

Quotes and Attribution Tipsheet

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ATTRIBUTION: keeping yourself out of your story

Always stay out of your story. Let your sources tell the story to your readers. The facts are more powerful than your opinion.

The importance of attribution:

- Clear attribution tells readers where the information came from so they can make up their own minds about what or whom to believe.
- Attribution protects the journalist.

When not to attribute:

- To protect a source. Don't overuse unnamed sources, as this robs credibility from the story and invites unethical reporting.
- If you do use an anonymous source, tell readers why it is necessary.

Some attribution tips:

- Keep attribution simple. "He said," usually is enough.
- Tell your readers enough about the source to allow them to decide whether to believe them or not. This is especially true of "experts."

QUOTATIONS: bringing stories to life

- Good use of quotations:

- give stories credibility and authority.
- make stories feel more human by putting readers in touch with the speaker.
- gives visual relief by the reader in the story.
- support information in the lead and throughout the story.
- makes stories come alive. Readers can hear, see, taste and feel the words.
- adds variety to the pace of the story.

- Use the good quotes and avoid the others. Good quotations:

- contain strong feelings or images. "I know how to do two things in life: catch fish and eat fish. My father fished and so will my sons."
- summarize a situation or illustrate a point well.
- contain live words, not dead ones.
- show something about a person's character.

- Use good quotes when:

- someone says something unique.
- someone says something uniquely.
- someone important says something important.
- If someone important says something important in a boring way, paraphrase it or use a partial quote.

- Know your publication's policy on changing the content of quotations and follow it.

ASK YOURSELF

- Did you find the most qualified sources for the story?
- Are there enough sources to tell the whole story and all sides of it?
- Is all the information clearly attributed?
- Could points have been made better with direct quotes?
- Is everything inside quotations worthy of being in quotations?