Ethical Gatekeeping

A rational decision-making process based on certain philosophical principles

Gatekeeping and Conflicting Loyalties

Conflicts of Interest

- Conflicts between your loyalty to the tenets of ethical journalism vs. loyalty to your personal needs.
- Conflicts between your loyalty to the tenets of ethical journalism vs. loyalty to your own beliefs and prejudices.
- Conflicts between your loyalty to the tenets of ethical journalism vs. loyalty to your employer.

- Loyalty to your personal needs:
  - Things that improve your life or give you pleasure.
  - Stories that might help a business you've invested in.
  - Stories that might please your significant other.
  - Stories that might please your publisher.

- Loyalty to your own beliefs and prejudices:
  - Stories that run contrary or that support your accepted views of the world.

> Drop in crime rate:
  - Drop caused by tougher laws and longer prison sentences.
  - Drop caused by better economy and aging population.
● Loyalty to your employer:
  − Stories that might embarrass the your paper or its corporate owner.
  − Stories that might further your publisher’s or corporate owner’s personal agenda.
  − Stories that will generate advertising or circulation, or might hurt advertising or circulation.

The Categorical Imperative
  − absolute ethics
  − no exceptions to the rules
    > what is right for one is right for all
    > what is right in one situation is right for all similar situations

Ethical principles:
● The Principle of Utility (utilitarianism)
See the most useful action
  − seek the greatest good for the greatest number of people
    > weigh the amount of harm against the amount of good

Conflicts of Interest Checklist
Because of the enormous responsibility journalists have to the public, they must be aware of any situations that create a real or perceived conflict of interest.
Individual journalists must weigh their obligations against the impact of:
- involvement in particular activities
- affiliation with causes or organizations
- acceptance of favors or preferential treatment
- financial investments
- outside employment
- friendships

In the end, individual journalists might do well to ask themselves:
- Am I being independent?
- Could my action harm my integrity or my organization's integrity?
- Is the mere appearance of a conflict enough to diminish my credibility?
- Am I willing to publicly disclose any potential conflicts?

Gatekeeping, taste, & offensive materials

Offensive Material Checklist:
- Does the story/photo have news value or is it simply a great news photo?
- How will the people of my community react to it?
- Is there a way I can tell the story without offending some people?

Offensive Material Checklist:
- Who is being hurt and who is being helped?
- What good would publication do?
- Is the story, photo or graphic complete and accurate to the best of my knowledge?
- How do I feel about the action?

Gatekeeping and Privacy
“Firefighters would not release the woman’s name at the request of the family. According to property records and neighbors, the sole occupant of the house is Jane Doe, 84.

PRIVACY CHECKLIST
- How important is the information I am seeking? Does the public have a right to know? A need to know? Merely a desire to know?
- What level of protection do individuals involved in the story deserve? How much harm might they receive? Are they involved in the news event by choice or by happenstance?

- How would I feel if I were being subjected to the same scrutiny?
- What can I do to minimize the privacy invasion and the harm? Can I broaden the focus of the story by including more “victims,” thereby minimizing harm to a select few? Can I postpone the story without significantly jeopardizing information to the public?
- In making the decision to invade privacy, do I need to talk to others in order to gain more perspective?
- Should I be focusing more on the system failure and the big-issue picture as opposed to focusing intensely on individuals?
- Can I clearly and fully justify my thinking and decision? To those directly affected? To the public?

A Fullerton resident was arrested Wednesday for killing a homeless man who was living in a makeshift tent in the alley behind his home. John Smith shot Bill Fields once in the chest after Fields refused to leave the alley.

edited:
A Fullerton resident was arrested Wednesday in the death of a homeless man who was living in a makeshift tent in the alley behind his home.

Police said John Smith shot Bill Fields once in the chest after Fields refused to leave the alley.
offensive:
Mexican-American held in fatal crash
Woman to head Disney Corp.

libelous:
Angry worker kills 3 at post office
Michael Jackson arrested for molesting boy
OK:
3 killed in shooting at post office
Michael Jackson arrested in boy's molestation
http://commfaculty.fullerton.edu/tclanin/comm332/co
mm332.html