

Tasks for Thursday's 10:30 a.m. session

1] Answer the following questions (a bullet point list for each question works well):

What should a journalist be fired for?

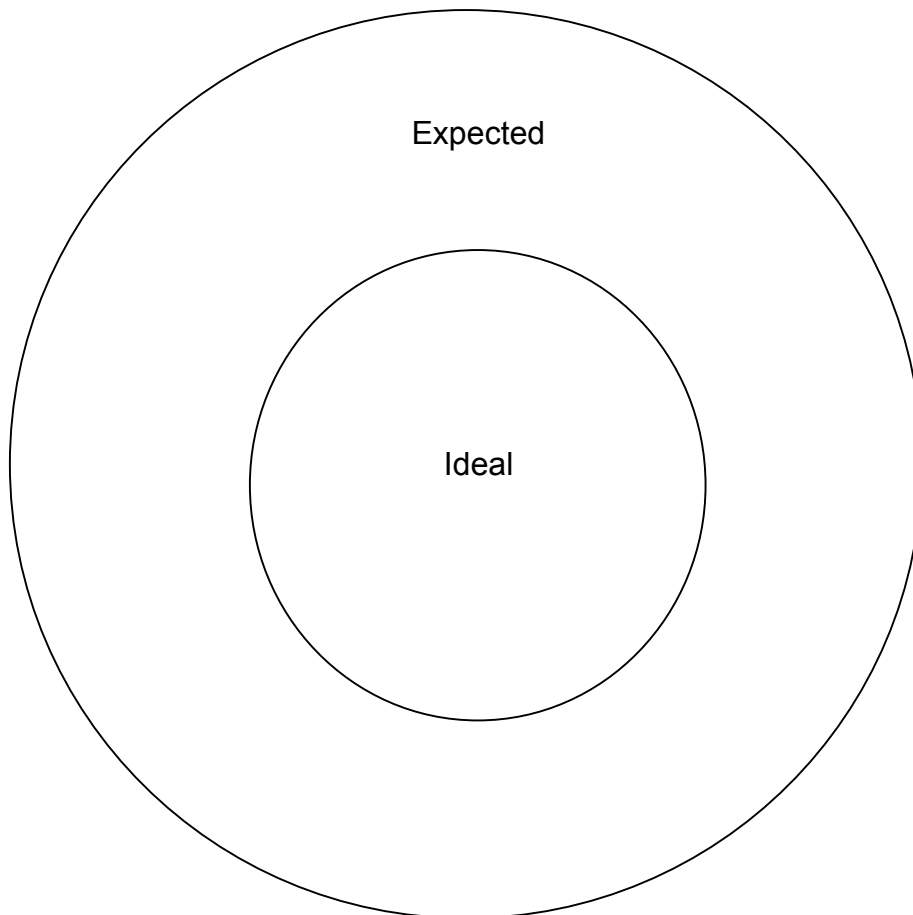
What should a journalist be expected to do?

What should a journalist win an award for?

2] One important tool in resolving professional ethical dilemmas is a consideration of the norms of a profession. To think about the norms of journalism, take your answers to the questions above and transfer them into a diagram that looks like the one below. In the “ideal” section (the bullseye of the sphere), put all of the things a journalist should win an award for; in the “expected” section, put all of the things a journalist should be expected to do; and in the “prohibited” section (outside the boundaries of the sphere), put all of the things a journalist should be fired for.

The Journalism Moral Sphere

Prohibited



3] A second tool in resolving professional ethical dilemmas is a consideration of the profession's code of ethics. For journalism, the primary code of ethics comes from the Society of Professional Journalists. Read its code below.

Preamble

Members of the Society of Professional Journalists believe that public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy. The duty of the journalist is to further those ends by seeking truth and providing a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues. Conscientious journalists from all media and specialties strive to serve the public with thoroughness and honesty. Professional integrity is the cornerstone of a journalist's credibility. Members of the Society share a dedication to ethical behavior and adopt this code to declare the Society's principles and standards of practice.

Seek Truth and Report It

Journalists should be honest, fair and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information.

Journalists should:

- Test the accuracy of information from all sources and exercise care to avoid inadvertent error. Deliberate distortion is never permissible.
- Diligently seek out subjects of news stories to give them the opportunity to respond to allegations of wrongdoing.
- Identify sources whenever feasible. The public is entitled to as much information as possible on sources' reliability.
- Always question sources' motives before promising anonymity. Clarify conditions attached to any promise made in exchange for information. Keep promises.
- Make certain that headlines, news teases and promotional material, photos, video, audio, graphics, sound bites and quotations do not misrepresent. They should not oversimplify or highlight incidents out of context.
- Never distort the content of news photos or video. Image enhancement for technical clarity is always permissible. Label montages and photo illustrations.
- Avoid misleading re-enactments or staged news events. If re-enactment is necessary to tell a story, label it.
- Avoid undercover or other surreptitious methods of gathering information except when traditional open methods will not yield information vital to the public. Use of such methods should be explained as part of the story
- Never plagiarize.
- Tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience boldly, even when it is unpopular to do so.
- Examine their own cultural values and avoid imposing those values on others.

- Avoid stereotyping by race, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, geography, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance or social status.
- Support the open exchange of views, even views they find repugnant.
- Give voice to the voiceless; official and unofficial sources of information can be equally valid.
- Distinguish between advocacy and news reporting. Analysis and commentary should be labeled and not misrepresent fact or context.
- Distinguish news from advertising and shun hybrids that blur the lines between the two.
- Recognize a special obligation to ensure that the public's business is conducted in the open and that government records are open to inspection.

Minimize Harm

Ethical journalists treat sources, subjects and colleagues as human beings deserving of respect.

Journalists should:

- Show compassion for those who may be affected adversely by news coverage. Use special sensitivity when dealing with children and inexperienced sources or subjects.
- Be sensitive when seeking or using interviews or photographs of those affected by tragedy or grief.
- Recognize that gathering and reporting information may cause harm or discomfort. Pursuit of the news is not a license for arrogance.
- Recognize that private people have a greater right to control information about themselves than do public officials and others who seek power, influence or attention. Only an overriding public need can justify intrusion into anyone's privacy.
- Show good taste. Avoid pandering to lurid curiosity.
- Be cautious about identifying juvenile suspects or victims of sex crimes.
- Be judicious about naming criminal suspects before the formal filing of charges.
- Balance a criminal suspect's fair trial rights with the public's right to be informed.

Act Independently

Journalists should be free of obligation to any interest other than the public's right to know.

Journalists should:

- Avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived.
- Remain free of associations and activities that may compromise integrity or damage credibility.
- Refuse gifts, favors, fees, free travel and special treatment, and shun secondary employment, political involvement, public office and service in community organizations if they compromise journalistic integrity.
- Disclose unavoidable conflicts.
- Be vigilant and courageous about holding those with power accountable.
- Deny favored treatment to advertisers and special interests and resist their pressure to influence news coverage.
- Be wary of sources offering information for favors or money; avoid bidding for news.

Be Accountable

Journalists are accountable to their readers, listeners, viewers and each other.

Journalists should:

- Clarify and explain news coverage and invite dialogue with the public over journalistic conduct.
- Encourage the public to voice grievances against the news media.
- Admit mistakes and correct them promptly.
- Expose unethical practices of journalists and the news media.
- Abide by the same high standards to which they hold others.

The SPJ Code of Ethics is voluntarily embraced by thousands of writers, editors and other news professionals. The present version of the code was adopted by the 1996 SPJ National Convention, after months of study and debate among the Society's members. Sigma Delta Chi's first Code of Ethics was borrowed from the American Society of Newspaper Editors in 1926. In 1973, Sigma Delta Chi wrote its own code, which was revised in 1984, 1987 and 1996.

Source: Code of Ethics, Society of Professional Journalists. (1996). Available at http://www.spj.org/ethics_code.asp. Retrieved June 9, 2006.

3] A third important tool to use when resolving ethical dilemmas is a consideration of moral philosophy. Some key moral theorists would ask you to consider these questions:

Aristotle:

What action would align with what your moral hero (a person of virtue) would do?

Immanuel Kant:

What action represents pure motivations?

What action would you be willing to universalize?

What action treats people not as means to an end, but as ends in themselves?

John Stuart Mill:

What action would result in the greatest good for the greatest number (taking into account both quantity and quality of goods and harms)?

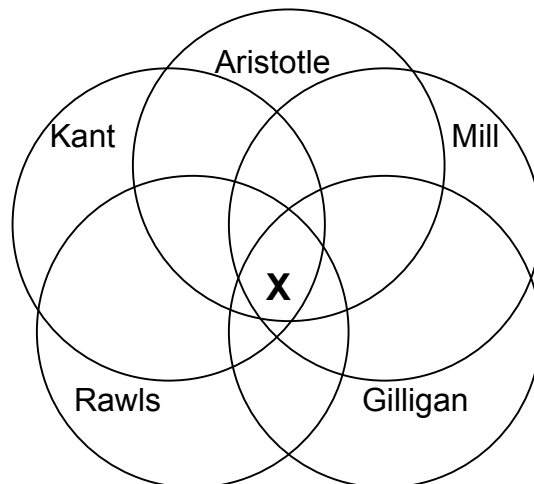
John Rawls:

What action would protect the most vulnerable?

Carol Gilligan:

What action would best satisfy the needs of all involved?

When considering the perspectives of each of these theorists, the ideal solution would be the action that satisfies all of their criteria. This is represented in the diagram below. The intersection of all five circles (X marks the spot) would be the ideal action. In most ethical dilemmas, the ideal is impossible to reach, but it is what we strive for – it's the target of all actions



4] Finally, read the following case and be prepared to discuss your opinions about it on Thursday.

Arthur Ashe's Deadly Secret

Take yourself back in time 14 years.

Tennis legend Arthur Ashe, who was the first black man to win Wimbledon and the U.S. Open, has retired from tennis. Since his retirement, Ashe has joined the struggle for human rights in the U.S. and has emerged as a leading critic of apartheid in South Africa. He has also written a highly regarded three-volume history of black athletes in the United States. By all accounts, he is generous with his time and gracious when dealing with the public.

It's April 8, 1992, and Arthur Ashe has just come face-to-face with one of the most difficult decisions of his life. Unknown to all but a few, Ashe contracted HIV, probably from a blood transfusion, during a heart bypass operation in 1983. Ashe, an intensely private man, has managed to keep his condition a secret from everyone except his family and close friends.

However, all of this has just changed. A reporter from *USA Today*, acting on a tip from an anonymous source, has just contacted Ashe asking him to confirm whether he has AIDS or not. Realizing that his secret would now, very probably, become public knowledge, Ashe is faced with the dilemma of letting the media expose his private life or taking the initiative and releasing the information himself.

He decides to ask *USA Today's* sports editor to allow him 36 hours before the paper runs the story so that he can prepare a statement. He also says he will not talk any further with the reporter at that time and asks not to be contacted again.

You are the sports editor at *USA Today*. What are you going to do?