

University of Arkansas

Data Journalism Course

Rules of Conduct

Students in data journalism courses at the University of Arkansas have been producing professional level content for statewide publication since 2016. Go out and do great things. But remember, do it right so that others may follow you. With that in mind, here are a few Do's and Don'ts.

The Don'ts

DON'T interview friends, family, roommates, fraternity brothers, sorority sisters, co-workers or close acquaintances without first clearing it with the instructor. You must disclose any relationships.

DON'T misrepresent who you are or what you are doing. Make clear at your first contact, at the beginning and end of interviews, and again when doing you're fact-checking that you are a reporter and that the information may be published or broadcast in a news story. These are not class projects. They are news stories.

DON'T take quotes, information, ANYTHING from another news source without specifically citing it.

DON'T pretend like aggregation is the same as reporting. There's a place for aggregation. That place is not in original news reporting.

DON'T make up information, no matter how minor you think it is.

DON'T assume you know anything. Don't guess. Check, verify and double-check everything - names, titles, dates, numbers - every fact.

DON'T access notes, video, data of another student on any shared drives without first requesting their permission in email and copying the instructor about this arrangement. **DON'T** share any information with outside authorities without first contacting your instructor.

DON'T use your reporter's notebook to check facts and spellings of names. If you got it wrong when you wrote it down, it will still be wrong the next time you look in your notebook.

DON'T wait until your story is done to check facts. Edit as you go. For example, when you interview someone, write their name down and then show it to them. Check everything at the beginning and at the end. And when you think everything is good, **CHECK AGAIN!**

DON'T take so much as a cup of coffee from a source, even if you're a student. And if you do, tell your instructor.

DON'T give up your work product to some "authority" without talking to your instructor, whether that is an SD card, hard drive full of video, the camera itself or whatever.

DON'T EVER re-enact or stage events for photos or video or for text summaries accompanying that multimedia. We're in the business of journalism, not fiction.

The Do's

DO depend on primary sources. Primary sources are always the best. In other words, don't ask me what my wife's birthday is. **ASK HER!**

DO read stories as if they were written by someone else. So, when your instructor asks you to read over a story one more time, don't read it fast to make sure it sounds good. Break it down, highlight every name, title and other checkable fact, and then check them all. Read it from the bottom up, rather than the top down. You're less likely to read over your mistakes. Print it and read it out loud. Print it out and put a check mark over every fact as you check each one. Or bold everything as you check it. **WE DON'T CARE HOW YOU DO IT!** Do whatever it takes to make sure that voice in your head that loves the beautiful prose you just wrote, doesn't keep you from making sure that you double-checked even the most basic facts.

DO treat Tweets, photo captions, headlines, videos, graphics and **EVERYTHING** that you plan to publish with the same fastidiousness you treat text stories. **It all has to be correct!**

DO apply the same journalistic standards to social media posts that you do to any other publication. You are always a journalist, which means you should keep your opinions private, especially on topics you are covering or may cover in the future. Credibility is your most important asset; don't do anything to erode it.

DO call your instructor. Stay in touch with your instructor at all times. Don't assume you can handle a situation, and don't be afraid to tell an instructor you have a problem with a story/source/situation. Calling your instructor won't affect your grade – failing to call them just might.

DO contact your instructor immediately if you are approached by any outside entity who is seeking access to unpublished notes, video, data or other work product.

DO remember that anything you turn into your instructor, at any stage in the reporting process, needs to be free of material that is not original to you. Keep your notes, and especially anything you copy and paste from another source, out of your story files.

DO, with the guidance of your instructor, be creative and entrepreneurial.

DO go out and commit high-quality, impactful journalism.

DO have fun.

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