Journalistic guidelines for SWI swissinfo.ch

Our approach – our craft – our style

About this manual

This manual describes editorial directives and principles which are binding for journalists of SWI swissinfo.ch. These are precepts for fair and credible journalism.

They demonstrate our approach and serve as a guide in matters of style and how we craft our content. They contribute to quality assurance for all language and multimedia teams in producing, adapting and distributing our content.

This document serves as an in-house manual but is also an instrument of public accountability. It is made available to the public.

The Editorial Board of SWI swissinfo.ch and its executive managers ensure that the editorial directives and principles are integrated into the introductory programme for new hires in editorial roles. Updates to the editorial directives and other relevant laws and regulations will be regularly addressed as part of our further training activities.

Contents

1. About SWI swissinfo.ch

WHAT WE DO

1.1. About us

SWI swissinfo.ch is the international, digital information platform of the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation SRG SSR. It offers independent and high-quality background information about Switzerland in ten languages and reports on world events from a Swiss perspective. SWI swissinfo.ch was established in 1999 as the successor to Swiss Radio International (SRI), which was founded in 1935 as the Swiss Short Wave Service. SWI is based in Bern and employs 103 people (as of 2021), 70 of whom work in its editorial offices. Additionally, around 120 freelance editorial staff work for SWI swissinfo.ch.

SWI swissinfo.ch comprises ten language desks, one multimedia desk for audiovisual output and 13 specialist editorial desks (beats1). At the moment, SWI swissinfo.ch has beats covering the following topic areas: direct democracy, foreign affairs, international Geneva, science, multinational corporations, Swiss politics, culture, history, Swiss nationals living abroad, life and ageing, the Swiss financial sector, education and Switzerland as a business location.

1.2. SWI swissinfo.ch as part of the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation

SWI swissinfo.ch is one of five Enterprise Units within the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation (SRG SSR), a private association with four sections representing Switzerland's language regions. SRG SSR is financed largely through licence fees that are paid by all Swiss households and companies. SWI swissinfo.ch receives 50% of its funding from the SRG SSR licence fees, and 50% from a federal grant. SWI swissinfo.ch does not generate any revenue of its own through advertising or sponsorship contributions.

The news and information service we provide is regulated in a service agreement between the Swiss Federal Council and SRG SSR. This agreement is renewed every four years and sets the budget. Within the framework of the service agreement with the Federal Council, SWI swissinfo.ch provides independent reporting on Switzerland's politics, economy, science, culture and society. The SWI swissinfo.ch offering is geared primarily towards an international audience with an interest in Switzerland. It is also aimed at Swiss nationals living abroad, allowing them to form their own opinions with regard to exercising their political rights in Switzerland (voting and elections).

The Federal Act on Radio and Television (RTVA) guarantees the independence of SWI swissinfo.ch. That means SWI swissinfo.ch is free and autonomous in all cases where the service agreement does not stipulate otherwise: namely, in the choice of topics covered and in the way content is produced and presented.

Our journalism is aligned with the SRG SSR Content and Services Charter. It is also subject to the internal directives of SRG SSR relating to the prevention of corruption and whistleblowing as well as its code of ethics.

We also refer to the Declarations on the Duties and Rights of the Journalist and the complementary Directives published by the Swiss Press Council in our journalistic work.

---

[1] A "beat" is a thematic area or field of expertise in which a journalist specializes.

1.3.   Vision and mission

Our vision is: "Those who love us understand Switzerland."

Since 2019, our mission statements have been as follows:

- We are a window onto Switzerland and, as a multifaceted entity, stand for the values of freedom, democracy, equality, respect and justice.
- We contextualise developments and decisions in Switzerland with a clear focus, taking a critical, in-depth approach in our reporting.
- We uphold our independence in our reporting and are transparent in everything we publish. We work together with our global communities to allow the public to form their own opinions.
- We strive to be relevant in parts of the world where local media are unable to provide independent reporting, offering analysis from a Swiss perspective.
- We exchange on an equal footing with our users, listen to their concerns and give them a voice.
- We embrace experimentation. We make use of our digital and dynamic environment to develop ourselves further, in a systematic and data-driven way, to meet the needs of the public.
- We create global understanding for diverse cultures, exercise tolerance and initiate global dialogue.

1.4.   Target groups

SWI swissinfo.ch targets its content at an international audience interested in Switzerland and provides balanced and in-depth reporting on Switzerland. It also produces content specifically directed at Swiss nationals living abroad and strengthens their connection to their homeland. In doing so, it helps these citizens to form well-founded and free opinions with a view to exercising their political rights in Switzerland.

SWI swissinfo.ch addresses specific target groups through its reporting by multilingual editorial coverage areas (beats), through events and through specific and personalised products such as its newsletter. This includes, for example, the members of the wider Swiss scientific and research community, individuals working for multinational companies headquartered in Switzerland or interested in these companies, individuals working with institutions in "International Geneva", and individuals working in the cryptocurrency and fintech scene in Switzerland's "Crypto Valley". The editorial staff are always seeking innovative and effective ways to contact and address these and other communities.

2.   Journalistic principles

OUR WORK ETHIC

Media professionals at SWI swissinfo.ch apply the following journalistic due diligence criteria to their work:

2.1.   Balance

In all its reporting, SWI swissinfo.ch is vigilant in ensuring balanced reporting. All relevant facts and positions are considered when selecting sources to analyse a subject. The public must be able to forge a factual and fully informed opinion based on our reporting.

SWI swissinfo.ch is not a mouthpiece for the loudest voices in debates, or the majority. Our reporting is inclusive and represents the diversity of Switzerland and its stakeholders.

"False balance" must be avoided. If a broadly based consensus opinion is up against a minority position, the latter must be flagged as such. Balance does not necessarily mean giving the same amount of space to everyone.

When allegations are made against third parties, the opinion or response of the criticized person must be presented.

This balance must not be evident in every single article; rather, it must be provided within the overall reporting on a particular subject or focus area. Items which are thematically related to votes or elections are subject to increased due diligence requirements and embargoes (see Section "Subject realization for elections and voting").

2.2.   Transparency

Users are presented with those facts which are essential to a comprehensive understanding of how the article was produced. This includes, for example, uncertainties or difficulties during research, and information on the reliability of sources. Assertions and comments must be supported and identified as such.

In general, anyone mentioned in SWI swissinfo.ch content is referred to by their real name. Requests for anonymity may be granted in exceptional cases where there is an interest worthy of protection and great public interest in the anonymous source's statement. In all cases, statements must be verifiable through a second source.

In specific cases, it may be advisable for the editorial staff to act on their own initiative to preserve an individual's anonymity even if they want to go public. When using anonymous statements originating from third-party journalistic content, employees must make all reasonable efforts to satisfy themselves of the statements' authenticity. Employees must disclose their anonymous sources to their line managers.

2.3.   Appropriateness

Regarding information, we apply the objectivity principle: Editorial content must present facts and events appropriately to ensure that the public is able to form its own opinion.

The editorial staff will use appropriate means to achieve this: no manipulative statements will be used. The members of the editorial team have a certain level of expertise concerning the topic being addressed.

2.4.   Truthfulness

Our media professionals do not say or show anything that they do not hold to be true to the best of their knowledge and belief. Information from other sources may be used provided there is a certain degree of assurance that it is correct and the source is indicated.

As a rule, the publication of news requires two mutually independent sources saying the same thing, or the original source of the information being cited in the news story. An exception can be made in cases where the source is highly credible (e.g. Keystone-SDA agency feed, or information from another unit within the SRG SSR).

The credibility of the sources and their information must be verifiable in all cases. Sources must be indicated. Particular caution should be exercised when dealing with online sources and material, to avoid content and images that may have been manipulated or otherwise falsified.

Wikipedia is not sufficient as a source citation, for the same reason as above. Information being used from this source must be verified through other sources.

The source transparency requirement also applies to images and audio recordings. For online video and audio material, a link to the source must be provided.

2.5.   Impartiality

Editorial staff may belong to a political or trade organization (party, association, union, etc.) as an ordinary member. However, they refrain from accepting mandates such as directorships, seats in parliament, retainers or consultancy work.
Freelance employees are subject to the same requirements as the permanent staff of SWI swissinfo.ch. They too must be independent of political, economic, and other vested interests.

Subject-related vested interests are actively disclosed. To ensure that positions provided by anyone quoted in a story are understood within the proper context, it is important not only to specify a person's official title, but also to make transparent any other vested interests they may have. Employees disclose vested interests which could be relevant to their work to their editor. In the event of conflicts of interest, they will voluntarily withdraw from the reporting in question. Vested interests on the part of freelance employees are likewise consistently disclosed.

Editorial staff members accept the outcome of thorough research even if it runs counter to their own opinion. They are prepared to drop research already conducted, even in cases where a lot of work has already been done, if the subject they originally intended to pursue cannot be realized or an assertion cannot be substantiated.

3.   Quality assurance

HOW WE ENSURE PROFESSIONAL WORK

3.1.   Quality criteria

The quality of the service provided is pivotal for a public service provider like SRG SSR. Article 4.1 of the licence granted to SRG SSR designates the following criteria for measuring the quality of its news and information service:

- Relevance
- Professionalism
- Independence
- Diversity
- Accessibility

The licence granted to SRG SSR (Article 4.4) also stipulates that the quality assurance processes must be regularly reviewed by external experts with the corresponding professional qualifications and experience. The public must be informed of the outcomes of these reviews. As of 2022, this inspection is carried out by the Institute of Applied Media Studies of the Zurich University of Applied Sciences. In addition, the services provided by SWI swissinfo.ch are assessed annually in the "Quality of the Media Yearbook" published by the University of Zurich's Research Center for the Public Sphere and Society (fög). Since 2021, SWI swissinfo.ch has also been certified with the quality label of the Journalism Trust Initiative (JTI).

3.2.   Internal quality assurance process

SWI swissinfo.ch has a multi-tiered internal system for quality assurance:
- **Subject management:** Subjects are developed within multilingual editorial coverage areas (beats). This ensures expertise in the subject matter and an international perspective.
- **Editing:** All in-depth content is accompanied by an experienced editor during production. This helps hone lines of questioning and ensures that the journalistic work meets our quality standards.
- **Acceptance:** All content and multimedia elements must be reviewed by an editor from the relevant language desk before publication (four-eyes principle). Content adapted into ten languages will also be quality checked by a member of the editorial board or the producer (six-eyes principle) before publication.
- **Feedback:** Members of the editorial board as well as editors of the individual language services provide daily feedback on current output, either within the language/multimedia department or at the daily editorial meeting. At regular quality assurance meetings, the editorial board and editors review output with the aim to ensure and improve compliance with the journalistic directives and ethical and legal principles. Editorial feedback sessions are also held to involve and inform all journalists.

In addition to this, at the behest of the editorial board and at irregular intervals, selected auditors review output and respond to questions on quality. This is particularly important for content published in languages other than Switzerland's national languages.

3.3.   Responsibility

As an author, every journalist is responsible for his or her output, in terms of both content (selection and verifiability of sources, etc.) and form (format, spelling, layout, etc.). They are supported by an editor in the production process. Editors carry out fact checking and guarantee the accuracy of the content and compliance with the quality criteria. Editorial staff must report errors, corrections and negative reactions to content from users to their line manager without delay.

The heads of the language desks are responsible for all content (self-produced output, adapted material and curated content) published in the relevant language on all channels. They review all content before publication to check that it complies with SRG SSR and SWI swissinfo.ch quality guidelines and with legal requirements. Errors, corrections and negative reactions to content must be reported to the editorial board without delay.

The editorial board bears the overarching responsibility for all content and output published by SWI swissinfo.ch on its own and third-party platforms. It is responsible for compliance with SRG SSR and SWI swissinfo.ch quality guidelines and legal requirements. The editorial board is also responsible for the quality assurance process and for ensuring that all editorial staff are acquainted with this process.

3.4.   Error correction procedure

Everyone makes mistakes – and it is the duty of journalists to correct them as soon as possible.

Errors must be corrected immediately. Errors identified in published items, whether on SWI swissinfo.ch or its social media pages, must be corrected immediately. If these are reported by external parties, they need to be checked before any changes are made. A response regarding the corrections made based on the tip received is compulsory.

Incorrect spellings, typos etc. will be made directly within the item itself; a note highlighting the correction is not required.

Corrections to content due to insufficient research, incorrect facts or misleading statements will be made immediately and disclosed in a box within the article or a footnote (What has been corrected? Date of correction? Reason for correction?). The publication date in the metadata will not be changed when a correction is made.

When errors are found, they are communicated by the author along with the correction to all language services publishing the same or adapted content.

When users report factual errors in social media items, the individuals responsible for distribution must react swiftly, transparently, and objectively in the corresponding language. When stakeholders (e.g. politicians) point out imbalances in our content, the editorial board must be involved. Errors are corrected immediately and made transparent, thanking those who pointed out the information.

In the case of users submitting complaints involving a claim, the complainer must be made aware of the option to access the ombudsperson.

3.5.   Requests for deletion and anonymity

SWI's online content remains permanently accessible. As a digital archive, it is of public interest: According to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), part of free formation of opinion is the right to be able to research past events.

SWI swissinfo.ch is highly restrictive regarding requests from individuals to delete older online content concerning them. In general, we do not delete content.

If an individual alleges that an older online item illegally infringes their privacy today, the public interest of the item will be analysed and the case for anonymisation reviewed. To this end, editorial staff can request the help of the SRG SSR legal service, which will assess the specific case and issue a decision on the request in consultation with the editorial board/the head of the department concerned. If, in exceptional cases, an item is anonymised, this will be made transparent online.

3.6.   Public Council

The Public Council, a committee representing the public, provides regular, systematic assessment reports of SWI swissinfo.ch's content. It is a multilingual body tasked with reviewing multilingual content. Members of the council who represent different world regions are rotated regularly to ensure monitoring across all languages. The feedback from the Public Council is relayed directly to the relevant staff by the editorial board.

The Public Council representatives also have a "Q-Day", when they visit the editorial teams to gain insights into their work and to provide direct feedback for improvements.

3.7.   Complaints

The Ombudsperson monitors complaints. When complaints are received, the Ombudsperson's office liaises between the public and people and institutions affected by media reports, on the one hand, and the editorial teams at SWI swissinfo.ch, on the other Since 2016, complaint cases can also be submitted to the Independent Complaints Authority for Radio and Television (ICA). These cases cover not only editorial content produced by SWI swissinfo.ch, but also comments by users.

4.   Engagement

HOW WE ENTER INTO DIALOGUE WITH THE USER COMMUNITY

4.1.   Openness to dialogue

SWI swissinfo.ch increases the visibility of its subjects and expertise through a collective, diverse and active engagement with the community affected. To this end, the editorial staff encourage an ongoing, personal dialogue on an equal footing and take part in moderating discussions. Within discussions, they offer further resources on the subject at hand and provide further context.

Editorial staff members show that they are open to interaction and take time for the concerns of the users. They reply to e-mails, comments and dialogues on social media as promptly as possible and using the correct form and style. E-mails to editorial staff are regularly monitored by the assistants' pool, which prioritises the messages.

Readers can also submit ideas for opinion pieces or other articles, whereby the editorial staff ensure that all relevant perspectives on the topic are represented across multiple pieces of content. Special formats on the website, such as the multilingual debates on questions posed by the editorial team, are also an opportunity for readers to give feedback and can lead to ideas for articles and further debates. Each journalist's profile contains information on how they can be contacted as well as on their areas of expertise and interests.

As a rule, media professionals respond to complaints directed at them personally themselves and, in extreme cases or in the event of reputational risks, inform their line manager.

4.2.   Comments and debates

Experience has shown that external comments on individual pieces of content can take on an abusive, hostile or discriminatory tone. To encourage more in-depth and high-quality debates on specific topics, in general the comments sections beneath individual articles are closed unless the author wants to have a conversation with the public about a particular aspect of the story.

Instead, focused, constructive debates are initiated. Experts, stakeholders and interested parties can engage in dialogue with the editorial staff, who cultivate constructive discussions with the public to provide more context and depth to relevant subjects and research. SWI swissinfo.ch wants to understand the world better for and with its users.

Editorial staff must be aware that they are always representing not just themselves but also SWI swissinfo. ch in these dialogues. If journalists are perceived as biased or pursue activist agendas on social media or within public online conversations, this can compromise the credibility of the entire organisation.

If employees experience threats during dialogue with readers, they should contact their line manager. In cases of doubt, the SRG SSR legal service should be brought in.

In debates and when moderating comments, editorial staff should:

… avoid conveying overly negative emotions
… show trust
… concentrate their responses and attention on users who are making a constructive contribution
… not shy away from self-criticism where necessary
… argue with expert knowledge but without patronising others
… refer to other content on the website
… manifest their knowledge on the topic
… thank the public for their contributions and use them in future articles where possible
… share praise, criticism and suggestions with the SWI swissinfo.ch staff responsible for the content
… ask deeper questions in order to obtain more detailed answers
… and create a positive atmosphere to encourage constructive debate

4.3.   Quality criteria for dialogue

All user comments and contributions to debates posted on SWI swissinfo.ch and the associated platforms and social media channels are thoroughly monitored and actively moderated by the staff of the relevant language desk. Comments on the website are reviewed before publication, comments on social media shortly after posting.

Other people's personal opinions are to be respected and taken seriously. However, in public debates staff should ensure that Netiquette is observed. In particular, the following will not be tolerated:

- Content that is unrelated to the respective topic
- Generalisations, accusations or assertions that cannot be verified
- Personal attacks of any kind, insults or intentional provocation
- Discrimination of any kind, for example based on religion, nationality, skin colour, sexual orientation, political affiliation, age or gender
- Content that glorifies violence or is obscene
- Commercial or political advertising
- Illegal content
- Giving a false name

Anyone found to be flouting the Netiquette will be given a warning. Repeat offenders will be banned. In cases of severe breaches of the Netiquette, the user can be blocked immediately. There is no absolute right to be published.

On social media, offensive, indecent or illegal content will be hidden and the user will be given a warning. Repeat offenders can be barred from the site without any reason being given. Before the ban is implemented, a screenshot of the comment must be stored.

For tricky comments or discussions, a second opinion from within the organisation will be sought. If a discussion is directed against individuals, the organisation or its staff, the editorial board will be informed.

4.4.   Social media

Social media are important to the distribution of content for SWI swissinfo.ch. They are often the place where users find and consume journalistic content. In particular, they are also a platform for interacting with the public. In dialogue, we can refine the questions being asked and research new topic areas. Feedback can be used as a basis for further reporting. Moreover, social media can give potential users an introduction to the work of SWI swissinfo.ch.

SWI swissinfo.ch is represented by a profile in every language on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Individual languages are also present on other platforms (TikTok, LinkedIn, WeChat, VKontakte…). Responsibility for maintaining and coordinating the profiles lies with the distribution specialists in the relevant language.

Anyone working with this content during the planning, writing and publication process is responsible for ensuring that it is disseminated. Considerations of how the content will be presented on the various platforms begin at an early stage of the process. Journalists, the editor and the multimedia and distribution specialists are included in the process. Publication of items on the platforms is carried out by journalists from the editorial department in question and/or the person responsible for distribution in the respective language.

The language used is adapted to fit the platform in question; this can be, for example, informal, humorous, charming, youthful, creative, accessible or personal. Having said that, the editorial staff are always professional in their demeanour and adhere to the journalistic standards and guidelines of SWI swissinfo.ch. They actively seek to engage with users on an equal footing and make direct personal contact with them. If it makes sense journalistically and in terms of content, they will refer to content from other providers.

Once something is online it cannot be deleted; consequently, respect, quality, justice and neutrality are particularly important. Nothing is published on social media channels that could not be put out on the front page of SWI swissinfo.ch.

4.5.   Private profiles of SWI employees

Use of social media for professional purposes is encouraged. Aside from distribution, this could for example serve the purpose of maintaining contacts with journalists from other media, obtaining or exchanging information, or maintaining a dialogue with members of the public.

Private profiles are regarded as a natural extension to the work of a journalist. Because of this, the same principles apply in terms of professional ethics. As representatives of a media company committed to maintaining balance, journalists have a responsibility for the credibility, balance and quality of SWI swissinfo.ch through their private statements as well as professionally.

Personal remarks made on private profiles may be associated with the company or directed against it. Therefore, on both official and private profiles, it is important to only make remarks that you can stand behind if they become public.

SWI journalists must refrain from taking sides in their personal profiles, as this could reflect on SWI swissinfo.ch publications. Employees must refrain from propaganda or promotional activities, for example for political parties or interest groups, as this could compromise their credibility and thus that of SWI swissinfo.ch publications.

Caution should also be exercised when liking and sharing posts, as this is generally not compatible with maintaining the necessary distance from a topic. Hence, as a basic principle, one-sided political content

should not be liked or shared. Another problematic area is membership in themed social media groups. SWI journalists should not join any groups whose demands include explicitly political or economic or social content.

Editorial staff members should be transparent about their role within SWI swissinfo.ch in the private profiles of their social media accounts. Wherever possible, Twitter profiles should be verified (blue tick).

SWI swissinfo.ch

5.   Topic selection

HOW WE DECIDE ON CONTENT

5.1.   Subjects reported

Every article on SWI swissinfo.ch ties in with an international debate and has a clear connection to Switzer-land and/or conveys Swiss perspectives. SWI swissinfo.ch publishes stories that reflect current debates, as well as background articles, opinion pieces, expert analysis and context on international topics from a Swiss perspective – editorially independent, nuanced and balanced.

We write above all for users who are not experts on Switzerland, and who are therefore not fully familiar with the intricacies of its politics and institutions. This requires additional context. Embedding the report clearly into the topic area and into the flow of the current situation/debate is therefore key here.

5.2.   Principles of topic identification

The content for our in-depth reporting is developed within the topic-specific editorial groups (beats).
The beats are assisted in selecting topics by the language desk journalists, who are familiar with the current news situation and debates in their target region and systematically monitor the local media there.
The beats also take suggestions and discussion contributions from users.

5.3.   Community focus

The SWI swissinfo.ch market is diverse. As a result, the editing teams process topics in such a way that the-matic and linguistic communities, i.e. user groups with similar needs and interests, are directly addressed, networked and involved in debates. This is done, for example, by:

- Placing debates and **concrete questions** from the community at the beginning of our research.
- Creating a **personal benefit** or connection for the user: How does an article relate to the user? In what way can they learn or benefit from it?
- Creating a **connection to current events:** Topical and relevant – ideally with background information related to current events (for example information about the Swiss Weapons Act after a mass shooting in the United States).
- Highlighting what users can **learn from Switzerland:** Cases and examples from Switzerland and/or users' own countries facilitate understanding.
- Drawing **comparisons** between countries: By comparing Switzerland to the user's own country, we can create connections.
- Where necessary, providing **background information:** Conspicuous links to existing SWI swissinfo.ch content and explanatory boxes make complex content easier to understand.

6.   Obtaining information

HOW WE ACCESS INFORMATION

6.1.   Research

6.1.1.   Access to information

Journalists have the freedom to establish all facts of public interest without being obstructed. Non-disclosure of public or private matters that has been told to journalists can only be enforced in exceptional cases and only if the reasons for this are clearly stated (source: Swiss Press Council). A source may not make access to information conditional upon positive coverage.

The Federal Act on Freedom of Information in the Administration (FoIA) also stipulates that, in general, all persons have access to all information and documents of the Federal Administration. The only exception to this is if, for example, access is likely to prejudice the privacy of a third party or to compromise Switzerland's national security.

6.1.2.   Payment for information

SWI swissinfo.ch does not pay money for information to anyone. In exceptional cases, it is permissible to provide compensation for expenses incurred by sources in order to conduct special research or support employees. In other cases, or if the total sum exceeds CHF300, approval must be obtained from the editorial board.

6.1.3.   How we handle embargoes

We will not accept news embargoes which make it difficult or impossible to select topics freely.

Objectively justified embargoes must be adhered to, in particular periods which give the media time to prepare their reporting. Embargoes which only serve to give certain media an advantage over others are not justified. If an embargo is unwarranted, we will inform the information provider in a timely manner so as to allow them to notify the other media also. Before breaching an embargo, journalists must consult their line managers.

6.2.   How we handle respondents

6.2.1.   Behaviour of journalists

Editorial team members are also ambassadors for journalism in general and for SWI swissinfo.ch in particular. Consequently, professional behaviour is a must. Thus, for example, questions to sources must be submitted in a timely manner, deadlines and agreements must be adhered to, and a journalist's tone must remain polite and professional even in difficult situations.

6.2.2.   Research interview requests

At the beginning of a research interview, journalists must introduce themselves to their contact persons unequivocally and transparently as SWI swissinfo.ch employees and broadly outline their intentions.

Media-savvy interviewees (e.g. politicians, press officers) know that their statements can be published. All other respondents must be made aware of this fact.

6.2.3.   Conducting interviews

The journalist must have a thorough understanding of the subject so as to be able to interact with the interviewee on an equal footing. Intensive preparation on the subject is essential.

Before the interview, the journalist must establish the interview conditions with the interviewee, for example the rules for authorisation. Interviews based on an informal conversation without the source's express consent are not permitted.

Journalists question the statements made by the interviewee and structure the discussion. Opposing positions must be put up for discussion. Questions must be formulated in a direct and straightforward way and be as brief as possible. The journalist assumes a critical and distanced role.

6.2.4.   Recordings

If conversations are being recorded, journalists must always declare this to the other participant. This applies in particular to telephone conversations. Making covert recordings of telephone conversations is a criminal offence and such recordings cannot be used legally.

Authorised recordings and notes from interviews must be kept, in case the accuracy of the statements needs to be verified at a later date.

6.2.5.   Authorisation

The person being interviewed has the right, upon request, to read their own direct quotes before publication and to learn in what context these are being published. When dealing with private individuals with no media experience, journalists should actively make them aware of the option to authorise quotes.

Interviews in Q&A form will be sent to the interviewee for authorisation (without the title, lead and images). Factual errors or incorrect wording must be amended; however, journalists must never leave out entire questions or make changes that distort the meaning of the content at the interviewee's request. Once the interviewer and interviewee have come to terms, previous versions of the interview may no longer be used. If no agreement can be reached on the use of an interview, both SWI swissinfo.ch and the interviewee may retract the interview. They may not retract the informational content of the interview. If necessary, the statement can be quoted in indirect speech.

Other than that, in principle complete articles will not be presented for inspection before publication. Exceptions must be justified and discussed with the journalist's line manager. The interviewee must be able to recognise their own statements, even in a highly condensed text.

When statements have been approved, they can no longer be retracted, however the situation develops. We take a stand on this even in the face of major opposition.

6.2.6.   Allegations

All persons mentioned in articles have the right to comment on facts which relate to them.

When serious allegations are made against a person or organisation, they must be actively offered the opportunity to comment. The accused party must be given at least 24 hours to respond. If they choose not to comment or cannot be reached, this should be transparently disclosed in the article.

6.2.7.   Anonymity of journalists

Protecting journalists and freelancers is a high priority for SWI swissinfo.ch. For this reason, in exceptional cases it is permissible for authors to research and report on stories anonymously where there is a high level of public interest in the topic in question. However, both covert research and anonymity for the journalist must be approved in advance by the editorial board. Criteria justifying anonymity include, for example, a threat to the lives of journalists or their contact persons, or if a visa could be refused over a long period and without acceptable reasons and could thus restrict the journalist's professional activity in the long term.

The reason for anonymity must be made transparent in an info box within the article.

7. Journalistic craft

HOW WE COVER TOPICS

7.1. Coverage of topics

7.1.1. Principles for coverage

We do not work in isolation. Good content is a product of cooperation between various language desks, in the beats, and specialists in different formats and/or marketing and IT.

7.1.2. Criteria for articles

When producing news items and reports, the ground rules of news journalism apply: Every item answers the journalistic questions (Who? What? How? When? Where? Why? Where does the information come from?).

Each item must speak for itself. It will contain:

- A core message
- A statement explaining why this core message is important or relevant at the time of publication
- Explanation of the international context
- The Swiss perspective on the topic
- Necessary but not excessive background information
- Quotes and source references

The item must not require the audience to already know a large amount or raise any questions it does not answer, especially in the title. The facts required to understand the item must be mentioned and must be correct; claims must be substantiated.

Complex content should be visualised or presented and conveyed in a simplified way.
For contextualisation, other focus areas relevant to the topic, explanatory content (explainers) and supplementary articles should be embedded.

Acceptance/revision of items should be carried out using the version prepared in the Content Management System.

7.1.3. Coverage of elections and voting

SWI swissinfo.ch plays a key role in helping Swiss expatriates inform themselves in the run-up to elections and votes. Consequently, the requirements in terms of appropriateness, diversity of opinion and fairness are particularly stringent.

The editorial teams ensure that, in aggregate, both pro and contra sides get a fair say and that reporting contains an appropriate measure of relevant, factual background information to aid voting decisions.

Reports on elections and votes which are dictated by current events and editorially justified can be submitted at any time. However, the following applies: the closer the election or voting day, the more important it is to ensure appropriateness and pluralism in our offering.

The following cut-off dates are binding for all reporting categories, formats and channels before elections and votes. The determining factor here is the time of publication in the original language.

Eight weeks before the date of the vote is usually when reporting on the subject effectively begins:

- To cover topics in more depth, it is permissible to focus on one camp or the other.
- Individual coverage of representatives of the pro or contra camp must be approved by the editorial board in all publications.
- The body of reporting on a topic must comply with the fairness requirement.

Three weeks before the day of the vote, increased due diligence requirements come into force:

- The various positions will all have an appropriate say in all articles, with all key arguments included.
- There will be no individual coverage of candidates offering a one-sided platform.

One week before the date of the vote, the most rigorous form of due diligence comes into effect:

- All individual news items must without fail provide a balanced view.
- From the Thursday preceding a vote, in principle no new content on the subject may be published.

All SWI swissinfo.ch journalists are subject to the increased due diligence requirements. In the run-up to an election or vote, they do not adopt an official position with regard to the issues on the ballot.

7.1.4.   Reporting on religious topics

Special attention must be paid to religious topics as in some instances these can be exploited in socio-political debate. We do not provide a platform for inciting hatred. We make a point of respecting the religious feelings of our users.

7.1.5.   Avoidance of racism, sexism and discrimination

SWI swissinfo.ch does not discriminate against any individual or group – whether on the grounds of ethnic affiliation, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity. We take care that the language and images we use do not reinforce stereotypes. All members of staff are committed to ensuring a balanced gender ratio in their reporting.

For language-specific descriptions of inclusive language, please consult the guide to "Inclusive language at SWI swissinfo.ch".

7.1.6.   Mentioning of names

In general, names of offenders or victims of offences are not used. Their nationality is only mentioned in cases where this is relevant to the offence. The same applies to victims of disasters or accidents.

We respect the presumption of innocence in the case of suspected offenders and the right to privacy of victims. We pay particular respect to the privacy of minors. Exceptions to this rule – which require approval from the

editorial board – can be made when the names of these persons are already so well known by the public that not mentioning them would be jarring.

For public figures, this threshold is set lower. People living in the public eye or occupying an important position in public life enjoy a lesser level of data protection, in particular in cases where their offences are associated with their position.

7.2.   Use of journalistic forms

7.2.1.   Principles for selecting journalistic formats

By choosing the appropriate journalistic format, the content of an article will be conveyed as comprehensibly as possible. Journalists decide jointly with their beat manager/editor on the format their work will take, bearing in mind that the content should be displayed on as many channels as possible (multimedia formats are good for displaying on social media).

7.2.2.   Interview

An interview allows us to provide a personal approach to a topic. This journalistic format allows an individual to present their point of view on a particular topic.

Knowledge-based questions (questions about facts) do not belong in an interview. One exception here is questions on new developments. The journalist's opinion likewise has no place in an interview.

Interviews are only conducted in writing if a statement is essential and there is no possibility of conducting a face-to-face conversation. If such an interview is published, this must be declared by including a sentence in italics at the bottom of the article: "This interview was conducted in writing by e-mail on xxx (date)."

If an interviewee has a business or special relationship with SRG SSR, this must be made transparent. The interviewee should be described with a brief résumé stating their job and particular achievements. If the journalist has a special relationship with the interviewee this will be disclosed.

Special conditions leading to the interview, such as an external initiative or agreements made before the recording of the interview (e.g. abstaining from asking certain questions) must be made transparent when the interview is published.

In terms of format, the following rules apply:

- Questions should be in bold.
- The first name and last name of the interviewee should be placed before the first answer.
- Before all other answers the journalist should put the interviewee's initials.
- After the lead comes a brief introduction to the topic with information to assist with understanding and provide incentive to read the interview. The introduction will also briefly introduce the interviewee.
- Noteworthy citations will be highlighted as quotes.

The editorial staff makes interviewees aware of the guidelines, especially that we refrain from using generic masculine language. If interviewees refuse to phrase their quotes in a gender-appropriate manner, this will be communicated in a footnote attached to the first generic masculine usage (* "SWI swissinfo.ch is committed to using gender-appropriate language and in particular refrains from using generic masculine terms. All interviewees are made aware of this fact. XY has not followed this recommendation").

7.2.3.   Profiles

A profile is a vibrant and descriptive format which is based in fact with a subjective tinge: A reportage about a person which constitutes more than just a description of their biography. A profile includes not just facts, but also observations by the journalist regarding character traits, activities, ways of thinking, feelings. It does not, however, include the journalist's own opinion of a person, value judgements or comments.

A profile is one of the most challenging stylistic forms in journalism because of its proximity to another person. The subject of the profile, who may also reveal some very personal things about themselves, must be able to rely on the integrity and conscientiousness of the journalist. Despite this, or perhaps because of it, a critical distance needs to be maintained (no "people-pleaser" reports). Statements are verified.

The profile will seem more authentic and the subject more human if both strengths and weaknesses are discussed. Statements from third parties about the person being profiled are important. Because it would be presumptuous to claim, after a 2–3 hour meeting, to be able to characterize a person accurately, it is chiefly the encounter with the person that is described – "a brief excerpt from the life of..."

We do not profile anyone we are personally close to or employees from our own editorial team. Exceptions must be agreed with the editorial board and made transparent.

Based on current events it may be necessary to create a profile without being able to meet the person or speak to them beforehand (this mostly occurs in the case of public figures). In these cases, the situation must be disclosed. For these profiles, journalists may use information from other media, from published interviews, or from sources who know or knew the subject well.

The text will not be sent to the person concerned before publication; at most they will receive a few excerpts to allow them to review the facts and quotes. The interests and perceptions of the profiled person and those of the journalist may not align in certain areas.

People who may not have the capacity to make sound judgements are to be protected from themselves. Even if they themselves seek publicity, we refrain from publishing reports relating to them.

7.2.4.   Opinion pieces, analyses and commentaries

Opinions and subjective assessments are only shown in the form of positions presented by external authors. As a rule, opinion pieces are not financially remunerated. They must be unequivocally identified as such through their layout and differentiated such that they can be clearly distinguished from fact-based reporting at first glance.

Analyses of world events from a Swiss perspective and of Switzerland from an international perspective are part of the core offering of SWI swissinfo.ch. They are used with caution and do not stand alone. Analyses complement existing SWI reporting on a specific theme.

Possible authors of opinion pieces and analyses include people who have made prominent statements on the topic in question as experts or who are internationally well known due to their experience. Care should be taken to ensure a balanced ratio of male and female authors.

In the case of external analyses, special attention should be paid to whether the argument is balanced. All points of view on the topic must be represented, to allow readers to form their own opinion. If an external author takes sides, SWI swissinfo.ch must also publish an equivalent item showing the opposite position at the same time, and the two items must without fail be linked to one another. Whatever the situation, a disclaimer must be published: "The views expressed by the authors do not necessarily reflect those of SWI swissinfo.ch".

Journalists with proven in-depth knowledge of particular topic areas may write analyses which go beyond neutral, absolutely unbiased reporting. What is important here is not the writer's opinion, but rather the focus and argumentation, the exposure of interdependencies and the consequences of events. Analyses help with understanding of complex issues. They are fact-based, free from prejudice and balanced. The argumentation is comprehensible and plausible. This content should be clearly identifiable as analysis.

Texts from a personal perspective are possible. Although subjective, they are based on facts and not on personal opinions. Otherwise, the same journalistic principles apply as for all other articles. Analyses are subject to increased due diligence requirements and must therefore be approved by the editorial board.

Op-eds, in their traditional form prevalent in print media, are not generally used at SWI swissinfo.ch. They can be deployed by the editorial board in the case of important elections or votes, or in exceptional cases for other key events.

SWI swissinfo.ch journalists refrain from writing commentaries in other media.

7.2.5.   Fact checks

Within a fact check, a statement from a public figure (e.g. a politician) will be selected and checked for its truthfulness based on reliable evidence. This can result in any of four possible verdicts: true, false, misleading or unproven (cf. here).

Within the context of a beat, any journalist can propose and implement a fact check. Suitable statements for fact checking must be provable (no opinions or forecasts) and pertain to a topic of public interest within Switzerland.

Accuracy and transparency are key elements of a good fact check. Consequently, the specific internal guidelines linked above must be consulted and specialists should be called in.

7.2.6.   Panel discussions

Panel discussions allow for personal and more intensive exchanges with communities and offer a platform to stakeholders. They are a special form of journalism and are held in virtual, hybrid or physical form. SWI swissinfo.ch primarily uses the virtual or hybrid format to allow users from all over the world to participate.

Panel discussions are recorded in video format and then utilized in line with the editorial concept and distributed via various channels. Content can also be acquired by third parties.

For storage, processing and dissemination of video recordings to be authorized, the following framework conditions must be met:

- Participants must be informed of the plan to record the session at the latest at the beginning of the panel discussion (before recording starts).
- The panel participants will be informed of the plan to record the session when they are first contacted; the SWI swissinfo.ch opt-in form must be signed before the event begins.

7.2.7.   Curations and press reviews

The principles of balanced reporting also apply to curations (acquisition of content from other media). If an acquired item shows only one perspective on a topic, or if the originators are biased due to vested interests, supplementary content must be provided to ensure that readers can form their own opinion on the topic. These thematically linked items must contain actual links to each other.

The press review is a key tool used by SWI swissinfo.ch to convey the public state of mind about an event or a decision taking place in another country. It allows us to cover an international topic from a Swiss perspective. The press reviews published by SWI swissinfo.ch provide an overview of media commentaries from the French-, Italian- and German-speaking regions of Switzerland.

When a current event in Switzerland also sparks discussion in other countries, SWI swissinfo.ch produces an international press review. All language desks are involved with this work in that they supply quotes from media in the regions where their language is spoken.

7.2.8.   Debates

When presenting debates, SWI swissinfo.ch complies with the following quality criteria:

- Debates are never unmoderated: Every debate is actively monitored by the author and moderated to ensure that it remains high-quality, fair and lively, with the aim of further developing the topic with the expertise of the users. If the author is absent, a proxy must be designated within the beat team.
- Debates always pertain to research and articles by SWI swissinfo.ch which have already been published. Questions alone are not enough to allow people to form a solid opinion on a topic; for this to happen, categorization, context and facts are required. A basic explanation and background information on the topic must be provided for every question.
- At the beginning of the debate component, every question is introduced with context and information; the facts are there for all to see.
- Questions are not banal or random but are journalistically crafted and offer interested parties added value in terms of content; they are oriented towards global debates relevant in other countries.
- Questions are always developed and discussed jointly within the beat team.
- During debates, there will be no suggestive, tendentious questions posed where it is clear from the outset these are merely intended to cultivate outrage and encourage discrimination, racism or sexism.
- Authors will make available debate components for distribution on other platforms.

7.2.9.   User-generated content (UGC)

An invitation to users to contribute (user-generated content) can result in a valuable enhancement to our reporting.

User contributions must be processed with due diligence and critical distance, as spoofing cannot be ruled out. These contributions are subject to the same quality requirements and standards as content produced in-house.
Before publication, users must be contacted to verify their authenticity and gain their consent for the content to be published. For all user-generated image or text content, employees must make sure that rights of use have been clarified and documented. Where users make fact-based claims, the journalist should always ask about the source so that the facts can be verified.

When user-generated items are published they must be clearly marked as such.

8.   Production

HOW WE REFINE OUR CONTENT

8.1.   Production principle

Every article is monitored by an editor during the production of the original version. In this way, together with the journalist, the editor can ensure that the topic is being realised in line with the SWI swissinfo.ch service strategy, the necessary information has been obtained, the correct formats are used, the facts are correct and considerations for distribution have been explored. The name of the editor of an item will be transparently disclosed.

As an additional step, during adaptation journalists will process the item in such a way that it is easily accessible to their community of readers. For example, it may be necessary to reformulate the title and lead, integrate additional context, or adjust the imagery.

8.2.   Reader incentives

Our output is based on the "mobile first" principle, as content will be used predominantly on mobile devices. All content is optimised for viewing on smartphones. In particular, this means clearly discernible paragraphs. The mobile display should be checked before publishing.

Every item should provide incentives to users to engage as well as affording them points of entry to the topic: sub-titles and images structure the text and provide anchor points for users. Rule of thumb: for each mobile screen there must be a visual interruption within the text. This could be an image, sub-title, highlighted quote, or graphic.

At the same time, writers should take care to provide appropriate transitions between text and multimedia elements such that continuity is ensured. It is not necessary to give a say to all the information sources in the piece: it should be as brief as possible and as long as necessary.

8.3.   Adaptation

At SWI swissinfo.ch, a large proportion of our output is published in several languages, or even all ten. The decision on what content will be translated into which languages lies primarily with the editorial board, secondarily with the language desks.

Linguistic adaptation of original content from the beats is part of the core business of the SWI swissinfo.ch editorial team. The challenge lies in making the text understandable and attractive to the users in the different language regions by, for example, reformulating the title and lead (also using SEO criteria) or integrating additional context, while at the same time remaining true to the original content.

Each language desk uses glossaries to record how to translate commonly used terms into the relevant language to ensure a certain consistency. This especially applies to terms which do not (yet) exist in the target language.

If an automated translation tool is used for adaptation and the adapted version is not post-edited, this will be unambiguously disclosed with a disclaimer.

If a piece is being rendered into another language, the target language version should be produced in such a way that it reads like an original text. The source language should not be reflected in the translated target version in terms of its style or structure.

To make the adaptation more easily comprehensible, additional explanations or clarifications are often required. When adapting titles, the core message should be retained. The writer can suggest options for abridging content. Journalists wishing to also make significant cuts or changes to the storytelling in their adaptation may do so in consultation with the original author.

Adapted texts must remain true to the original and to the essence of the item. Significant changes – such as changes to the structure, leaving out certain sources, leaving out multimedia elements – must be discussed with the author or line manager.

Where interviews and direct quotes are being adapted, particular care must be taken. Wherever possible, statements in the original language should be obtained from the author and translated from there.

When adapting interviews into other languages, writers are allowed to reproduce the content in a different journalistic form. Each editorial department is free to convert quotes into indirect speech in its own content. When doing so they must not make any changes that will distort the meaning of the text, and a clear distinction must be made between a statement by the interviewee and how the content is otherwise presented editorially.

The adapted version of the item will indicate the original language and the adapter's name. Responsibility for the published language version lies with the head of the relevant language desk.