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## Journalistic Ethics and Full Disclosure: Sources

The extracts below reflect the views on "full disclosure" and related issues of news-gathering enterprises, organizations of journalists, and institutions committed to the education of journalists and the support of journalism. The online sources for this material are indicated in brackets; all were accessed on March 31, 2015.

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### From the [Pulitzer Center](#)

<<http://pulitzercenter.org/about-us/ethics-and-standards-policy>>

### CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Normal activities -- outside work, investments, political activism -- pose special problems for journalists. Often, it's best to avoid activities that might interfere with your ability to function as a journalist. Alternatively, you may be precluded from working on certain topics for the Pulitzer Center if you're personally involved.

A third alternative is public disclosure of any information that a site user might find relevant in understanding the content. Someone who is writing about a relative would need to disclose the relationship. A guest contributor writing about politics would need to disclose if he is associated with a candidate, and any employment or other financial relationship that could be viewed as related to the topic being reported.

Full disclosure of relevant information is standard practice for the Pulitzer Center - a necessary step but not always sufficient when a potential conflict of interest exists.

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**From the [Society of Professional Journalists](#)**

<<http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>>

Journalists should:

– Avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived. Disclose unavoidable conflicts.

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**From [National Public Radio \(NPR\)](#)**

<<http://ethics.npr.org/category/e-independence/>>

To secure the public's trust, we must make it clear that our primary allegiance is to the public. Any personal or professional interests that conflict with that allegiance, whether in appearance or in reality, risk compromising our credibility. We are vigilant in disclosing to both our supervisors and the public any circumstances where our loyalties may be divided – extending to the interests of spouses and other family members – and when necessary, we recuse ourselves from related coverage. ...

All NPR journalists, including those of us who work for the arts and music desks, must tell our supervisors in advance about potential conflicts of interest. When first assigned to cover or work on a matter, disclose to your immediate supervisors any business, commercial, financial or personal interests where such interests might reasonably be construed as being in actual, apparent or potential conflict with our duties.

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**From the [New York Times](#)**

<[http://www.nytc.com/wp-content/uploads/NYT\\_Ethical\\_Journalism\\_0904-1.pdf](http://www.nytc.com/wp-content/uploads/NYT_Ethical_Journalism_0904-1.pdf)>

Our contracts with freelance contributors require them to avoid conflicts of

interest, real or apparent. ... The authority to interpret and apply these guidelines is vested in department heads and ranking editors, most notably in the standards editor and the deputy editorial page editor. They may delegate that duty to their ranking assistants, but they remain responsible for decisions made in their name. ...

Relationships with sources require the utmost in sound judgment and self discipline to prevent the fact or appearance of partiality. Cultivating sources is an essential skill, often practiced most effectively in informal settings outside of normal business hours. Yet staff members, especially those assigned to beats, must be sensitive that personal relationships with news sources can erode into favoritism, in fact or appearance. ...

Even though this topic defies hard and fast rules, it is essential that we preserve a professional detachment, free of any whiff of bias. Staff members may see sources informally over a meal or drinks, but they must keep in mind the difference between legitimate business and personal friendship. ... Scrupulous practice requires that periodically we step back and take a hard look at whether we have drifted too close to sources we deal with regularly.

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**From the [Denver Post](http://www.denverpost.com/ethicspolicy#selfdealing)**

<<http://www.denverpost.com/ethicspolicy#selfdealing>>

Editorial employees must notify a supervisor if they are working on a matter involving a personal connection. If it is deemed by a supervisor to be a potential conflict of interest, the story should be reassigned. The same scenario applies to editors who may have an interest in, or personal connection to, the outcome of a story.

If a columnist is writing about an issue in which he or she has a stake, the columnist must discuss the matter with a supervisor. Sometimes, it will be enough for

the writer to clearly disclose to readers what his or her connection is to the source or issue. Other times, it may be deemed inappropriate for the columnist to write about that source or issue.

Areas of conflict potentially include, but are not limited to, writing/editing stories about: family or friends, organizations you belong to, schools you attend, a business from which you benefit, a church you attend, etc.

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**From the [Graduate School of Journalism, City University of New York](http://www.journalism.cuny.edu/current-students/code-of-ethics/)** <http://www.journalism.cuny.edu/current-students/code-of-ethics/>

All students must avoid any conflicts of interest between their appropriate role as student journalists and any other outside role. Such conflicts include preparing journalistic assignments on subjects or institutions in which the student has a financial, family, or personal involvement.

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**From the [National Scholastic Press Association \(NSPA\)](http://studentpress.org/nspa/pdf/wheel_modelcodeofethics.pdf)** <http://studentpress.org/nspa/pdf/wheel\_modelcodeofethics.pdf>

Disclose any potential conflict of interest by a journalist or news medium. For example, conflicts of interests could involve personal relationships with news subjects or sources. ... Declare any personal or unavoidable conflict of interest, perceived or certain, in covering stories or participating in editorial or policy decisions.