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Social Role of Mass Media

Journalist/Sources Standards

**Lesson Title:** Journalism standards for sources

**Description of the lesson**: Identified and anonymous sources can be important for journalists to retrieve information that may otherwise remain hidden. But it is crucial that journalists continue to hold a high standard from sources and experts to ensure that the information is credible and accurate.

**Objectives*by the end of this lessons, students will be able to ..***

* identify a healthy approach to understanding when and how to use sources.

**Before moving forward, read about how journalists should use anonymous sources in their publications.**

* [Anonymous Sources (Society of Professional Journalists)](https://www.spj.org/ethics-papers-anonymity.asp)
* Elements of Journalism (Chapter 4)
* [NPR Ethics: Anonymous Sourcing](http://ethics.npr.org/tag/anonymity/)

**Procedures:**

Below is a hypothetical example of a source who has come to you with information. State how you would proceed with using or not using the source:

EXAMPLE:

A source has come to you with this information following a number of reports of sexual harassment claims against Republican U.S. Senate candidate Roy Moore. Here’s what she writes to you:

“Roy Moore in Alabama . . . I might know something but I need to keep myself safe. How do we do this?”

The woman claims to have been in a sexual relationship with Moore at the age of 15. She also claims that she was once pregnant with his child.

IDENTIFY some questions and key pieces of information that you would need to move forward with publishing a story with the anonymous source.

For example:

* How many times would you meet with the source?
* How would you confirm her identity? Her reported past? Her connection with Moore?
* What would the background check look like? Could it be as simple as a Google search?

Once you’ve completed your list of questions in the search to determine the source’s credibility, take a look at how this case turned out for the [Washington Post](https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/a-woman-approached-the-post-with-dramatic--and-false--tale-about-roy-moore-sje-appears-to-be-part-of-undercover-sting-operation/2017/11/27/0c2e335a-cfb6-11e7-9d3a-bcbe2af58c3a_story.html?utm_term=.2635faf6fa40). In a Word document, identify how the Post came to their conclusion that the woman’s story did not appear to be credible.