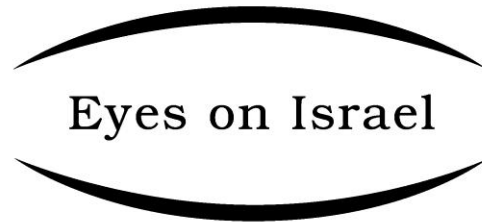


A curriculum that teaches critical analysis of news media coverage of Israel and the Middle East.



Module 2
Journalism and Its Responsibilities

Table of Contents

Module Introduction	2
Lesson 2.1: Codes of Ethics.....	3
Lesson 2.2: Code of Ethics: Upheld or Violated?.....	7
Lesson 2.3: Accuracy and Misrepresentation	10

Journalism and Its Responsibilities

Module Introduction

Perceptions of the world around us are powerfully influenced by what we read, see and hear in the news and broader communication media. With Israel so often in the headlines, news consumers are especially challenged to discern the truth of what is reported.

Perhaps one reason you are using this curriculum is because you have concluded that depictions of Israel in the news media too often are not accurate, balanced or complete. In order to assess this hypothesis, news consumers require a solid footing in the history of Israel and in the professional standards that apply to journalists' work.

The purpose of Module 2—Journalism and Its Responsibilities—is to introduce students to a focus of this curriculum: What obligations do journalists have in covering controversial issues such as the Arab-Israeli conflict? Students will explore prescribed ethics in journalism and their relationship to news actually reported.

The following topics are covered in this module:

Lesson 2.1: Codes of Ethics

Objective: Students will identify the main values and codes of professional journalistic ethics.

Lesson 2.2: Codes of Ethics: Upheld or Violated?

Objective: Students will assess whether and how selected media texts reflect journalistic standards.

Lesson 2.3: Accuracy and Misrepresentation

Objective: Students will determine whether or not provided media materials accurately portray a controversial Israel-related event.

These objectives and a list of materials are included within each lesson. Actual materials needed—student handouts and teacher aids—appear in the appropriate section of each lesson.

Lesson 2.1: Codes of Ethics

Objective

Students will identify the main values and codes of professional journalistic ethics.

For the Teacher

Most journalists view themselves first and foremost as professionals, undertaking a serious responsibility. But unlike many other professionals or craftspeople such as doctors, lawyers, electricians or plumbers, journalists do not need a license or certification to practice their occupation. While it is true that many journalists today have attended schools of journalism or majored in communications, such an academic degree is not mandatory nor is there any professional test administered to certify readiness to become a reporter, let alone any peer or statutory requirement for continuing professional education or periodic testing and recertification.

In place of certification, journalists have created agreed-upon voluntary “codes of ethics” to guide their work. These codes focus on the fundamental values journalists believe are at the heart of a free and reliable press. By adhering to the values and principles laid out in these codes, journalists, editors and producers can be confident that they are performing their job fairly and conscientiously. Many organizations have their own code of ethics. The Society for Professional Journalists (SPJ) has one, as does the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) and Radio-Television News Directors Association (RTNDA). Individual news media, such as *The New York Times*, *National Public Radio* (NPR) and *Associated Press* (AP) have their own codes to uphold as well. For the sake of simplicity, the *Eyes on Israel* curriculum will only examine one of these codes—the SPJ Code of Ethics.

The goal of this lesson is to give students the opportunity to understand and articulate why such codes are necessary and to examine an example of such a code and its implementation (or lack thereof) in practice. By studying a code and its self-enforcement by journalists, students will gain a better understanding of what constitutes “good journalism.” Sample exercises involving coverage of the Arab-Israeli conflict will help students hone their journalistic evaluation skills.

Grades: 7-12

Estimated Time: 1 period

Materials

Student Handouts:

- **Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) Code of Ethics** (Student Handout 2.1A)
- **Code of Ethics Scenarios** (Student Handout 2.1B)

Teacher Aid:

- **Code of Ethics Scenarios Answers** (Teacher Aid 2.1B)

Instructional Objective

Students will identify the main values and recommended behaviors of a code of ethics used by journalists and assess whether and how selected news scenarios reflect journalistic standards.

Lesson Instructions

Warm-up Activity

Ask students the following:

- **What is a code of behavior? Are there any codes of behavior, written or unwritten, that you are familiar with?**
[Depending on student responses, you may wish to mention such formal codes as the Torah and the Ten Commandments, the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights, school honor codes and informal codes such as the ways in which boys and girls interact, ways in which family members interact.]
- **You’ve heard it said, “It’s a free country.” If you are free to do what you please, why do we have codes of behavior?**
[You may wish to point out that without rules or legal codes, there could be anarchy. One person may feel free to do something that bothers or harms someone else; without the rules of a civil society—and rules or customs may differ from formal laws—people can get hurt, property can be seized without legal permission, etc.]
- **Who would like to explain or give an example of the word “ethics?”**
[A popular dictionary definition is “a set of moral principles or values.” Another defines it as “proper standards of conduct.”]

Tell students that they will examine a typical code of ethics used by journalists. The Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) is probably the largest professional group in America to which journalists belong. Many reporters, editors, anchors and producers of major print media, networks, radio stations, and cable news stations in America belong to this organization.

Make sure to mention the self-regulatory nature of journalism’s codes of ethics.

Step 1 Distribute the SPJ Code of Ethics (Student Handout 2.1A), which can also be found at: <http://www.spj.org/pdf/ethicscode.pdf> and ask students to read the preamble.

Discuss the following with the class:

1. **What do journalists who belong to SPJ consider to be their main job?**
2. **If you were a journalist, what would you do to get at the “truth”?**
3. **The preamble urges journalists to be “fair.” How would you ensure fairness when many issues involve at least two opposing views?**
4. **The preamble urges journalists to be “comprehensive.” If you were a journalist, what would you do to be “comprehensive” in your reporting?**

Now ask students to scan the code, looking for the main categories of values or principles that the code identifies. Tell students to look for headings that group certain behaviors.

According to the code, what are the four main categories of values that good journalists must follow? [Seek Truth and Report It; Minimize Harm; Act Independently; Be Accountable]

Tell the students that for the purpose of this activity, they are not going to focus on the second category (“Minimize Harm”) but will be looking closely at the other three.

Step 2 Students will now look closely at the principles within each category. Give students five minutes to read the principles that fall under the heading of “Seek Truth.” Ask them to circle or underline the three behaviors that they think are the most important. When the time is up, ask students to share what they think is most important and why, and write their responses on the board. Repeat the process with “Act Independently” and “Be Accountable.”

Step 3 Distribute Student Handout 2.1B (Code of Ethics Scenarios). Tell students that they will read two fictitious news scenarios, then review two headlines and lead paragraphs based on each scenario. One of the headlines/paragraphs will capture the main information of the scenario accurately and in accordance with the Society of Professional Journalists’ Code of Ethics. The other headline/paragraph will violate a specific behavior within the code. Their job is to determine:

1. Which headline/paragraph upholds the code and which violates it
2. Why the latter fails to support the code’s principles.

Answers can be found in Teacher Aid 2.1B (Code of Ethics Scenarios *Answers*).

Summing up

Point out to students that editors and publishers are not in the habit of trying to violate their codes of ethics but that violations do occur. For instance:

- Sometimes a shorter headline or paragraph fits into the space better than a longer, more elaborate one.
- Sometimes there are time pressures to meet a deadline that make editors believe that they need to cut corners just to get the job done.
- Sometimes a less accurate headline is more sensational and attention getting. Remind students that communications media are in business to make money and are always looking for ways to hold and increase their audiences.
- Sometimes it is difficult to separate one’s attitudes from the essence of an issue. These attitudes may be so ingrained in the reporter that he or she doesn’t notice that the news item reflects a viewpoint as well as conveying the facts.
- Often the journalist who writes the news article may not be the one who edits the article or writes the headline.

Students should be able to conclude that while a code such as the SPJ's provides a baseline against which to assess actual coverage and the "ethical" conduct of the reporter, it does not *guarantee* ethical or straightforward reporting. Communications media are self-regulating.

Point out that these scenarios are modeled on examples of poor coverage of the Middle East found regularly in today's newspapers and news broadcasts. Actual examples will be dealt with in subsequent lessons.

Digging Deeper

Research topic: Students may wish to compare the SPJ code with other codes, such as the Radio-Television News Directors Association (RTNDA) and American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE).

Evaluation Material

Evaluate students' mastery of the instructional objective by the classroom discussion and how they evaluate the Code of Ethics scenarios (Student Handout 2.1B).

Lesson 2.2: Code of Ethics: Upheld or Violated?

Objective

Students will assess whether and how selected media texts reflect journalistic standards.

For the Teacher

Now that students have studied in depth a sample code of ethics, they will apply their knowledge to selections from various sources dealing with the Arab-Israeli conflict. The goal of this lesson is for students to use their judgment to determine how well each media text remains true to journalistic ethics. Students will evaluate each media text and which principles have been upheld and which have been violated. This will also help them become accustomed to evaluating journalistic portrayals of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Grades: 7-12

Estimated Time: 1 period

Materials

Student Handout:

- **Sample Media Texts** (Student Handout 2.2A)

Teacher Aid:

- **Sample Media Texts *Answers*** (Teacher Aid 2.2A)

Instructional Objective

Students will assess whether and how selected media texts reflect journalistic standards.

Enabling Objectives

- a. Students will identify the main values and recommended behaviors of the provided code of ethics.
- b. Students will compare the code to selected media samples to determine similarities and dissimilarities.

Lesson Instructions

Warm-up Activity

Review journalistic ethics by having students refer to the SPJ Code of Ethics (SH 2.1A) from Lesson 1. Make sure that students understand the four categories of the code and the important principles under each category. Ask the following questions:

1. **What general concepts do you learn from these principles?**
2. **What does it mean to misrepresent? Is it the same as lying?**
3. **Why is it important that sources' truthfulness be checked? Why might a source not tell the truth? Why might a source only tell part of the truth?**
4. **Why is it important to give people a chance to respond to a claim? If you don't give them a chance, how will the news account be affected?**

5. **Why is it important to correct mistakes? Why is it important for a news organization to give the public a chance to respond to problems it finds in reporting?**
6. **Why do you think the ethics code encourages reporters to look for diversity? Do you think that there are always “two sides to a story”? Can there sometimes be only one, or more than two? More than once accurate side? More than one accurate side in balance and context?**

Step 1 Distribute Student Handout 2.2A (Sample Media Texts), which are selections from various sources dealing with the Arab-Israeli conflict. (The first media text has an audio clip that can be played as well.) Ask students to review each media text and write in the space provided which principle from the SPJ Code of Ethics, if any, they believe may have been upheld or violated and briefly explain why. Suggest that they use Student Handout 2.1A (SPJ Code of Ethics) for reference. URLs for the media texts as well as CAMERA’s critiques of each can be found in the Digging Deeper section of this lesson.

Teacher Aid 2.2A (Sample Media Texts *Answer Sheet*) is provided with suggested responses. Note that several of the Code of Ethics principles overlap, so you may find your students disagree about which item is being upheld or violated. Accept all reasonable answers and encourage a lively discussion on the differences among the items.

Step 2 Show the class CAMERA’s 15-minute exposé on BBC Panorama’s “A Walk in the Park” in which the BBC details Israel’s alleged misdeeds in its attempts to “change the demographics of East Jerusalem.” It can be found at:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wqoOWYZZu8k&feature=results_main&playnext=1&list=PL594A59D0BF398F7B

CAMERA’s textual analysis (“BBC Panorama Distorts the Facts About Jerusalem”) can be found at: http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=4&x_outlet=12&x_article=1789

Summing up

Students should be able to conclude that it is the news media’s responsibility to report accurately, impartially and take a fair, even-handed approach toward the subject matter. Media are self-regulating, however. While a code such as the SPJ’s provides a baseline against which to assess actual coverage and the “ethical” conduct of the reporter, it does not *guarantee* ethical or straightforward reporting. Reinforce that, as media consumers, students need to keep the basic principles of the “Code of Ethics” in mind when they read, listen to or watch the news.

Point out that these Sample Media Texts are not meant to imply that all media outlets produce reports such as this or that the texts selected are necessarily examples of what these outlets produce on a regular basis.

Digging Deeper

Have students read the entire pieces for the excerpts provided as well as CAMERA's critiques on each media text.

- Media Text #1: The NPR clip and transcript can be found at:
<http://www.npr.org/2011/01/20/133071551/Israeli-Settlement-Update>
CAMERA's rebuttal piece ("On NPR, Israel is Accused With No Defense Allowed" by Eric Rozenman, Jan. 21, 2011) can be found at:
http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=4&x_outlet=28&x_article=1981
- Media Text #2: Have students read the excerpt/screen capture of *The New York Times* story. The entire text can be found at:
<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/06/world/middleeast/06palestinians.html>
CAMERA's rebuttal piece ("UPDATED: Hamas, the 'Two-State Solution' and the NY Times" by Gilead Ini, May 11, 2011) can be found at:
http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=2&x_outlet=35&x_article=2037
- Media Text #3: Have students read the excerpt of the *Time Magazine* article. The entire article can be found at:
<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2058660,00.html>
CAMERA's rebuttal piece can be found at:
http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=2&x_outlet=37&x_article=2010

Evaluation Material

Evaluate students' mastery of the codes by their responses to Student Handout 2.2A and through in-class discussion.

Further Reading and Viewing

A good article on the problem of "competing narratives" at the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict ("Why 1948 Matters More Than Ever" by Alex Safien) can be viewed through CAMERA's Web site or at: www.jpost.com/Features/InTheSpotlight/Article.aspx?id=266926

Lesson 2.3: Accuracy and Misrepresentation

Objective

Students will determine whether or not provided news media materials accurately portray a controversial Israel-related event.

For the Teacher

One of the axioms of reporting in a free society is that journalists should strive to discover and report “the truth.” Under the heading “Seek Truth and Report It” the Society of Professional Journalists’ (SPJ) Code of Ethics states, “Journalists should be honest, fair and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information.” Likewise, the Radio-Television News Directors Association (RTNDA) urges its members to “operate as trustees of the public, seek the truth, report it fairly and with integrity and independence, and stand accountable for their actions.”

Getting at the “truth” of a topic is a difficult task, even for the best reporters. That is why journalism codes recommend checking reports and statements for accuracy. Further, seeking truth implies that a journalist must not be content with merely reporting unsubstantiated allegations but must rigorously pursue relevant facts. Too often a half-truth amounts to a lie. Choosing words or images that report just part of a news story can impart incomplete and therefore inaccurate or misleading information.

Reputable journalists are mindful of this problem and specifically address it in their ethical codes. For example, the SPJ declares: “Journalists should . . . make certain that headlines, news teases and promotional material, photos, video, audio, graphics, sound bites and quotations do not misrepresent.” The RTNDA approaches the issue by stating that electronic journalists need to “present the news accurately” and “avoid . . . techniques that skew facts, distort reality or sensationalize events.”

The goal of this lesson is to help students explore a variety of news media texts and decide whether the sources have done their best to be accurate and avoid misrepresenting the facts.

Grades: 7-12

Estimated Time: 1 period

Materials

Student Handouts:

- **Flotilla 2010 Newspaper Excerpts** (Student Handout 2.3A)
- **“The Long Overdue Palestinian State”** (Student Handout 2.3B)

Teacher Aids:

- **Flotilla 2010 Newspaper Excerpts with Factual Explanation** (Teacher Aid 2.3A)
- **“Abbas Rewrites History in *NY Times*”** (Teacher Aid 2.3B)

Instructional Objective

Students will compare journalistic commitments to accuracy and fact checking with actual news media accounts of a controversial news event.

Enabling Objectives

- Students will examine the role of accuracy in reporting as presented in codes of journalistic ethics.
- Students will read newspaper articles and determine what impression of the events and issues emerges from those accounts.
- Students will examine research findings about designated events and issues and draw conclusions about the accuracy of the media accounts.

Lesson Instructions

Warm-up Activity

Review journalistic ethics by having students refer to the SPJ Code of Ethics (SH 2.1A) from Lesson 1. Discuss the following questions with the class:

1. What are journalists expected to do to be accurate and factual?

[Journalists are expected to test the accuracy of their sources. The SPJ code warns against distorting facts.]

2. What are journalists expected to do if their reports turn out to be less than accurate?

[They are expected to publish prompt and prominent corrections.]

3. According to the SPJ code, why is accuracy so important?

[The code focuses on honest reporting to help enlighten the public. False information, inaccuracies or bias by omission would do the opposite.]

Ask students why *they* think accuracy and fact-checking are important. Point out that news media accounts meant to enlighten the public or help it make well-informed decisions can be crucial to free government based on self-rule. What people read, see and hear in the news media help form their impressions about an issue. In our democratic system, public perception of a topic can shape government policy through the voting booth or influence decision-makers and ordinary citizens by reported results of public opinion surveys.

Step 1 Distribute Student Handout 2.3A (Flotilla 2010 Newspaper Excerpts). Advise students these are excerpts from articles printed in reputable, mainstream media sources that profess codes similar to the SPJ Code of Ethics. If the students based their knowledge solely on these excerpts, what impression would they have about Israel's handling of the 2010 Gaza Strip flotilla? Have students record their impressions on Student Handout 2.3A. Have students also write what they know actually happened, from their knowledge of current events and from what they learned in Module 1: A Brief History of Modern Israel.

After students have had time to review all the excerpts and write their thoughts, have volunteers briefly summarize what image of Israeli behavior emerged. Be sure to ask students to explain what items appeared in the article that led to that impression.

Summarize that all the excerpts portray an aggressive Israel needlessly blockading a suffering Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip. Worse, Israel then attacked a defenseless ship attempting to aid needy Palestinian Arabs.

But are these depictions accurate?

Step 2 Review the material from Teacher Aid 2.3A (Flotilla 2010 Newspaper Excerpts *with Factual Explanation*) or distribute the handout to the class. Tell students the explanations are reputable and are supplemented by photos as well as video footage showing flotilla passenger violence toward the Israelis. Click on <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gYjklUcbJWo> to see the “Close-Up Footage of Mavi Marmara Passengers Attacking IDF Soldiers.” Go through each item with the class.

Ask students to describe the image of Israel and its actions now that they have read and seen additional and more accurate information. How does it compare to the original “picture” that the newspaper excerpts conveyed?

Students may challenge the information provided as just another “version” of the truth, one side’s story or “narrative” versus another’s. Compliment their healthy skepticism but point out to them that at the very least, the information provided by the news media as “facts” are disputable. Stress that it is a reporter’s job to “Test the accuracy of information from all sources and exercise care to avoid inadvertent error” (SPJ Code of Ethics). Encourage students to conduct their own research on the subject if they are still unconvinced. And remind them that a fact is something true, an actuality, something verified or verifiable—not merely a supposition, a feeling or an unsupported opinion. Two-plus-two equals four is a fact. So is the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941. One can claim otherwise, but only as an unsubstantiated opinion, not as fact. Likewise the aggression by *Mavi Marmara* passengers against Israeli forces attempting to enforce a legal blockade of the Gaza Strip.

Step 3 Point out that news media often provide accurate and comprehensive reporting, and many reporters did *not* misrepresent the flotilla incident. This lesson presents several of this subject’s more glaring examples of media misrepresentation. Note that several of the outlets later revised their presentation of the issues and even the language used. For instance, *The Wall Street Journal* dropped the terminology “peace activists.” And, the Associated Press followed several of its problematic stories with an accurate description of the scene on the Mavi Marmara: “The military said naval commandos descending from a helicopter onto the deck of a Turkish-flagged ship were assaulted by armed activists. Military footage showed activists swarming around the commandos as they rappelled from a helicopter one by one, hitting them with sticks until they fell to the deck, throwing one off the ship and hurling what the military said was a firebomb.”

Step 4 Ask students: Should standards of accuracy apply in editorials, opinion or “Op-Ed” commentaries? What about letters to editors?

If the class is unaware of what these types of articles are, explain that although newspapers report the news, they also regularly publish sections (the editorial page and accompanying “Op-Ed” [“opposite the editorial”] page, and letters to the editor) to allow for opinions on a variety of subjects. Point out that while editorials reflect the views of the newspaper itself, Op-Eds sometimes present conflicting or alternative viewpoints of newspaper writers not on the editorial page staff or by outside contributors. Likewise, letters to the editors do not necessarily reflect the newspaper’s views.

After students have shared their opinions, ask them if the SPJ code has any guidelines regarding opinion pieces. The SPJ code as well as the American Society of Newspaper Editors’ standards (that students may or may not have reviewed) address this question directly:

- *Analysis and commentary should be labeled and not misrepresent fact or context.* (Society of Professional Journalists)
- *Editorials, analytical articles and commentary should be held to the same standards of accuracy with respect to facts as news reports.* (American Society of Newspaper Editors)

Ask students what Professor Daniel Patrick Moynihan, U.S. senator and ambassador to the United Nations meant by saying, “Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not his own facts.” Should news media commentaries meet his standard? Why or why not? Regarding letters to the editor, *The New York Times* letters editor, Thomas Feyer, had this to say in May 2004:

“Letter writers...are entitled to their own opinions, but not to their own facts...we do try to verify the facts, either checking them ourselves or asking writers for sources of information. Sometimes we goof, and then we publish corrections.”

Have the class read Mahmoud Abbas’ Op-Ed “The Long Overdue Palestinian State” (Student Handout 2.3B), an opinion piece published in *The New York Times* (May 16, 2011). Or click on the following link: www.nytimes.com/2011/05/17/opinion/17abbas.html

Have students analyze the piece and see if they can identify the falsehoods. Does Abbas have a right to say whatever he wants to support his proposal? Does the newspaper have any obligation to ensure the writer’s claims are supported by facts? Students should say that the newspaper does indeed have a journalistic obligation to ensure facts are presented, even in an opinion piece.

Distribute CAMERA’s critique, “Abbas Rewrites History in *NY Times*” (Teacher Aid 2.3B), an in-depth analysis of Abbas’ Op-Ed. It can also be found at: http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=2&x_outlet=35&x_article=2044

After they have reviewed CAMERA’s analysis, do students think *The New York Times* has been true to its own standards?

Summing Up

Mention that in today's world, "false facts" can make an even greater impact than in the past due to the speed of the Internet. Misrepresentations and lies can be disseminated almost instantaneously and reprinted countless times in many online publications, including social media, such as Facebook and Twitter. Ask students what Mark Twain meant by saying, "A lie can travel half-way around the world while the truth is still putting on its shoes." Is this more or less true in the Internet era? Actually, both lies and truth now travel faster and it is up to the news consumer to be able to distinguish one from the other.

In addition, certain media sources, such as *Haaretz*, *The New York Times* and Associated Press have more influence than others and often set the agenda for other media outlets.

Accuracy and fact-checking are the heart of what news media are supposed to do. Sloppy work repudiates journalists' own standards and fails to serve the public properly.

Evaluation Material

Student mastery of the instructional objective may be evaluated by in-class discussions following use of the Flotilla 2010 Newspaper Excerpts (Student Handout 2.3A) and the accompanying factual explanation), and the Abbas Op-Ed and accompanying CAMERA critique.

Further Reading and Viewing

The following CAMERA exposés were used in this lesson. You may wish to distribute them as reading material for the class.

"Gaza Flotilla Yields More Coverage, More Bias"

http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=2&x_outlet=54&x_article=1857

"The Gaza Flotilla: Falsehoods and Facts"

http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=2&x_outlet=118&x_article=1862

"Reuters Reports False Claims, But Ignores Flotilla Facts"

http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=2&x_outlet=36&x_article=1900

"*New York Times* Presents Attack on Soldiers by Mavi Marmara Activists as Israeli Claim"

http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=2&x_outlet=35&x_article=2100