

BLOG ETHICS



Journalists across America are writing personal blogs, expressing opinions and revealing their personal lives while their bosses struggle with how restrictive they should be.

1-No Surprises. When you work for a journalism organization you represent that organization on and off the clock. Your actions may reflect on the whole organization even if you are not highly visible. Any staff member of a journalism organization who plans to set up or regularly contribute to an Internet blog, Web site, Social Network or other electronic billboard, the journalist must know what the newsroom policies are for such writing. Avoid posting photos or any other content that might reflect badly on the newsroom, even if posting on a private site.

2- Writing and researching must be done on the employee's own time and not at work or during work hours.

3- The topic(s) that the blogger writes must be different from those the employee generally covers for the news organization. Editorializing about a topic or person can reveal an employee's personal biases. Biased comments could be used in a court of law to demonstrate a reporter or editor's predisposition, or even malicious intent, should someone bring a libel action against the journalism organization even for an unrelated story.

4- Employees of a journalism organization should recognize that even though their comments may seem to be in their "private space," their words are a direct extension of the organization. Search engines and social mapping sites can locate their posts and link the writer's name to their employer. Thus, what an employee writes in his or her "private space" and on personal time can reflect back on the employee and the newspaper. If you express a bias on a topic, your sources of information may change the way they respond to your inquiries, and your readers may doubt the accuracy of future stories. Your expressions of bias will not be forgotten quickly.

5-Writing for the newsroom's website is different but journalists should still avoid saying things online that they would not say on the air or in print.

6-Writing anonymously or with a pen name doesn't solve the issue. Reporters are responsible for their work, and commenting or blogging anonymously compromises that core principle. Ethical problems are not cured by secrecy. We should be as open and transparent as possible.