

# Starts at 60 Media Ethics Policy and Code of Practice

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## Introduction

Starts at 60 prides itself on being trustworthy to our community and readers. The purpose of this code is to protect and foster the bond between Starts at 60 readers and our publication and protect the integrity of our news and journalism.

This is a set of guidelines by which we operate the Starts at 60 Newsroom and news operations. It is a critical policy in the management of staff and practices.

By observing our code, journalists working for Starts at 60 will be protecting the independence, standing and reputation of themselves and their colleagues.

It is important that freelancers also abide by these guidelines while on assignment for Starts at 60.

Whilst not a paid-member, Starts at 60 is an active and vocal supporter of the [code of conduct and general principles recommended by the Australian Press Council](#). We require that all staff are familiar with these two critical industry standards and observe them in their making of and publishing of media and responding to our audience.

We also provide detailed instructions on our expectations of all staff producing or managing copy on our media website.

### **Rebecca Wilson**

CEO

Starts at 60

## Starts at 60 Standards of Practice

As per the standards of the Australian Press Council which we respect and admonish, we take reasonable steps to comply with the following Principles of the Press Council and adhere to the Council's other Standards of Practice.

Starts at 60 is not a member of, but commits to abide by the standards set by the [Australian Press Council's General Principles](#) as the peak industry body in setting the standards we work to for reporting the accuracy and impartiality of news.

All core news explainer content is edited by professional editors and written by professional journalists trained to this set of [principles](#) and [standards of practice](#).

Please ensure you have read the [General Principles](#) and Standards of Practice prior to lodging a complaint.

We have adopted these principles and articulate them below:

### Accuracy and clarity

1. Ensure that factual material in news reports and elsewhere is accurate and not misleading, and is distinguishable from other material such as opinion.
2. Provide a correction or other adequate remedial action if published material is significantly inaccurate or misleading.

### Fairness and balance

3. Ensure that factual material is presented with reasonable fairness and balance, and that writers' expressions of opinion are not based on significantly inaccurate factual material or omission of key facts.
4. Ensure that where material refers adversely to a person, a fair opportunity is given for subsequent publication of a reply if that is reasonably necessary to address a possible breach of General Principle

## Privacy and avoidance of harm

5. Avoid intruding on a person's reasonable expectations of privacy, unless doing so is sufficiently in the public interest.
6. Avoid causing or contributing materially to substantial offence, distress or prejudice, or a substantial risk to health or safety, unless doing so is sufficiently in the public interest. Integrity and transparency
7. Avoid publishing material which has been gathered by deceptive or unfair means, unless doing so is sufficiently in the public interest.
8. Ensure that conflicts of interests are avoided or adequately disclosed, and that they do not influence published material.

## Our Community Editor

Starts at 60 takes media ethics very seriously and has a Community Editor who coordinates and responds to all communications and complaints from our readers.

The job of the Community Editor is to collect, consider, investigate, respond to and where appropriate close-out issues related to readers questions, concerns and complaints in a prompt and timely manner and from a position of editorial independence.

Calista Bruschi has been with Starts at 60 for more than five years and took up the role of community editor in 2018.

Starts at 60 news and media policy is to correct any substantial errors as soon as possible and notate any major corrections on the page of publication if deemed important.

The Community Editor's role is to look into complaints and communications about our publication and respond to consumers complaints against the editorial code.

Before making a complaint, please read the Australian Press Council's General Principles and Standards of Practice which you can visit [here](#). And if you believe we have breached these principles or standards please contact us to lodge a complaint by emailing [community@startsat60.com](mailto:community@startsat60.com). We will respond to you personally within 24 hours. We commit to investigate all concerns and complaints as quickly as possible and to communicate with you in response to legitimate concerns until the issue is resolved, remedied or deemed closed-out. Outstanding issues are logged by our community editor for tracking and monitored in a compliance schedule until closed out or remedied.

## Lodging a complaint

Please email [community@startsat60.com](mailto:community@startsat60.com). All complaints through this inbox are logged for compliance purposes so that we can manage through to close-out or remedy.

- Mark the subject of the email: COMPLAINT
- The article you're complaining about.
- The date on which it appeared.
- The nature of your complaint in no more than 500 words.
- Which part of the General Principles or Standards of Practice it breaches.

All staff creating content should read through the attached policy and sign each page to demonstrate their understanding of their responsibility as a writer or editor for Starts at 60.

## Being ethical at all times

Any writer who creates editorial content – be they a qualified journalist or not – is by doing so committing to the central tenets of a code of ethics designed to ensure that readers can be certain the information they are consuming is accurate and unbiased. This is important because:

- It upholds journalism as an honourable profession
- It best represents the company as a professional media outlet
- It best ensures the audience receives a balanced, informed story
- It best protects the company and employees against accusations of unethical behaviour.

For information on the prevailing journalist code of ethics in Australia, see the [Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance's code](#), which has existed since 1944. The [Australian Press Council has further principles and standards](#) that help guide journalists' behaviour.

The wording of specific ethical codes varies by media organisation but the principles remain the same: *we must be honest, fair and independent of influence*. As such, there are questions you should ask yourself every time you interview, write, edit or publish a piece of editorial content.

### The must-do checklist

1. When interviewing, have I clearly identified myself and the nature of my interview/questions?
2. If relevant, have I informed the interviewee that I am recording their comments?

3. Have I asked the interviewee whether they are happy to be identified by name or other identifying characteristics?
4. Have I checked with the interviewee all relevant spellings and any other relevant facts, such as age or job title?
5. When transcribing an interview, have I clearly dated the transcript, made clear the identity of the interview subject, and filed the transcript when I can access it on a later occasion?
6. When writing a story, have I given any relevant individual or group the right of reply? Is my story balanced?
7. Have I provided sufficient time for right-of-reply response? *Please see SAS\_HowTo\_SeekComment for more information.*
8. Have I ascertained the facts to the best of my ability, including by asking interviewees to explain any issues about which I'm unsure?
9. Have I done all additional research required to ensure I'm comfortable that I'm representing the facts accurately and fairly?
10. Have I double-checked all spellings, particularly proper nouns?
11. Have I checked that there is no legal impediment to publishing the information contained in my story?
12. Have I considered whether any comments or information contained in my story could be defamatory?
13. Have I alerted my editor to any potential legal issues I'm aware of?
14. If allowing a source anonymity, have I considered what their motives may be?
15. Have I alerted my editor to my use of anonymous sources in my story and explained my reasoning for use of anonymity?
16. Have I made clear where information in my story is personal or anecdotal in nature?
17. Have I clearly attributed quotes and partial quotes so there can be no misunderstanding of the identity of the speaker?
18. Does any paraphrasing accurately represent my sources' views?
19. Have I sought permission for use of non-public imagery and attributed the source?
20. Have I included the suicide helpline if required? *See below for wording and [here](#) for more information on reporting suicide.*

21. Have I ensured that my reporting doesn't breach any cultural guidelines? Click [here](#) for more information on reporting related to the Aboriginal community, particularly in regard to death, [here](#) for information on reporting on the Muslim community and [here](#) for information on reporting on asylum matters.
22. When editing, am I satisfied that all of the above has been completed by the reporter and is evident in the story?
23. Am I satisfied that my headline and other fields fairly represent the story?
24. Am I satisfied that my image selection fairly represents the story?

**For use on all content related to suicide/suicide attempts/euthanasia:**

*If you're depressed or need someone to talk to, there are many 24/7 support lines available, including Lifeline on 13 11 14, the Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467, MensLineAustralia on 1300 789 978 and Beyond Blue on 1300 224 636.*

## Staying legal at all times

There are several factors that influence what we are permitted to include in a story, beyond what is ethical. For example, defamatory content, content subject to a suppression order and content identifying certain individuals cannot be published, regardless of the public's 'right to know'. For reference:

- Defamation is the act of spreading a report about someone that could do them harm. Libel is the written form of defamation, while slander is spoken defamation.
- Suppression orders are issued by courts where the court believes information would prejudice the proper administration of justice, such as an accused's right to a fair trial.
- Individuals who cannot be identified not just by name but by identifying detail include victims of sexual offences (unless specific permission is granted), child victims of sexual offences (no permission can be granted in this case), children accused of or charged with criminal activity and members of a jury.
- After person is arrested or charged with a crime or a warrant is issued for their arrest, it's safer to avoid writing about the case other than if you are able to attend court hearings, as doing so risks being in contempt of court. This remains the case until a trial has completed.
- Children cannot give informed consent to be interviewed so whenever interviewing a child or using a non-public image of a child, ensure you have written permission from their parent or guardian.

We have a formal take-down procedure that we enact when we identify that a piece of content we have published transgresses one of the above. But there are issues all reporters and editors should be aware of when writing, editing and publishing, as well as when posting on social media and moderating comments. Being conscious of and acting on these issues is important because:

- It upholds journalism as an honourable profession
- It best represents the company as a professional media outlet
- It best ensures the audience receives a balanced, informed story
- It best protects the company and employees against accusations of defamatory behaviour.

**We CAN be held liable for comments made on our social media posts and on content on our site.** While we encourage readers to report egregiously offensive comments, it's up to each reporter to monitor the comments on their stories (on the site and on Facebook) and moderate if necessary. If you're unsure if a comment goes beyond 'honest opinion' and is defamatory, please refer it to your editor.

**We CAN be held liable if we include a defamatory comment or post in a story.** Please consider everything you write into stories with that view – just because it's been said by someone, whether it's a politician or a blogger, we can still be held liable if we publish it.

**We are guilty until proven innocent.** Unlike in other legal matters, on defamation the onus is on the defendant to prove what was written is true. Don't write ANYTHING you feel unsure of and particularly do not copy claims/comments published by other media that may be defamatory, because an attribution and linkback doesn't absolve us of guilt if we republish defamatory claims or comments.

**We CAN be sued over a headline, meta, boost or caption.** Even if the rest of a piece of content has context and balance, a headline that is seen separately, for example, from the rest of the article – such as those that appear in Facebook posts – can be sufficient grounds for a defamation suit. Make sure your fields, when read in isolation, can't be misinterpreted.

**We MUST respect suppression orders, and to do so requires utmost caution.** There is no central database of current suppression orders issued by Australian courts, so no way of checking whether new ones have been issues. Nor can we

attend courts to be aware of orders being issued. Thus, when writing legal/police/court matters, it's essential to exercise caution – consider whether naming the parties involved adds to the story (if they're not well-known names, in most case, it doesn't), consider whether you're using details that would otherwise identify people who aren't named, and carefully check what other outlets are publishing. When in the slightest doubt, don't name or use identifying information.

**We MUST only publish the names of the deceased/charged that we can independently verify.** It's tempting to write stories based on other media reports when news is breaking, but no pageviews are worth breaking court or police orders for so if we're unable to verify identities by making our own calls to relevant authorities or via authoritative statements, it's preferable to skip the story or write it based on the facts we can verify but without names.

**We MUST be aware of reporting restrictions.** Once a person is charged with a crime, it's safest not to name them or publish more than a bare outline of the alleged crime as such details could be considered prejudicial. This remains the case when reporting on court proceedings – only the evidence that has been heard in court up to that date (assuming it is not suppressed) can be reported – adding background on the case could also be considered prejudicial.

## Making corrections and clarifications

Publicly acknowledging and correcting mistakes and clarifying gaps of understanding in content is a key part of being a responsible media outlet that doesn't take lightly the trust readers place in it. We do so immediately on becoming aware that a correction or clarification is required. This is important because:

- It upholds journalism as an honourable profession
- It best represents the company as a professional media outlet
- It best ensures the audience receives a balanced, informed story
- It best protects the company and employees against accusations of unethical or misrepresentative behaviour.

However, **NEVER** remove/unpublish/amend content, publish a correction or clarification, issue an apology or respond to a complaint of inaccuracy or misrepresentation without conferring with your editor.

Instead, on receipt of a complaint of inaccuracy or misrepresentation or on noticing an inaccuracy or misrepresentation in published content, notify your editor immediately, including outside business hours, by Slack, SMS, Messenger, personal/work email or phone call if necessary – it's important such issues are dealt with asap.

Our corrections and clarifications procedure

We assess complaints and clarifications within 24 hours of receipt of complaint or knowledge of issue. After immediately reviewing the content, the on-duty editor will determine whether the issue is minor or major.

1. On minor corrections and clarifications (typos, grammatical inaccuracies, misspellings), the on-duty editor will make the correction/clarification, republish the content and refresh any social media posts containing the republished content.
2. Where a minor inaccuracy or misrepresentation may have impacted readers' understanding of the facts, the on-duty editor will make the correction/clarification, apply the *italicised note* below to the bottom of the story page, republish the content and refresh any social media posts containing the republished content.
3. Where the on-duty editor deems the correction/clarification to be major i.e. sufficient to have substantially impacted readers' understanding of the facts, the on-duty editor will refer the matter to the Chief Content Officer (CCO) for determination on whether an *expanded italicised note* will suffice or if the inaccuracy or misrepresentation poses a legal risk that requires removal of the content.
4. If an expanded italicised note is deemed sufficient, the content will be corrected/clarified, an expanded italicised note attached and the content republished on site. However, the original social media posts will be deleted and the content reposted to refresh readers' understanding of the content. The content will also be included in the most appropriate EDM at the earliest possible date to refresh readers' understanding of the content.
5. If an expanded italicised note is deemed insufficient, the content will be removed from site, social media and Google Search cache. See *SAS\_HowTo\_TakedownContent* for more information.
6. The CCO is responsible for all further communications with any complainant (if required) and for providing written documentation to the Executive team for awareness.

*CORRECTION/CLARIFICATION: This article has been updated on XXX [full date i.e. Month Day, Year] to show XXXX [the nature of the correction].*

## Taking down a story

Once we become aware or receive notification via one of our company or individual email or other communication channels of a potential breach of any ethical or legal publishing guidelines or laws, we must act immediately. This is important because:

- It upholds journalism as an honourable profession
- It best represents the company as a professional media outlet
- It best ensures the audience receives a balanced, informed story
- It best protects the company and employees against accusations of unethical or illegal behaviour.

However, **NEVER** remove/unpublish/amend content, issue an apology or respond to such an email or message without conferring with your editor.

Instead, on receipt of a complaint or threat of legal action of any kind, or on receipt of notification of a potential breach, notify your editor immediately, including outside business hours, by Slack, SMS, Messenger, personal/work email or phone call if necessary – it's important such issues are dealt with asap.

### **Our take-down procedure**

We assess the risk associated with the content within 24 hours of receipt of complaint or knowledge of issue (as per industry standards). After immediately reviewing the content, the on-duty editor will refer the matter to the Chief Content Officer (CCO) for advice and documentation – outside business hours if necessary. We then take one of three actions:

- a) If deemed a legitimate risk, the CCO will remove the offending article from the website and social media channels. An application for a

Google Search cache update will be made. The complainant will be notified of these actions. The CCO will provide written documentation to the Executive team on actions taken.

- b) If the CCO is unable to determine risk without external legal advice, legal advice will be sought on the next working day. The complainant will be notified that the matter is being investigated and updated at the earliest possible occasion of next action being taken.
- c) If deemed to be no/minimal risk, the CCO will provide written documentation to the Executive team for awareness. The complainant will be notified of this outcome.

## Seeking comment

There is a process that all journalists and content creators must use when seeking comment for a story. This is an industry-wide standard, not specific to Starts at 60, and is important for the following reasons:

- It upholds journalism as an honourable profession
- It best represents the company as a professional media outlet
- It best ensures the audience receives a balanced, informed story
- It best protects the company and employees against accusations of misrepresentation.

Before making any call for comment, prepare your SPECIFIC questions and be aware of your deadline and thus the deadline for comment.

Ensure that you give any call recipient AT LEAST one hour to respond. In the case of breaking news, your editor will advise you on when it is appropriate to seek comment and how to reflect comment/lack of comment in the story.

If required by deadline, write your story without comment, then retop/rejig based on the nature of the comment, if comment comes in immediately before deadline. Again, your editor will advise you on how to best do so.

### **Initial call**

*If you phone through a switchboard and get a human recipient:*

- State your full name and outlet and ask to be transferred to the media/press/public relations team, explaining that you are seeking comment on X story.
- If your call is not transferred, leave a message with the above information and your deadline.

- Inform the call recipient that if you do not receive a response by the stated deadline, your story will say that the recipient's company/organisation/department did not comment in time for publication, and that you will update the story with a comment if your request for comment is returned within business hours on the given day. *(We do not guarantee to update with comment beyond that point.)*
- Request the call recipient's full name and direct contact details (ideally both email and phone) for your own records, not for publication.

*If you phone through a switchboard and get a message bank:*

- State your full name and outlet, and explain that you are seeking comment on X story and that your deadline is X.
- State that if you do not receive a response by the stated deadline, your story will say that the recipient's company/organisation/department did not comment in time for publication, and that you will update the story with a comment if your request for comment is returned within business hours on the given day.

*If you call direct to or are transferred to a media/press/public relations team/office:*

- State your full name and outlet and explain that you are seeking comment on X story.
- If requested to do so, undertake to submit the question in writing by email, but also explain that you had a deadline of X.
- Inform the call recipient that if you do not receive a response by the stated deadline, your story will say that the recipient's company/organisation/department did not comment in time for publication, and that you will update the story with a comment if your request for comment is returned within business hours on the given day.
- Request the call recipient's full name and direct contact details for your own records, not for publication.

If you submit your request for comment in writing:

- State your full name, your outlet and list SPECIFIC questions (*A general 'request for comment' doesn't suffice*).
- Note your deadline and add that if you do not receive a response by the stated deadline your story will say that the recipient's company/organisation/department did not comment in time for publication, and that you will update the story with a comment if your request for comment is returned within business hours on the given day.

### **Follow-up calls**

A single call/email is not sufficient. Depending on what time allows, follow up your call/email within two hours and then, if comment is for a next-day or longer-term story, again at the end of the day.