ETHICS
Ethical issues in Journalism

- Freebies
- Checkbook Journalism
- Conflict of Interest
- Misrepresentation
- Private Lives
Freebies

- Editors are concerned with the effect a gift – large or small – will have on a reporter's objectivity.
- Will a dinner, tickets to a sporting event, a “Christmas” gift effect a reporter's relationship with the source?
- Junkets – all expenses paid trips [to cover an opening or preview] may be the only way small media outlets could get to such events.
  - Could you write a negative review of a resort
  - or theme park if you took such a gift?
Checkbook Journalism

- This refers to paying for news or paying for an exclusive interview.
- Financial arrangements distort the presentation of news by the source and the news organization.
- Will the station or the source embellish their story so that they “get their money's worth.”
Conflict of Interest

- Newspapers are businesses that rely on other businesses for advertising revenue.
- Negative coverage should not be ignored because of financial considerations – the reader's interests are paramount. (Public's right to know.)
- Reporter's also face challenges:
  - Police beat reporter should not be a member of the PBA.
  - Business reporter should not be writing press releases for a local business.
Misrepresentation

- Do reporters lie to get the truth?
- Does the ends justify the means?
- Some reporters go undercover, pretending to be someone they are not to get a story.
  - Is there no other way to get the story?
  - If a reporter obtained information undercover, they should go back as a reporter and offer the person an opportunity to explain their actions.
Private Lives

- Are individual's private lives “newsworthy”?
- Are politicians private lives “newsworthy”?
  - Does it have an affect on his job performance?
  - Do you cover gambling, womanizing, drug abuse when the person has not been charged with a crime?
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Three ethical approaches

- Deontological ethics (absolutism)
- Telelogical ethics
- Antinomianism
Deontological ethics

- The ethics of duty – you have a duty to do what is right.
- Believe some actions always right, some actions always wrong.
- There is a fixed set of laws in nature and there is no deviation from them.
- Sometimes called absolutism or legalism.

If it is wrong to lie, it is always wrong to lie even if it would save someone from being murdered. The duty of the media is to report the news, period – regardless of the consequences.
Teleological ethics

- The ethics of final ends.
- What makes an act ethical is not the act itself, but the consequences of the act. (More relativistic than absolutist.)
- Deceiving people or stealing may not always be wrong if a greater public good comes from it.
Antinomianism

- There are no moral absolutes.
- Only one overriding principle – every person and every situation is unique and each ethical problem must be solved on its own merits.
- An antinomian may have core values and and antinomian may believe it is okay to ignore them. Some may be deontelics (a combination of first two) – they consider the ethics of the act and the consequences. Lying may be okay for a good purpose.
- Situation ethics.
Examining ethical issues

- Appraise the situation
- Identify what values are involved - personal – news organization - community
- Identify your ethical principals
- Choose your loyalty