



Balance and Fairness

By [Anne Glover](#)

Be alert for accusations, statements or characterizations that cast another person or a group of people in a bad light.

Beware of stories that use only one source. Even if it's a speech by someone, make sure you try to provide some background or context.

NEWS VALUE

Ask yourself, What's the news here? Is it worth this much type? Worth the front page?

DIVERSITY, STEREOTYPES

Be alert for phrases or descriptions that seem rooted in stereotype: e.g., a feisty senior.

TASTE

It's a weird, wacky, sometimes ugly world out there. We shouldn't sugarcoat it. But we do need to keep our readers in mind. If it makes you go "Ewwwww!" maybe it doesn't belong in the story.

OVERWROUGHT PROSE

Not every story needs a dramatic, narrative lead. Like the courts' definition of pornography: You'll know it when you see it.

BURIED LEAD

Be aware of how long it takes to get to the nut graph. Anything further than five or six paragraphs down needs to be discussed.

SKEPTICISM

Be aware of poll stories or medical breakthroughs or wonder drugs.

Watch the language. Flowery adjectives and adulation, or biting criticism, is a big tip-off.

CLARITY

It goes without saying: Check the math. Follow the logic. Make sure the example is correct.

DISSONANCE

Make sure the story's tone matches the news.

QUOTES

Make sure your paper has a policy about when you clean them up (if ever) and when you leave them alone.

SENSITIVITY

Sometimes details can illuminate. Other times, they can risk offending readers. Sexual assaults, gruesome accidents, descriptions of living conditions – all have potential for going just over the line (and maybe sometimes way beyond).

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