

## El Estoque ● Staff Policies

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

First Amendment to the United States Constitution

“Students of the public schools shall have the right to exercise freedom of speech and of the press including, but not limited to, the use of bulletin boards, the distribution of printed materials or petitions, the wearing of buttons, badges, and other insignia, and the right of expression in official publications, whether or not such publications or other means of expression are supported financially by the school or by use of school facilities, except that expression shall be prohibited which is obscene, libelous, or slanderous. Also prohibited shall be material which so incites students as to create a clear and present danger of the commission of unlawful acts on school premises or the violation of lawful school regulations, or the substantial disruption of the orderly operation of the school.

Each governing board of a school district and each county board of education shall adopt rules and regulations in the form of a written publications code, which shall include reasonable provisions for the time, place, and manner of conducting such activities within its respective jurisdiction.

Student editors of official school publications shall be responsible for assigning and editing the news, editorial, and feature content of their publications subject to the limitations of this section. However, it shall be the responsibility of a journalism adviser or advisers of student publications within each school to supervise the production of the student staff, to maintain professional standards of English and journalism, and to maintain the provisions of this section.

There shall be no prior restraint of materials prepared for official school publications except insofar as it violates this section. School officials shall have the burden of showing justification without undue delay prior to any limitation of student expression under this section.

“Official school publications” refers to material produced by students in the journalism, newspaper, yearbook, or writing classes and distributed to the student body either free or for a fee.

Nothing in this section shall prohibit or prevent any governing board of a school district from adopting otherwise valid rules and regulations related to oral communication by students upon the premises of each school.”

California Education Code, Section 48907

### Mission Statement

El Estoque is an open forum created for and by students of Monta Vista High School. The staff of El Estoque seeks to recognize individuals, events, and ideas and bring news to the Monta Vista community in a manner that is professional, unbiased, and thorough in order to effectively serve our readers. We strive to report accurately, and we will correct any significant error. If you believe such an error has been made, please contact us. Letters of any length should be submitted via email or mail. They become the sole property of El Estoque and can be edited for length, clarity, or accuracy. Letters cannot be returned and will be published at El Estoque’s discretion. El Estoque also reserves the right to reject advertising due to space limitations or decision of the Editorial Board that content of the advertisement conflicts with the mission of the publication.

### Advertising

El Estoque will accept advertisements submitted with a signed contract and full payment providing they do not advocate illegal activity for minors or are deemed by the Editorial Board racist, sexist, or otherwise inappropriate for El Estoque’s audience. Advertisements may be rejected due to space limitations, though El Estoque is obligated by law to provide equal space for advertisements representing opposing viewpoints.

## **Legal Protections**

Staff members are protected by the First Amendment of the Constitution and by Section 48907 of the California Education Code. It is the adviser's responsibility to ensure that "prohibited expression" – libel, obscenity, and inflammatory material – not be published.

## **Access**

Reporters are free to access public meeting and quote those who speak at them.

## **Sources**

Student sources are the most important part of nearly every story, and reporters must make efforts to ensure that the reader is able to clearly see student angles and viewpoints. Reporters must interview sources representing the major sides of news stories. All stories, with the exceptions of editorials and columns, must include at least three sources.

## **Involvement/Conflict of Interest**

Staff members are not to write about or photograph their friends, family members, or clubs/teams with which they are connected. A column would be an exception to this policy. Reporters cannot write about each other, the newspaper, the adviser, or members of other student publication staffs unless newsworthiness makes that coverage necessary.

## **Diversity**

Reporters and photographers will make genuine efforts to include sources and subjects for photographs who represent all parts of the Monta Vista population. Diversity includes, but is not limited to, ethnicity, age, gender, and social group. Staff management will make a conscious effort to check for diversity after each issue.

## **Journalistic Integrity**

Reporters who plagiarize – fabricate quotations or statistics, knowingly use copyrighted material, intentionally misrepresent a subject – will be asked to leave the staff. These offenses are unethical and the damage done is irreparable. Reporters who accept off-the-record information are expected not to print it.

## **Prior Review**

It is the policy of El Estoque that stories and pages are not to be reviewed by any non-staff member prior to publication. The reporter can, and should, check quotations and facts in his or her story, especially if the quotation is controversial and the interview was not tape recorded.

## **Reporting and Interviewing**

Reporters are to conduct face-to-face interviews. Phone interviewing should only be used for fact-checking or follow-up questions. Interviewing over the internet or writing out questions for interviewees to respond to in written form is also unacceptable and could result in removal from staff. Reporters are expected to take accurate notes and keep notes from all interviews throughout the year. El Estoque encourages all staff members to use recorders when possible, especially for controversial topics. Recorders can be checked out from Ms. Balmeo.

## **Internet Use**

Reporters may use the internet to research for and enhance a story, but the internet should not be a primary source for your story. Talking to people in person – not on the internet – is the best way to get authentic quotes that form the basis of a strong story.

## **Legal Behavior**

Neither reporters nor photographers will participate in any illegal act in pursuit of a story. Reporters are responsible for understanding the law pertaining to libel, invasion of privacy, and copyright. Members of staff discovered abusing their privileges may be asked to leave.

## **Withholding Names**

In most cases all names will be used, even if a story is humiliating to the subject. Withholding a name will only occur in rare cases when a student's safety is in danger, it is required by law, or the Editorial Board deems it appropriate for the case at hand. The adviser will be notified of the intent to withhold the subject's name, she must be given the name, and she may request to meet with the subject.

## **Death of a Person on Campus**

When a student or adult that is a member of the current Monta Vista community dies, El Estoque will cover the death in a respectful manner. The staff may also decide to cover the deaths of alumni or community members, when appropriate. The staff will not release the names of deceased persons until police have named the deceased and after the family has been notified.

## **Editorial Board**

The Editorial Board consists of the Editors-in-Chief, Managing Editors, Specialized Editors, Section Editors and Adviser. This group may convene to resolve conflict or ethical issues. The decisions of the Editorial Board are ruled by a 2/3 majority vote.

## **Sports Coverage**

The staff should strive to provide equal coverage to all sports. Boys and girls sports should be covered equitably. Reporters are required to attend games or practice to research for their sports stories. Every effort should be made to see the subjects of sports stories in action.

## **Columns**

Columnists must also be reporters. A column should have substance and be grounded in real, lived experience. While columns should have a personal connection, they should not simply be personal stories. Columnists are required to write a story in addition to their column each issue.

## **Letters to the Editor**

Letters to the editor are welcome per the editorial statement on page one. A staff response is only appropriate when a fact needs to be clarified. It is the policy of El Estoque to allow the reader to have the last word.

## **Corrections/Retractions**

Errors of significance will be corrected in the following issue. It is the responsibility of the staff to listen for corrections after distribution and to report such mistakes to the editors and adviser.

## **Unattributed Editorial Statements**

The Staff Editorial will be printed without attribution to the writer each issue. It is intended to represent the opinion of the majority of staff members while protecting the identity of the writer. Staff members should keep the name of the staff editorial writer confidential.

Brief editorials on issues that are deemed interesting but too insignificant for a thorough editorial should be lighter in nature and express an opinion that the majority of the school population would sensibly agree with. They should reflect praise as well as criticism.

## **Images/Fair Use**

Images will not be taken illegally from the Internet or other sources. Fair use laws will be observed. Small pictures used to identify may accompany a story.

## **Equipment Check Out**

All equipment will be housed in the equipment closet. Only the Editors in chief, the photo editor, and the adviser will have access to this closet. In order to check out equipment, staff members should contact one of these people. All equipment should be signed out prior to use and signed in upon return. Equipment should be returned immediately and in the condition it was received. Special care should be taken to ensure that the batteries are charged and all attachments are kept together. A neck strap should be worn at all times with cameras.

## **Press Pass Use**

During class, staff members may need to leave to conduct interviews, take photos, or do research. The press pass can function as a hall pass. The press pass will also allow reporters and photographers to be admitted to home games. Only one reporter and one photographer will be admitted per game. Abuse of the press pass will lead to its confiscation and could also lead to removal from staff.

## **El Estoque Oath**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, swear to abide by these staff policies to the best of my ability. I understand that these standards are intended to ensure the integrity and establish the credibility of El Estoque.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date