

ALARM BELLS FOR EDITING FAST NEWS

Bad journalism is unsafe journalism – for the reporter and for the reliability of the media. And it is produced not only by unprofessional reporters, but also by too busy and eager reporters.

Errors should be caught in the editing process, using the ethical and professional standards. Sometimes they are not – sometimes is also the editing process too busy.

Here are the **alarm bells** to watch out for:

Flaws

- Fake news – check accuracy, documentation, first-hand sources
- Disputable facts – are they sufficiently backed by reliable sources?
- Sensationalism – avoid exaggerations, beware of emotional reporting

Bias

- Speculations and assumptions – if they can't be proved, they are not news
- Allegations, also in quotes – are they sufficiently justified?
- Opinions, even between the lines – delete the bias, balance the story

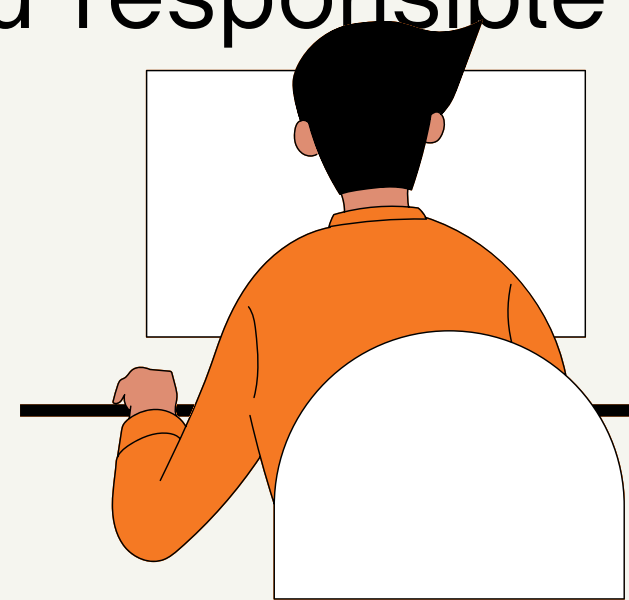
Harm

- Stereotyping and generalizations, also in quotes – they are often harmful and rarely justifiable
- Defamation and libel – even if it is not illegal, it may be dangerous to offend somebody
- Privacy – to disturb privacy may be illegal, to disclose private personal details may be dangerous

BE AWARE AND
STAY SAFE!

SEVEN SAFE WAYS TO EDIT RISKY STORIES

- The reporter should be available during the editing process – to minimize the chances of your story changing emphasis.
- Double check with the reporter on any omission and additions to the story – to prevent misunderstandings, errors, exaggerations or generalizations that may put the reporter or the office at risk.
- Ask the reporter to suggest headlines and visuals to go with their stories – it helps the editor to avoid exaggerations or generalizations and to present visuals, comments and soundbites that are accurate and verifiable.
- While editing a story, you should be extra careful that the message is not distorted by mistake. Without context the reporter's life may be put at risk.
- Don't compromise on accuracy in the race for breaking news. Beware that most dangers are caused by unprofessional or unethical journalism. Allow time for safety check, such as the "Alarm Bells for Fast News".
- If the story exposes the reporter or photographer, consider protective by-lines such as "by staff reporter" or "by (editors name)" or "Photo: (name of media)".
- In case of mistakes, publish a timely and visible corrigendum or apology; be humble enough to say sorry – it makes you responsible and credible and protects the reporter.



Safety Check of Investigative Stories

- Legal screening: Give the story a legal screening to check for possible unjustified or unlawful accusations, preferably with a lawyer or another expert to assist you and your editor.
- Fact checking: Make a thorough fact check and check that all revelations are supported by sufficient sources together with the reporter.
- Safety checking: Make a safety check on the draft version. Look out for anything in the story that would give the targets of your research a compelling reason to go after you. It is better to omit details or otherwise change the story than to get killed. Look for trigger-details. The very revelation may trigger reaction, but also details in the report could trigger hostile reaction.
- Protection of sources: Check the protection of sources. Don't give room for speculations about your sources. Be as transparent as you can be with what you know and how you know it. And never give them a compelling reason to go after a specific source.
- Forecast reactions: Assess the aftermath – what may happen, when the story is published: How may the accused react? Towards whom? Are you aware of accomplices, conspirators or allies, who are not accused, but could feel threatened by the story? How may other stakeholders react – towards the accused, the sources or towards you and your medium?

Seven Safety Tips for Co-publishing and Follow-up

Co-publishing of risky stories can protect your reporter and your media house. Following up on other media's revelation can protect their exposed reporter and media.

- 1 .If several news media co-publish and follow-up, the culprits can't silence the story by attacking one reporter or one medium.
2. More media coverage also sustains more impact of the story. And impact sustains safety, because the wrongdoers will be hold accountable by the relevant authorities.
3. Co-publishing can take shape in several ways:
 - A local media works together with a national media, an in-depth magazine works together with a daily news media, or a newspaper works together with a radio or TV station.
- 4 .Co-publishing can take shape in different stages:
 - During the investigation, sharing findings, covering multiple angles. Before publishing, sharing the full story, planning the angles and steps of publicizing.
5. Follow-up can happen in many ways:
 - Once the story breaks, all competing media should have the decency to follow-up on the investigation.
6. The media of the investigation can sustain the follow-up by sharing angles and stories even with competitors.
7. Any media can quote the story from day one – and soon follow-up with their own angles and new revelations – not only for the sake of their own audience and the society, but also for the sake of their exposed colleagues.