



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 3

## How Does the TAO Pledge Define Openness?

The Pledge states: "If there are credible challenges to our point of view or simply differences of opinion, we will be open to contrary positions. We will give the other side(s) opportunity and space to express their views and engage in open public dialogue through comments or other means. If we are primarily engaged in opinion and commentary, rather than news reporting, we will make that clear — while inviting others to express their opinions through comment and feedback means."

## Must TAO Pledgers Abide by a Specific Ethics Code?

No. The Pledge states: "We do not necessarily agree to abide by any particular code of journalism ethics or professional standards, although we may choose to do so. If we do, we will declare that publicly. If we don't, we will declare that as well."

## Who Will Enforce the TAO Pledge?

The public. The Pledge states: "We understand that this will not be enforced by any outside organized group. It will be overseen by everyone on the Internet who wants to see high standards of Transparency, Accountability and Openness in journalism — through whatever media platform. We understand that if someone using the 'TAO Seal' starts violating its basic principles, they will be admonished, criticized, reprimanded and embarrassed in public through the awesome power of the Internet. Call it 'crowdsourcing' ethics and accuracy. In summary, we believe that Transparency, Accountability and Openness are keys to our personal credibility and public trust."

## Is This a "Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval"?

No, because the TAO Pledge and Seal is totally voluntary, self-selected and self-affixed. It will not be overseen or enforced by the Washington News Council or any other organization. It does not violate the First Amendment's guarantee of freedom of the press. TAO pledgers voluntarily agree to abide by the basic principles of Transparency, Accountability and Openness. Journalists rightly oppose government licensing, certification, regulation, or mandatory controls. The beauty of the TAO Pledge is its simplicity. It's no panacea, but it can help build public trust.

## What If TAO Pledgers Break the Pledge?

Concerned members of the public will determine if TAO Seal users are living up to the Pledge. There will be no official oversight group or regulatory body. The goal is to have engaged citizens provide oversight. However, the TAO website has a "Sealbreakers"

page to report violations. Repeated violations could lead to a review by a peer group made up of other TAO pledgers. They would decide if permission to use the Seal should be revoked. The WNC is trademarking the TAO Seal with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

## Are You Open To Suggestions?

Absolutely. This is a work in progress. The WNC (206.262.9793) welcomes ideas on how the TAO Pledge and Seal can be made more effective. We promise to be Transparent, Accountable and Open in our efforts to promote and improve the TAO concept. Just TAO it! **Take the Pledge at [taofjournalism.org](http://taofjournalism.org).**

## RESOURCES

Here are some other good sources of information:

### Books:

- "BLUR: How to Know What's True in the Age of Information Overload" (2010), Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel
- "Don't Be Fooled: A Citizen's Guide to News and Information in the Digital Age" (2012), John McManus
- "We're All Journalists Now" (2011), Scott Gant

### Magazines:

- American Journalism Review, Columbia Journalism Review, Journal of Mass Media Ethics, Media Ethics, Quill

### Organizations:

- Alliance of Independent Press Councils, American Press Institute, American Society of News Editors, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications, Center for Journalism Ethics, Center for Media and Public Affairs, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, Media Matters for America, Media Research Center, Media Standards Trust, Newspaper Association of America, Online News Association, Organization of News Ombudsmen, Poynter Institute, Project for Excellence in Journalism, Radio Television Digital News Association, Society of Professional Journalists