**You’ve come up with definitions for each of the following words. Now it’s time to compare.**

**In your small groups, discuss and analyze how your definition may be different than these listed here. Why is this? How do they differ?**

**Some additional points to consider for inclusion in your discussion:**

How do you think journalists define the term?

How are journalists impacted by the definition of the term?

How does the word relate to scholastic journalism?

How should journalists define the term?

**Terms list:**

Journalism terms as defined by JEA’s Scholastic Press Rights Commission members

**Accountability**, according to Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel in The Elements of Journalism, is “a code word for letting advertisers shape the news.”

In scholastic media, administrators often use it as a way to gain control of the content of student media.

If used in scholastic media, it should be in the context of what a student journalists is accountable for: truth, accuracy, credibility, completeness, verification and coherence; loyalty to citizens as students try to provide information their audiences need to be free and self-governing.

**Accuracy**: Keeping reporting truthful and in context. A cardinal guideline in journalism of all platforms.

**Credibility**: That which makes a news organization at any level respectable and respected. It involves the gathering and presentation of information in a way that the sources and information are presented in a way that builds trust for the news organization. Verification, accuracy, truth, completeness, coherence and transparency are essential elements.

**Defamation**: Defamation: the printed or broadcast word has damaged someone’s reputation with information that is false. For defamation to occur, however, the person has to be identifiable. That means someone in the reading or listening audience not connected with the publication or broadcast station is able to identify the person who has been defamed. Defamation is composed of information that has been published, identifies the person, harms the person, shows fault in reporting and is false (PIHFF).

**Ethics in journalism**: According to Rushworth Kidder in How Good People Make Tough Choices, “Ethics is not about definitions. Nor is it about footnotes and philosophers, dry tomes and dusty arguments...It’s about inner impulses, judgments and duties of people like you and me...For ethics to be practical and applicable it must be understood as the stuff of daily life.”

The “stuff of daily life” includes being ethically fit through constant practice of right v right decision-making, and knowing that one should not be punished for the use or misuse of this ethical decision-making.

Media Ethics, by Philip Patterson and Lee Wilkins, says this about ethics: “Ethics begins when elements within a moral system conflict. Ethics is less about the conflict between right and wrong than about the conflict between equally compelling (or equally unattructive) alternatives and the choices that must be made.” In other words, ethical principles, and their application, ethical fitness, can help people make good ethical decisions.

Kidder, in his book, quoted Lord John Fletcher Moulton: “The real greatness of a nation, its true civilization, is measured by the extent of the land of obedience to the unenforceable. It measures the extent to which the nation trusts its citizens, and its existence and area testify to the way they behave in response to that trust.”

**Fairness**: “Fairness is too abstract and, in the end, more subjective than truth. Fair to whom? How to you test fairness? Truthfulness, for all its difficulties, at least can be tested.”: The Elements of Journalism. While there are better terms to use, fairness generally means having a balance of information, verified information, in context, accurate and complete.

**Forum**: Forum (the concept or individual ones: Three forums of expression are public forums,

limited public forums and nonpublic forums. Public forums are those places where communicating of ideas or sharing of information have historical been permitted. Limited forums are usually restricted by time, place and manner restrictions. Nonpublic forums are restricted by the nonpublic entity.)

• Public (open) forum for student expression — A public forum, also called an open forum, is open to all expression that is protected under the First Amendment. This means a publication must accept comments or articles from virtually everyone. The key word is protected. It does not allow for expression in the nine categories of unprotected speech. Public forum status, according to the Student Press Law Center “is determined by examining two things: policy and practice. The key question is whether the government agency in question (a school, for example) intended to allow speakers to make their own content decisions. Official statements of the government’s intent are probably most important, but if such policies do not exist or are unclear, the practice or tradition of how the venue operates will be significant.

• Limited forum — A limited public forum, as related to student publications, means a publication has not opened itself up to the general public, but it has opened up to a specific group of people, such as student journalists. Since non-student members of the general public are usually not permitted to use a student publication to publish anything they want, student media are usually referred to as limited or designated public forums. Opinions may be limited to certain people, such as letter writers, guest columnists and the publication staff members.

• Closed forum — Closed forums have not been established to function as places for free expression. “In a non-public forum,” the Student Press Law Center says, “government officials can limit expression as long as their restrictions are “reasonable” and not simply an effort to silence a particular viewpoint.”

• Public forums by policy: An official school policy exists that designates student editors, within clearly defined limitations (libel, obscenity, etc.), as the ultimate authority for determining content. (A publication’s own editorial policy does not count as an official school policy unless some school official has formally endorsed it.) School officials actually practice this policy by exercising a “hands off” role and empowering student editors to lead. Advisers teach and offer students advice, but they neither control nor make final decisions regarding content.

Public forums by practice: A school policy may or may not exist regarding student media, but administrators have a “hands off” approach and have empowered students to control content

decisions. For some period of time, there has been no act of censorship by school officials and there is no required prior approval of content by a school administrator. Advisers teach and offer students advice, but they neither control nor make final decisions regarding

content.

**Infotainment**: “Journalism” that diverts attention from what is important from the daily information we need to make crucial decisions in our lives. Infotainment commonly involves stories that are not significant, authoritative, relevant or engaging to the important decisions of our lives. (Resource: The Elements of Journalism, Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel.)

According to the authors, infotainment “destroys the news organization’s authority to deliver more serious news and drives away those audiences who want it.”

**Liability**: In New York Times Co., v Sullivan the U.S. Supreme Court outlined when journalists would be liable for libel against public officials. The court said “A defamatory falsehood relating to his” (a public official’s conduct) “must be made with actual malice—that is, with knowledge that it was false or with reckless disregard of whether it was false or not.” Generally, malice usually does need to be proven before those sued become liable for defamation of character. Liability for a libel falls on anyone connected with the story from the original writer to the publisher.

**Material disruption of the school process:** This is the Tinker standard. In Tinker v. Des Moines, the U.S. Supreme Court held students could wear black armbands to protest the Vietnam War, since the administration could not prove wearing the bands would disrupt the educational processes. Student publications have used the Tinker standard to try to prevent administrators from censoring school publications, if they cannot prove the content in dispute would disrupt the school day.

**Prior Restraint:** Prior restraint is a term used to describe banning the expression of ideas prior to publication, or prior to a reporter even writing an article. Administrators use prior restraint in order to keep materials from being published. Prior restraint occurs when someone not on the publication/media staff requires pre-distribution changes to or removal of student media content.

**Prior review** occurs when anyone not on the publication/media staff requires that he or she be allowed to read, view or approve student material before distribution, airing or publication. Prior review itself is a form of prior restraint and it inevitably leads the reviewer to censor and student journalists to self-censor in an effort to assure approval.

**Journalistic responsibility:** Reporting should be non-biased, accurate, balanced and verifiable without editorial comment, unless the reporter is writing an opinion piece, such as a personal column or a editorial giving the publication’s viewpoint. As well as being factual, reporting should also be free of grammatical and spelling errors. Responsible journalism means a publication will avoid doing anything that would weaken its credibility. That means the publication and its reporters will adhere to a Code of Ethics.

**Transparency**: Allowing full access to how decisions were made about information gathering and presentation.

**Trustworthy**: Or, you can add something like this: According to The Elements of Journalism, this means:

--Never add anything that was not there

--Never deceive the audience

--Be as transparent as possible about your methods and motives

--Rely on your own original reporting

--Exercise humility.

**Viewpoint neutrality** goes beyond endorsements, however. In any story of a sensitive or controversial nature, the writer needs to be careful to present all sides of reported coverage in a non-biased and impartial manner with credible resources, verified information and direct quotes surrounding the issue.