



## For Whom the Bells Toll

Or

Warning Signs that a Story Needs a Closer Look  
From a Workshop by [Kathy Schenck](#)

A person is accused of wrongdoing

A crime or something that might be criminal:

- Does the story follow your paper's naming guidelines?
- Is at least one version of events attributed to an official source such as the police?
- If possible, did we try to get comment from the accused or his or her lawyer?

A civil conflict:

- Are both sides presented?
- Have all the people involved been given the chance to comment?

A story contains race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or other physical descriptions

- Is it pertinent?
- Does the description provide essential information to the reader?
- Would we say the same about everyone?
- Is the description redundant because a photo is running with the story?

A story refers to how old people are or how many children they have

Unless your paper's policy is always to include ages, marital status and parenting status, ages and phrases such as divorced father of two or single mother should be used only when the context of the story makes them pertinent.

A story contains profanity, explicit descriptions or slurs

Does the profanity or slur give the readers some insight into the person using it?

A story refers to a legal but potentially embarrassing activity, such as owning pornography or having another fetish

Is it integral to the story? If this is a private citizen, his or her right to privacy could very well outweigh the "public's right to know."

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