

SUGGESTED REPORTING GUIDELINES FOR STUDENT JOURNALISTS

NOTE: These suggested guidelines are meant to be just that. Educators are welcome to take this boilerplate language and adapt it for their own use. Good luck!

Introduction

Today more than ever, journalism students need to consider their safety and the safety of others while reporting. The following guidelines were compiled after reviewing the practices of other universities and news organizations around the country. These guidelines are relevant whether you're taking remote classes on campus or from home. They are designed to allow students to get their reporting done while also remaining safe.

Please keep these three points in mind while Reporting During a Pandemic:

- **No story assignment is worth sacrificing your health.**
- **You have options beyond face-to-face interviews.**
- **Be smart.**

As always, we encourage students to pursue their reporting with dedication and determination. We also expect our students to use best practices and do all they can to remain safe while reporting.

While these guidelines are not exhaustive, they represent common-sense practices for asserting your rights as a journalist and staying safe while reporting. These guidelines are meant for students reporting for courses in their departments, as well as within student media.

Reporting During a Pandemic:

- When possible, interviews should be conducted via phone, Skype, Zoom, FaceTime -- pick your platform. Most journalists agree that email interviews are not a good idea, especially when dealing with public officials. But coordinate with your individual instructor, who may make exceptions, especially when conducting follow-ups.
- When conducting video interviews, [Don't Be A Video Vampire!](#)
- If a situation arises where you need to conduct face-to-face interviews, please consult with your instructor about how to proceed. Students in broadcast, photojournalism, multimedia and sports journalism classes may feel the need to conduct face-to-face interviews. Here are some general guidelines to follow:

- All interviews **MUST** be conducted outdoors. Faculty will not accept interviews recorded indoors. Make sure to keep an eye on the weather and if needed, reschedule your interviews in the event of bad weather.
- All face-to-face interviews must be conducted **AT LEAST** six feet away from the interview subject (10 feet is better.) When possible keep face-to-face interviews short. Think in terms of getting your key questions answered. You can always follow up by phone. Make these guidelines clear to your interview subjects during the pre-interview so they understand that you're not being rude.
- Stay away from crowded locations when conducting interviews (this will involve some planning).
- For video and broadcast: Use a shotgun mic mounted on camera or a boom pole with mic to record audio. Wear a face covering (mask or face shield) at all times. Do not share objects with others (don't let others touch any of your video equipment). Wash hands thoroughly after shooting video and gently clean equipment with sanitizing wipes (avoid touching/wiping lenses, SDHC cards and other sensitive electronic components).
- Photography students should follow the same basic rules as reporting students - work outdoors as much as possible, maintain at least six feet of distance and use telephoto lenses whenever possible.
- Masks. Wear masks to interviews and during interviews. Practice speaking loudly and clearly when asking questions, so the interview subject can hear you.
- **Protest Coverage.** Please read the following section on protest coverage but if you want to cover protests this fall, you **MUST** coordinate with your instructor **beforehand**. Many of us have covered protests and can provide guidance.

Crowds/protests/marches/riots

Crowds offer their own unique reporting conditions. Mark Johnson at the University of Georgia has provided [some strong tips here](#). Here are some general guidelines.

- **Agreements.** Never agree to support a cause as a condition of your reporting. You attend protests to observe, **NOT** to participate. You need to reconcile **beforehand** that you are there to observe and report, not participate.
- **Background.** Conducting background research beforehand will inform your reporting and improve your story. There is an historical background to the protests occurring in this country. Yes, you will inform yourself of this background through interviews, but you should also research and attempt to understand the background before you go into any interview/situation.

- **The role of journalists.** Journalists have been detained, arrested and assaulted at protests in the United States over the past several months. For your own protection, **ALWAYS** report in pairs. Don't expect people to understand or care about the work of journalists. You have the right to access public spaces, but in many cases, negotiation will be required. In some cases, it's ok to walk away, observe and return later. When in doubt, call your professor.
- **Hostile crowds.** Crowds can be hostile to anyone who doesn't belong. Make sure you can get out. Make sure your car/truck is parked in a spot where you can jump in and get out quickly.
- **Watch the crowd.** If they're ignoring you, great! If they're helping you, even better. But, if the crowd thinks you're the enemy, consider leaving.
- **Police.** Obey police commands. If you are arrested during a sweep of a crowd, call your professor. If you are interrogated at the jail, ask for legal representation and don't answer questions or talk further. Let the police know who you are and what you're doing.
- **Watch the police.** If possible, find a vantage point where you can see and report and keep a clear avenue of escape.
- **Equipment/What's In Your Backpack.** Extra water, hand sanitizer, alcohol wipes for cameras (not to be used on lens surfaces). Extra scarves, masks, googles. Press credentials (some reporters have taken to pasting "press" on helmets during coverage.)
- **Dress.** Dress appropriately: no flip-flops or open-toed shoes. Recommended: Long-sleeves when possible, Jeans, shoes for walking.
- **Technology.** Turn your phone's location sharing on for your editors or colleagues. Turn biometrics off (face or fingerprint recognition). Make sure your device is fully charged, bring an external battery and at least two charging cables. Stay in touch with your professor.