



ANIMALS AND MEDIA

a style guide for giving voice to the voiceless

Guidelines for all media practitioners encouraging more respectful, fair, and accurate representations of animals

www.animalsandmedia.org



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The intent is to challenge discriminatory distinctions between human/nonhuman animals in the interest of increased diversity and more inclusive reporting and cultural storytelling on all animal species.

Mission

These style guidelines were created to offer media producers concrete guidance for how to cover and represent nonhuman animals in a fair, honest, and respectful manner in accordance with professional ethical principles. Given the scope of industrialized animal oppression and environmental crisis globally, including mass extinction of species, we believe fellow animals, as sentient living beings, warrant not only increased attention in media and popular culture, but coverage that encourages human society to transform our relationships with various animal species in ways that foster less domination and exploitation and more respect, care, and ecological responsibility. The lives and habitats of the world's animals are largely dependent on the cultural values and worldviews promoted in the media, such as encouraging humans to identify as animals ourselves.

Additional resources at www.animalsandmedia.org:

- Animal expert sources list
- Training materials
- Media watchdog groups

Who Are the Authors?

These guidelines were developed by media scholars Dr. Debra Merskin (University of Oregon) and Dr. Carrie P. Freeman (Georgia State University) based on their years of research in media ethics, social justice, environmental communication, animal rights, and media representation of animals.



Act consistent with the SPJ code of ethics mandate to “give voice to the voiceless” and “seek voices we seldom hear” to create animal-inclusive stories that better inform the public.

Guidelines for Journalists

Utilizing Animals as News Topics and Sources

As a matter of course, nonhuman animals and their perspectives should be routinely covered and included in news affecting them, rather than relegating coverage to special, occasional stories.

Journalists and editors should:

- * Dedicate time and space to coverage of interactions between humans and nonhumans. Consistent coverage demonstrates animals are important subjects of interest and attention. This could involve assigning a dedicated journalist to this beat, which should present animal and ecological issues not only from a scientific or economic perspective, but also from socio-cultural, ethical, and political perspectives.

- * Acknowledge and include the perspective and interests of nonhuman animals within major news stories where animals are involved or affected (for example, stories about war, crime, health, food, politics, science, & lifestyles).

- * Investigate animal exploitation and harm in its many forms, even legally sanctioned practices (such as farming, experimentation, and hunting) that are standard and routine. While illegal activities

(such as dogfighting or trade in endangered species) are newsworthy crime stories, the news should also question all human practices that involve and potentially harm animals. To be inclusive of both welfare and rights perspectives, a critique should not only involve questioning the *treatment* of animals used by industry but also the rights and entitlement of humans *to use* sentient beings for whatever reasons. These investigations support journalism’s function of holding the powerful accountable.

- * Show nonhuman animals interacting with human caregivers. While some stories will be conflict-oriented or concern abuse, it is important to also model positive bonds and mutually beneficial interspecies relationships.

Avoiding Bias

As humans are the consumers, news stories are typically framed in ways that prioritize human interests, but this can give the impression that nonhumans do not also have interests at stake or perspectives on issues that affect them. To be fair and help avoid an anthropocentric bias (similar to how racial or gender bias should be avoided), **journalists and editors should:**

- * Recognize that animals have an interest in habitat, territory, food, water, safety, and freedoms from pain, injury, distress, as well as needs to express normal behavior.

- * Represent nonhuman animals as sentient individuals (fellow species who share the planet) rather than presenting them primarily in human-centered terms. Avoid stereotyping species by defining them primarily as pests, threats, game, or tools for humans for food, research, skins, or entertainment. Acknowledge that fellow animals, rather than being mere mechanical, instinctual beings, are individuals who exercise agency and have perspectives and feelings.

- * Dedicate space to exploring the complex interactions between humans and the natural world, while questioning long-standing cultural prejudices against and dislike for certain species (ex: dolphins and whales over fish, horses over cows, dogs over wolves, songbirds over chickens or pigeons, mammals over reptiles, vertebrates over invertebrates). Avoid stereotypically constructing inter-species conflicts as premeditated based solely on species membership (ex: cats against birds, dogs against cats, wolves against humans).

- * When possible, use audio-visual media to present real animals living in their natural or captive space, expressing themselves using their own species-specific ways of communicating – giving them voice.

Journalism Guidelines (cont.)

* Interpret other species' basic communications if they seem self-evident (such as joy, curiosity, fear, sadness, anxiety, affection, boredom, or playfulness) to acknowledge these emotions for the audience. In some cases, more nuanced interpretation of animal communication might require the use of professionals, such as biologists, ethologists, and animal advocates. Experts can also be used as sources to speak on behalf of animal species' general interests. While humans who hunt, farm, use, or own fellow animals should be represented in the news, this perspective should be balanced with sources who advocate on the *nonhuman's* behalf (especially those who don't have a vested interest in the use of animals).

Covering Animal Advocacy Organizations

* Balance industry and government sources with activist sources where any issue affecting or involving nonhuman animals is discussed. For example, a mass killing of cows due to disease should not only be reported from the side of agribusiness and government regulators (solely as an economic loss or public health issue), but also from the perspectives of farmed animal advocacy groups (as a rights and welfare issue for nonhumans and humans).

Complex issues, such as mass extinction of species and use of nonhuman animals as resources, do not always fit well into event-focused news (episodic coverage). And dramatic protest and direct action by certain activist groups tend to get more news coverage than less dramatic activist campaigns and thus become the "face" of the animal protection

movement to the public (often creating a radical stereotype that is unrepresentative of the movement as a whole). To address this imbalance and favor more thematic coverage, journalists should:

* Include the context and history of animal advocacy events and accomplishments across the entire spectrum from more radical to moderate tactics and ideologies. This will provide a more representative picture of the diversity of the movement and its motivations for the public to consider. The goal is to cover substance rather than spectacle.

Selecting Visuals

Broadcast news often relies on dramatic images. Yet, behind-the-scenes footage of animal exploitation is difficult and risky to obtain, especially, in some states, as recent "ag gag" laws increase the criminal punishment for anyone documenting and exposing farmed animal conditions. Yet owners of

domesticated or captive animals must be held accountable, allowing the public visual access to determine whether the treatment of these vulnerable beings is fair and in accordance with societal values, expectations, and laws.

Photojournalists should:

* Be willing to air verified undercover footage of exploitation for public debate as well as obtain such footage themselves when other open means of investigation do not yield access to verifying and exposing routine treatment and living conditions of animals.

* Balance footage of nonhuman animals as victims by also showcasing them in empowering ways as fellow, productive citizens of their own communities.

* Seek visual evidence of wild animals in their natural habitats living as free adults in social settings rather than relying on images of *captive* wild species.

Selecting Appropriate Terminology

To reduce bias and inaccuracy in language, journalists should:

* Be clear who is included in the term "animal." Use more precise terms such as *nonhuman animals*, *animals excluding humans*, or *other than human animals* (at least upon first use as a disclaimer). This is not only more accurate but also more inclusive in acknowledging humans as members of the animal kingdom. Alternately, journalists could simply list the type of animal category more precisely (ex: farmed animals, companion animals, wildlife or free-living animals, nonhuman primates, reptiles, insects, aquatic animals, and endangered species).

* Accurately describe animals by gender (e.g. he or she) rather than saying "it" (a pronoun most befitting an inanimate object). "It" can be used to describe an entire species category but not an individual. When gender is unknown, use the plural term "they" or "theirs" or perhaps "he or she." Similarly, use "who" instead of "that," and "someone" or "somebody" instead of "something."

* Strive for neutrality. Avoid primarily using industry terms (especially euphemisms) to describe nonhuman animals; instead, use given species names or refer to them as *someone who is used* by an industry, as that use does not define them and is something that is done to them, often against their will. **SEE TABLE ON NEXT PAGE**

INSTEAD OF THESE TERMS	USE THESE TERMS	INSTEAD OF THESE TERMS	USE THESE TERMS
It, that or which, something	She, he, they, who(m), someone or somebody.	OBJECTIFYING INDUSTRY TERMS	ANIMATED SPECIES NAMES
Pets	Companion animals, nonhuman family members	Livestock	Cows, sheep, pigs, donkeys, etc.
PASSIVE TERMS THAT CONCEAL HUMAN CONTROL	ACTIVE TERMS THAT REVEAL HUMAN CONTROL	Pork	Pigs
Farm animals	Farmed animals; individuals raised and killed for food.	Poultry	Chickens, turkeys, geese, ducks
Dairy cows	Cows used for their milk (dairy)	Veal	Calves (males from dairy industry)
Beef cattle	Cows and bulls used for beef/meat/flesh	Game	Deer, rabbits, foxes, ducks, etc.
Lab rats	Rats used as research subjects	Seafood	Fish, salmon, shrimp, tunas, etc.
Circus elephants	Elephants kept in circuses		

Guidelines for Advertisers

Advertisers can be more socially and ecologically responsible if they:

Advertising is harmful if it promotes selfishness and dissuades consumers from engaging in sustainable and compassionate practices.

* Avoid “humane-washing,” i.e. misleading consumers about a company’s animal welfare policies, misrepresenting the extent to which it supports animal protection (such as concealing animal testing practices). If any welfare claims are made, be specific about which animals are benefited and how, in proportion to what business practices could be changed to create a truly cruelty-free product or service (where nothing is taken from an animal).

* Avoid “greenwashing,” i.e. implying environmental benefits where few or none exist or exaggerating benefits of a company or product in order to jump on the sustainability bandwagon. Keep green marketing claims in context to their actual level of costs vs. benefits to planetary health, understanding what could still be improved for the product to be fully sustainable, cradle to grave.

* Have human characters in advertisements model

sustainability, responsibility, respectfulness, and compassion (for all species). Even in sales messages, consider how it is possible to avoid suggesting people need to consume new items more so than conserve, reuse, or recycle.

* To create a culture that identifies with helping others (including other species), try to incorporate altruistic appeals rather than primarily focusing on appeals to individual self-interest.

* If using nonhumans to associate a trait with a brand or product, consider the effect on the species in the real world. As traits and personalities can vary among individuals within a species, avoid stereotyping a species or simplistically reducing them to just annoying or disgusting pests, cunning threats, rugged warriors, majestic nobles, beautiful exotics, comic jesters, cutesy playthings, objects of prey, or tools for human use.

* Avoid using wild animals (such as captive, trained nonhumans) as performers, and instead use digital technology to represent them. Actors (of any species) should be participating of their own free will.

* Be cautious about portraying endangered species, as studies have shown that audiences get the impression that a species is abundant and healthy the more they see them visually represented.

* Avoid gendered messages that associate idealized masculinity (culturally and biologically) with nonhuman animal use or abuse (ex: meat-eating, hunting, domineering over domesticated animals).

* Avoid sexualizing animals or using them as symbolic stand-ins for human sexual attributes (ex: equating chicken breasts with human female breasts).

* Use respectful language that acknowledges that animals are sentient individuals not objects.

Guidelines for Entertainment Media

* Ensure that television programs and films include and address problems *facing* nonhuman animals and nature rather than primarily framing them *as* the problem.

* Diversify TV programming to ensure more represent the perspectives of animal liberation and animal welfare (in fiction, nonfiction, dramatic, and comedic formats). While some programs will continue to take a more human-centered perspective, for the sake of diversity and innovation, some should branch out and take a more bio-centric (life-centered) or eco-centric (ecosystems-centered) perspective that privileges the interests of other species.



* Include nonhuman animals' stories. Represent them as individuals with their own self-interests, rather than presenting them mainly in human-centered terms. For example, avoid stereotyping species by defining them primarily as pests, threats, game, or tools for human use. Acknowledge that they have thoughts and feelings and exhibit some rational free will, rather than just more mechanical behaviors, responses, and instincts. This acknowledges that there is uniqueness (such as different personalities and preferences)

among individuals within the same species. These diverse personalities should be fun for viewers to explore.

* Remind viewers that humans too are animals and naturally share many traits. It is helpful any time programming can deconstruct the dichotomies that falsely separate humans from animals (and nature from culture), reuniting us instead. To embrace multiculturalism, entertainment programming can serve as ethnography, teaching us about other animal cultures.

* While anthropomorphism (especially in children's programming) can be useful in bringing audiences closer to other animals by recognizing nonhuman animals as persons who have emotions similar to human animals, it can risk misrepresenting other animal species and creating unrealistic expectations for how real animals should behave (especially to be attractive to humans). Therefore, content creators should be careful not to rely too heavily on formulaic, romanticized, cutesy approximations of other animals and instead attempt to more accurately capture the essence of their actual personalities and behaviors. This will help us to accept and appreciate them on their own terms, whether they are similar to us or not.

* Recognize that programming featuring nonhuman animals (including wildlife documentaries) currently tends to over-represent 'charismatic megafauna', i.e. mammals and birds who are considered the most attractive. This tendency may also result in



viewers regarding them as "characters," while other species, by comparison, may seem uninteresting and unimportant. For accuracy and biodiversity, creators should make an effort to also showcase and introduce audiences to other types of animal species such as fish, amphibians, reptiles, insects, and invertebrates.

* Call attention to biodiversity loss and the need to protect endangered species and their habitats by telling the stories of a wider variety of endangered species rather than the select few who are most popular.

* Avoid using wild animals (such as captive, trained animals) as performers, and instead use digital technology to represent them. Actors (of any species) should be participating of their own free will.

* Take care not to harm animals or damage ecosystems while filming or making programs. Be selective in portrayals of wildlife (free-living animals) so as not to over-represent predatory-prey conflicts for dramatic purposes. Over reliance on tooth-and-claw representations imply nature and wildlife are primarily harsh and dangerous (in contrast to "civilized" human culture). Balance this with portrayals of more filial, cooperative, or symbiotic relations between wild species and among their family or community groups.

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Guidelines for the General Public

In a digital age, citizens' voices and actions are needed to diversify corporate media industries and protect animals and nature. Citizens should:

- * Monitor and reward ecologically responsible and animal-friendly media. Financially support media that stand up for animals and nature. Utilize media watchdog groups to stay informed of issues. Write to media producers (or comment publicly) to express praise or criticisms, based on following the guidelines at www.animalsandmedia.org. Please share that link widely.
- * Use and support public, non-commercial, and non-profit media, including emerging non-profit journalism organizations that may require donations to produce investigative reports.

Stand in solidarity with human rights groups to promote justice and respectful representations of all beings.

- * Take advantage of public access channels, community radio, websites/blogs, and social media as ways to start producing your own public affairs programming or airing documentaries to increase the discussion of animal and environmental topics in the local and global public sphere.

Entertainment Guidelines (cont.)

- * Consider the behavior and values of human characters portrayed on screen to determine what messages they convey about the human capacity for kindness and social and ecological responsibility. Ask what habits the characters model (especially charismatic characters framed as heroes or protagonists) and consider the effects on audiences of attitudes and actions portrayed as normal, acceptable, or cool vs. aberrant, archaic, or objectionable. Consider including more diverse representations of characters who live simply and have a low carbon footprint, live animal-friendly/vegan lifestyles, choose to have a small family or adopt children, recycle, engage in volunteerism and civic actions, adopt rescued companion animals, and demonstrate compassion and nonviolence toward all living beings.

- * Encourage programming that invites viewers to envision a future world governed by ecological principles and sustainable practices. Creative storytelling and imaginative narratives can serve as a path to achieve this better world.



"Lisa the Vegetarian" The Simpsons

Guidelines for Public Relations

Communicating with key publics is essential to businesses and nonprofits alike. PR practice should foster mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders based on truthful communication. The public is often skeptical of PR as self-serving "spin," especially in terms of a company's animal welfare or environmental practices. To earn the public's trust, and create open, honest dialogue that fosters informed decision-making, **organizations should:**

- * Conduct two-way communication with animal and environmental protection organizations as stakeholders. This involves listening to and addressing the activists' concerns about business activities and being open or willing to consider amending business practices to increase the fairness and responsibility toward animals and the natural world.

- * Be fair to animal and environmental protection organizations and activists, or anyone with fewer resources and a smaller voice in the public sphere, when publicly communicating about issues.

- * Consider the interests of animals and nature when crafting messages as well as considering them as stakeholders who are affected by the organization's practices and decision-making. Use respectful, non-objectifying terms ("he or she," "someone," "who," not "it").

- * Be upfront with the public about the economic support and influence the company puts into lobbying, especially if that involves weakening of animal and environmental protection laws. Share all corporate activities affecting animals with the public, not just select, non-controversial or favorable activities. To avoid puffery or exaggeration (or charges of green-washing or humane-washing), honestly disclose the level of sustainability or cruelty-free practices the organization has yet to achieve vs aspirations.