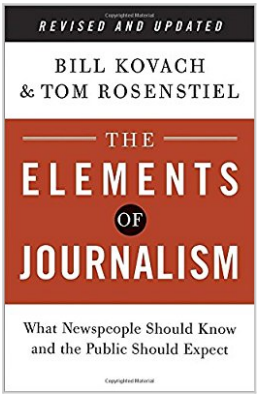

The Elements of Journalism, Revised and Updated 3rd Edition: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect

By Bill Kovach, Tom Rosenstiel

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Revised and updated with a new preface and material on the rise of social media, the challenges facing printed news, and how journalism can fulfill its purpose in the digital age.

Seventeen years ago, the Committee of Concerned Journalists gathered some of America's most influential newspeople to ask the question, "What is journalism for?" Through exhaustive research, surveys, interviews, and public forums, they identified the essential elements that define journalism and its role in our society. The result is this, one of the most important books on the media ever written, and winner of the Goldsmith Book Award from Harvard, the Society of Professional Journalists award, and the Bart Richards Award from Penn State University.

Updated with new material covering the rise of social media, sponsored content, a new, collaborative web-based journalism in which anyone—professional or citizen—can produce news, and much more, this third edition of *The Elements of Journalism* is an essential read for journalists, students, and anyone hoping to stay informed in the digital age.

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Editorial Review

Review
"At a time when technological and financial forces are creating formidable challenges to journalism's traditional values, Kovach and Rosenstiel have written an immensely valuable primer on who we are, what we do, and how we should do it."
-- David Halberstam

"**The Elements of Journalism** is a remarkable book that does a superb job of describing the problems, articulating the values, outlining the risks, and offering understandable and practical ways to respond to the difficulties of the present state of journalism. **The Elements of Journalism** ought to become required reading for every institution (and individual) engaged in journalism."
— Neil Rudenstine, President, Harvard University

"Of the many books that have been written about reporting the news, this one best captures the shortcomings, subtleties, and possibilities of modern journalism. It deserves to become as indispensable to journalists and journalism students as **The Elements of Style**."
— Tom Goldstein, Dean, Graduate School of Journalism, Columbia University

"In an age when partisan rancor and ratings-driven showmanship have crowded out the more subtle virtues of solid journalism, Tom Rosenstiel and Bill Kovach provide a timely refresher course in the importance of press fundamentals. They remind us that at its best, journalism is a high public calling, and all those who practice it have a deeper obligation to their readers and viewers than to the demands of the market."
— David Talbot, editor-in-chief, Salon.com

About the Author
Bill Kovach was editor of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, the Washington bureau chief for the New York Times and curator of the Nieman Journalism Fellowship program at Harvard. He was founding chairman of The Committee of Concerned Journalists.

Tom Rosenstiel is executive director of the American Press Institute, founder of the Project for Excellence in Journalism, a former media critic for the Los Angeles Times, and chief congressional correspondent for Newsweek. He and Kovach have written two other books together.

Excerpted from Chapter 1

What Is Journalism For?

On a gray December morning in 1981, Anna Semborska woke up and flipped on the radio to hear her favorite program, Sixty Minutes Per Hour. Semborska, who was seventeen, loved the way the comedy revue pushed the boundaries of what people in Poland could say out loud. Though it had been on the air for some years, with the rise of the labor union Solidarity, 60MPH had become much more bold. Sketches like one about a dim-witted Communist doctor looking vainly to find a cure for extremism were an inspiration to Anna and her teenage friends in Warsaw. The program showed her that other people felt about the world the way she did, but had never dared express. "We felt that if things like these can be said on the radio then we

are free," she would remember nearly twenty years later. (1)

But when Anna ran to the radio to tune in the show on December 13, 1981, she heard only static. She tried another station, then another. Nothing. She tried to call a friend and found no dial tone. Her mother called her to the window. Tanks were rolling by. The Polish military government had declared martial law, outlawed Solidarity, and put the clamps back on the media and on speech. The Polish experiment with liberalization was over.

Within hours, Anna and her friends began to hear stories that suggested something this time was different. In a little town called 'Swidnik near the Czech border, there were the dogwalkers. Every night at 7:30, when the state-run television news came on, nearly everyone in 'Swidnik went out and walked his dog in a little park in the center of town.

It became a daily silent act of protest and solidarity. We refuse to watch. We reject your version of truth.

In Gdansk, there were the black TV screens. People there began moving their television sets to the windows-with the screens pointed out to the street. They were sending a sign to one another, and the government. We, too, refuse to watch. We also reject your version of truth.

An underground press began to grow, on ancient hand-crank equipment. People began carrying video cameras and making private documentaries, which they showed secretly in church basements. Soon, Poland's leaders acknowledged they were facing a new phenomenon, something they had to go west to name. It was the rise of Polish public opinion. In 1983, the government created the first of several institutes to study it. It mostly conducted public opinion surveys. Others would sprout up throughout Eastern Europe as well. This new phenomenon was something totalitarian officials could not dictate. At best, they could try to understand it and then manipulate it, not unlike Western democratic politicians. They would not succeed.

Afterward, leaders of the movement toward freedom would look back and think the end of Communism owed a good deal to the coming of new information technology and the effect it had on human souls. In the winter of 1989, the man who shortly would be elected Poland's new president visited with journalists in Washington. "Is it possible for a new Stalin to appear today who could murder people?" Lech Walesa asked rhetorically. No, he answered himself. In the age of computers, satellites, faxes, VCRs, "it's impossible." Technology now made information available to too many people, too quickly. And information created democracy. (2)

What is journalism for?

For the Poles and others in emerging democracies the question was answered with action. Journalism was for building community. Journalism was for citizenship. Journalism was for democracy. Millions of people, empowered by a free flow of information, became directly involved in creating a new government and new rules for the political, social, and economic life of their country. Is that always journalism's purpose? Or was that true for one moment, in one place?

In the United States for the last half century or so the question "What is journalism for?" has rarely been asked, by citizens or journalists. You owned a printing press or a broadcasting license and you produced journalism. In the United States journalism has been reduced to a simple tautology: It was whatever journalists said it was. As Maxwell King, the former editor of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, has said, "We let our work speak for itself." Or, when pressed, journalists take it as a given that they work in the public interest. (3)

This simplistic answer is no longer sufficient — if it ever really was to an increasingly skeptical public. Not now that the new communications technology with which anyone with a modem and a computer can claim to be "doing journalism." Not now that the technology has created a new economic organization of journalism in which the norms of journalism are being pulled and redefined, and sometimes abandoned.

Perhaps, some suggest, the definition of journalism has been exploded by technology, so now anything is seen as journalism.

But on closer examination, as the people of Poland demonstrated, the purpose of journalism is not defined by technology, or by journalists or the techniques they employ. As we will show, the principles and purpose of journalism are defined by something more basic — the function news plays in the lives of people.

For all that the face of journalism has changed, indeed, its purpose has remained remarkably constant, if not always well served, since the notion of "a press" first evolved more than three hundred years ago. And for all that the speed, techniques, and character of news delivery have changed, there already exists a clear theory and philosophy of journalism that flows out of the function of news.

The primary purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing.

As we listened to citizens and journalists, we heard that this obligation to citizens encompasses several elements. The news media help us define our communities, and help us create a common language and common knowledge rooted in reality. Journalism also helps identify a community's goals, heroes, and villains. "I've felt strongly for a long time that we proceed best as a society if we have a common base of information," NBC anchorman Tom Brokaw told our academic research partners. (4) The news media serve as a watchdog, push people beyond complacency, and offer a voice to the forgotten. "I want to give voices to people who need the voice . . . people who are powerless," said Yuen Tying Chan, a former reporter for the New York Daily News who has created a journalism training program in Hong Kong.5 James Carey, one of the founders of our committee, has put it this way in his own writing: Perhaps in the end journalism simply means carrying on and amplifying the conversation of people themselves. (6)

This definition has held so consistent through history, and proven so deeply ingrained in the thinking of those who produce news through the ages, that it is in little doubt. It is difficult, in looking back, even to separate the concept of journalism from the concept of creating community and later democracy. Journalism is so fundamental to that purpose that, as we will see, societies that want to suppress freedom must first suppress the press. They do not, interestingly, have to suppress capitalism. At its best, as we will also show, journalism reflects a subtle understanding of how citizens behave, an understanding that we call the Theory of the Interlocking Public.

Yet the longstanding theory and purpose of journalism are being challenged today in ways not seen before, at least in the United States. Technology is shaping a new economic organization of information companies, which is subsuming journalism inside it. The threat is no longer simply from government censorship. The new danger is that independent journalism may be dissolved in the solvent of commercial communication and synergistic self-promotion. The real meaning of the First Amendment — that a free press is an independent institution — is threatened for the first time in our history even without government meddling.

There are some who will contend that defining journalism is dangerous. To define journalism, they argue, is to limit it. Maybe doing so violates the spirit of the First Amendment: "Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech or of the press." This is why journalists have avoided licensing, like doctors

and lawyers, they note. They also worry that defining journalism will only make it resistant to changing with the times, which probably will run it out of business.

Actually, the resistance to definition in journalism is not a deeply held principle but a fairly recent and largely commercial impulse. Publishers a century ago routinely championed their news values in front-page editorials, opinion pages, and company slogans, and just as often publicly assailed the journalistic values of their rivals. This was marketing. Citizens chose which publications to read based on their style and their approach to news. It was only as the press began to assume a more corporate and monopolistic form that it became more reticent. Lawyers also advised news companies against codifying their principles in writing for fear that they would be used against them in court. Avoiding definition was a commercial strategy. It was not born of the meaning of the First Amendment.

On the other side, some will argue that not only should journalism's purpose be unchanging, but its form should be constant as well. They see changes in the way journalism looks from when they were young, and fear that, in the memorable phrase of Neil Postman, we are "amusing ourselves to death." They miss another fact. Every generation creates its own journalism.

But the purpose, we have found, is the same.

Though journalists are uncomfortable defining what they do, they do fundamentally agree on their purpose. When we set out in 1997 to chart the common ground of newspeople, this was the first answer we heard: "The central purpose of journalism is to tell the truth so that people will have the information that they need to be sovereign." It came from Jack Fuller, an author, novelist, lawyer, and president of the Tribune Publishing Company, which produces the *Chicago Tribune*. (7)

Even people who resist the label of journalist, who work on the Web, offer a similar goal. Omar Wasow, a self-described "garage entrepreneur" who founded a website called New York Online, told us at one committee forum that his aim, in part, was helping to create citizens who are "consumers, devourers and debunkers of media . . . an audience who have engaged with the product and can respond carefully." (8)

Were these just disparate voices? Not really. In collaboration with the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, we asked journalists what they considered the distinguishing feature of journalism. Those working in news volunteered this democratic function by nearly two to one over any other answer. (9) Open-ended in-depth interviews with a hundred more journalists conducted by developmental psychologists at Stanford, Harvard, and the University of Chicago with whom we collaborated came to the same conclusion. "News professionals at every level . . . express an adamant allegiance to a set of core standards that are striking in their commonality and in their linkage to the public information mission," they write. (10)

Ethics codes and journalism mission statements bear the same witness. The goal is "to serve the general welfare by informing the people," says the code of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, the largest association of print newsroom managers in North America. "Give light and the people will find their own way," reads the masthead of Scripps Company newspapers. Indeed, every newspaper mission statement on file with the American Society of Newspaper Editors names advancing self-government as the primary goal of the news organization. (11)

Those outside journalism, too, understand a broader social and moral obligation for journalism. Listen to Pope John Paul II in June 2000: "With its vast and direct influence on public opinion, journalism cannot be guided only by economic forces, profit, and special interest. It must instead be felt as a mission in a certain sense sacred, carried out in the knowledge that the powerful means of communication have been entrusted to

you for the good of all." (12)

This democratic mission is not just a modern idea. The concept of creating sovereignty has run through every major statement and argument about the press for centuries, not only from journalists but from the revolutionaries who fought for democratic principles, both in America and in virtually every developing democracy since.

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Excerpt Endnotes
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1.Anna Semborska, interview by Dante Chinni, January 2000.
2.Thomas Rosenstiel, "TV, VCR's, Fan Fire of Revolution: Technology Served the Cause of Liberation in East Europe," Los Angeles Times, 18 January 1990.
3.Maxwell King, at founding meeting of Committee of Concerned Journalists (CCJ), 21 June 1997.
4.Tom Brokaw, interview by William Damon, Howard Gardner, and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi.
5.Yuen Ying Chan, interview by Damon et al.
6.James Carey, James Carey: A Critical Reader, ed. Eve Stryker Munson and Catherine A. Warren (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 235.
7.Jack Fuller, at CCJ Chicago forum, 6 November 1997.
8.Omar Wasow, at CCJ Ann Arbor, Michigan, forum, 2 February 1998.
9.CCJ and the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, "Striking the Balance: Audience Interests, Business Pressures and Journalists' Values" (March 1999): 79.
10.William Damon and Howard Gardner, "Reporting the News in an Age of Accelerating Power and Pressure: The Private Quest to Preserve the Public Trust" (academic paper, 6 November, 1997), 10.
11.In total, all 12 of the ethics codes on file with the American Society of Newspaper Editors that mention purpose describe this as journalism's primary mission. Four of the 24 that don't mention purpose mention it inside the texts of their ethics codes.
12.Associated Press, report of Pope John Paul II's declaration of the Vatican's Holy Year Day for Journalists, 4 June 2000.

Users Review

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Linda Pinkerton:

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