***ACTIVITY: A female track star, expected to place near the top in the state finals for the third year, injures her leg and must drop out of competition. A reporter asks how is feels not to be able to run in the state finals.***

***"It sucks," she said.***

***That is what the reporter wants to put into the story.***

***QUESTION: Should the editors print the quote? What questions or potential issues do the editors have to deal with? What ethical issues come to mind? What would you do?***

The question I would first pose to students is the news value of the article. Discuss the importance of publishing this story. What can the reader learn? If you’ve identified the news value and determine it will move to publication, analyze the purpose and use of the quote. While the word “sucks” may not be seen obscene to some, it may to others. Is the quote a compelling component to the story? Does it provide additional information to the person’s frame of mind or character?

Also determine whether there’s an alternative way to ask the track star to describe her feelings? Does the quote “it sucks” provide depth to the story or is there another quote or way to describe the track star’s emotions?

The Wall Street Journal once tackled a similar case in their blog:

*“Use of impolite words should still be rare, but there are certain words that we’ll publish now that we wouldn’t have used a decade ago. There still has to be a compelling reason to use the quotation, including demonstrating insight into someone’s character by his or her word choices, but there are times when ass, jackass or yes, suck, may be allowed to appear, in cases where they might have been “Barney-dashed” before.”*

When in doubt, talk it out. Discuss alternatives and the compelling nature of the quote. When discussing language, it is important to understand that words can be used in different settings for different reasons. Each case is different. You should try to refrain from publishing obscene language or words unless it’s critical to the story, providing compelling or needed support to the story.