

## ACCURACY

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The BBC's commitment to accuracy is a core editorial value and fundamental to our reputation. Our output must be well sourced, based on sound evidence, thoroughly tested and presented in clear, precise language. We should be honest and open about what we don't know and avoid unfounded speculation.

For the BBC accuracy is more important than speed and it is often more than a question of getting the facts right. All the relevant facts and information should be weighed to get at the truth. If an issue is controversial, relevant opinions as well as facts may need to be considered.

We aim to achieve it by:

- the accurate gathering of material using first hand sources wherever possible.
- checking and cross checking the facts.
- validating the authenticity of documentary evidence and digital material.
- corroborating claims and allegations made by contributors wherever possible.

### **GATHERING MATERIAL**

**We should try to witness events and gather information first hand.**

Where this is not possible, we should talk to first hand sources and, where necessary, corroborate their evidence.

**We should be reluctant to rely on a single source.** If we do rely on a single source, a named on the record source is always preferable.

**We should normally only rely on an agency report if it can be substantiated by a BBC correspondent** or if it is attributed to a reputable national or international news agency.

**We should record our interviews with sources wherever possible.**

In circumstances where recording might inhibit the source, full notes should be made, preferably at the time, or if not, then as soon as possible afterwards.

### **FINDING CONTRIBUTORS**

**We should not rely on outside bodies to find contributors for us.** In particular, we should not use agencies who deal with actors and performers to find people to talk about matters outside their specific profession or experience. It can be useful to contact news and other specialist agencies but any information or contacts they supply must be verified.

**We should not use third party websites,** especially those that help people wanting to appear in the media, except when seeking contestants or audiences for entertainment programmes.

### **ADVERTISING FOR CONTRIBUTORS**

**We should only advertise for contributors to factual and factual entertainment programmes as a last resort when other research methods have been exhausted.** When we do use adverts or make appeals within programmes we must word them carefully to avoid bringing the BBC into disrepute.

There are risks in advertising for contributors whether using posters or personal adverts in newspapers, specialist publications, or the internet. The people who reply are self-selecting and may seek to appear regularly as “serial guests”. We need to screen out those who are unsuitable or dishonest and those prone to exaggeration.

It may be appropriate for entertainment programmes to advertise for contestants and audiences. Even then all appropriate checks should be made to screen out unsuitable or untruthful contributors.

**The proposed wording of all written adverts, including those for entertainment programmes, must be referred to the relevant divisional representative or for Independents to the commissioning editor.**

**Any proposal to use a chat room or message board to find contributors must be referred to the relevant divisional representative or for Independents to the commissioning editor.**

### **CHECKING CONTRIBUTORS**

**We should make checks to establish the credentials of our contributors and to avoid being “hoaxed”.** The precise nature of these checks should be appropriate to the nature and significance of their contribution and the genre.

**We should consider whether it is appropriate to make more in depth checks about people who are the main subject of, or who are to make a significant contribution to, the programme.** This may include ensuring they are interviewed and if necessary checked by more than one member of the production team using a combination of the following:

- documentary evidence to validate their identity and story.
- corroboration from people other than those suggested by the contributor.
- self declaration of personal information which may bring the BBC into disrepute, for example, criminal convictions or political affiliation. Asking some contributors to consent to a Criminal Records Bureau check may also be considered.

### **NOTE-TAKING**

**We must take accurate, reliable and contemporaneous notes of all significant research conversations and other relevant information.**

**We must keep records of research including written and electronic correspondence, background notes and documents.** It should be kept in a way that allows double checking, particularly at the scripting stage, and if necessary by another member of the team.

**We must keep accurate notes of conversations with sources and contributors about anonymity. A recording is preferable where possible.**

**When we broadcast serious allegations made by an anonymous source, full notes of interviews, conversations and information which provide the basis for the story must be kept.**

**When anonymity is essential no document, computer file, or other record should identify a source.** This includes notebooks and administrative paperwork as well as video and audio tapes.

### **FACT CHECKING**

**We must check and verify information, facts and documents, particularly those researched on the internet.** This may include confirming with an individual or organisation that they posted material and that it is accurate.

Even the most convincing material on the web may not be what it seems.

### **DIGITAL MANIPULATION**

The ability to digitally create, manipulate and copy audio-visual material, including still photographs, video and documents poses ethical dilemmas and creates the potential for hoaxing.

We should ensure that any digital manipulation, including the use of CGI or other production techniques to create scenes or characters, does not distort the meaning of events, alter the impact of genuine material or otherwise seriously mislead our audiences.

### **IDENTIFYING SOURCES**

**We should normally identify on air and online sources of information and significant contributors,** as well as providing their credentials, so that our audiences can judge their status.

### **ANONYMOUS SOURCES**

**Sometimes information the public needs to know is only available through anonymous sources or contributors, generally on an “off the record” basis.**

**Protecting sources is a key principle of journalism for which some journalists have gone to jail. We must take care when we promise anonymity that we are in a position to honour it, including the need to resist a court order.**

**When a source asks for anonymity as a condition of giving information, or a contributor demands anonymity when taking part, we must agree with them precisely the way they are to be described.** However, with an anonymous source, especially a source making serious allegations, we must give the audience as much information about them as is compatible with protecting their identity, and in a way that does not mislead the audience about their status. See Section 7 Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour.

**Whenever a BBC story involves an anonymous source, the relevant editor has the right to be told their identity.** In cases involving serious allegations we should resist any attempt by an anonymous source to prevent their

identity being revealed to a senior BBC editor. If this happens, the reporter should make it clear that the information obtained confidentially may not be broadcast.

**When anonymity is agreed everyone must be clear about its extent.** It may be sufficient to ensure that contributors are not readily recognisable to the general public, or in the case of significant contributors it may be necessary to ensure they cannot even be identified by friends and family.

**We must ensure that if anonymity is necessary it is effective. Both picture and voice may need to be disguised.** A “voice-over” by another person is usually better than technically induced distortion, which can be reversed, but audiences should be told what they are hearing. Blurring rather than “pixilation”, which can be reversed, is the best way of ensuring anonymity in pictures.

**Our promises of anonymity may also need to include, for example, blurring car number plates** and taking care not to reveal the location of a contributor’s home in order to avoid any risk of “jigsaw identification”.

**We may need to disguise the identity of contributors if their safety may be compromised** when material originally recorded for the BBC’s UK services is rebroadcast on our international services.

## **REPORTING ALLEGATIONS**

**We should not normally use live unscripted two-ways to report allegations.** It must be the editor’s decision as to whether they are an appropriate way to break a story. When BBC colleagues follow up a story they must ensure they understand the terms in which the allegations are to be reported and do so accurately.

**Any proposal to rely on a single unnamed source making a serious allegation or to grant anonymity to a significant contributor must be referred to a senior editorial level, or for Independents to the commissioning editor.** In the most serious cases it may also be necessary to refer to Controller Editorial Policy and Programme Legal Advice. We will need to consider:

- whether the story is of significant public interest.
- whether the source is of proven credibility and reliability and in a position to have sufficient knowledge of the events featured.

- any legal issues.
- safety concerns e.g. whistleblowers.
- whether a response to serious allegations has been sought from the people or organisations concerned.

See Section 5 Fairness – Right of Reply.

- sensitive and personal issues such as whether the serious allegation was made or substantiated “off the record”.

**We should script carefully the reporting of allegations made by an anonymous source to explain:**

- the nature of the allegation.
- that the allegation is being made by an anonymous source and not the BBC.
- whether the allegation has been independently corroborated.

**MISLEADING AUDIENCES**

**We should not distort known facts, present invented material as fact, or knowingly do anything to mislead our audiences. We may need to label material to avoid doing so.**

**RECONSTRUCTIONS**

**In factual programmes, reconstructions should not over dramatise in a misleading or sensationalist way.** Reconstructions are when events are quite explicitly re-staged. They should normally be based on a substantial and verifiable body of evidence and be labelled as reconstructions. If unlabelled they should be differentiated in some way from the visual style of the rest of the programme such as using slow motion or black and white images in a consistent and repeated way.

**News programmes should not generally stage reconstructions of current events** because of the risk of confusing the audience. But reconstructions staged by others may be reported in the usual way.

See Section 7 Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour - Crime Reconstructions.

### **STAGING AND RE-STAGING EVENTS**

There are very few recorded programmes which do not involve some intervention from the director, but there are acceptable and unacceptable production techniques. The acceptable production techniques include using cutaway shots, set-up shots to establish interviewees and asking contributors to repeat insignificant actions or perform an everyday activity.

However, unless clearly signalled to the audience, or using reconstructions, it is normally unacceptable in news and factual programmes to:

- stage or re-stage significant action or events which are **significant to the development of the action or narrative**, for example, the moment of discovery in a scientific documentary.
- inter-cut shots and sequences to suggest they were happening at the same time, if the resulting juxtaposition of material leads to a distorted and misleading impression of events.

Commentary must never be used to give the audience a misleading impression of events.

### **USE OF THIRD PARTY MATERIAL IN NEWS AND FACTUAL OUTPUT**

**We should only use material supplied by third parties if it is credible and reliable.** This includes weather reports, financial markets information and music charts. We need to ensure that any credit given for the use of third party material is in accordance with BBC credit guidelines.

**We should only broadcast material from third parties who may have a personal or professional interest in its subject matter if there is a clear editorial justification.** The material should be labelled. This includes material from the emergency services, charities, and environmental groups.

**We should be very reluctant to use video and audio news releases or other material.** We do not normally use any extracts from such releases if we are capable of gathering the material ourselves. If it is editorially justified to use it then we must explain the circumstances and clearly label the material on air.

### **USE OF LIBRARY MATERIAL IN NEWS AND FACTUAL OUTPUT**

**When library material is used to illustrate a current issue or event it must be clearly labelled if there is any risk of misleading the audience.**

**We should not use library material of one event to illustrate another in such a way as to suggest the audience is seeing something it is not.**

**We should ensure that we do not give a misleading impression by using out of date library footage to illustrate our stories, for example of places, people or industrial production processes.**

See Section 6 Privacy and Section 7 Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour.

### **USE OF LIBRARY MATERIAL IN DRAMAS AND DRAMA DOCUMENTARIES**

**We should only use library material in dramas and drama documentaries when it can be editorially justified.**

**We should try and avoid causing unjustified embarrassment, surprise or offence to identifiable people featured in the library material. We should take particular care when re-using material of past events involving suffering or trauma, or contentious material such as riot footage.**

So far as is reasonably practicable we should inform contributors of our plans to re-use material when it may cause them possible distress, such as re-use of funeral footage.

**We must check all original consents and observe any restrictions placed on the re-use of the library material.**

See Section 6 Privacy – Use of Library Material of Scenes of Suffering, Distress and Trauma.

### **ARCHIVE MATERIAL**

When we repeat programmes it may be possible to justify broadcasting them in their original form. But when we are aware that factual material has become inaccurate or out of date for other reasons we must make this clear to our audiences. **We should clearly label archive material and wherever possible indicate the date of its first broadcast or publication.**

In the on-demand digital world our content may be accessible long after its original broadcast or publication as a valuable resource for our audiences. However, it is important that archive material does not cause unfairness to individuals or organisations. It may be necessary to edit or remove it to achieve this. In addition it may be necessary to remove links to archived stories online when legal proceedings become active if the information contained in a linked article could risk substantially prejudicing a trial.

### **REPORTING STATISTICS AND RISKS**

**We should report statistics and risks in context, taking care not to worry the audience unduly, especially about health or crime.** It may also be appropriate to report the margin of error and the source of figures to enable people to judge their significance. This may involve giving trends, taking care to avoid giving figures more weight than can stand scrutiny. If reporting a change, consideration should be given to making the baseline figure clear. For example, a doubling of a problem affecting one in two million people will still only affect one in a million.

**We should consider the emotional impact pictures and personal testimony can have on perceptions of risk** when not supported by the balance of argument. If a contributor's view is contrary to majority scientific or professional opinion, the demands of accuracy may require us to make this clear.

### **CORRECTING MISTAKES**

**We should normally acknowledge serious factual errors and correct mistakes quickly and clearly.** Inaccuracy may lead to a complaint of unfairness. An effective way of correcting a mistake is saying what was wrong as well as putting it right. Where we may have broadcast a defamatory inaccuracy Programme Legal Advice should be consulted about the wording of a correction.

### **CHECKING PROGRAMMES**

**We must check programmes recorded some time before transmission or being repeated to make sure they have not been overtaken by events,** such as the known death of a contributor, the charging of an offender, or significant life changes. In some cases an on air announcement will be required, in others, the alteration or removal of some material.