



Building your editorial/ethics policies:

It's probably not good to have policy/ethical guides/staff manual all in one piece without subheads or clear divisions. Several reasons exist for this.

First, board-level policies are made to be long-term, with few, but significant changes. Think in terms of a constitution. Amendments are few, far between and reflect major philosophical changes. Publications level policies should at least reviewed yearly.

Second, the wording of ethics statements and staff manual directions are meant to reflect the process of students applying the philosophical directions and principles of scholastic journalism.

Design a separate ethics policy —ethics is right vs. right decision making — You won't want anyone to punish your students if they don't follow part of ethics guidelines, hence it is separate from editorial policies. Using must and will in ethics policy creates the potential for misunderstanding at a minimum and sets up censorship possibilities.

When it comes to creating or revising an editorial policy, copy and paste models match your mission and goals. The JEA and SPLC models at board and publication levels are designed for that. BUT you need to attribute. Please, please, please — attribute and/or get permission depending on the circumstance. Give credit to your sources just like you would have students in stories so they avoid plagiarism.

The legal definitions and such in the SPLC version are correct. If someone tries to get creative with them, they may not get it right. An easy way to handle this is to just say the policy follows the SPLC definitions of unprotected speech.