

The Falconer

Ethical Contract

These policies govern the conduct of all members affiliated with the journalism program, regardless of rank. A violation of these standards is grounds for immediate demotion or expulsion and are not tolerated.

Conflicts of interest

A conflict of interest occurs when a journalist has a variety of interests in conflict with another that could corrupt the motivation for writing a story. Journalists should never be involved with any of the people, organizations, or events they report on. Conflict of interests include interviewing your friends, writing an article about a club you're a member of, or reporting on any event you are involved in.

Additionally, journalists should never accept any form of compensation for their work. This obviously includes direct compensation, such as being paid a monetary sum for their reporting. It also includes indirect compensation, such as accepting products or services that would otherwise incur an expense (such as being treated to food or other services). An exception to this rule are dedicated seats and services designed for the press.

It is unfair to apply these rules to a journalist's friends and family, however due diligence should be taken by them to ensure that there are no obvious conflicts of interest. For example, it would be inappropriate for a journalist to cover a political race that their friend or relative is a candidate in.

Objectivity

Except on designated opinion, review, or op-ed pieces, journalists have the responsibility to be objective in their writing, meaning they appropriately consider all viewpoints and perspectives and incorporate them into their writing. Except on the aforementioned designated pieces, the personal opinion of the journalist is irrelevant and should not be published.

Fairness

Journalists have a responsibility to ensure that the articles they publish are fair and honest. No article shall ever mislead or lie to our readers, or leave out key details. Organizations and individuals are entitled to the right to provide comment if a claim is made about them in an article.

Taste

As a publication affiliated with a high school, we have a responsibility to ensure that our articles are not only fair and accurate but also tasteful. Profanity should never be used in journalistic writing, and pertinent profanity in quotes should be redacted at the discretion of the editorial board. The publication is not a gossip column, and articles must be pertinent to the readers of the school and local area.

There are times when a journalist wishes to cover a potentially sensitive, serious, controversial, or taboo topic. Discretion is left to the editorial board who will decide an appropriate course of action. The publication will always attempt to appropriately balance the public's right to know with personal privacy and the interests of the student population.

Non-Discrimination

Under Standing Order 006, all members of the publication are prohibited from engaging in any act of discrimination against any individual or entity on the basis of numerous protected factors. See the full document for additional details.

Conduct Outside of the Publication

Members of the publication serve as representatives of the organization as a whole, while actively participating in official activities or while away. The conduct of our journalists "off the clock" must still be appropriate and respectful, especially on social media platforms. Journalists are welcomed and encouraged to post about their recent work, but are advised to remain civil and respectful on those accounts.

Abuse of Power

Journalists must never use their position in the publication for personal gain or for the gain of any other individual, entity, or political cause. Positions must also never be used to endorse any individual or entity.

Plagiarism

Plagiarizing any text or images of any kind is strictly prohibited and is immediate grounds for dismissal.

This Organization Protects its Journalists

The Falconer will take all necessary steps to ensure the safety of its members, especially if a threat arises due to their work with the publication. The editorial board is responsible for responding publicly and determining the best course of action.

Corrections

The process of article writing does not stop upon publication. It is the responsibility of the journalist to respond to community feedback and issue prompt and immediate corrections when necessary.

Sources

Sources used for all stories will be verified by the editorial board to be trustworthy and accurate. The publication tries to use government entities or educational institutions as sources when possible, or well-established local organizations. For interviews, students, teachers, and other FCPS personnel are the most trustworthy.

Anonymous sources are not preferred but are sometimes necessary to be used. The identity of the source is only disclosed to pertinent editors and is not shared. We do not reveal anonymous sources, except as necessary to comply with a legally binding court order, or if the editorial board believes that refusing to disclose the source would constitute an immediate threat to life. School administrators are not entitled to our sources, even if they believe school rules have been violated.

Interviewing

It is important to appear professional when conducting an interview, as you become a public representative of the publication. Sources must clearly understand that they are on the record and being recorded before the interview can begin. Information not obtained by these means is "off-the-record" and cannot be used.

Independence

This is a *de facto* independent publication, meaning that while the law does not grant us true independence, by practice we enjoy relative freedom to publish as we wish. This freedom, however, is contingent on all members abiding by the policies above as to not disturb the FCPS administration.

Printed Name

Signature

Date