



The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and The Public Should Expect

By Bill Kovach, Tom Rosenstiel

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The Book That Every Citizen and Journalist Should Read

“What this book does better than any single book on media history, ethics, or practice is weave . . . [together] why media audiences have fled and why new technology and megacorporate ownership are putting good journalism at risk.” —Rasmi Simhan, *Boston Globe*

“Kovach and Rosenstiel’s essays on each [element] are concise gems, filled with insights worthy of becoming axiomatic. . . . The book should become essential reading for journalism professionals and students and for the citizens they aim to serve.” —Carl Sessions Stepp, *American Journalism Review*

“If you think journalists have no idea what you want . . . here is a book that agrees with you. Better—it has solutions. The Elements of Journalism is written for journalists, but any citizen who wonders why the news seems trivial or uninspiring should read it.” —Marta Salij, *Detroit Free Press*

The elements of journalism are:

- * Journalism’s first obligation is to the truth.
- * Its first loyalty is to citizens.
- * Its essence is a discipline of verification.
- * Its practitioners must maintain an independence from those they cover.
- * It must serve as an independent monitor of power.
- * It must provide a forum for public criticism and compromise.
- * It must strive to make the significant interesting and relevant.
- * It must keep the news comprehensive and proportional.
- * Its practitioners must be allowed to exercise their personal conscience.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

These are tough times for journalism. Newsroom executives' bonuses tend to be based on their company's profit margin. Journalists are constantly jockeying for the time and space necessary to tell their stories as they see fit. Only 47 percent of Americans even read a newspaper. And *Time* and *Newsweek*--news magazines, remember?--"were seven times more likely to have the same cover story as *People* magazine in 1997 than in 1977."

It's no wonder that in 1997, the Committee of Concerned Journalists formed to "engage journalists and the public in a careful examination of what journalism was supposed to be." *The Elements of Journalism* reports the results of that study, which included 21 public forums (attended by 3,000 people), in-depth interviews with 100 journalists, editorial content studies, and research into the history of journalism. Part of what the committee members learned, they already knew. Journalism is complicated business: journalists are paid by management but work for the citizens; they tend to be self-taught (there is little evidence of mentoring and much disdain for journalism schools); and they need to be objective even when they're not impartial. This has always been the case. But the committee also detected a trend, one abundantly evident to anyone who has tried to find news on the evening TV news: "news was becoming entertainment and entertainment news."

"Unless we can grasp and reclaim the theory of a free press," warn Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, the book's authors, "journalists risk allowing their profession to disappear." Through their discussions with journalists, the Committee of Concerned Journalists defined nine "clear principles" of journalism, which Kovach and Rosenstiel explore in great detail. The first principle is, "Journalism's first obligation is to the truth." The last: "Its practitioners must be allowed to exercise their personal conscience." In between come issues of loyalty, verification, independence, and power monitoring, among others.

Invigorating reading for newsroom interns, jaded reporters, and anyone else who needs to be reminded of the rigor, integrity, and meaning of journalism. --*Jane Steinberg*

From Publishers Weekly

In 1997, 25 men and women formed the Committee of Concerned Journalists and began a three-year investigation into what they believe is a crisis in journalism today. If, as they set forth, "the purpose of journalism is to provide people with the information they need to be free and self-governing," the committee believes that journalism has lost its credibility in the interest of the bottom line. One of the main reasons for this new emphasis on the bottom line, claim committee chair Kovach and fellow member Rosenstiel (coauthors of *Warp Speed: America in the Age of Mixed Media*), is that "technology is shaping a new economic organization of information companies [e.g., Time Warner is now part of AOL, Disney owns ABC News], which is subsuming journalism inside it." In this incisive, controversial and well-presented work, the authors have synthesized the committee's findings to lay down nine principles of sound journalism for both those in the industry and the citizens who rely on the free press as a fundamental element of democracy. First and foremost among these principles is journalism's "obligation to the truth." At first glance, this principle may appear self-evident, but as Kovach and Rosenstiel explain, what constitutes the truth is sticky and often misunderstood. For example, the truth may be neither fair nor balanced, nor should it necessarily be, they say. Kovach and Rosenstiel have issued a clarion call to their colleagues, and they hope that all journalists, editors and owners of news organizations will incorporate the principles of the profession as they've outlined them into their everyday work. However, the authors offer no specific suggestions as to how to enact these

principles in a wide-reaching or systematic manner.

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Review

"At a time when technological and financial forces are creating formidable challenges to journalism's traditional values, Kovach and Rosenstiel have written an immensely valuable primer on who we are, what we do, and how we should do it."

-- David Halberstam

"**The Elements of Journalism** is a remarkable book that does a superb job of describing the problems, articulating the values, outlining the risks, and offering understandable and practical ways to respond to the difficulties of the present state of journalism. **The Elements of Journalism** ought to become required reading for every institution (and individual) engaged in journalism."

— Neil Rudenstine, President, Harvard University

"Of the many books that have been written about reporting the news, this one best captures the shortcomings, subtleties, and possibilities of modern journalism. It deserves to become as indispensable to journalists and journalism students as **The Elements of Style**."

— Tom Goldstein, Dean, Graduate School of Journalism, Columbia University

"In an age when partisan rancor and ratings-driven showmanship have crowded out the more subtle virtues of solid journalism, Tom Rosenstiel and Bill Kovach provide a timely refresher course in the importance of press fundamentals. They remind us that at its best, journalism is a high public calling, and all those who practice it have a deeper obligation to their readers and viewers than to the demands of the market."

— David Talbot, editor-in-chief, Salon.com

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