



Newspapers In Education, Washington News Council and  
Washington Journalism Education Association Present:

# THE TAO OF JOURNALISM: TRANSPARENT, ACCOUNTABLE AND OPEN

*Tao* :: a Mandarin Chinese word meaning way, path, doctrine or principle.

Week 1

## What Qualities Build Trust?

Whom do you trust most among your friends, family, teachers, mentors and colleagues? Bet it's those who are:

1. **Transparent** about who they are and don't try to hide anything from you;
2. **Accountable** if they make mistakes, willing to apologize and set things straight;
3. **Open** to hearing your point of view, even if they disagree with you.

Those are key qualities for building trust among individuals, aren't they? If so, shouldn't journalists practice those values if they want to be trusted by their readers, viewers and listeners?

*"I think TAO is a great idea, and focuses on just the issues that matter to us — transparency, accountability and openness."  
— Martin Moore, Director, Media Standards Trust, London*

## What Is the TAO Pledge?

If you're a student journalist, citizen journalist, professional journalist, independent blogger or anyone else practicing journalism in the broadest sense of the word, you may voluntarily take the TAO Pledge and post the Seal on your newspaper, website, blog, newsletter, social-media page or wherever. It's a simple public promise that you will be **Transparent** about who you are, **Accountable** for your mistakes and **Open** to other points of view.

*"The TAO of Journalism Pledge distills the essential commitments journalists today need to make as they work to regain public trust."  
— Scott Rosenberg, Founder, Media Bugs*

## What Is "Transparent" Journalism?

The Pledge states: "We will fully disclose who we are, our journalistic mission and our guiding principles. We will post information on our background and expertise, including education and experience. We will list advertisers, donors, grants and any other payments that support our work. If affiliated with a political party or a special-interest group, we will disclose that. If lobbying for any particular legislation or regulation, we will disclose that. If we are being paid to promote a product or cause, we will disclose that. If other factors could be seen as potential conflicts of interest, we will disclose them. (NOTE: The principle of transparency does not apply to confidential sources, who may still be protected.)"

## Are the News Media Trusted Today?

The most recent annual Gallup Poll (September 2012) found that 60 percent of Americans have "little or no trust in the media's ability to report the news fully, accurately and fairly." That's the highest percentage since the poll began in 1997. Other nationwide surveys had similar results. In today's digital media age, with countless sources worldwide sharing

information every second, trust is elusive. Who can be trusted online? What sources are accurate, ethical and reliable?

*"There is a growing concern that we are moving further away from strong ethical decision making."  
— Kevin Z. Smith, Ethics Committee Chairman, Society of Professional Journalists*

## Who Has Taken the TAO Pledge?

Since the Washington News Council launched the TAO of Journalism project, journalists all over the world have taken the Pledge and displayed the Seal. They include student journalists, individual bloggers, professional media organizations, newsletter publishers and others. For a full list, see the "DirecTAOry" page on the TAO of Journalism's website, [taoofjournalism.org](http://taoofjournalism.org).

*"Every sensible writer on this planet should support this."  
— Abhijit Roy, Calcutta, India*

*"I've taken this pledge as an independent journalist."  
— Afi-Odelia Scruggs, Cleveland, Ohio*

*"It gives you something to stand by."  
— Aabida Allaham, Trinidad and Tobago*

## STUDENT MEDIA: TAKE THE PLEDGE FEB. 20

Feb. 17–23 is the national Journalism Education Association's Scholastic Journalism Week. JEA's third annual TAO Pledge Day is Feb. 20. Student media groups that take the TAO Pledge may post the Seal on their masthead or online. It's free. Just send evidence that your group has taken the Pledge and posted the Seal. You will receive a TAO poster, temporary "TAOtoos" for your entire staff, and your name will be added to the TAO website. Join the many students around the country who have promised to practice the best journalism possible by taking the TAO Pledge.

*"We need to realize that these fundamental qualities translate to all aspects of our lives — practice them privately, embody them publicly."  
— David Gaines, Moffat County (Colorado)  
High School Newspaper Adviser*

