

## How to Recognize Unfair Reporting

[http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x\\_context=22&x\\_article=385](http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=22&x_article=385)

The Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics requires that journalists seek out and report the truth and that they be accountable to their readers, listeners, viewers and each other. Sometimes journalists reporting under pressure from the Middle East—with its complex history, issues and emotions—may be unfair in their depiction of unfolding events. The job of a media activist is not to impute motive but to provide checks and balances to ensure that a media outlet remains accountable for its reporting. How does one do this?

1) Detecting factual error is the first step in recognizing unfair reporting. It requires following breaking events closely as well as being knowledgeable about modern Middle East history and myriad related subjects reported on by the media. CAMERA's website provides background articles on subjects such as water, building, demography, UN resolutions, etc. If you notice an outright error or a noticeable discrepancy between media outlets in their coverage of a certain event, you should investigate further and write to the offending news outlet, providing factual information to counter the error.

2a) Does the article or broadcast fail to provide the perspective of all parties, focusing on only one side's outlook? When a preponderance of space and/or time in a report is given to presenting a single viewpoint, this should be challenged.

2b) Are the proponents of opposing points of view given equal weight—i.e. are both quoted directly and/or given equal opportunity to speak and respond, or does the reporter summarize and paraphrase one position while allowing the other to be expressed directly? Those affected by the events or issues reported should have a voice in the coverage.

3a) Does the reporter editorialize in a news story? Are his/her statements properly attributed or does personal opinion creep in? Opinion-laden, partial language in news reports can and should be challenged. (see CAMERA ALERT: Small Words with a Big Impact)

3b) Does the reporter use partisan language or emotional “buzzwords?” For example, does the reporter refer to “occupied Arab lands,” “illegal Jewish settlements,” “Arab East Jerusalem?” Indicate the lack of objectivity of such language, providing factual historical or legal information to prove the point. (For more, see Middle East Issues: Misuse of Terms: Dictionary of Bias)

4) Does the article or broadcast omit essential context and information? This tends to be a frequent problem when reporting about the Middle East. Write a letter to the editor or directly to the journalist and/or media outlet to provide the missing context.

5) Are there double standards? Is one group of people singled out for more criticism or held to a different standard than others? Are differential terms used to describe the same phenomenon, depending on who the protagonists are? For example, are perpetrators of atrocities against Americans called “terrorists” while perpetrators of atrocities against Israelis called “activists” or “militants?” Indicate double standards by providing examples of similar events or issues that

received differential coverage ( see CAMERA Backgrounder: “Is Israel Using Excessive Force?”).

6) Do headlines and photograph captions accurately reflect the story? Is there a preponderance of photographs presenting only “one side of the coin?”

Finally, recognize the good reporting that provides context, information and insight into the complex problems of the Middle East and give positive feedback, as well.