

What Would You Do? Media Ethics Scenarios

You are the editor of your school's newspaper. In each of the following scenarios, you are asked to consider a situation. Make a decision about what you will cover, what your angle will be and what you will publish. Will yours be an ethical decision? Include in your answer whether accuracy, fairness or clarity is in question.

1. A student at your school is highlighted on the local TV news. A reporter for the school newspaper uses information from the TV newscast without giving credit to the station. It turns out that several facts from the news report are wrong. *Do you admit the mistake? Do you tell how you got the incorrect information?*

2. A well-known musician is filming an anti-smoking ad at your school. The school newspaper photographer gets pictures of him smoking a cigarette during a break. Your photo editor wants to run the photo with the cutline "Rock Star Filmed Anti-Smoking ad on Tuesday." *Do you reword the caption?*

3. The daughter of the principal at your rival high school has been arrested on drunken driving charges. *Do you report it?*

4. One of your best friends says she saw the new basketball coach smoking marijuana at a concert. You tell the newspaper adviser that someone told you about seeing him and that you plan to report it in your concert review. The coach tells you he wasn't even at the concert. *Do you report the allegation? If so, do you include the coach's denial?*

Suggested answers:

1. **Yes.** It is a core value that journalists are accurate. And reporters should do their own reporting.
2. **Yes.** The cutline implies the picture was taken during the filming of the ad. Clarity is important in cutlines as well as in stories.
3. **Perhaps.** Why are you reporting this story? If only to cloud the reputation of the rival school's principal, don't publish it. Do you regularly report students who are arrested on DWI charges? Is the daughter 18 or older? Be fair, and treat this story as you would any other story.
4. **No.** You need facts. Rumors and mistaken identification have no place in a newspaper. By the way, what's this information doing in a concert review?