjects. As a practice, Chronicle journalists should proactively identify themselves as such. Any decision to misrepresent oneself or to impersonate someone else can undermine The Chronicle's credibility. There may be limited reporting situations where anonymity or the use of a pseudonym is necessary or appropriate, such as when food critics visit restaurants they are reviewing. Nevertheless, any decision to misrepresent oneself must be approved by the Editor in Chief in advance, and, if appropriate, reviewed by legal counsel.

Use of Chronicle's name

Staffers may use the name of The Chronicle only for purposes directly connected to their employment. No staff member may use his or her employment to seek personal benefit. Benefits, gifts or favors provided solely because an employee is employed by The Chronicle should be avoided or declined.

Correcting errors

Transparency is essential to maintaining public trust. Factual errors or corrections of misleading statements that would warrant a correction in print should also be reflected online. Changes that substantially alter the balance and tone of the story should be made clear to the reader. In general, all corrections, clarifications or retractions must be approved by a senior editor and, when appropriate, by legal counsel. *See [the corrections policy](#) for more information.*

Photo and video usage

Photography

Re-creating events for photo or video is not allowed. Photographers should note posed portraits as such when creating original captions. Emerging technologies should be used responsibly and not violate relevant laws, including the right to privacy. Visual elements should not be used if it would encourage or glorify illegal or unsafe behavior. As with all types of reportage, it is important to consider the state of the subject and the public value of the photography. *For in-depth guidelines please see the [photo policy](#).*

Historical material

Archival photos or videos must be clearly labeled as such.

Captions

All photo and video captions must adhere to Chronicle style and accurately describe the situation depicted.

Photo illustrations

Photo illustrations must be labeled. Any work to alter a photograph or video — including blurring of offensive words or faces — must be discussed with a masthead-level editor prior to publication. Altered photos, regardless of how they were altered and by whom, should include caption information that explains the type and purpose of the alteration.

Live video

Instances of live video should adhere to Chronicle standards of taste, quality and respect for privacy. Live video should be avoided in favor of recorded files during uncontrolled situations where events may become violent or otherwise inappropriate for live dissemination. Secretive recordings are generally not allowed under California state law. The Editor in Chief should be notified of any attempts or interest in obtaining secretive recordings.

Drones

The ability to use a drone does not allow you to invade the expectation of privacy of others. In other words, treat individuals' privacy the same you would when dealing with individuals face-to-face. Drone pilots should follow FAA regulations and current laws. Regular consultations with editors and legal counsel for the current state of the law is essential.

Copyrights

In general, Chronicle employees should seek explicit permission from the copyright holder to host or publish photos and video for editorial purposes.

Reportage of The Chronicle may not be given to other media outlets without the approval of the Editor in Chief or the Director of Photography.

INTEGRITY

It is imperative that Chronicle journalists adhere to their principles of truthfully reporting the day's news, regardless of platform. We will inform the public about important issues and events in a manner that is upfront, transparent and professional.

Sourcing material for publication

Anonymous sources and pseudonyms

Attributing facts to anonymous sources must be extremely rare and occur only when all other on-the-record options have been exhausted. The decision to use a confidential source can diminish the credibility of the story and the newspaper, which is why The Chronicle has a detailed policy governing such sources. The anonymous source policy, which covers the limited use of pseudonyms, is available [here](#). Editors should consult with legal counsel as appropriate.

Promises to sources

At all times, it is incumbent upon the journalist that his/her sources understand the conditions of a conversation. This is critical because no source will be allowed to take statements off the record retroactively. A reporter who pledges confidentiality to a source must not violate that pledge; however, a reporter pledging confidentiality to a source should inform the source that the editor of the story will be told his or her identity. The Editor in Chief may also ask to know the identity of a source. If anonymity is granted, the source and journalist must discuss conditions under which the source's identity can be revealed. In general, off-the-record discussions should be avoided.

Removal of published material

In general we do not remove published material from our websites unless there is a clear public safety issue that can be substantiated by court documents or police records. Any decision to remove information or an entire article from our websites must be approved by the Editor in Chief. In rare cases, The Chronicle may decide to add information to an online story. Possible examples includes cases in which a person who has been arrested can prove charges were never filed.

Pseudonyms

False names should be avoided. The Editor in Chief must give explicit approval to use a pseudonym. If such permission is granted, the decision to use a pseudonym must be explained clearly and prominently.

Plagiarism and inadequate attribution

It is unacceptable to use wording, quotes or other material from another publication or individual without proper and complete attribution. All language, research findings and images in The Chronicle should be the originally conceived work of the writer, photographer or artist, or credit an original source.

Electronic recording

Before recording audio and/or video of any part of an interview, you must first obtain clear consent from the subject of the recording. Any decision to pursue and/or publish surreptitious recordings must be approved by the Editor in Chief and requires consultation between editors and legal counsel.

Reporting practices

Fact checking

When possible, stories containing statements from public figures should clearly state when there is evidence to support or refute claims. Private citizens espousing false statements should not be quoted doing so unless it is pertinent to the story, in which case reporter should also clearly state how it is known the statement is false.

It is up to each journalist to check their work for accuracy, immediately correct it when needed, and to make sure editors are aware if they know of errors made by other Chronicle journalists. See The Chronicle's correction policy for proper procedures.

Race, sexual orientation and gender

In general, we do not report the race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation of people unless such information is pertinent to the reporting. For example, in stories about immigration or race issues, a source's background may be relevant to a reader's understanding of the issues involved.

When officials use race or skin color to describe crime suspects, the Chronicle generally will publish that information only if it is accompanied by several other identifying traits of the suspect. A "5-foot-tall Asian man" will not help catch a suspect; however, a "5-foot-tall Asian man with bleached blond hair, a rose tattoo on his forearm and missing front teeth" is significantly more identifiable. As with other races, stories should not omit racial identification of white suspects, if applicable.

If The Chronicle decides to include the race of a source in a story, the reporter should verify the race with that person or a knowledgeable source. Never assume a person's race based on appearance.

Similarly, journalists should take care to ascertain how a source identifies by gender. Gender descriptions, including preferred pronoun usage, will follow Chronicle style. The Editor in Chief must approve a decision to disclose the sexual orientation of any person who does not openly acknowledge it.

Juveniles

In general, we do not name juvenile suspects (under the age of 18) in crime stories. We also are cautious about naming juvenile victims of a crime. Exceptions may be made when a juvenile is charged as an adult in a criminal proceeding. Because children as young as 14 can be tried as adults, reporters should weigh the seriousness of the charges with the need for our readers to know who the person is by first and last name.

Crude language

Offensive language, including profanity and insulting comment, should be published only when essential to a story. Discuss racial slurs with an AME or more senior editor before publication. The use should be consistent with The Chronicle's style policy. These same considerations should be applied even in situations where public officials use crude language.

Sexual assault

In general, we do not identify victims of sexual assault unless he or she informs us that he or she wants his or her name to be published. If a sexual assault victim files a civil lawsuit in the matter, under most circumstances it is acceptable to name him or her.

Suicide

We treat suicides and attempted suicides with sensitivity. We cover a suicide only if it happened in a highly trafficked area and/or the victim is a widely known public figure.

Bomb threats

In general, we do not report on bomb threats unless there is a broad impact or relevance, in which case social media and web-only updates are preferred. Bomb threats may be mentioned in crime stories when relating to a suspect's criminal history/background, but such mentions should also include whether threats were empty or resulted in any action.

Advertorial and advertising content

Content produced by or on behalf of an advertiser should be clearly labeled and made to look distinct from news stories both in print and online. Online advertorials should include language indicating the content was “paid for” by a sponsor and be categorized under a label that says “from our advertisers” or similar.

Advertorials are commercial content and, as such, staff members should avoid participating in the creation of it for The Chronicle, another company or another media outlet. Staff members may not make commercial endorsements or appear in advertisements for companies other than The Chronicle and Hearst Corp.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

It is not only the existence of conflicts of interest that could affect The Chronicle and the perception of our news coverage. The appearance of such conflicts can pose just as much — if not more — of a problem. Avoiding and compensating for personal biases is an ongoing exercise for all journalists, but a necessary one: Fair and honest reportage must involve an intelligent exchange of ideas free of the journalist’s ideology or personal conviction. To that end, every newsroom employee, regardless of job function, must avoid real or perceived conflicts that could impeach The Chronicle’s coverage.

Gifts, meals and amenities

The Chronicle staff must not accept free gifts, services or preferential treatment. No staffer should seek, expect or accept tickets or gratuities using his or her employment at The Chronicle, except in situations where, for example, tickets are provided at no cost so as to enable coverage of an event. Staffers should take care to emphasize that even at private or invitation-only events, they are there in a journalistic capacity.

Staffers should be cautious about cultivating personal relationships with subjects and sources that could affect objectivity in their beat. Interviews or meetings conducted over meals should be paid for by The Chronicle.

Products, experiences or trips offered with the expectation that they will produce news coverage should be discussed with a masthead editor or above. Those editors should consider the newsworthiness of such products, the real market cost, the commercial intent and whether readers will benefit from the coverage. When possible, designated critics should be employed to review products and experiences. The Chronicle does not accept trips from foreign entities or travel companies.

Nepotism

No journalist should be involved in the reporting or editing of a story in which they have a clear conflict, including involvement of close friends, relatives, spouses or domestic partners.

There is no restriction on unmarried couples, relatives, spouses or domestic partners working in the news department except that no employee can directly report to someone with whom they have a romantic or familial relationship. Employees who are in, or become involved in, familial or romantic relationships with other Chronicle employees — regardless of reporting structure — must disclose the relationship to their supervisor. Such instances will be evaluated on a case by case basis.

Products and Equipment For Coverage Consideration

Solicited Products

If we can buy a product, we should do so. Sometimes, due to cost or availability, it may be necessary to borrow samples for a story, review or photo shoot. Staff members who borrow such goods should return the borrowed items as soon as possible.

Unsolicited products

When possible, products of more than nominal value that are submitted as samples should be returned or donated to charity. The Chronicle should be clear with companies about what it does with unsolicited products. Editors should carefully consider the news value and critical benefit of writing about any unsolicited product or service.

When possible, unsolicited food delivered by a food company should be politely rejected before it arrives in the newsroom. There is little point in returning unsolicited, perishable goods delivered by mail to The Chronicle. We should not write about a product or service, nor publicize it on social media, simply because it was sent or offered to us. In the event that coverage may be warranted, your editor should be consulted on how to handle the product and how to disclose it to readers.

Social media use

Chronicle journalists should be conscious of how their social media use can color readers' perceptions of our integrity and credibility. Everyone has some bias; however, our ability to perform as honest brokers of news is called into doubt if our journalists promote their biases. Methods of modern journalism — including

getting differing sides of the story, using qualified sources and avoiding speculation as to the facts — are tools used to produce news coverage that is closest to the truth. Journalists should not undermine this ideal by satisfying a personal desire to share opinions that betray a bias.

Thus, newsroom employees must refrain from posting views that could be seen as expressing bias or favoritism. This applies to columnists writing outside their coverage area. Exceptions may be made for opinion journalists who have been asked to cover specific topics, such as politics.

Staff members also should carefully consider the news value of sharing any content expressing a partisan political point of view. Cases in which an employee may be permitted to take a stance include free press issues that affect The Chronicle's ability to report the news. When in doubt about an issue, a journalist should consult their editor or the ethics committee.

Personal conflicts

Chronicle journalists should not use their platforms to air or publicize personal complaints against individuals, organizations or companies.

Activism, affiliations and memberships

Editorial employees must avoid actions that may reasonably cause readers or sources to doubt The Chronicle's objectivity or ability to provide balanced journalism.

Staff members who wish to become involved with any cause should take care not to create the appearance, or reality, of a conflict of interest between those involvements and their duties as journalists. Many community organizations can take on political causes — seek to avoid these. Journalists should also strongly consider declining to affiliate with a political party when registering to vote.

Journalists with spouses, relatives and close friends who are active in political campaigns or issues should disclose those activities to their editors and steer clear of covering those issues. Journalists who may have been involved with issues prior to their employment at The Chronicle should avoid participation in the creation, editing or producing of related content unless it is clearly marked as opinion content.

Editorial employees have the right under the National Labor Relations Act to engage in protected concerted activity and no part of this section should be read to impede that right. Protected activity includes, but is not limited to, labor

organizing activity and discussions involving wages, benefits, or other terms and conditions of employment.

Editorial employees may not:

- Become members of or affiliates of any organization that seeks to advance a political cause. That holds true even if the organization focuses on an issue outside that journalist's area of coverage. An arts or sports reporter, for example, may not become a member of a political group.
- Participate in any political gathering or protest or in any online group where it would appear you endorse that group's view, with the exception of activity related to your employment at the company and other protected union activity.
- Sign petitions, letters or allow their name to be included in any political campaign or cause.
- Financially contribute to political causes or campaigns.
- Make public endorsements of any sort, including the display of bumper stickers, posters or yard signs.

Volunteering

Employees are encouraged to participate in their community; however, serving on advisory boards or participating in community events could lead to potential conflicts of interest. In such cases, the employee and their manager should consider how participation would appear to our readers and other critics of our journalism. Participation in such events by an employee or family member could limit the employee's ability to be involved in associated news coverage.

When there is a possible appearance of conflict

Editors can choose to consult the Ethics Committee to help advise on any issue. Any significant or potentially controversial community involvement — either by the editorial employee or that person's romantic partner or relative — should be brought to the attention of the Editor in Chief or her designee.

External income

Without written permission from the Editor in Chief or her designee, staff members may not work for any external editorial outlet or advertiser/commercial entity. All outside work, including jobs not associated with media, must be approved in advance.

Journalism contests, unsolicited laurels and speaking events

Conflict of interest and the appearance of conflict of interest should be avoided when taking part in journalism contests, speaking engagements or receiving recognition from any entity. As a rule, we avoid involvement with any contest, speaking opportunity or unsolicited award from an entity promoting an agenda

that might call our journalistic integrity into question. In general, staffers should seek approval for involvement in any endeavors of this type.

All staff members must seek and receive permission from the Editor in Chief or her designee before accepting a per diem for participation or membership in an outside nonprofit organization. Taking money from any entity exposes The Chronicle to future scrutiny. Possible solutions might include politely declining the per diem or donating it to a charity such as The Chronicle's Season of Sharing Fund or an organization that works to protect the First Amendment.

Financial interests

No Chronicle employee may seek to obtain personal financial benefit from knowledge obtained in the course of their work. All employees must publicly disclose relevant financial interests to readers.

Personal investments

Editors and reporters should not hold investments in companies they cover. If a staff member with a financial interest in a company outside his or her regular beat is assigned a story concerning that company, he or she must disclose the matter to the assigning editor before undertaking the assignment and the assigning editor must obtain approval from the Business Editor, Managing Editor for Enterprise, and/or Editor in Chief. Editors assigned to handle stories concerning companies or investments in which they have a personal stake must advise their supervisors of the potential conflict and obtain similar approval. If such approval is obtained, the conflict must be clearly disclosed in the article.

Inside information

No members of The Chronicle staff may seek financial or other paid or unpaid benefits for themselves or others by disclosing or acting upon any nonpublic information, including the timing of an article's publication in The Chronicle, acquired in the course of their employment at The Chronicle.

Stock trading

Staff members may not buy or sell any securities or otherwise make investments in anticipation of forthcoming articles in The Chronicle. In instances where staff members become aware of nonpublic information concerning a company as a result of their employment at The Chronicle, the staff members may not trade on that information until the information has been disseminated to the general public.

Commercial endeavors and work derived from Chronicle assignments

Any work done for The Chronicle or the Hearst Corp. is proprietary and may not be used for any other project without the prior permission of the Editor in Chief or her designee.

Affiliate links and e-commerce

No employee may use links to personal affiliate accounts within Chronicle work or otherwise seek to obtain personal financial benefit from sales of products mentioned within The Chronicle.

Personal conduct as a Chronicle employee

Chronicle personnel are expected to act and present themselves properly at all times. As an employee of the Chronicle, you are specifically identified with the company. You are expected to act in compliance with the law, with decorum, and with respect for coworkers and anyone in contact with The Chronicle. Any concerns about Chronicle issues may be taken to a supervisor, the Editor in Chief, or the Human Resources department.

Chronicle employees may not use the company's name, or their personal association with the company, in any way that is deemed harmful to the image of the paper or the Hearst Corp. Use of the company's name, or personal association with the company, in connection with labor organizing or other legally protected activity, is not deemed harmful to the image of the company or corporation.

Ethics Committee

The Chronicle's Ethics Committee may consult and advise on issues related to this policy. It will convene annually to review the policy. It shall include a minimum of eight staff members, including a chair, to be named by the Editor in Chief and the editorial masthead. Members will reflect a variety of job functions and departments in order to bring in a diverse group of opinions and backgrounds.

The committee may be asked to weigh in on application of the policy as well as changes and updates. Final decisions are the discretion of management and will comport with current local, state and federal law.