PROFESSIONAL MEDIA TRAINING GUIDE

Precision in the Newsroom:

Code of Conduct for Rights-Based and Social Reporting on SOGIESC in Lebanon

For journalists, editors, producers, photographers, multimedia and digital-platform teams, in addition to newsroom management

Author & Researcher: Rouba El Helou-Sensenig (university lecturer and communications expert)

Rouba El Helou-Sensenig



PROUD lebanon

FRIEDRICH NAUMANN STIFTUNG Für die Freiheit.
Lebanon and Syria

Editorial Credits

Research Foundation:

This professional code of conduct (CoC) is based on the empirical findings and media monitoring framework of the baseline study: Constructing Public Understanding of SOGIESC in Lebanese Media

Document Scope:

An operational newsroom guide and editorial framework for rights-based reporting and social coverage in Lebanon. This professional code is issued by Proud Lebanon in collaboration with the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (FNF) Lebanon.

License

This Code is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0). URL: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/

Introduction

Journalism Standards: Historical Context and Public Responsibility

It is difficult to identify a single historical starting point for newsroom writing guidelines. However, historians of the profession point to early Associated Press (AP) guides dating to 1900 that addressed language and writing practice, reflecting decades of professional experimentation before the AP issued its first formal stylebook in 1953.

In Arabic and based on a regional context, earlier generations described journalism as the "profession of seeking difficulties". This was neither a rhetorical metaphor nor an empty slogan, it rather emerged from lived experience and from the cost of seeking truth in environments marked by uncertainty, pressure, and censorship.

Historically, journalistic standards did not emerge all at once. In France, for example, the Dreyfus Affair shook society and helped spur the creation of a Free College of Social Sciences, later associated with the École Supérieure de Journalisme, established in 1899 to provide broad knowledge in politics and economics and awarding diplomas from 1910. In the United States, the Missouri School of Journalism was established in 1908 and became influential in the development of ethical guidance. Its founding dean Walter Williams wrote "The Journalist's Creed" in 1914. In Germany, economist Karl Bücher established an institute for newspaper studies at Leipzig University in 1916, combining academic standards with editorial skills, and the German Press Council (Deutscher Presserat) was later founded in 1956 as a self-regulatory body intended to strengthen professional accountability and reduce the need for government control over the press.

Sweden, meanwhile, adopted a pioneering Freedom of the Press Act in 1766 and later developed a system of media self-regulation and an Ombudsman mechanism to address grievances, protect human dignity, and safeguard press freedom without direct state control.

This history shows that journalism did not begin with a ready-made code of conduct (CoC) or a single unified charter. The profession developed tools and standards gradually in response to practical need: ethical charters and codes defined principles and values, while a CoC translated them into everyday practice. Later, stylebooks and editorial guides brought consistency to language and difficult editorial decisions. Press councils, ombuds mechanisms, and mediation subsequently added channels for complaints and accountability. Today, this evolution is complemented by pre-publication review guides and verification tools designed to anticipate and reduce legal and ethical risks while protecting public trust, a principle defined with lasting clarity in the second statement of Walter Williams's 1914 "Journalist's Creed":

> ***I believe that the public journal is a public trust; that all connected with it are, to the full measure of their responsibility, trustees for the public; that acceptance of a lesser service than the public service is betrayal of this trust.***

This commitment reinforces the idea that those who enjoy an exceptional degree of freedom carry a corresponding responsibility toward society, without treating individual rights as automatically expendable.

Finally, since I began working on this code of conduct (CoC), I have kept returning to a personal question that predates the contemporary terminology: when did journalism begin setting clear standards for what we publish, what we deliberately withhold to protect individuals from harm, and what we openly and courageously correct?

This CoC on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) is neither an imported Western template nor a translation. It is an extension of a longstanding ethical tradition, rooted directly in the realities of Lebanon's media landscape and the practical challenges reporters navigate in the field.

Rouba El Helou-Sensenig
University Lecturer and Political Communication Expert

What is this Code of Conduct?

This CoC builds on an earlier study of media content in Lebanon. Rather than reproducing monitoring figures or rankings within the reporting, it translates research findings on conceptual, professional, and institutional gaps, into actionable editorial decisions that can be applied under everyday newsroom pressure.

The assessment revealed that core editorial flaws extend far beyond vocabulary or terminology. They are embedded in the structure of the narrative itself: Who speaks? Who frames the issue? Does an official or institutional statement get treated as the definitive truth? Does a headline or image expose an identity that the report itself took care to protect? And do we conflate SOGIESC with LGBTQ+, treating two distinct concepts as identical in meaning?

Core of the Code

Inclusive journalism does not mean adopting political agendas or editorial advocacy. It requires building stories grounded in accuracy, verifiable facts, context, and editorial independence. It also demands a conscious awareness of power dynamics, alongside a strict commitment to shielding individuals from identity exposure or gratuitous harm that serves no genuine public interest in knowing the truth.

How This Code Is Designed

Grounded in this responsibility, the CoC does not seek to dictate editorial decisions or impose predetermined judgments. Instead, it provides clear professional standards to support difficult decisions made under tight deadlines and in the field.

To achieve this, it follows an applied structure of seven interconnected modules. These modules guide journalists from conceptual clarity through story construction, interviewing, source protection, specialized verification, pre-publication review, and institutional governance, as illustrated in the learning and workflow path below:



Editorial Note

This professional CoC serves as a guidance and training tool for newsrooms and does not constitute legal counsel. Throughout its drafting, an incremental approach was adopted for introducing technical vocabulary. At the outset, the phrase is written in full at the beginning to ground the concept: *Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, and Sex Characteristics*, followed directly by its standard international acronym, SOGIESC, to anchor the material within established human rights and research frameworks. Subsequently, the original acronym is used, or replaced by the phrase *"sexual and gender diversity issues"*, to maintain narrative flow and prevent redundancy without compromising accuracy.

Regarding the acronym LGBTQ+, the code treats it as an umbrella term for identities and labels that individuals adopt to describe themselves. On this basis, we avoid the use of the term *"LGBTQ+ society/community"* (مجتمع الميم-عين) as a monolithic bloc or as an assumed uniform gender identity. This accounts for the divergence of lived realities and

varied local contexts, and avoids confining individuals to a single mold or presuming a unified political agenda. In Arabic copy, the phrasing *"LGBTQ+ individuals"* (أفراد الميم-عين) is adopted, or journalists are directed to use the specific self-identification requested by the person involved, provided its relevance to the reporting is established.

How to Use This Code

This Code is designed to serve both as a quick operational newsroom reference and as a specialized field-training tool. It does not require a cover-to-cover reading for every assignment. Instead, journalists and editors can consult the relevant tool and module according to the nature of the story and the level of risk surrounding sources:

- **In Breaking Daily Coverage:** When processing breaking news or urgent updates under publication deadlines, consult the **"60-Second Pre-Publication Checklist"**, cross-referenced with **Module 2**, to calibrate benchmarks and contextual verification within 1 to 5 minutes.
- **In Sensitive Interviews:** When preparing for a sensitive interview or engaging with a source whose identity must remain protected, consult Modules 3 and 4 before recording or broadcast, and complete the "Informed Consent Form" to define publication boundaries and protect digital security.
- **In Complex Investigative Stories:** When handling stories involving legal, psychiatric, medical, religious, or political disputes, allow time for editorial review of Module 5 and use the **NEEDS Harm Reduction** Test as a cross-cutting framework to assess evidence, examine claims, and reduce physical and digital safety risks.
- **In Digital Visual Packaging:** When selecting headlines, thumbnails, teasers, and social media cuts that could inadvertently reveal a source, re-apply the **"Re-identification Test"** outlined in Module 4 within the visual and digital publishing workflows of **Module 6**, within a 5-minute review.
- **In Emergencies and Grievances:** Upon receiving a complaint, experiencing an accidental identity disclosure, or identifying immediate post-broadcast threats, act immediately within the first 15 minutes by executing the **"Emergency Response and Administrative Escalation Protocol"** detailed in **Module 7** to contain harm and ensure source security.

Quick Reference - Mapping

Recommended Pathway & Module	Editorial Need / Scenario
Module 1 + Glossary of Terms	Ambiguity surrounding terminology or descriptors
Module 2	Building a story, verifying evidence, and testing relevance
Module 3 + Informed Consent Form	Conducting an interview with a vulnerable or at-risk source
Module 4	Anonymizing a source or securing identity parameters
Module 5 + NEEDS Test	Navigating complex legal, medical, or contested claims
Module 6	Reviewing headlines, thumbnails, cuts, and social media
Module 7	Managing complaints, editorial errors, or publishing crises
The 60-Second Card	Conducting a rapid final checkpoint immediately prior to broadcast

Structure of the Code

Module 1: Conceptual Precision Before Usage - SOGIESC, LGBTQ+, Terminology, and Gender Mainstreaming.

Module 2: Building the Story on Evidence, Not Sensationalism - Evidence, Relevance, Verification, and Deconstructing Official Authority.

Module 3: An Interview Does Not Equal Permanent Consent - Informed Consent, Agency, and Trauma-Informed Reporting.

Module 4: Protecting Identity Throughout the Story - Privacy, Anonymization, Digital Security, and the Impact of Permanent Archiving.

Module 5: Covering Complex Files Without Sensationalism or Defamation - Crime and the Judiciary, Law and Medicine, Religion and Politics.

Module 6: Visual Packaging and Digital Publishing - Headlines, Thumbnails, Comment Moderation, and AI Tools.

Module 7: Editorial Governance and Accountability: Decision-Making Tiers, Review Gateways, Correction Mechanisms, and Emergency Response.

The Journalist's and Editor's Toolkit (Operational Annexes): NEEDS Harm Reduction Test, The 60-Second Pre-Publication Card, Informed Consent Form, and Editorial Lexicon & Descriptors.

Module One

Clarify Concepts Before Use: SOGIESC, LGBTQ+, terminology, and gender mainstreaming

Module Scope and Function

This module establishes the conceptual foundation of the Code. Its objective is to eliminate recurring errors before stories reach the copy desk or interview stage. In particular, it addresses the frequent confusion among sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics, as well as the incorrect use of SOGIESC as a demographic label or category name.

Core Learning Outcomes

After completing this module, journalists and editors will be able to:

- Distinguish clearly between SOGIESC as an analytical framework and LGBTQ+ as an umbrella identity term.
- Determine which specific identity dimension is directly relevant to the story.
- Avoid turning analytical criteria into reductive labels or artificial group categories.

Recent media monitoring shows that conflating SOGIESC with LGBTQ+ is not unique to daily journalism, it persists across professional and academic literature as well. For this reason, the code establishes conceptual clarity before addressing editorial execution and story construction.

1. SOGIESC Is a Framework, Not an Identity or Group Label

SOGIESC is an acronym for four distinct dimensions that apply universally to every human being: Sexual Orientation (SO), Gender Identity (GI), Gender Expression (GE), and Sex Characteristics (SC).

Newsrooms must avoid phrases like "SOGIESC people" or "the SOGIESC community." SOGIESC describes dimensions that apply to everyone;,it is not an identity label or a community. By contrast, LGBTQ+ is an umbrella acronym for identities and self-descriptions that individuals may use.

Conceptual Breakdown and Newsroom Traps

Dimension	Core Meaning	Editorial Error to Avoid
Sexual Orientation (SO)	Patterns of emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction.	Reducing orientation to mere sexual behavior, personal lifestyle preference, or inferring it from external appearance.

Dimension	Core Meaning	Editorial Error to Avoid
Gender Identity (GI)	An individual's deeply felt, internal sense of gender, which may or may not align with sex assigned at birth.	Treating gender identity as synonymous with sexual orientation or assuming it dictates who someone loves.
Gender Expression (GE)	The external presentation of gender through clothing, grooming, voice, mannerisms, or name.	Treating outward expression or non-traditional styling as conclusive proof of a person's gender identity or sexual orientation.
Sex Characteristics (SC)	Biological and physical traits, including anatomy, reproductive organs, hormones, and chromosomal configurations.	Conflating biological traits or intersex variations with medical gender transition or social gender identity.

2. Terminology Precision Is Insufficient on Its Own

A report can use correct, human rights-aligned terminology and still cause severe harm. Editorial failures routinely occur through sensational headlines, identifying imagery, uncritical reliance on security service narratives, or the passive adoption of unverified medical claims.

For this reason, the code treats terminology as only one component of an integrated editorial verification system. Accuracy requires alignment across five core pillars:

- Relevance: Establishing why personal identity matters to the public interest core of the report.
- Context: Situating events within broader legal, social, and structural realities.
- Verification: Corroborating claims independently rather than treating official assertions as objective fact.
- Voice Representation: Ensuring affected people have genuine agency rather than serving as passive objects of debate.
- Source Safety: Assessing and mitigating the digital, social, and physical risks of publication.

3. The Self-Identification Rule

When identity is demonstrably relevant to the core of the reporting, the baseline protocol is direct verification with the source.

Reporters must ask two standard questions:

1. *What words do you use to describe yourself?*
2. *Are there specific terms you prefer we avoid**?***

This does not give sources editorial veto power over the reporting, but prevents newsrooms from imposing inaccurate labels or overriding personal agency.

4. Mainstreaming a Gender Lens: What Is Its Relation to SOGIESC?

Integrating a gender perspective is not synonymous with SOGIESC. It is an editorial approach that examines power relations, systemic disparities, and representation across every beat. Reporters can apply this approach to economics, armed conflict, healthcare, labor, education, urban transport, and artificial intelligence (AI) whenever gender influences the distribution of resources, authority, or harm. It must never be artificially

grafted onto stories where no meaningful connection exists.

To assess whether gender mainstreaming applies, evaluate these core analytical checks:

- Who is impacted?
- Who holds decision-making power?
- Who is permitted to speak?
- What baseline data is missing from the text?
- Are we reinforcing existing stereotypes?
- Are there disproportionate impacts or distinct vulnerabilities linked to sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or sex characteristics?

☑ Pre-Publication Verification Questions

- ☐ Is SOGIESC used strictly as an analytical framework, avoiding invalid phrases like "the SOGIESC community"?
- ☐ Has the specific relevant dimension (SO, GI, GE, or SC) been identified and isolated rather than blurred into a generic term?
- ☐ Does the language accurately reflect how the individual identifies, without granting outside parties the power to define them?
- ☐ Is the gender lens directly substantive to the subject matter, or is it an artificial insertion into an unrelated story?

Practical Exercise: Module 1

Correcting Conceptual Conflation Prior to Story Architecture (Lebanese Media Realities)

- Suggested Time: 10 minutes.
- Required Output: Categorize concept cards, identify one editorial error, and explain its real-world impact.
- Success Metric: Flawless distinction between analytical framework, adopted identity, and biological dimensions.
- Team Distribution: Divide participants into working groups and provide each team with cards labeled: *Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, Sex Characteristics, Sexuality, LGBTQ+, LGBTQ+ Individuals*.

Editorial Task:

1. Classify each card into its precise category: (Analytical Framework / Self-Adopted Identity / Biological Trait).
2. Identify an editorial error arising from conflating these concepts, detailing its repercussions on story accuracy and source safety.

→ Next Step

Having clarified terminology, Module 2 moves from "What is the precise word?" to "How do we structure the story itself?": relevance, accuracy, verification, amplifying underrepresented voices, and challenging the monopoly of official authority over the narrative.

Module Two

Building the Story on Precision, Not Sensationalism

Module Scope

This module governs the standards of accuracy, relevance, voice representation, and independent verification. It covers story construction: What enters the text and what is omitted? Who is given a platform? And who holds the authority to frame the issue? It guides the overall editorial architecture before drafting begins: Who makes the claim? Where is the evidence? How relevant are personal details to the news event? And whose voice is missing?

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this module, the journalist and editor will be equipped to:

1. Distinguish between verified facts, unsubstantiated allegations, and personal commentary.
2. Evaluate the direct relevance of sensitive identity details to genuine news value.
3. Diversify sourcing to disrupt single-source official narratives and secure independent verification.

1. Accuracy Extends Beyond the Body Text

A story may be factually correct yet still mislead through its headline, image, or lack of context. In stories involving identity and private life, the consequences of an error may be difficult to reverse once the material has circulated, appeared in search results, and been preserved in screenshots.

- Distinguish clearly between empirical facts, claims, opinion, commentary, and assessments.
- Modify headlines and image caption whenever they imply meanings not supported by the body of the report.
- State clearly when verification is not possible because evidence is unavailable, do not fill gaps with inference or speculation.

2. The Standard of Relevance: Defaulting to Omission Over Gratuitous Disclosure

The Guiding Relevance Rule (a cross-module rule)

- Identity or sensitive personal attributes must not be mentioned unless their omission demonstrably impairs the public's understanding of the story or its public-interest essence. This rule applies uniformly across the article text, long-form investigative features, headlines, visual choices, and the 60-second card.
- Never publish identity details simply because they are accessible or guaranteed to generate click-throughs. The editorial test is: What specific understanding would the public lose if this detail were withheld? If the news value remains intact without it, the justification for publication collapses.

The Reverse Test

Would this story include this personal attribute if the person were cisgender and hetero-sexual? If the answer is no, re-examine why identity was introduced as a relevant news element.

3. Voice and Representation: Who Owns the Story?

In covering SOGIESC and gender issues in Lebanon, security agencies, political figures, religious authorities, and medical establishments represent the most accessible paths for newsrooms. However, institutional accessibility does not confer a monopoly over defining lived experiences.

Source Category	Editorial Question	Knowledge Classification
Executive Authorities: Ministries, security forces, courts, official administrations.	Who issues the decision or enforces the measure?	Decision Making Authority
Professional Experts: Lawyers, physicians, academic researchers.	Who possesses qualified interpretations of legal texts or empirical medical data?	Technical Expertise
Lived Experience: Directly affected individuals (safeguarded as required).	Who endures the direct consequences of the decision or policy?	Lived Experience
Neutral Verification: Independent documents, public records, corroborating datasets.	What neutral evidence independently tests the validity of the claim?	Independent Verification

4. Official Authority Is an Informational Source, Not Self-Evident Proof

Official press releases and security statements provide initial leads, but never absolve journalists of investigative scrutiny:

- Attribute every factual claim precisely to its original speaker.

- Demand supporting documentation and verify statutory legal baselines and empirical data.
- Guarantee right-of-reply whenever explicit accusations or wrongdoing are alleged.
- Establish clear boundaries between an official source's narrative and facts verified by the newsroom.

☑ Pre-Publication Checklist

- ☐ Is every factual detail in the story supported by evidence?
- ☐ Does referencing identity serve public comprehension, or does it merely function as clickbait?
- ☐ Who dominates the speaking space in this piece, and whose perspective is omitted?
- ☐ Does the official source conflate relaying facts with moralizing and interpreting context?
- ☐ What specific facts have been independently Verified by the newsroom?

Applied Exercise

Security Agency Communiqués Are Not the Entire Story (Lebanese Media Realities)

Suggested Time: 15 minutes.

Required Output: 5 missing critical questions + 2 independent sources + 1 verified contextual background sentence.

Success Metric: Preventing an official communiqué from being framed as established fact, demonstrating an independent verification trail.

Case Study: A security communiqué detailing the dismantling of an alleged blackmail ring targeting men via a mobile dating application.

Editorial Requirements: Refuse to copy-paste the communiqué's framing. Execute the following:

1. *Identify Missing Questions:* Formulate 5 fundamental questions ignored by the statement (e.g., chain of custody of evidence, legality of searches and procedural due process, statutory classification of charges, conditions of detention, and origin of the complaint).
2. *Broaden Sources:* Identify two independent non-security sources (e.g., digital rights attorney, criminal procedure scholar, human rights monitor).
3. *Contextual Background:* Add an editorial background note contextualizing digital safety practices or clarifying the legal statute in question, ensuring complete suppression of any detail that could expose victims or witnesses.

☑ Next Step

When building the story requires direct testimony, immediate security questions arise: Can the source speak safely? What are the boundaries of their consent? Module 3 addresses these procedures.

Module Three

An Interview Does Not Equal Permanent Consent

Informed Consent, Agency, and Trauma-Informed Interviewing

Scope and Purpose

This module translates the principle of *"Do No Harm"* from theory into concrete operational workflows. It clarifies what must be communicated to the source at three critical junctures: before the interview, during the interview, and prior to publication while preserving editorial independence without source interference while preventing commitments the newsroom cannot fulfill.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this module, the journalist and editor will be equipped to:

1. Define the parameters of informed consent across all reporting stages.
2. Communicate the realistic boundaries of protection to sources without forfeiting editorial independence.

1. Consent: An Ongoing, Multi-Tiered Process

Agreeing to an interview does not automatically authorize publishing a source's full legal name, facial features, voice, workplace, identity facets, or distribution across third-party platforms. Publishing a full interview on a flagship website is fundamentally distinct from cutting short clips for social media or syndicating material to external networks.

Clarification Level	Key Questions to Clarify with the Source
Story Objective	What is the purpose of this reporting? What public-interest issue does it address?
Publishing Format	Will this appear as print text, audio, edited video, live broadcast, documentary, or social media teaser?
Reach & Distribution	Is the primary audience local, national, diaspora, or permanent searchable web archives?
Identity Disclosure Level	How will the source appear: full name, pseudonym, on-camera, blurred, audio-scrambled, or role-generalized?
Scope of Topics	What sensitive topics are covered? What boundaries does the source wish to set regarding private details?
Risks & Protection Limits	What are the realistic repercussions post-publication? What technical safeguards can the newsroom realistically guarantee?
Review & Revocation Terms	What is the exact deadline and procedure for the source to adjust their identity parameters or withdraw consent before release?

2. Interview Protocols: Restoring Agency to the Source

- Ask one question at a time and avoid confusion, coercion, or leading the source.
- Allow the source to stop, decline to answer, or take a break whenever they choose.
- Reconfirm consent when new information emerges that creates additional risk.
- Agree in advance on the status of the conversation: on the record, for background, or off the record.
- Use the exact name, pronouns, and terminology the source chooses for self-identification.

Trauma-informed interviewing does not mean abandoning essential questions, critical scrutiny or lowering verification standards. Rather, it prohibits using fear, trauma, or emotional vulnerability as leverage to extract sensational details that add zero value to public understanding.

Editorial Boundaries: What You Must Never Promise

- Do not promise absolute safety or guaranteed legal protection.
- Do not promise complete deletion of content from the internet once published.
- Do not grant a source editorial control or pre-approval rights over the final journalistic text unless explicitly mandated by newsroom policy.
- Do not exploit dependency, financial need, or psychological crisis to obtain consent to speak.

☑ Pre-Publication Checklist

- ☐ Does the source clearly understand the publication context, target platform, and presentation format?
- ☐ Did the source grant explicit, segmented consent regarding how their identity is handled?
- ☐ Is the source experiencing trauma or acute distress that may impair their ability to understand the consequences of public exposure?
- ☐ Has the source settled on a clear identity term for publication, or does personal safety require a broader, neutral description to avoid imposing a permanent label?
- ☐ Have risk levels, story framing, or distribution channels changed since the interview was recorded?
- ☐ Can the newsroom realistically fulfill every commitment made to the source?

✎ Applied Exercise Transforming Offhand Verbal Assent into Segmented Informed Consent

Suggested time: 15 minutes.

Required Output: Convert casual verbal permission into a structured, multi-tiered consent protocol.

Success Metric: Clear documentation of platforms, identity exposure, known risks, and pre-publication withdrawal windows.

Scenario: A source casually states during a conversation: *"Yeah, sure, you can use the interview."*

Required editorial process:

Ban reliance on vague verbal approval. Break this down into the seven operational areas: story objective, delivery format, distribution reach, exposure tier, boundary of topics, realistic risk assessment, and pre-publication revocation terms. **N**ext Step

Even with verified informed consent, careless visual or audio details, such as distinct tattoos, street architecture, vocal cadence, or embedded metadata can lead to re-identification. Module 4 details technical and editorial source protection.

Module Four

Protecting Identity Throughout the Story

Privacy, source anonymization, digital safety, and the impact of permanent archiving

Module Scope and Purpose

A pseudonym alone does not guarantee anonymity. This module provides reporting, visual production, and digital teams with an applied protocol to eliminate indirect clues that inadvertently reveal sources, implementing the principle of data minimization**.**

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this module, journalists and editors will be able to test for re-identification risks via direct and indirect clues, reducing collected and published data to the bare professional minimum. **1**. The Re-identification Test

Verification goes beyond checking whether the legal name was omitted. The standard test is: *Could a relative, employer, landlord, or security official deduce the person's identity by piecing together the details provided?* Isolated data points might seem harmless, but cross-referencing an unusual profession, residential neighborhood, exact incident date, vocal pitch, and physical markings (e.g., tattoos) will identify the person.

Risk Domain	Editorial Assessment Question	Professional Safeguard
Judicial & Security	Could publication lead to police summonses, interrogation, device searches, or prosecution?	Seek legal counsel; anonymize fully; delay publication; excise non-essential legal claims.
Family & Community	Could the social circle identify the source via voice tone, location, or life chronology?	Remove indirect identifiers; use pseudonyms; alter audio pitch; neutralize filming backdrops.
Employment & Housing	Could the person face eviction, workplace termination, or educational expulsion?	Mask profession and workplace; obscure neighborhood landmarks; avoid distinct uniforms.
Digital Blackmail & Doxxing	Could unredacted screenshots, chat logs, or metadata be weaponized against the source?	Ban unredacted app screenshots; strip metadata; utilize end-to-end encrypted transfer.
Physical & Psychological Safety	Can the source evaluate the consequences of exposure free from acute distress or external coercion?	Provide neutral interview spaces; allow a trusted support person; pause or reschedule if distressed.

2. The Principle of Data Minimization

- Do not collect legal names, national identity documents, or home addresses unless strictly necessary for news verification.

- Strip all metadata (EXIF data) from audio, video, and image files—especially geolocation coordinates, capture dates, and device models.
- Restrict access to raw, unedited footage to the absolute minimum editorial personnel; separate contact databases from working drafts.
- Scrutinize visual backgrounds: tattoos, reflections, license plates, balconies, distinctive clothing, and visible documents.
- Evaluate how cropping video clips or creating teasers for social media platforms impacts source protection.

3. Permanent Archiving and Publication Responsibility

Publishing on a primary website is only the first step in a piece's digital lifecycle. Content is repurposed into clips, archived in search engines, screenshotted, downloaded, and distributed through messaging applications. Source protection protocols must account for downstream redistribution and digital persistence, rather than focusing solely on the original web page.

☑ Pre-Publication Checklist

- ☐ Does source anonymization provide robust, real- world protection, or is it merely cosmetic?
- ☐ Which indirect clues could allow third parties to identify the source if cross-referenced?
- ☐ Does the value of the story justify retaining sensitive identity data in newsroom raw working files/records?
- ☐ Does the risk increase when the material is clipped or redistributed on other platforms?

Testing Identity Protection Protocols (Lebanese Media Realities)

Suggested Time: 15 minutes.

Required Output: Map identifying clues that could expose the source, and edit the text to minimize exposure.

Success Metric: The core news story remains comprehensible while removing all details that permit reverse identification.

Case Study: A draft report where the source's name was removed, but which includes: an uncommon profession within a specific municipal district, a residential neighborhood, an exact incident timestamp, a description of a distinct tattoo, and unmodulated audio.

Editorial Requirements:

1. *Identify Corroborating Clues:* Extract every detail that collectively allows the source to be identified despite the missing name.
2. *Re-edit the Text:* Re-write the copy to preserve essential public-interest facts while excising all non-essential identifying data.

→ Next Step

Once source safety is assured, the same standards must be applied to more complex beats: crime and courts, law and medicine, religion and politics. These are the focus of Module Five.

Module Five

Covering Complex Files Without Sensationalism or Defamation. Crime and the Judiciary, Law and Medicine, Religion and Politics

Scope and Purpose

Rather than offering fragmented guidelines for different beats, this module introduces a unified editorial approach: scrutinizing the nature of claims, selecting qualified expert sources, distinguishing opinion from verified fact, and protecting public-interest issues without reducing individuals to their identities.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this module, the journalist and editor will be equipped to:

1. Distinguish between empirical facts and subjective viewpoints.
2. Fact-check specialized claims via accredited institutions.
3. Anchor stories in events and structural accountability, steering clear of character assassination or sensationalism.

1. Crime and Court Reporting: Focus on the Offense

In cases involving extortion, data leaks, or exploitation, uncritical reporting often focuses on personal identity or sexual orientation as a sensational angle rather than analyzing the crime itself. Injecting identity where it has no bearing stigmatizes entire communities and causes harm to victims that often exceeds the impact of the original offense:

- Respect the presumption of innocence and distinguish clearly between suspicion, charge, prosecution, and final judgment.
- Prioritize the protection of victims' and witnesses' identities over sensational news value.
- Identify the core issue: is the story about extortion, institutional corruption, exploitation, or regulatory loopholes?
- Do not republish compromised personal photos, videos, or leaked chat links under the guise that they are "trending" on social platforms

2. Handling Expert Claims: Evidence and Accreditation

Journalists are not expected to be physicians or jurists, but they are accountable for determining the technical qualifications required to verify a claim. A theological opinion does not settle a clinical question; an activist perspective does not resolve a constitutional interpretation; and a single court ruling does not automatically invalidate a statu-

tory law.

Nature of Claim	Verified Source for Substantiation	Editorial Standard
Medical / Psychiatric Claims	Recognized medical syndicates, peer-reviewed clinical literature, independent specialists.	Prohibit creating false equivalence between empirical science and subjective impressions.
Legal / Statutory Claims	Statutory legislative texts, documented judicial jurisprudence, verified legal counsel.	Distinguish between statutory text, judicial interpretations, and real-world courtroom enforcement.
Theological Opinions	Authorized institutional representatives or accredited scholars.	Frame as an attributed theological viewpoint; never present it as medical fact or statutory law.
Political Statements	Policymakers, official records, communities directly impacted by decisions.	Deconstruct rhetoric and verify the tangible empirical facts behind the claims

3. Religion and Politics: Coverage Does Not Equal Editorial Endorsement

Reporting controversial theological and political rhetoric is part of the journalistic remit. However, professional duty requires attributing every statement directly to its speaker, while preventing discriminatory or inflammatory rhetoric from being adopted as the newsroom's own voice. If a political figure claims an activity *"threatens societal morals,"* report this strictly as an attributed quote; the assertion of an actual threat remains an allegation subject to verification, not an established reality.

5

☑ Pre-Publication Checklist

- ☐ Is mentioning personal identity essential to understanding the alleged criminal offense, or is it sensationalist framing?
- ☐ Has the legal proceeding been verified with primary court records or counsel?
- ☐ Does the cited expert hold relevant professional credentials to evaluate the claim?
- ☐ Are empirical findings separated from subjective viewpoints?
- ☐ Are political or religious statements framed to prevent uncritical editorial adoption?

Applied Exercise

Separating Opinion from Fact (Lebanese Media Realities)

Suggested Time: 15 minutes.

Required Output: Identify claim, classify its nature, identify the appropriate verification source, and draft an attributed headline.

Success Metric: Correctly aligning the claim with its verifying authority, and refusing to frame subjective opinion as fact.

Case Study: A public statement by a political faction claiming that a cultural event *"violates public order, morality, and Lebanese law."*

Editorial Requirements:

1. ***Deconstruct the Statement:*** Separate value judgments from verifiable legal claims.
2. ***Identify Verification Sources:*** Determine the exact professional authority competent to evaluate each claim (e.g., legislative penal code, judicial precedents, civil rights experts).
3. ***Draft Headline and Lead:*** Write a headline attributing the accusation to its claimant without adopting the assertion as objective fact (e.g., write *"Political Party Claims Cultural Event Violates Law,"* rather than *"Cultural Event Violates Lebanese Law"*).

→ Next Step

Even with an impeccably researched text, poor visual packaging, sensational headlines, or decontextualized social cuts can destroy safeguards. Module 6 applies these standards to visual packaging, digital publishing, and AI workflows.

Module Six

Visual Packaging and Digital Publishing

Headlines, Images, Social Media, Comment Moderation, and AI Tools

Scope and Purpose

Headlines, thumbnails, and social media cuts are not neutral packaging. A written report may protect a source while the accompanying thumbnail exposes them, or the article may be balanced while the headline resorts to defamatory clickbait. This module integrates digital and social media desks into editorial decision-making.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this module, the journalist and editor will be equipped to evaluate headlines, images, teasers, comment sections, and AI outputs to prevent stigmatization or identity exposure during digital distribution.

6

1. Headline and Image: Documentation Versus Suggestion

- Review the headline and image as a single visual and semantic unit rather than checking each element in isolation.
- Assess whether highlighting identity in the headline is essential to understanding the news event, or merely clickbait.
- Avoid clichéd, sensationalist imagery (e.g., handcuffs, faceless silhouettes in dark alleys, nightlife clubs, or rainbow flags) unless they represent verified elements of the reporting.
- Inspect photo backgrounds to confirm they do not reveal landmarks, street signs, or details obscured in the text.
- Apply these verification and protection standards to short vertical video clips, pull-quote cards, and platform teasers.

2. Comment Moderation and Data Protection

Newsrooms bear professional and ethical responsibilities if third-party commenters publish an anonymized source's name, workplace, or residential location. Newsrooms must maintain a clear moderation policy to address:

- The malicious exposure of private personal information (Doxxing).
- Direct threats, harassment, and explicit incitement to violence or hatred.
- Establishing protocols for pre-moderation, keyword filtering, or disabling comments when necessary to protect source safety.

3. Generative AI Tools: Preserving Human Editorial Responsibility

Editorial responsibility is an exclusively human duty that cannot be delegated to algorithms. Generative AI models risk hallucinating facts and perpetuating bias. Crucially, the confidentiality of prompt data cannot be assumed, as public tools may retain inputs for model training. Significant risks emerge when unedited recordings, phone numbers, or images containing geolocation data are uploaded to unvetted platforms:

- Prohibit entering private identifiers, sensitive documents, or raw footage into public, unvetted AI tools.
- Subject every AI-generated name, fact, quotation, legal citation, or scientific reference to rigorous human verification.
- Explicitly disclose and label any image or multimedia asset generated or modified using AI to avoid misleading the public.
- Never deploy AI tools to infer personal identities via facial recognition or voiceprint analysis.

☑ Pre-Publication Checklist

- ☐ Does the headline accurately reflect the body copy without exaggerating identity to drive clicks?
- ☐ Is the featured image directly tied to the event, or does it perpetuate stigmatizing visual tropes?
- ☐ Do social media cuts and teasers preserve the same balance and source protections as the original report?
- ☐ Does the newsroom have active moderation mechanisms to prevent doxxing in comment sections?
- ☐ Were all prompts and inputs in AI systems scrubbed of identifying or sensitive data?

Applied Exercise

Thumbnails Re-frame the Story (Lebanese Media Realities)

Suggested Time: 10 minutes.

Required Output: Select a visual thumbnail, provide professional editorial justification, and analyze the risks of rejected options.

Success Metric: Selecting a visual asset that documents the core legal event without sensationalism, stereotyping, or exposure.

Scenario: A legal case moving through the Lebanese court system regarding civil rights. The newsroom is choosing between three thumbnails:

1. A photo of the Palace of Justice facade.
2. A generic rainbow flag.
3. A blurred, shadowy figure sitting in a dark room.

Editorial Requirements:

1. ***Evaluate News Value****:* Assess what each image conveys before the audience reads the text.
2. ***Deconstruct Connotations:*** Pinpoint symbols that reinforce tropes, sensationalize the

case, or imply criminality or shame.

3. ***Select the Asset:*** Choose the visual asset that documents the reality of the legal proceeding without distortion or sensationalism. **N**ext Step

Source protection and ethical journalism cannot rest solely on individual reporters; they require institutional support. Module 7 covers managerial structures, sign-off hierarchies, corrections, and crisis response.

Module Seven

Editorial Governance and Accountability

Decision-Making Tiers, Review Gateways, Corrections, and Post-Publication Crises

Module Scope and Purpose

A reporter's efforts to protect a source are undermined if an editor, platform manager, or photo desk reverses those safeguards down the production line. This module delineates final decision-making authority and establishes newsroom workflows to transform ethical standards into binding institutional policy.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this module, the journalist and editor will be equipped to:

1. Identify who holds final editorial authority and define accountability chains.
2. Implement verification sign-offs across all production and distribution stages.
3. Adhere to clear escalation pathways during editorial crises.
4. Execute immediate emergency responses and transparent corrections before and after publishing.

1. Newsroom Review and Decision Gateways

Stage	Timing	Review elements	Decision responsibility
1. Pitch Approval	Before assignment	Public interest, coverage priority, risk assessment, and whether sensitive identity details are justified	Journalist and responsible editor
2. Prepare the interview	Before recording	Informed-consent terms, secure communication channels, anonymization method, and question boundaries	Journalist in agreement with the source
3. Final approval	Before publication	Fact verification, reverse-identification test, headline review, images, and platform content	Editor, journalist, and digital/visual production team
4. Follow-up	After publication	Comment moderation, threat and doxxing monitoring, corrections, and professional lessons learned	Editor, platform team, editorial management, and safety lead

2. The Temporary Hold Protocol (Halting Publication)

Whenever a source's consent is unclear, significant re-identification risks are detected, or critical factual claims remain unverified, publication must be paused immediately. The file

must be escalated to the senior editorial tier for review. Delaying a release is always preferable to publishing unverified or hazardous content.

3. Corrections, Complaints, and Remedying Errors

Editorial accountability does not end when a story goes live. Inaccuracies in names, pronouns, statutory classifications, or imagery can quickly be amplified across search engines, social media, and third-party archives. Newsrooms require a clear, transparent corrections procedure:

- Issue prompt, conspicuous corrections in a prominent position; do not execute silent edits.
- Distinguish clearly between correcting verified factual inaccuracies and yielding to external political pressure to alter legitimate reporting.
- Act immediately upon accidental identity exposure: audit copy, images, social tags, file metadata, and user comments.
- Maintain a publicly accessible, transparent channel for receiving audience complaints.
- Document root causes of serious editorial errors to address procedural flaws and identify newsroom training needs.

4. Institutionalizing Standards

- Conduct regular training for editorial, production, and social media staff on these guidelines.
- Update newsroom terminology references to reflect evolving legal, medical, and social contexts.
- Establish clear escalation points for high-sensitivity stories.
- Restrict access to raw, identifying source files to essential personnel.
- Integrate headline, visual, and social teaser reviews into the mandatory sign-off workflow.
- Maintain transparent, public-facing mechanisms for grievances and corrections.
- Periodically evaluate and adapt these guidelines to respond to changing regulatory, digital, and legal frameworks.

☑ Pre-Publication Checklist: Editorial and Institutional Readiness

- ☐ Is it clear who holds final sign-off authority at this stage of production?
- ☐ Has the senior editorial contact been identified should safety concerns arise?
- ☐ Do source protection measures remain intact across video and social media teams?
- ☐ If an accidental leak occurs, is there an emergency response plan ready for the first 15 minutes?

Applied Exercise

Emergency Response Protocol for Accidental Identity Exposure

Suggested Time: 15-20 minutes.

Required Output: A phased response plan spanning the first 15 minutes, first 2 hours, and first 24 hours, specifying decision-makers for each action.

Success Metric: Clear accountability, rapid containment, source communication, and institutional documentation to prevent recurrence.

Case Study: An anonymized source calls the newsroom stating that a comment beneath the published story on Facebook revealed their full legal name and home address.

Editorial Requirements: Execute the following phased response:

First 15 Minutes: Immediately hide/delete the comment, take a secure archive screenshot for legal documentation, and alert the senior editor.

First 2 Hours: Contact the source directly to inform them of actions taken, audit all platform materials for corroborating clues, and run an immediate threat assessment.

First 24 Hours: Take corrective editorial action if required, review moderation settings to block recurring identifiers, and file an internal post-incident review to address systemic vulnerabilities.

→ **Next Step**

With the seven modules complete, the guide concludes with a set of operational annexes designed for everyday use in the newsroom and in the field:

The Journalist's and Editor's Toolkit: Operational Annexes

These practical tools are designed for daily newsroom and field use. The core questions of relevance, verification, and protection are deliberately applied across each production stage:

- The NEEDS Harm Reduction Test: A framework for evaluating the necessity of sensitive details and weighing public interest against potential harm.
- The 60-Second Card: A rapid pre-publication checklist for high-pressure deadlines. This card serves as a final consolidated sign-off, but does not replace the in-depth module checklists when time permits.
- The Informed Consent Form: A structured record to document agreements between the journalist and the source.
- Editorial Lexicon and Descriptors: A glossary to standardize accurate terminology and avoid stigmatizing language.

Journalist and Editor Toolkit: Field and Desk Tools

1. NEEDS[1] Harm-Reduction Test

Indicator	Review Question	Applied Editorial Action
N: Necessity	Is every identifying detail or sensitive attribute essential to the public interest?	Remove non-essential data; generalize personal descriptors.
E: Exposure	Who can identify the source using these details, and what risks follow?	Lower the level of disclosure; remove corroborating contextual clues.
E: Evidence	Are claims substantiated, properly attributed, and free from false balance?	Verify independently; clearly state the boundaries of certainty.
D: Dignity	Does the story uphold the individual's agency, or reduce them to a spectacle?	Re-frame angles, re-evaluate questioning, and change imagery.
S: Safety	What concrete safeguards protect the source before, during, and after publication?	Implement additional technical safeguards; delay publication; withhold identifying details

2. The 60-Second Card: Rapid Pre-Publication Review

- Relevance: **Does the public need to know this identity attribute to understand the story?**
- **Accuracy:** Have facts, terminology, and legal or medical claims been verified?
- **Voice:** Who speaks? And who is being talked about without a voice?
- **Authority:** Have official statements and opinions been distinguished from verified facts?
- **Consent:** Did the source explicitly agree to the specific disclosure level and distribution platforms?
- **Privacy:** Is naming the source, showing their face, broadcasting their natural voice, or revealing their location essential?
- **Visuals & Headlines:** Do thumbnails or headlines add stigma or expose an identity protected in the text?
- **Digital Security:** Have metadata and secondary identifying clues been stripped from all files?
- **Public Interest:** Can the newsroom justify the publication of every sensitive detail included?

1 The NEEDS Harm-Reduction Test was developed for this Code of Conduct as an original applied newsroom tool drawing on established journalistic ethics, human rights standards, source-protection principles, and harm-reduction practices. NEEDS stands for Necessity, Exposure, Evidence, Dignity, and Safety. The test is grounded in evidence-based journalistic and human rights standards designed to protect vulnerable groups and uphold safety in the field. By providing five operational indicators, it shifts the evaluation of public interest, disclosure, and source anonymization from subjective editorial judgment toward a more structured institutional verification process. Rather than functioning as an isolated checklist, it serves as a cross-cutting decision-making tool whenever reporting involves sensitive information, risk of identification, contested claims requiring substantiation, or decisions that may affect the dignity, privacy, or physical and digital safety of a source.

- **Post-Publication:** Is an editor assigned to monitor comments, handle corrections, and track risks?

3. Short Consent Form

Parameter	Agreed-Upon Selection
Identity Disclosure	Full Legal Name: _____First Name Only _____ Pseudonym: _____ No name
Identity disclosure/Reference	☐ Yes ☐ No Or only in these exact words: _____
Photo / video	☐ Face visible ☐ Concealed/Covered ☐ No photo / video
Voice	☐ Natural ☐ Altered ☐ Written quote only
Location / workplace	☐ Name it ☐ Generalize it ☐ Do not mention
Platforms	☐ Website ☐ TV / Radio ☐ Social media ☐ Translation / republication
Sensitive details that must not be published	
Safe communication method	
Reconfirmed before publication	☐ Yes

Note: This form documents an editorial conversation; it does not replace it. Never store sensitive personal identifiers beyond what is strictly necessary for editorial verification.

4. Editorial Terminology and Descriptors Guide

Standard Term	Operational Definition and Editorial Use	Editorially Avoid	Primary Reference
SOGIESC	An acronym for Sexual Orientation (SO), Gender Identity (GI), Gender Expression (GE), and Sex Characteristics (SC). It serves as an analytical and human rights framework that applies to all human beings and helps identify the exact dimension relevant to a story.	Do not use as a synonym for LGBTQ+ or as an identity label for a specific person or collective group (e.g., avoid “SOGIESC Society/Community” or “SOGIESC people”).	OHCHR; Yogyakarta Principles Plus 10.
Sexual Orientation	Each person’s capacity for profound emotional, affectional, and/or sexual attraction to, and intimate relations with, individuals of a different gender, the same gender, or more than one gender.	Avoid stigmatizing, criminalizing, or pathologizing expressions such as “deviant behavior,” “perversion,” or “abnormal inclinations”.	World Health Organization (WHO); Yogyakarta Principles.

Standard Term	Operational Definition and Editorial Use	Editorially Avoid	Primary Reference
Gender Identity	A person's deeply felt, internal, and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned or recorded at birth.	Do not conflate with sexual orientation; do not infer identity from physical appearance, clothing, mannerisms, or medical history.	World Health Organization (WHO); Yogyakarta Principles.
Gender Expression	How a person manifests their gender externally through appearance, dress, voice, mannerisms, name, or behavior.	Do not treat outward expression as definitive proof of a person's underlying gender identity or sexual orientation.	UN Women & World Health Organization (2025).
Sex Characteristics	Physical and biological traits associated with sex, including anatomy, chromosomal configurations, hormonal profiles, and secondary sexual characteristics.	Do not overlook this distinct dimension or conflate variations in biological sex characteristics with gender transition or being transgender.	OHCHR; European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA, 2024).
LGBTQ+	An umbrella acronym referring to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people, with "+" encompassing intersex people, other diverse identities, and people who choose not to use a specific label. Base usage on self-identification.	Do not impose acronyms or categorical labels on individuals who do not explicitly claim them; mention identity only when editorially relevant to the story.	UNDP; OHCHR.
Transgender Person	An adjective describing a person whose gender identity differs from the sex assigned or recorded at birth. Refer to individuals using their affirmed name, descriptive terms, and pronouns.	Avoid outdated, clinical, or slurs such as "transsexual," "transvestite," or "shemale"; avoid sensationalized phrases such as "a man who became a woman" (or the reverse).	WHO ICD-11 (gender incongruence is not classified as a mental disorder)[2].
Intersex / Variations in Sex Characteristics	Refers to individuals born with physical, chromosomal, or biological sex characteristics that do not align with conventional medical or binary definitions of male or female bodies.	Avoid medically inaccurate, dehumanizing, and derogatory terms such as "hermaphrodite"	OHCHR; European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA, 2024).

2 World Health Organization (WHO, ICD-11 classification): The diagnosis of Gender Incongruence was reclassified from the chapter on mental and behavioral disorders to the chapter on conditions related to sexual health, with the organization clarifying that trans and gender-diverse identities are not mental health conditions; the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR); and the European Union Agency for Asylum practical guidance note (EUAA, 2024).

Standard Term	Operational Definition and Editorial Use	Editorially Avoid	Primary Reference
Chosen Name & Affirmed Pronouns	The personal name, descriptors, and pronouns that an individual asks others to use when addressing or referring to them.	Avoid dismissive phrases like “real name” or “preferred name”; refer to a “legal name” or “previous name” only when legally essential and strictly relevant to public interest.	Council of Europe; International journalism style guides.
Agency	Recognizing and preserving a source’s ability to act, make informed decisions, and control the pace, limits, and terms of their participation, rather than viewing them merely as passive subjects.	Avoid reducing individuals to helpless victims, tabloid spectacles, or sensational objects of entertainment.	Solutions Journalism Network; Trauma-informed reporting guidance (El Helou, 2026).
Trauma-Informed Journalism	A journalistic practice that prioritizes active listening, transparent pacing, non-coercive questioning, psychological boundaries, and an understanding of how trauma alters narrative memory and chronology.	Do not interpret narrative gaps, emotional flatlining, or chronological inconsistencies as dishonesty; do not probe for intimate, anatomical, or surgical details unnecessary to the story.	Trauma-sensitive reporting Basics of Understanding Trauma-Informed Journalism. Tipsheets for Reporters (El Helou, 2026).
Outing (Forced Disclosure)	The unauthorized, non-consensual public disclosure of a person’s sexual orientation, gender identity, or private status without their explicit, ongoing informed consent.	Do not expose sources or vulnerable third parties to physical, social, or legal danger in pursuit of an editorial scoop or viral engagement.	Yogyakarta Principles (Principles 6 and 32); IFJ Global Charter of Ethics for Journalists.
Re-identification / Inference	The process by which audiences, family, employers, or authorities piece together non-identifying clues (e.g., profession, neighborhood, date, distinctive tattoo, voice pattern) to uncover an anonymized source’s identity.	Avoid cumulative circumstantial identifiers; never publish screenshots of private chats or dating profiles where avatars or handles remain decipherable.	UNESCO safety of journalists guidelines; Newsroom digital-safety protocols
Doxxing	The malicious, intentional publishing or broadcasting of private, identifying data (e.g., legal name, address, phone number, workplace, or private handles) to orchestrate harassment, shaming, or harm.	Strictly prohibit the reproduction of leaked personal communications or doxxed records; actively moderate and promptly purge identifying comments posted on newsroom platforms.	UNESCO online safety guidelines; International Federation of Journalists (IFJ).

Standard Term	Operational Definition and Editorial Use	Editorially Avoid	Primary Reference
Metadata	Hidden technical information embedded within digital image, audio, and video files that can reveal GPS coordinates, date/time stamps, camera serial numbers, or device models.	Do not publish or distribute raw media files without systematically stripping Exif data, location tags, and device identifiers.	Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ); UNESCO digital safety resources.
Conversion Practices / SOGIECE	Coercive, pseudoscientific psychological, physical, spiritual, or medical interventions intended to alter, suppress, or eradicate a person's sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.	Do not legitimize these abusive practices by calling them "conversion therapy," "corrective treatments," or presenting them as valid medical options.	UN Independent Expert on SOGI (A/HRC/44/53); World Psychiatric Association (WPA).
Hate Speech and Incitement	Any communication in speech, writing, or behavior that attacks, dehumanizes, or incites discrimination, hostility, or violence against individuals or groups based on their identity characteristics.	Do not justify dehumanizing slurs, harassment, or incitement to violence under the editorial guise of "opinion," "debate," or "free expression".	Rabat Plan of Action (OHCHR); UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech.
False Balance	A distorting editorial practice that accords equal weight, credibility, or platform time to established scientific and legal facts alongside unsubstantiated opinions, prejudice, or conspiracy theories in the name of superficial neutrality.	Do not pit accredited scientific, medical, and legal consensus against inflammatory rhetoric or unverified religious/ political opinions as if they have equal evidentiary standing.	IFJ Global Charter of Ethics for Journalists; Poynter Institute verification literature.
Mis/Dis/Mal-information (MDM)	Informational ecosystems containing inaccurate, manipulated, or purposefully weaponized narratives designed to cause public harm, foster moral panics, or marginalize vulnerable groups.	Do not recycle unverified claims, weaponized rumors, or institutional propaganda without robust independent verification and necessary contextualization.	UNESCO Media and Information Literacy (MIL) Framework.
Gender Mainstreaming	An editorial and investigative methodology that assesses how decisions, systemic policies, legislation, and resources differentially impact individuals across diverse gender identities and expressions.	Do not restrict newsroom sourcing exclusively to institutional, dominant, or official male figures; avoid treating gender as an isolated or superficial "soft topic".	UN ECOSOC Agreed Conclusions 1997/2; UN Women.

Standard Term	Operational Definition and Editorial Use	Editorially Avoid	Primary Reference
LGBTQ+ Individuals	A neutral, humanizing formulation used to denote people who identify with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and sex characteristics, rather than viewing them as an ideological bloc. Prioritize specific self-descriptors.	Avoid monolithic phrases like “the LGBTQ+ agenda,” “the lobby,” or portraying individuals as an alien, foreign-funded, or imported threat.	OHCHR guidelines; Media assessment on SOGIESC in Lebanese media (El Helou, 2026).

References

Council of Europe. (2021). D*iversity in the workplace: A sexual orientation, gender identity or expression and sex characteristics approach.* https://rm.coe.int/div*ersity-in-the-workplace-a-sogiesc-approach/1680a477ce*

*El Helou-Sensenig, R. (2026). Const*ructing public understanding of SOGIESC in Lebanese media: A media assessment report. Proud Lebanon*; Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (FNF) Lebanon.*

FE-MALE, & ABAAD. (2018). Code of conduct *for media coverage on gend*er-based violence, Lebanon. https://www.fe-male.org/archives/12797

Free Press Unlimited. (n.d.). Gender-sensitive reporting. https://kq.freep*ressunlimited.org/themes/gender-*equality/gender-in-media-content/gender-sensitive-r*eporting/*

German Press Council. (n.d.). German Press Code (Pressekodex). https://www.presserat.de/en.html

*Internat*ional Organization for Migration. (n.d.). Full glossary of terms on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex cha*racteristics (SOGIESC). https://www*.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl486/files/documents/IOM-SOGIESC-Glossary-of-Terms.pdf

Lebanese Psychiatric Society. (2013). Position statement on homosexuality. Republished by LebMASH (2016). h*ttps://lebmash.org/2016/05/11/statement-from-the-lebanese-p*sychiatric-society-lps/

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. (n.d.). Independent Expert on sexual orientation and gender identity. htt*ps://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/ie-sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity*

*Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2024). Report of the Independent Expert on protec*tion against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity concerning freedom of expressi*on, peaceful a*ssembly and association (A/HRC/56/49).

Smith, *R. A. (2023, June 9). From LGBTQIA+ to SOGIESC: Reframing sexuality, gender, and human rights. OpenGlobalRights. https://www.openglobalrights.org/lgbtqia*-to-sogiesc-reframing-sexuality-gender-human-rights/

Thomson Reuters Foundation. (*2026, July). Pre-publ*ication review for journalists in Lebanon: Supplement to the legal pre-publication review guide for journalists in the Middle East and North Africa. Trust Law; *The Samir Kassir Foundat*ion. https://www.trust.org/

UN Women. (n.d.). Gender mainstreaming. https://gendercoordinationandmainstreaming.unwomen.org*/gender-mainstreaming-global*

*United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (n.d.). Media a*nd gender equality. https://www.unesco.org/en/gender-equality/media-gender-equality

United Natio*ns High Commissioner for Refugees*. (2024). Multilingual glossary of terms on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics. https://www.refworld.org/reference/tools/unhcr/2024/en/147995

Yogyakarta Principles. (2017). The Yogyakarta Principles Plus 10. https://yogyakartaprinciples.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/A5_yogyakartaWEB-2.pdf

How to Use the References

International standards and medical and legal positions are guidance tools that help journalists verify claims and build context. They do not replace editorial judgment, override independent journalistic decision-making, or turn every social or political disagreement into a purely legal or medical question.

Newsroom Commitment

By adopting this **Code, the organization commits to turning its principles into consistent practice through regular staff training, periodic updates to the terminology guide, clear responsibility for decisions and escalation, protection of source confidentiality and digital safety, pre-publication review of headlines and visuals, and public channels for complaints and corrections. The Code should also be reviewed regularly to reflect linguistic, legal, and technological developments.**

Conclusion: Accurate journalism neither ignores diversity nor turns it into spectacle. It names relevant facts when they serve the public interest, verifies them, places them in proper context, and protects people from unnecessary exposure or harm that does not advance the public's right to know.

Institutional Adoption

Organization: _____

Responsible Editor: _____

Date of Adoption / Review: _____