

## HANDBOOK OF JOURNALISM



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## REPORTING FROM THE INTERNET

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We are committed to aggressive journalism in all its forms, including in the field of computer-assisted reporting, but we draw the line at illegal behaviour. Internet reporting is nothing more than applying the principles of sound journalism to the sometimes unusual situations thrown up in the virtual world. The same standards of sourcing, identification and verification apply. Apply the same precautions online that you would use in other forms of newsgathering and do not use anything from the Internet that is not sourced in such a way that you can verify where it came from.

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## General Guidelines

**No falsehoods**

Reporters must never misrepresent themselves, including in chat rooms and other online discussion forums. They do not "pick locks" in pursuit of information, nor do they otherwise obtain information illegally. Discovering information publicly available on the web is fair game. Defeating passwords or other security methods is going too far.

**Know your subject**

Reporters should use aggressive Internet reporting techniques only when they are familiar with the way an organisation releases news. Familiarity with an organisation's past disclosure procedures can insulate us from all-too-common Internet spoofs. Please capture, save and print a copy of a "screenshot" of the web page in question in order to defend us against charges of printing nonexistent information. If you do not know how to capture a screenshot, ask anyone with a technical bent to show you how. It is our best protection against vanishing web sites. Be wary of "unusual" news discovered on a web site. Do not treat this as "normal news" until the company or organisation confirms it or at least has a chance to respond to what you have found. Escalate such situations to your manager. Also keep in mind what we consider newsworthy. Personal information must be relevant to a legitimate story for Reuters to publish it. Copyright laws, and libel laws, apply to the Internet too.

### Attribution

Headlines should be very clear when we have obtained information in unorthodox settings. In stories, we also must make it clear high up how we gathered the information. Retain those facts high in the story as it plays out. The reader wants to know how we obtained the information.

### Fairness

The act of seeking confirmation of the news before publishing it can lead the organisation to front-run our story and announce the information before we have a chance to put our story out. This does not relieve us of the responsibility to give an organisation a fair chance to comment. Please make it clear if the organisation is unwilling to confirm the information.

### Is it a hoax?

Do a reality check. Does this information fit within the bounds of what was expected? Any wild divergences are a clue you may be viewing information in the wrong context.

### Social media guidelines

We want to encourage you to use social media approaches in your journalism but we also need to make sure that you are fully aware of the risks -- especially those that threaten our hard-earned reputation for independence and freedom from bias or our brand. The recommendations below offer general guidance with more detailed suggestions for managing your presence on the most popular social networks. This is a fast-changing world and you will need to exercise judgment in many areas. In framing this advice we've borne in mind the following principles and encourage you to think about them whenever using social media.

### Basic Principles

The Trust Principles compel us to explore all new techniques for delivering news and information to our customers: our recommendations are designed to support rather than inhibit your exploration of these important new approaches.

One of the distinguishing features of Reuters is the trust invested in the judgment of its journalists -- we will continue to look to you to use your common sense in dealing with these new challenges

Accuracy, freedom from bias and integrity are fundamental to the reputation of Reuters and your ability to do your job effectively. The advent of social media changes none of this and you should do nothing that would damage our reputation for impartiality and independence. We reserve the right to change your beat or responsibilities if there are problems in this area. In the case of serious breaches, we may use our established disciplinary procedures.

The advent of social media does not change your relationship with the company that employs you -- do not use social media to embarrass or disparage Thomson Reuters. Our company's brands are important; so, too, is your personal brand. Think carefully about how what you do reflects upon you as a professional and upon us as an employer of professionals.

The distinction between the private and the professional has largely broken down online and you should assume that your professional and personal social media activity will be treated as one no matter how hard you try to keep them separate. You should also be aware that even if you make use of privacy settings, anything you post on a social media site may be made public.

While it is not practical to always apply the 'second pair of eyes rule' for journalists using social media, especially Twitter, in a professional capacity, you should consider that a 'virtual second pair of eyes rule' applies under which your manager and/or senior editors will retrospectively review your professional output.

Remember, too, that your sources, colleagues, peers, competitors and even future employers also can and will look at your output.

If you have your tweets aggregated onto reuters.com or another company property or have your blog hosted by us, we are your publisher and in some jurisdictions may even have a legal responsibility for what you have written. This makes it absolutely imperative that you remember basic rules about fairness, taste and libel. Even beyond the legal question, readers may well wonder if a mean-spirited or nasty comment is truly yours alone or if it somehow represents the view of the institution if it appears on a corporate property.

We're in a competitive business and while the spirit of social media is collaborative we need to take care not to undermine the commercial basis of our company.

### Recommendations

#### *Think before you post*

One of the secrets to social media's success is how easy it has become to participate. But that also makes it easy to respond or repeat before you have thought through the consequences. Whether we think it is fair or not, other media will use your social media output as Reuters comment on topical stories. And we will play into the hands of our critics unless we take care

- Resist the temptation to respond in anger to those you regard as mistaken or ill-tempered

- Think about how you'd feel if your content was cited on the front page of a leading newspaper or website or blog as Reuters comment on an issue
- Don't suspend your critical faculties. It's simple to share a link on Twitter, Facebook and other networks but as a Reuters journalist if you repeat something that turns out to be a hoax, or suggests you support a particular line of argument, then you risk undermining your own credibility and that of Reuters News

#### ***Avoid raising questions about your freedom from bias***

Your Facebook profile, Twitter stream or personal blog give clues to your political and other affiliations and you should take care about what you reveal. A determined critic can soon build up a picture of your preferences by analysing your links, those that you follow, your 'friends', blogroll and endless other indicators. We all leave an 'online footprint' whenever we use the Web and you need to think about whether your footprint might create perceptions of a bias toward or against a particular group.

- Think about the groups that you join -- it may be safest not to join a group or to follow participants on just one side of a debate
- Think about using 'badges' expressing solidarity with some cause
- Think about whether it would be best to leave your political affiliation out of your Facebook profile
- Think about whether you link only or mainly to voices on one side of a debate
- Think about making use of the privacy settings on social networks and basic ways in which you can conceal your use of the Web like clearing your cache regularly

#### ***Be transparent***

We're in the transparency business and we encourage you to be open about who you are.

- On your personal blog or social networking profile make it clear that you are a Reuters journalist and that any opinions you express are your own.
- When you post comments do so under your real name

#### ***If you use social networks for both professional and private activity then use separate accounts***

Many of you are using social networks like Facebook or Twitter both as part of your newsgathering and as part of your personal social networking. In the online world private and professional are increasingly intertwined but we do expect you to maintain a professional face at all times in your work for us and this extends to your use of social media. Put simply, we're expecting you to apply standards to your professional use of social media that will probably differ to those you would use for your personal activity. For this reason we recommend that you set up separate profiles for your professional and private activity. This is not to say that we recommend that you strip out all personal content from your professional streams, but that you should think carefully about what personal content would be appropriate.

- Use a separate professional account for your newsgathering and professional community-building activity
- Social networking encourages you to share personal details but don't overload your professional network with personal content

#### ***Seek the permission of your manager before setting up a professional presence on a social networking site***

- Effective use of social media requires a commitment of time and you should clear this with your manager before you get involved.
- Effective use of social media may also require you to share a lot of content and you need to be clear that this does not conflict with our commercial objectives. Again, your manager should be consulted on this
- Be aware that you may reveal your sources to competitors by using "following" or "friending" functionality on social networks

#### **Twitter policy**

What is Twitter?

Twitter is a "micro-blogging" system that lets users send out short 140-character posts to the Internet.

Can I use Twitter as a source?

Twitter may be used sometimes to post information and images of interest to our clients that are not available elsewhere. We will sometimes need to retransmit such material, or refer to it in text stories. Before using such content, please refer to "Picking up from Twitter and social media" in the section [The Essentials of Reuters sourcing](#).

When should I 'tweet'?

There are several ways in which Reuters News journalists are using Twitter to micro-blog as part of their professional duties:

- Specialist journalists use Twitter to share articles and build up a following (see [twitter.com/reutersBenHir](https://twitter.com/reutersBenHir) and [twitter.com/bobbymacReports](https://twitter.com/bobbymacReports))
- Online Editorial staff and bloggers use Twitter to distribute news and solicit reader comment (see [twitter.com/mediafile](https://twitter.com/mediafile), [twitter.com/Reuters\\_FluNews](https://twitter.com/Reuters_FluNews) and [twitter.com/reuters\\_co\\_uk](https://twitter.com/reuters_co_uk))

- Reuters journalists are using Twitter during live events such as Davos and to solicit questions for newsmaker interviews

1. *If you wish to use Twitter as part of your professional role you should seek the permission of your line manager.*

2. *If you are using Twitter professionally you should use the word 'Reuters' in the name of your stream or somewhere else on the page.*

3. *The Trust Principles apply to Twitter -- you should do nothing that compromises them.*

4. *Micro-blogging and use of social media tend to blur the distinction between professional and personal lives: when using Twitter or social media in a professional capacity you should aim to be personable but not to include irrelevant material about your personal life.*

Does the 'second pair of eyes rule' apply to Twitter?

The short-form nature of Twitter means it is fast and well-suited to certain tasks including the live-blogging of events. It will not always be possible or even desirable to find someone to double-check your content.

Where practical you should ask someone to check content of Twitter posts. If there is no one to check then you should satisfy yourself that your posts conform to the Trust Principles. Be aware, however, that Reuters Twitter streams will and must be reviewed by an editor – not necessarily in real time or before publication, but eventually and regularly.

What guidelines apply to my personal Twitter use?

The same rules apply as for personal blogging -- you should make it clear that you a) work for Reuters News; b) any views expressed do not represent those of your employer; and c) you say nothing that would damage the reputation of Reuters News or TR.

Can I break news via Twitter?

As with blogging within Reuters News, you should make sure that if you have hard news content that it is broken first via the wire. Don't scoop the wire. NB this does not apply if you are 'retweeting' (re-publishing) someone else's scoop.

Corrections

If a correction is required, a new tweet that begins "CORRECTION:..." should be published.

### Online Encyclopedias

Online information sources which rely on collaborative, voluntary and often anonymous contributions need to be handled with care. Wikipedia, the online "people's encyclopedia", can be a good starting point for research, but it should not be used as an attributable source. Do not quote from it or copy from it. The information it contains has not been validated and can change from second to second as contributors add or remove material. Move on to official websites or other sources that are worthy of attribution. Do not link to Wikipedia or similar collaborative encyclopedia sites as a source of background information on any topic. More suitable sites can almost always be found, and indeed are often flagged at the bottom of Wikipedia entries. It is only acceptable to link to an entry on Wikipedia or similar sites when the entry or website itself is the subject of a news story.

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