

Community Agreements for Journalism & Media Classrooms

Journalism and media classrooms are spaces where we examine power, truth claims, representation, and harm. We analyze real events, contested narratives, and institutional failures--often involving race, gender, class, religion, nationality, and political conflict. These conversations can be uncomfortable, emotionally charged, and politically sensitive. Because journalists shape public understanding, this classroom is not only a learning space but also a training ground for media literacy, professional judgment, ethical reasoning, and democratic responsibility. These Community Agreements exist to help us engage critically and respectfully with media texts, lived experiences, and each other, while recognizing how power, privilege, and positionality shape whose voices are amplified or marginalized in the news. We will use these agreements during in-class discussions, peer feedback, newsroom simulations, group reporting projects, and online forums. When tension arises, these agreements provide shared language for navigating disagreement, accountability, and care.

Agreement 1: Practice Journalistic Listening with Curiosity

Journalists listen to understand before they interpret, frame, or report. In this class, we practice listening as a professional skill, not just politeness. We listen across differences, resist rushing to judgment, and ask questions that clarify rather than corner.

Sentence Prompts

- "When you talked about....., it got me more curious about....."
- "I was intrigued by your perspective about....., yet I could not fully understand what you meant. Could you explain a little more about.....?"
- "Can you walk me through how you reached that conclusion?"
- "What sources or experiences shaped that perspective?"
- "Let me check my understanding—are you saying...?"

Agreement 2: Speak from Positionality, Not False Objectivity

Journalism values accuracy and fairness, but neutrality is not the same as objectivity. We speak from our own cultural proximities and experiences, recognizing how race, gender, nationality, class, religion, language, and professional access shape what we observe, question, and value. We do not claim to speak *for* communities we are not part of.

Sentence Prompts

- "From my position as a reporter/student from..., I notice..."
- "I can't speak for that community, but based on this reporting/readings..."
- "My background shapes how I'm interpreting this media coverage."

Agreement 3: Fumble Forward in Reporting and Analysis

Journalistic learning requires risk: asking imperfect questions, testing frames, and revising assumptions. Fear of "getting it wrong" can silence inquiry—especially around race, politics, religion, or identity. In this classroom, we normalize fumbling as part of ethical and intellectual growth.

Sentence Prompts

- "I'm still working through this idea, so this may come out messy..."
- "I might be missing something here—can you help me think it through?"
- "Please flag if this framing feels problematic or incomplete."

Collective Response

- "Fumble Forward."
- Support clarification, contextualization, and revision—not ridicule.

Agreement 4: Challenge Media Ideas, Not People—Repair Harm When It Happens

Journalists critique frames, narratives, sourcing practices, and power structures. Disagreement is essential, but it must be ethical and accountable. When harm occurs (through language, stereotypes, or assumptions), we prioritize naming impact, repairing harm, and improving our journalistic practice.

Sentence Prompts

- “I want to challenge that framing because...”
- “That example reinforces a stereotype—can we unpack that?”
- “I’m sorry—that wasn’t my intent. Thank you for naming the impact. How can I repair this?”

Agreement 5: Care for Ourselves, Our Sources, and Our Classroom Community

Journalism deals with trauma, violence, injustice, and conflict. Emotional responses are not weaknesses, but they are signals. You have agency over your participation, and we also share responsibility for checking in on one another. Ethical journalism begins with ethical treatment of people.

Sentence Prompts

- “I need to step back from this conversation right now.”
- “Can we pause? This topic is hitting close to home for me.”
- “I noticed you went quiet, do you want to check in later?”

Conclusion: Journalism as a Living Ethical Practice

These Community Agreements are not fixed newsroom rules, but they are evolving ethical practices. Journalism itself is shaped by changing technologies, political pressures, and social movements. If you believe these agreements need revision to better support learning, equity, or accountability, you are encouraged to propose changes during the semester.

Revising how we talk about journalism is part of becoming better journalists.

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