

principles+ standards

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1	Independence, integrity and responsibility	3
2	Accuracy	4
3	Corrections and clarifications	5
4	Impartiality and diversity of perspectives	6
5	Fair and honest dealing	8
6	Privacy	10
	Harm and offence	11
8	Children and young people	13
9	Public access and participation	14
10	Announcements about ABC programs and activities	16
11	Advertising and sponsorship restrictions	18
12	Commercial references	20
13	External funding and relationships	21

ABC Editorial Policies – Principles and Standards

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Note on interpretation

The purpose of these Editorial Policies is to assist the ABC to provide content which fulfils its functions under the ABC Act to a high standard.

The Principles set out the ABC's approach to each of the main issues to be addressed by an independent public broadcaster that regulates itself. The Standards which follow each statement of principle are enforceable under internal management processes and under the ABC Complaints Handling Procedures. The Principles are intended to assist the interpretation and application of the Standards. More detailed advice is available in non-binding Guidance Notes.

The Editorial Policies are intended to be applied with due regard for the nature of the content under consideration in particular cases. The ABC is conscious that its dual obligations – for accountability and for high quality – can in practice interact in complex ways. It can be a sign of strength not weakness that journalism enrages or art shocks.

The Standards are to be applied in ways that maintain independence and integrity, preserve trust and do not unduly constrain journalistic enquiry or artistic expression. However, all who are involved with content for the ABC are required to act with integrity and take account of likely harms in exercising their power and responsibility.

Scope

The ABC Editorial Policies apply to all content produced, commissioned, acquired or otherwise obtained by the ABC for broadcast or publication by the ABC on platforms and through services operated by the ABC, or by the ABC on platforms and through services operated by third parties.

The ABC Editorial Policies do not apply to the activities of ABC Commercial except to the extent that ABC Commercial exercises editorial control over content for broadcast or publication by the ABC which has not been already broadcast or published by the ABC. In all its activities, ABC Commercial must operate in a manner consistent with maintaining the independence and integrity of the ABC.





1 Independence, integrity and responsibility

Principles

The trust and respect of the community depend on the ABC's editorial independence and integrity. Independence and responsibility are inseparable. The Managing Director is the Editor-in-Chief who has ultimate editorial power and responsibility.

- 1.1 Maintain the independence and integrity of the ABC.
- 1.2 Exercise ABC editorial control over the content the ABC broadcasts or publishes.
- 1.3 Ensure that editorial decisions are not improperly influenced by political, sectional, commercial or personal interests.
- 1.4 External activities of individuals undertaking work for the ABC must not undermine the independence and integrity of the ABC's editorial content.
- 1.5 Exercise editorial independence as authorised and accept responsibility for it. When in doubt about an editorial matter, refer it up to the next most senior person for advice or decision.
- 1.6 When any editorial matter, including an editorial matter not being referred up for advice or decision, is likely to cause controversy or have an extraordinary impact, give proper notice of it to the most appropriate senior manager.

2 Accuracy

Principles

The ABC has a statutory duty to ensure that the gathering and presentation of news and information is accurate according to the recognised standards of objective journalism. Credibility depends heavily on factual accuracy.

Types of fact-based content include news and analysis of current events, documentaries, factual dramas and lifestyle programs. The ABC requires that reasonable efforts must be made to ensure accuracy in all fact-based content. The ABC gauges those efforts by reference to:

- the type, subject and nature of the content;
- the likely audience expectations of the content;
- the likely impact of reliance by the audience on the accuracy of the content; and
- the circumstances in which the content was made and presented.

The ABC accuracy standard applies to assertions of fact, not to expressions of opinion. An opinion, being a value judgement or conclusion, cannot be found to be accurate or inaccurate in the way facts can. The accuracy standard requires that opinions be conveyed accurately, in the sense that quotes should be accurate and any editing should not distort the meaning of the opinion expressed.

The efforts reasonably required to ensure accuracy will depend on the circumstances. Sources with relevant expertise may be relied on more heavily than those without. Eyewitness testimony usually carries more weight than second-hand accounts. The passage of time or the inaccessibility of locations or sources can affect the standard of verification reasonably required.

The ABC should make reasonable efforts, appropriate in the context, to signal to audiences gradations in accuracy, for example by querying interviewees, qualifying bald assertions, supplementing the partly right and correcting the plainly wrong.

- 2.1 Make reasonable efforts to ensure that material facts are accurate and presented in context.
- 2.2 Do not present factual content in a way that will materially mislead the audience. In some cases, this may require appropriate labels or other explanatory information.





3 Corrections and clarifications

Principles

A commitment to accuracy includes a willingness to correct errors and clarify ambiguous or otherwise misleading information. Swift correction can reduce harmful reliance on inaccurate information, especially given content can be quickly, widely and permanently disseminated. Corrections and clarifications can contribute to achieving fairness and impartiality.

- **3.1** Acknowledge and correct or clarify, in an appropriate manner as soon as reasonably practicable:
 - a significant material errors that are readily apparent or have been demonstrated; or
 - **b** information that is likely to significantly and materially mislead.

4 Impartiality and diversity of perspectives

Principles

The ABC has a statutory duty to ensure that the gathering and presentation of news and information is impartial according to the recognised standards of objective journalism.

Aiming to equip audiences to make up their own minds is consistent with the public service character of the ABC. A democratic society depends on diverse sources of reliable information and contending opinions. A broadcaster operating under statute with public funds is legitimately expected to contribute in ways that may differ from commercial media, which are free to be partial to private interests.

Judgements about whether impartiality was achieved in any given circumstances can vary among individuals according to their personal and subjective view of any given matter of contention. Acknowledging this fact of life does not change the ABC's obligation to apply its impartiality standard as objectively as possible. In doing so, the ABC is guided by these hallmarks of impartiality:

- a balance that follows the weight of evidence;
- fair treatment:
- open-mindedness; and
- opportunities over time for principal relevant perspectives on matters of contention to be expressed.

The ABC aims to present, over time, content that addresses a broad range of subjects from a diversity of perspectives reflecting a diversity of experiences, presented in a diversity of ways from a diversity of sources, including content created by ABC staff, generated by audiences and commissioned or acquired from external content-makers.

Impartiality does not require that every perspective receives equal time, nor that every facet of every argument is presented.





Assessing the impartiality due in given circumstances requires consideration in context of all relevant factors including:

- the type, subject and nature of the content;
- the circumstances in which the content is made and presented;
- the likely audience expectations of the content;
- the degree to which the matter to which the content relates is contentious;
- the range of principal relevant perspectives on the matter of contention; and
- the timeframe within which it would be appropriate for the ABC to provide opportunities for the principal relevant perspectives to be expressed, having regard to the public importance of the matter of contention and the extent to which it is the subject of current debate.

- **4.1** Gather and present news and information with due impartiality.
- 4.2 Present a diversity of perspectives so that, over time, no significant strand of thought or belief within the community is knowingly excluded or disproportionately represented.
- 4.3 Do not state or imply that any perspective is the editorial opinion of the ABC. The ABC takes no editorial stance other than its commitment to fundamental democratic principles including the rule of law, freedom of speech and religion, parliamentary democracy and equality of opportunity.
- **4.4** Do not misrepresent any perspective.
- **4.5** Do not unduly favour one perspective over another.

5 Fair and honest dealing

Principles

Fair and honest dealing is essential to maintaining trust with audiences and with those who participate in or are otherwise directly affected by ABC content. In rare circumstances, deception or a breach of an undertaking may be justified. Because of the potential damage to trust, deception or breach of an undertaking must be explained openly afterwards unless there are compelling reasons not to do so.

Standards

Dealing with participants

- 5.1 Participants in ABC content should normally be informed of the general nature of their participation.
- **5.2** A refusal to participate will not be overridden without good cause.

Opportunity to respond

5.3 Where allegations are made about a person or organisation, make reasonable efforts in the circumstances to provide a fair opportunity to respond.

Attribution and sources

- **5.4** Aim to attribute information to its source.
- 5.5 Where a source seeks anonymity, do not agree without first considering the source's motive and any alternative attributable sources.
- **5.6** Do not misrepresent another's work as your own.

Undertakings

5.7 Assurances given in relation to conditions of participation, use of content, confidentiality or anonymity must be honoured except in rare cases where justified in the public interest.





Secret recording and other types of deception

- 5.8 Secret recording devices, misrepresentation or other types of deception must not be used to obtain or seek information, audio, pictures or an agreement to participate except where:
 - justified in the public interest and the material cannot reasonably be obtained by any other means; or
 - **b** consent is obtained from the subject or identities are effectively obscured; or
 - c the deception is integral to an artistic work and the potential for harm is taken into consideration.

Mandatory referral

- **5.9** An appropriately senior ABC person designated for the purpose must approve in advance, having consulted ABC Legal, any proposal:
 - a to use secret recording during the production of content commissioned, produced or co-produced by the ABC; or
 - **b** to broadcast or publish material obtained by deception; or
 - c to broadcast or publish without attribution information that forms the basis of a report and the ABC is to be committed to protect the identity of the source of the information; or
 - d not to honour an assurance given in relation to conditions of participation, use of content, confidentiality or anonymity.

6 Privacy

Principles

Privacy is necessary to human dignity and every person reasonably expects that their privacy will be respected. But privacy is not absolute. The ABC seeks to balance the public interest in respect for privacy with the public interest in disclosure of information and freedom of expression.

Standards

6.1 Intrusion into a person's private life without consent must be justified in the public interest and the extent of the intrusion must be limited to what is proportionate in the circumstances.





7 Harm and offence

Principles

The ABC broadcasts and publishes comprehensive and innovative content that aims to inform, entertain and educate diverse audiences. Innovation involves a willingness to take risks, invent and experiment with new ideas. This can result in challenging content which may offend some of the audience some of the time. But it also contributes to diversity of content in the media and to fulfilling the ABC's function to encourage and promote the musical, dramatic and other performing arts. The ABC acknowledges that a public broadcaster should never gratuitously harm or offend and accordingly any content which is likely to harm or offend must have a clear editorial purpose.

The ABC potentially reaches the whole community, so it must take into account community standards. The ABC must also be able to provide content for specific target audiences whose standards may differ from generally held community attitudes. Applying the harm and offence standard requires careful judgement. Context is an important consideration. What may be inappropriate and unacceptable in one context may be appropriate and acceptable in another. Coarse language, disturbing images or unconventional situations may form a legitimate part of reportage, debate, documentaries or a humorous, satirical, dramatic or other artistic work. Consideration of the nature of the target audience for particular content is part of assessing harm and offence in context, as is any signposting that equips audiences to make informed choices about what they see, hear or read.

- 7.1 Content that is likely to cause harm or offence must be justified by the editorial context.
- **7.2** Where content is likely to cause harm or offence, having regard to the context, make reasonable efforts to provide information about the nature of the content through the use of classification labels or other warnings or advice.
- 7.3 Ensure all domestic television programs with the exception of news, current affairs and sporting events are classified and scheduled for broadcast in accordance with the ABC's Associated Standard on Television Program Classification.
- **7.4** If inadvertent or unexpected actions, audio or images in live content are likely to cause harm or offence, take appropriate steps to mitigate.
- 7.5 The reporting or depiction of violence, tragedy or trauma must be handled with extreme sensitivity. Avoid causing undue distress to victims, witnesses or bereaved relatives. Be sensitive to significant cultural practices when depicting or reporting on recently deceased persons.

- 7.6 Where there is editorial justification for content which may lead to dangerous imitation or exacerbate serious threats to individual or public health, safety or welfare, take appropriate steps to mitigate those risks, particularly by taking care with how content is expressed or presented.
- **7.7** Avoid the unjustified use of stereotypes or discriminatory content that could reasonably be interpreted as condoning or encouraging prejudice.





8 Children and young people

Principles

The ABC aims to provide children and young people (under the age of 18) with enjoyable and enriching content, as well as opportunities for them to express themselves. Children and young people participate and interact with the ABC in various ways – as actors, presenters, interviewees, subjects, content makers and audience members.

The ABC has a responsibility to protect children and young people from potential harm that might arise during their engagement with the ABC and its content. The ABC shares this responsibility with parents/guardians and with the child or young person him/herself. In particular, the ABC recommends that parents/guardians supervise children and young people's access to content, their participation in interactive services, and their exposure to news and current affairs. It is not always possible to avoid presenting content that may be distressing to some audience members.

- **8.1** Take due care over the dignity and physical and emotional welfare of children and young people who are involved in making, participating in and presenting content produced or commissioned by the ABC.
- **8.2** Before significant participation of a child or young person in content produced or commissioned by the ABC, or in interactive services offered by the ABC, consider whether it is appropriate to obtain the consent of both the child/young person and the parent/guardian.
- 8.3 Adopt appropriate measures wherever practicable to enable children and young people, or those who supervise them, to manage risks associated with the child/young person's participation with, use of and exposure to ABC content and services designed for them.
- **8.4** Take particular care to minimise risks of exposure to unsuitable content or inappropriate contact by peers or strangers.

9 Public access and participation

Principles

The ABC provides opportunities for individuals and organisations to engage with the ABC, its audiences and each other consistent with the ABC's public service purposes to inform, entertain, educate and encourage and promote the arts.

Public access and participation can take many forms, for example: musicians and artists submit work for broadcast or online presentation; audience members question ABC presenters and their guests by phone or through online interactive services; organisers of concerts and other activities inform local communities through event diaries; political parties are granted broadcast time to convey their policies directly to the electorate; and community service announcements support charities and other activities in the public interest.

The ABC seeks both to draw audiences to the platforms it controls and to reach audiences using suitable services that third parties control. The ABC takes editorial responsibility in proportion to its control of the media environment in which it operates. The ABC expects those who participate also to exercise responsibility for what they can control.

In fostering engagement, the ABC seeks to maintain its independence and integrity, preserve trust and cultivate respect among participants. The ABC may establish conditions for participation with which participants are expected to comply, such as the ABC's Conditions of Use relating to users' interactivity on abc.net.au. The ABC will exercise appropriate oversight over participants' contributions, for example through appropriate moderation of its interactive services.

The ABC does not require content generated and submitted by individuals and organisations to meet the standard of accuracy required of content generated by the ABC. However, where the ABC is satisfied that it is appropriate to do so, the ABC may decline to broadcast or publish, or may edit, remove, correct or clarify content generated by public participants that contains error or is otherwise false, misleading or harmful.

Individuals and organisations who generate and submit content are not required to be impartial. The ABC recognises that social and political activity, including robust debate, is a necessary and desirable aspect of a healthy democratic community.





14

- 9.1 Free broadcast time or publication space may be provided to enable individuals or organisations to communicate directly with the ABC, the audience and each other, provided that:
 - a the content is broadcast or published as a public service;
 - **b** the content is relevant and suitable in the context in which it appears;
 - c the ABC maintains editorial control; and
 - **d** ABC independence and integrity are maintained.
- **9.2** Opportunities to participate must be administered fairly and respectfully.
- **9.3** Do not knowingly mislead audiences about the nature of the content.
- **9.4** Clearly distinguish content generated and submitted to the ABC from content produced, commissioned or acquired by the ABC.
- **9.5** Do not accept money or other benefit in exchange for broadcasting or publishing the content generated through public access and participation.

10 Announcements aboutABC programs and activities

Principles

The ABC is permitted by the ABC Act to publicise its programs, products, services, events and other activities. The ABC is conscious that its audiences value the ABC's role as a non-commercial broadcaster and its non-commercial style. To that end, the ABC will ensure that announcements about ABC activities are produced, scheduled and broadcast or published in a style consistent with the tone and approach of the ABC's various content strands. ABC program promotions should not misrepresent original content and should be scheduled so as to be consistent with the nature of the surrounding content.

- 10.1 Ensure program promotions and announcements about other ABC activities are produced, scheduled and broadcast or published in a style consistent with the tone and approach of the surrounding content and appropriately take into consideration the likely composition of the audience.
- 10.2 Program promotions must not misrepresent the content they promote.
- **10.3** Announcements about specific ABC commercial products, services or other activities may be broadcast or published provided that:
 - a the product, service or activity is directly related to ABC content or to content or services that bear an ABC logo or trademark;
 - b prior approval has been obtained from an appropriately senior person designated for the purpose within the Division(s) editorially responsible for the surrounding content or from the Managing Director;
 - where the product, service or other activity involves sponsorship, any reference to the sponsor must be relevant to informing the audience and not simply a promotion of the sponsor; and
 - **d** the announcement is not broadcast within news content, content designed for preschool children, or any television program.





- **10.4** Generic announcements about ABC commercial products, services or other activities may be made provided that:
 - a prior approval has been obtained from an appropriately senior person designated for the purpose within the Division(s) editorially responsible for the surrounding content or from the Managing Director; and
 - b the announcement is not broadcast within news content, content designed for preschool children, or any television program.
- 10.5 Except where permitted by law, do not accept payment or other benefit to broadcast an announcement relating to any program, product, service or other activity which has been produced, published or otherwise created or made available by the ABC in association with an external organisation.

11 Advertising and sponsorship restrictions

Principles

The absence of advertisements and commercial sponsorship is one of the distinctive features of the ABC's domestic television and radio services. It has been reinforced by statute since the ABC was first established in 1932. The ABC is conscious that its audiences value the ABC's distinctive role and style as a non-commercial broadcaster.

The ABC is permitted by law to augment its public funding through advertising and sponsorship in relation to certain of its activities, for example its international television service. The ABC may also include advertisements in its commercial products and services where permitted under the ABC Act, for example in its print magazines.

The ABC will not accept advertising or sponsorship for online content or services offered on abc.net.au. This is not intended to limit the ABC's ability to link, where editorially justified, from abc.net.au to non-ABC sites which are supported by advertising or sponsorship, or to sites external to abc.net.au which are operated by the ABC's international television service or by ABC Commercial.

Where permissible advertising or sponsorship occurs, the ABC is committed to maintaining the audience members' trust in the honesty and integrity of what they see, hear and read. Advertisements and sponsored content must be readily recognisable as such. Advertisers and sponsors must have no influence over editorial content or scheduling decisions. In all decisions relating to advertising and sponsorship, the ABC's independence and integrity are paramount.

- **11.1** Do not accept advertising or sponsorship in relation to content or services offered on:
 - a the ABC's domestic free-to-air television and radio services; or
 - **b** the ABC's internet site, abc.net.au.
- 11.2 Do not accept sponsorship for news content or content designed for preschool children.
- 11.3 Ensure advertising is not broadcast within news content or content designed for preschool children.





- **11.4** Ensure sponsored content is identified as such and in a manner that informs but does not promote.
- **11.5** References to a sponsor or a sponsor's product or service must not be a condition of the sponsorship arrangement. Any sponsorship reference must be editorially justified.
- **11.6** Ensure advertising is readily distinguishable from editorial content.
- 11.7 Product placement and other forms of embedded or surreptitious advertising are prohibited. In exceptional cases, the ABC may use content that already contains product placement provided:
 - a the ABC played no role in the commissioning or production of the content;
 - **b** the content has intrinsic editorial value;
 - c the product placement is not unduly frequent or unduly prominent; and
 - d the ABC's editorial independence and integrity are not undermined.
- **11.8** Do not enter into any advertising or sponsorship arrangement if it would be likely to undermine the ABC's independence and integrity or could be reasonably perceived to do so.

12 Commercial references

Principles

The ABC needs to be able to reflect the world as it is, and this involves referring appropriately to commercial organisations, products and services, while maintaining the ABC's editorial independence and integrity.

- 12.1 References to trade names, brand names, and logos may be made provided that:
 - a the references are editorially relevant in the context; and
 - **b** the ABC's editorial independence or integrity is not undermined.
- 12.2 Commercial references must not be unduly frequent or unduly prominent.
- **12.3** Take particular care to minimise commercial references in content designed for children.
- 12.4 Do not state or imply that the ABC endorses any commercial organisation, product or service.





13 External funding and relationships

Principles

The ABC relies on public funding from Parliament to fulfil its charter obligations and carry out its functions under the ABC Act. The ABC is permitted to supplement its public funding and work collaboratively with others to extend the variety and reach of content offered to the community. The ABC is permitted to accept direct external funding from public sources and enter into funding arrangements with bona fide producers and publishers of content.

The production of content by independent producers, including co-production arrangements, regularly involves funding from the public sector, bona fide industry funding sources and other permitted sources some of which the ABC may not be able to access directly. The ABC is also able to accept free or discounted products, services or facilities to support the creation of content where that does not undermine the ABC's independence and integrity.

External funding sources for ABC produced, commissioned or co-produced content must be scrutinised by the ABC to ensure the ABC's editorial independence and integrity are maintained. Contentiousness alone is not a reason to reject a proposal. The ABC Act requires innovative services of a high standard. The Editorial Policies require the ABC to present a diversity of perspectives over time on contentious matters. Innovation, high quality, diversity and contentiousness can travel together, so long as risks are properly managed.

In these Standards, "external partners" includes funders, producers, publishers and distributors.

- 13.1 Before the ABC enters into an arrangement for external funding or co-production of content, the arrangement must be scrutinised by an appropriately senior ABC person designated for the purpose who must reject the arrangement unless satisfied that the independence and integrity of the ABC are fully protected. Factors to consider include:
 - a whether the arrangement is permissible under the ABC Act;
 - whether the content is something that the ABC would consider producing for broadcast or publication without external funding;
 - the nature of the external partners' interest in the subject matter of the content and in broadcast or publication of the content by the ABC, and how that interest – whether it be political, commercial, sectional, personal or otherwise – is likely to be perceived;
 - d the extent to which the making, promotion or scheduling of the content will be influenced by any funder and how that influence is likely to be perceived;

- e the reputations of the external partners, including where relevant whether they have editorial standards similar to the ABC's;
- f the willingness of external partners to contract to comply with the Editorial Policies and to assist the ABC to comply;
- g how the ABC will exercise an appropriate level of editorial control that is commensurate with the ABC's contribution and consistent with its obligations under the ABC Act and Editorial Policies; and
- h the degree to which the subject matter or proposed treatment of the subject matter or scheduling of the content is likely to be contentious, and ways to manage that contentiousness consistent with obligations under the ABC Act and Editorial Policies.
- **13.2** A record of the reasons for acceptance or rejection of external funding proposals must be kept.
- 13.3 The sources of funds obtained by external partners must be disclosed to the ABC before an external funding or co-production arrangement is formalised.
- **13.4** Do not accept public funding from Commonwealth, State or Territory governments or their authorities for the production and broadcast or publication of content which is or appears to be party political.
- 13.5 Free or discounted products, services or facilities may be accepted to support the creation of content provided that:
 - a there is no obligation imposed on or accepted by the ABC to structure or present any matter with a particular editorial perspective;
 - **b** prior approval is obtained from an appropriately senior ABC person designated for the purpose;
 - c the independence and integrity of the ABC are fully protected; and
 - **d** accurate records are kept of what is accepted.
- **13.6** Any credits acknowledging creative, managerial and financial contributions must be editorially justified and not unduly prominent.
- 13.7 Ensure appropriate disclosure of any external funding arrangement, and any acceptance of free or discounted products, services or facilities, where the arrangement or acceptance, if it were not disclosed but later became public, may reasonably be perceived to distort the editorial content or otherwise undermine the ABC's independence or integrity.



