



# governmentattic.org

*"Rummaging in the government's attic"*

Description of document: US Agency for Global Media (USAGM) Voice of America (VOA) Best Practices Guide, 2017

Requested date: 22-October-2019

Release date: 20-March-2020

Posted date: 05-October-2020

Source of document: USAGM FOIA Office  
Room 3349  
330 Independence Ave. SW  
Washington, D.C. 20237  
ATTN: FOIA/Privacy Act Officer  
Fax: (202) 203-4585  
Email: [foia@usagm.gov](mailto:foia@usagm.gov)

The governmentattic.org web site ("the site") is a First Amendment free speech web site, and is noncommercial and free to the public. The site and materials made available on the site, such as this file, are for reference only. The governmentattic.org web site and its principals have made every effort to make this information as complete and as accurate as possible, however, there may be mistakes and omissions, both typographical and in content. The governmentattic.org web site and its principals shall have neither liability nor responsibility to any person or entity with respect to any loss or damage caused, or alleged to have been caused, directly or indirectly, by the information provided on the governmentattic.org web site or in this file. The public records published on the site were obtained from government agencies using proper legal channels. Each document is identified as to the source. Any concerns about the contents of the site should be directed to the agency originating the document in question. GovernmentAttic.org is not responsible for the contents of documents published on the website.



U.S. AGENCY FOR  
GLOBAL MEDIA

UNITED STATES  
BROADCASTING  
BOARD OF  
GOVERNORS

330 Independence Avenue SW | Washington, DC 20237 | usagm.gov

**Office of the General Counsel**

March 20, 2020

**RE: Request Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act – FOIA #20-004**

This letter is in response to your Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request dated October 22, 2019 to the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM), which the Agency received on the same day. In your request, you asked for the following --

*“A copy of each internal reporting/journalism guidelines/practices/policy document circulated at the Agency for Global Media during the last two years.”*

The Agency has completed its search for and review of the records responsive to your request. Enclosed are the responsive records identified. We did not withhold any information or records responsive to your request, as these are public documents. The Agency is waiving all fees for this request and the enclosed records are provided to you at no charge.

This concludes the Agency’s response to your request and it is now closed. You may contact me or the Agency’s FOIA Public Liaison at 202-203-4550 for any further assistance and to discuss any aspect of your request. Additionally, you may contact the Office of Government Information Services (OGIS) at the National Archives and Records Administration to inquire about the FOIA mediation services they offer. The contact information for OGIS is as follows:

Office of Government Information Services  
National Archives and Records Administration  
8601 Adelphi Road-OGIS  
College Park, Maryland 20740-6001  
E-mail at [ogis@nara.gov](mailto:ogis@nara.gov)  
Telephone at 202-741-5770  
Toll free at 1-877-684-6448  
Facsimile at 202-741-5769

Finally, if you are not satisfied with this response to your request, you may file an administrative appeal with the Agency by writing to: Chairperson, Access Appeal Committee, USAGM, Suite 3349, 330 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20237. Your appeal must be postmarked or transmitted by facsimile to 202-203-4548 within 90 days of the date of this letter.

If you have any questions regarding your request, please contact me at 202-203-4550 or the Office of the General Counsel at the above address or at [foia@usagm.gov](mailto:foia@usagm.gov).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dana Sade", followed by a horizontal line.

Dana Sade  
Assistant General Counsel

Enclosure



# ***BEST PRACTICES GUIDE***

---

***JANUARY 2017***

***<https://bbg.sharepoint.com/sites/journalist-portal/editorial/Pages/Best-Practices-Guide.aspx>  
DALETPLUS: MEDIA-->CATEGORIES--> MANUALS***

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>THE VOA CHARTER</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>NEWS GATHERING</b>	
-FAIRNESS, OBJECTIVITY & BALANCE	7
-BIAS & DIVERSITY	8
-U.S. ELECTIONS	9
-SENSITIVE & GRAPHIC MATERIAL	11
-COVERING WAR	12
-COVERING TERRORISM	12
-VIDEO & AUDIO OF TERRORISTS, HOSTAGES OR PRISONERS	13
-COVERING CRIMINAL ACTIVITY	14
-HOSTAGE/BARRICADE SITUATIONS	14
-NAMING PEOPLE INVOLVED IN CRIMES	15
-INTERVIEWING & VIDEOTAPING MINORS	16
-COVERING & REPORTING SUICIDES	16
-BREAKING NEWS	17
-REPORTING CROWD ESTIMATES	17
-STAGING & RE-CREATIONS	17
-USING VOA EMPLOYEES OR RELATIVES FOR STORIES	18
-WRITING	19
-ATTRIBUTION	20
-SOURCING	21
-CONFIDENTIAL SOURCES	23
-RUMORS & SPECULATION	24
-PLAGIARISM	25
-CREDITING THE NEWS AGENCIES	26
-CREDITING OTHER SOURCES	27
-USING MATERIAL FROM STATE-RUN MEDIA	29
-INTERVIEWS	31
-PUBLIC FIGURES	32
-ANONYMITY	33
-“AMBUSH” INTERVIEWS	33
-ADVANCE SCRIPTS/SCREENING	33
-REQUESTS FOR UNAIED/UNPUBLISHED MATERIAL	34
-SUBJECT TAPING INTERVIEW	34
-PAYMENT	34

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### GUESTS

-NOTIFYING VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT OF HIGH-LEVEL GUESTS	35
-COHEN BUILDING SECURITY PROCEDURES FOR GUESTS	35
-GUEST BOOKING PROCEDURES	37
-GUIDELINES FOR HOSTING A LIVE GUEST ON VOA PROGRAMS	39

### DIGITAL MEDIA

-SOCIAL MEDIA	40
-USER-GENERATED CONTENT	44
-YOUTUBE GUIDELINES	46
-GOOGLE EARTH GUIDELINES	48
-REVEALING WEBSITES & ADDRESSES	49
-AFFILIATE/RECIPROCAL LINKS	49

### PHOTOGRAPHS

-GENERAL RULES	50
-TECHNICAL TIPS	52
-SENDING IN PHOTO FILES	51
-CAPTIONS	51
-EDITING PHOTOGRAPHS	52

### MUSIC 53

### AUDIO USAGE RIGHTS

-AUDIO CLIPS FROM TV NETWORKS	54
-------------------------------	----

### VIDEO USAGE RIGHTS

-COMMON FEATURES	56
-USING VIDEO FROM TV NEWS NETWORKS	57
-ABC NEWS	58
-AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE (AFP)	60
-ASSOCIATED PRESS (APTN)	61
-REUTERS	63
-NEWSMARKET	64

### VIDEO NEWS RELEASES (VNRs) 66

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b><u>DOMESTIC DISSEMINATION OF VOA PROGRAMMING</u></b>	
-DOCUMENTING SOURCE VIDEO IN DALETPLUS	67
-THE VOA DOT	69
-VOA DOT EDITING INSTRUCTIONS FOR FINAL CUT PRO	71
-VOA DOT EDITING INSTRUCTIONS FOR PREMIERE PRO	74
-ADDING THE DOT TO VIDEO IN DALETPLUS	76
<b><u>CORRECTIONS</u></b>	78
<b><u>LEGAL ISSUES</u></b>	
-FIREWALL	80
-COPYRIGHT & FAIR USE	80
-TRADEMARK	82
-FILMING IN PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE PLACES	82
-DEFAMATION/PRIVACY/FALSE LIGHT	83
-REPORTER'S PRIVILEGE & CONFIDENTIAL SOURCES	84
-SUBPOENAS OR REQUESTS FOR TESTIMONY OR DOCUMENTS	85
-REPORTING ON CLASSIFIED DOCUMENTS	85
-INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL BY VOA REPORTERS	85
<b><u>OUTSIDE ACTIVITIES</u></b>	
-VOA STAFF	86
-CONTRACTORS	87
-COMPETITIONS AND CASH AWARDS	88
<b><u>APPENDIX A - HOW-TO GUIDES</u></b>	
-RADIO PRODUCTION BASICS	89
-WORKING WITH MINICAM	90
-VIDEO EDIT SESSION BASICS	92
-TV CONTROL ROOM BASICS	95
-SKYPE	99
-ENCODING VIDEO WHEN UPLOADING TO PEACH	100
-DESKTOP ANIMATED GIF MAKER	101
<b><u>APPENDIX B – NATIONAL PARK SERVICE GUIDELINES</u></b>	107
<b><u>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</u></b>	112



## ***BEST PRACTICES GUIDE***

### **THE VOA CHARTER**

President Gerald Ford signed the VOA Charter ([Public Law 94-350](#)) into law on July 12, 1976. It protects the independence and integrity of VOA programming.

The long-range interests of the United States are served by communicating directly with the peoples of the world by radio. To be effective, the Voice of America must win the attention and respect of listeners. These principles will therefore govern Voice of America (VOA) broadcasts:

1. VOA will serve as a consistently reliable and authoritative source of news. VOA news will be accurate, objective, and comprehensive.
2. VOA will represent America, not any single segment of American society, and will therefore present a balanced and comprehensive projection of significant American thought and institutions.
3. VOA will present the policies of the United States clearly and effectively, and will also present responsible discussions and opinions on these policies.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)



## **INTRODUCTION**

### **THIS GUIDE APPLIES TO ALL EMPLOYEES, CONTRACTORS AND STRINGERS WHO GATHER, PRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE CONTENT FOR VOA**

The VOA Charter and Journalistic Code lay out in broad terms the journalistic standards that are universally recognized by VOA and other news organizations. The purpose of this Guide is to define in more detail the best practices that VOA employees should follow every day. And it is a **Guide** rather than a rulebook for one very good reason: although the increasingly changing news and information environment requires each of us to have a basic understanding of best practices, it goes without saying that every news event, every radio, TV and web piece, every program, every interview – that is, everything we cover, produce and disseminate – is unique and must be considered in context and on its own merits.

VOA employees are encouraged to bring issues not covered in this guide to the attention of their supervisors, Service Chiefs, Division Directors, VOA Senior Management or the Office of General Counsel as appropriate.

- There may be times when the News Center or a Language Service will be working on stories that allege wrongdoing. In those cases, the Office of General Counsel **must** be consulted.  
[\(Also see Legal Issues, p.80\)](#)

It is the responsibility of all staff members to understand these best practices as well as to consider one's own sense of right and wrong. Credibility is the most precious commodity of any news organization. The only way to achieve and maintain that credibility is for everyone within VOA to accept responsibility for it.

### **WHEN IN DOUBT, ASK - DO NOT ASSUME**

This guide will help, but should not replace, discussions of difficult issues with co-workers and supervisors. We grow as a news organization -- and policies are formed -- by asking questions and discussing the journalistic issues we face daily.

In addition to these guidelines, as federal employees, all VOA employees are required to comply with the policies laid out by the Office of Government Ethics and the BBG's Ethics Counsel:  
<http://inside.bbg.gov/offices/ethics/default.aspx>

The [Best Practices Guide](#) is a living document and is updated regularly on Sharepoint.

### **NEWS GATHERING**

#### **FAIRNESS, OBJECTIVITY & BALANCE**

- **When performing official duties, VOA broadcasters leave their personal political views behind.**  
All correspondents, producers, writers, editors and hosts should be aware of their own cultural values and personal beliefs and put them aside when preparing a report, conducting an interview, hosting a newscast or an interview program.
- The accuracy, quality and credibility of the Voice of America are its most important assets, and they rest on the audiences' perception of VOA as an objective and reliable source of world, regional and U.S. news and information.
- VOA journalists -- including writers, correspondents, stringers and program hosts -- should avoid at all times use of unattributed negative terms or labels to describe persons or organizations, except when the individuals and groups use those labels to describe themselves or their activities.
- Be fair to all of the people involved in a story. People who are presented in a negative light must be given a reasonable chance to present their side of the issue. If they refuse to comment, that should be noted. This demonstrates to our audience that we made the effort to be fair to all sides.
- A correspondent, producer or host should be well prepared with facts to balance the statement of one side or the other. Don't simply nod in acknowledgement when listening to someone's answer, as this could imply that you agree with that position.
- **THERE IS NO PLACE AT VOA FOR SO-CALLED ADVOCACY JOURNALISM – THE PRESENTATION OF NEWS FROM ONE PARTICULAR VIEWPOINT OR ONE SPECIFIC AGENDA**  
VOA journalists and all those preparing news and feature programming must avoid any action or statement that might convey the appearance of partisanship.
- VOA employees should carry out their work with the utmost professionalism. This applies equally to your work in the Cohen Building and in the field. Professionalism and respect for your colleagues is absolutely vital to maintaining best practices. Whether in a newsroom, studio, control room or in the field, pursuit of a story is not an excuse for arrogance.

### **BIAS & DIVERSITY**

One of the key areas for ensuring fairness, objectivity and balance in our reporting is to stay clear of bias or preconceived notions. Some examples:

- Avoid stereotyping by race, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, geography, sexual orientation, disability, social status or physical appearance.
- The words we use in our scripts should be precise. For example, avoid the casual use of words and phrases like “illegal immigrant,” “Third World” and “terrorist,” or the assumption that “fundamentalism” equals violence.
- Don’t include a description of an individual unless it is essential to the story. If a description doesn’t serve an editorial purpose, it may perpetuate negative stereotypes, possibly anger some members of a community, and in all likelihood doesn’t effectively advance the story.
- Coverage of events in a gay community should not be automatically linked to coverage of HIV/AIDS, because HIV/AIDS is not exclusive to gay communities.
- Correspondents, producers, video, photo and web editors must understand the possibility of racial or ethnic stereotyping when selecting images to include in stories. For example, in a story about unwed mothers in the U.S., should every mother shown be African American? If using file video about drug arrests in the U.S., should every person shown be African American or Hispanic? The clear answer is no.
- This [link](#) leads to guidance from the AP on writing about the “alt-right.” All VOA staff should read the guidance and follow it in our own reporting.

### U.S. ELECTIONS

#### THE HATCH ACT

The Hatch Act is a federal law; its main provision is to prohibit government employees in the Executive Branch from engaging in partisan political activity. The Office of General Counsel has provided some basic guidelines regarding political activity by VOA employees.

Employees **MAY NOT** engage in political activity while:

- On duty
- In any government office
- Using a government vehicle
- Wearing an official uniform or insignia

In addition, the following political activities are prohibited while **on duty**:

- Wearing campaign buttons and/or t-shirts
- Displaying campaign posters in the workplace
- Using **AGENCY** e-mail accounts, social media accounts or blogs to support or criticize a candidate or political position
- Using agency computers to make online campaign donations
- Using screensavers supporting or criticizing a candidate or political position
- Using agency-supplied smartphones to support or criticize a candidate or political position

**NOTE: You are on duty when you are teleworking.**

**IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT THESE GUIDELINES,  
PLEASE CONTACT THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL AT 202-203-4550**

#### POLITICAL REPORTING ON VOA WEBSITES

Reporting on U.S. politics can be a delicate balancing act for VOA. This is especially true because of the provisions of the Hatch Act.

In the case of VOA, the Office of Special Counsel took note of our reporting on U.S. political campaigns. The OSC's concern was that as a federal agency VOA's reporting should abide by the letter and spirit of the Hatch Act. In addition, the OSC's noted that a federal agency's website "...must not create the appearance that the agency, and in turn the federal government, is politically biased."

In response, the BBG's Office of General Counsel made the case that the VOA Charter lawfully empowers the agency to "...present the policies of the United States clearly and effectively, and will also present responsible discussions and opinions on these policies."

In its final ruling, the Office of Special Counsel said that by balancing the requirements of the Hatch Act with the realities of news reporting, it is permissible for VOA to include links to a candidate or party's website in a web story if the website is source material for the article.

So if any VOANews.com website is reporting on a GOP or Democratic presidential debate and the story includes a link to the campaign website of one candidate, we must include the campaign websites of all the candidates who are taking part in the debate. The same holds true if we are reporting on candidates for the Senate, House and for governors.

We follow the same guidelines during the final presidential campaign period, with regard to a sitting president and the opposing candidate/s. But in that case, the link for the sitting president **MUST BE TO THE CAMPAIGN'S WEBSITE, AND NOT TO WWW.WHITEHOUSE.GOV.**

In other words, when reporting on U.S. political campaigns, all VOANews.com websites should follow the same journalistic balance and fairness that we strive for in all of our daily reporting.

For more complete guidance on the Hatch Act, please follow this link to the Office of General Counsel's Ethics page: <http://inside.bbg.gov/offices/ethics/default.aspx>

### **SENSITIVE & GRAPHIC MATERIAL**

Newsworthiness should be the primary determining factor in deciding whether to air or publish audio or video that may be offensive to our audiences. Some examples include murder scenes, acts of war, acts of nature, faces of victims.

**IN THESE CASES, THE BEST PRACTICES EDITOR AND/OR VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT WILL DETERMINE WHETHER THE MATERIAL IS GRAPHIC ENOUGH TO REQUIRE A MANDATORY WARNING AND WILL ISSUE A HOUSE-WIDE NOTE DETAILING THE LANGUAGE OF THE WARNING.**

In most cases, VOA should not broadcast or publish the moment of death in a suicide, execution, or any similar event. Exceptions might include circumstances where an event is being covered live and the action is unexpected or spontaneous, or where the event is so highly newsworthy as to warrant broadcast or posting.

If it happens during live coverage, explain to the audience what has happened as quickly as possible, and move on.

[\*\(Also see Covering and Reporting Suicides, p. 16\)\*](#)

The broadcasting or posting of graphic, profane, racist or other objectionable language should be determined if it is essential to the newsworthiness of the story.

Material of a sexual nature is also a cause for concern, as people of all ages listen to, watch and read VOA news stories. Questions to be asked: Is the material essential to the story? Should video be digitized in some way so as not to be offensive? Would you want your children to see such images?

If it's determined the material will be broadcast, a mandatory warning needs to be provided far enough ahead of the story to make sure children do not see or hear the material. If the material is posted online, it should not be on the homepage. Rather, a link to the story should appear on the homepage, with a warning that sexual/graphic images are included with the story.

YouTube has a [blurring tool](#) that lets you blur any part of a video, including moving objects.

[\*\(Also see YouTube Guidelines, p. 46\)\*](#)

**THE DECISION TO AIR OR POST IMAGES OR AUDIO OF A SUICIDE, EXECUTION OR SIMILAR EVENT WILL BE MADE BY A SUPERVISOR, THE BEST PRACTICES EDITOR AND/OR VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT.**

The following sections explain these guidelines in greater detail.

[\*Return to Table of Contents\*](#)

### **COVERING WAR**

Given the many nationalities and ethnicities that VOA reaches via radio, TV and online, it's imperative that we follow some basic guidelines in covering and reporting conflicts.

#### **LOADED WORDS**

VOA should never use "we," "us," "our" or "they," "them" and "their" in reporting about any side in a conflict. VOA practice is to name the country, as in "U.S. troops" or "Pakistani troops."

No side in a conflict should be referred to as "the enemy," or any territory as "enemy territory" in copy or in graphics. The only exception is if you are directly quoting someone making those references.

Referring to attacks as "punishing," "brutal" or "successful" can imply that VOA is taking sides. Again, the only exception would be if you're directly quoting someone making those claims.

#### **REPORTING COMBAT ACTIVITY**

As a rule, VOA should not report that warplanes or missiles are approaching a target. When an attack is underway, VOA will report it:

- If we're able to independently confirm that bombs/missiles have hit the ground; or
- If the country being attacked confirms it's being attacked; or
- If an official of an attacking country directly tells VOA that an attack is happening; or
- If VOA observes the attack first-hand

In all of the above cases, attribution **MUST** be as clear and as specific as possible.

[\*\(Also see Attribution, p. 20\)\*](#)

When information originates only from state-owned media, we should make that clear to audiences the entire time the information is used.

[\*\(Also see Using Material From State-Run Media, p. 29\)\*](#)

If VOA's reporting is being censored or shut down and/or VOA's movements are being restricted, that should also be reported.

### **COVERING TERRORISM**

Generally, terrorism is defined as "the use of violence and threats to intimidate or coerce, especially for political purposes." Terrorists use violence against (often innocent) individuals to advance their political or ideological agenda. "Terrorism" and "terrorist" carry a lot of weight, and they should be used with extreme care. It is up to editors to determine if they are most appropriate terms to use.

VOA will report the actions of terrorists (bombings, shootings, hostage takings) fully, accurately and without taking sides, as we would cover any other news story. Wherever possible, we should also provide appropriate coverage of the victims, their injuries and their families.

We will provide our audiences with informative analyses of terrorist organizations, their ideology and history, but at the same time VOA must never suggest that reporting the context in which terrorism takes place justifies terrorism in any way.

### **VIDEO & AUDIO OF TERRORISTS, HOSTAGES OR PRISONERS**

Statements from, interviews with, or video of terrorists, hostages or prisoners of war should be judged on their journalistic merits before making a decision on usage.

Some guidelines for making decisions about using video of this kind:

#### ➤ **TERRORISTS**

- Although we will report on the actions of terrorists, **VOA SHOULD NOT BE USED AS A PLATFORM TO SPREAD THEIR MESSAGES.**
- This means that in almost all cases, VOA will not air a terrorist message in its entirety. Senior VOA managers will decide what portions, if any, of the message will be cleared for broadcast and websites based upon its news value.

#### ➤ **HOSTAGES/PRISONERS**

- Pay close attention to whether a hostage or prisoner appears to have been mistreated, is bound in handcuffs or shackles, or has a hood on his/her head.
- In the case of a prisoner's statement, VOA will take special measures to ensure that the individual POW identities are not revealed (i.e. facial blurring, voice alteration, use of pseudonym or nom du guerre).
- Senior VOA managers will decide whether to show video of this nature.

#### ➤ **FULL DISCLOSURE**

- When applicable, all TV and radio scripts and web copy **MUST** state that VOA has not been able to independently verify the source of the video or audio. Should VOA receive the material directly from a group, army or government that should be noted in the script and web copy as well.

#### ➤ **LEGAL ISSUES**

- From the office of General Counsel: The Geneva Convention relative to Treatment of Prisoners of War requires POWs to "at all times be protected, particularly against acts of violence or intimidation and against insults and public curiosity." However, the convention does not define what "public curiosity" means. Nevertheless, the U.S. is a party to the convention and it generally applies it at all times to the maximum extent practicable.

**PLEASE REMEMBER THAT THESE ARE BASIC GUIDELINES.  
EACH INSTANCE IS UNIQUE, AND WHAT IS DECIDED FOR ONE SITUATION WILL  
NOT NECESSARILY BE THE PROPER ACTION FOR THE NEXT SITUATION.  
ALWAYS CONSULT WITH VOA SENIOR MANAGERS BEFORE MAKING ANY  
DECISIONS TO AIR OR PUBLISH MATERIAL OF THIS NATURE.**

[Return to Table of Contents](#)



### **COVERING CRIMINAL ACTIVITY**

VOA staff **must not** interfere in any way with ongoing law enforcement activities. If some orders seem designed to manage or deny news coverage, VOA reporters, producers and photographers at the scene should protest and notify senior management and the Office of General Counsel as quickly as possible. If necessary, the agency will take appropriate legal action to protect access to the news.

There may be occasions where VOA staff has the opportunity to accompany law enforcement on arrests or investigations. These situations can present sensitive legal questions, including trespass and invasion of privacy. These activities should only be undertaken with approval in advance from your supervisor, VOA senior management and the Office of General Counsel. It's important to understand that even though law enforcement may go onto private property, it **DOES NOT** mean that journalists are exempt from trespassing.

[\*\(Also see Filming In Public vs. Private Places, p. 82\)\*](#)

Keep in mind that cameras, microphones and lights can cause relatively passive bystanders to “put on a show.” All VOA staff should use their own best judgment and discretion in these situations; where possible, you should avoid any action that could possibly influence the event.

At the same time, VOA staff covering conflicts, protests or demonstrations should not take one side or another.

Neither the police nor demonstration leaders should be a reporter's only sources for accurate reporting of causes, issues or casualties.

### **HOSTAGE/BARRICADE SITUATIONS**

Coverage of these situations, whether in the U.S. or abroad, presents difficult challenges and usually requires special care. No single statement or guideline can begin to cover every situation that we may report on. The following are intended to guide you in exercising your best judgment.

- The event should be characterized as accurately as possible. Before labeling an event a “riot” or “terrorism,” or referring to someone as a “terrorist,” you should discuss it with your senior editors and managers, and if necessary, with News Center managers or the Best Practices Editor.
- Keep in mind the possibility that a hostage taker may be able to see, hear, or try to manipulate VOA's coverage. Consider whether describing or showing the actions or movements of law enforcement officers could tip off the hostage taker or barricaded person.
- **DO NOT** put yourself in a position where you could be playing a role in the incident. VOA staff should **NEVER** attempt to contact a hostage or hostage taker. This could endanger a hostage and interfere with rescue efforts. It could also possibly subject you to criminal liability. You should not solicit telephone calls from within a hostage or barricade situation or from nearby homes or businesses.

- When reporting on these situations, avoid speculation about the hostage taker, his or her motives, demands, or state of mind. If a guest speculates about these issues, point out that VOA has not verified what the guest has just said, and move the conversation away from such speculation.

### **NAMING PEOPLE INVOLVED IN CRIMES**

Be precise with the language used in reporting about crime or demonstrations.

#### **VICTIMS**

VOA should not name rape victims or other victims of sexual assaults or molestations. These crimes carry a stigma for the victims, and victims should be allowed to decide whether they want to be identified. Be cautious in providing descriptive details so that the person is not inadvertently identified.

There are special difficulties in identifying minors (under 18 years of age) who have been kidnapped or are alleged victims of sexual crimes. In the case of a kidnapping, news outlets may identify minors to help them be found. However, if we learn that a kidnapped minor has been sexually assaulted, the responsible action is to stop both naming the individual and showing his/her picture.

### **EXCEPTIONS TO THE ABOVE MUST BE APPROVED IN ADVANCE BY A SUPERVISOR AND THE BEST PRACTICES EDITOR**

#### **SUSPECTS**

VOA does not identify suspects of criminal investigations who have not been charged or arrested. This has become more difficult in the U.S. in recent years, when law enforcement officials refer to someone as “a person of interest.” This is not a legal term, and VOA should not use it because it can place a person under increasing suspicion and may result in unintended consequences for the individual.

The essential source for identifying the status of a person or group charged or arrested is law enforcement or the court system, **NOT** a supposedly “informed individual.” When someone has been charged with a crime, use caution in choosing language to refer to the accused so as not to imply guilt or innocence. Similarly, if someone identified as a suspect ultimately is not charged with a crime, we must make that known as soon as possible in a follow-up story.

#### **NAMING OR IDENTIFYING MINORS INVOLVED IN CRIMINAL ACTIVITY**

In addition to the guidance above regarding minors who are victims, VOA should not name, show video or play audio of a minor who is a suspect in a crime, or is arrested and charged with a crime. However, exceptions may be made if a minor is charged as an adult, but in this case we should wait until the accused has been formally charged, not just arrested.

There may be other exceptions, such as if a minor is charged with murder or another heinous crime. In some cases, local media may have already widely reported the minor’s identity.

### **BEFORE DECIDING TO IDENTIFY A MINOR, PLEASE CONSULT A SUPERVISOR AND THE BEST PRACTICES EDITOR**

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### **INTERVIEWING & VIDEOTAPING MINORS**

Interviewing minors, whether for audio or video, can present special issues, particularly where wrongdoing, criminal activity, private, potentially embarrassing or other sensitive situations are involved. In these situations you **MUST** obtain permission from a parent or adult guardian. Permission should be in writing, where possible. [You can find the release form for minors on Sharepoint.](#)

If that isn't possible, recording audio or video of the parent/guardian giving consent is acceptable.

Generally, minors can be interviewed and recorded, without permission, on non-controversial subjects such as reaction to a movie, talking about a favorite food, going back to school on the first day of the school year.

When recording audio or shooting video at a school in the U.S., ask whether a school has sent out what are known as "negative releases" to parents. These are notifications that a media crew will be visiting a school, asking parents to return the notice only if they **DO NOT** want their child to participate in interviews or tapings. In this situation you may not need additional permission.

In a breaking news situation, provided the minor is out of harm's way, it may be permissible – without parental approval -- to interview the minor if he/she is a witness or has information about the event. However, keep in mind that the minor should not be asked private, personal or other potentially embarrassing questions, should not be asked to name suspects, and is freely willing to talk.

In all cases, ABC NewsOne, AFP, APTN and Reuters video should be carefully screened to follow the same guidelines.

### **COVERING & REPORTING SUICIDES**

Deciding whether to report the name of a suicide victim is a delicate and difficult matter. Did the victim commit suicide publicly in order to achieve notoriety? Will reporting the person's name encourage others who might be contemplating suicide and looking for recognition? Will reporting the victim's name bring unwanted attention to family or friends? Keep in mind that by most accounts, people who commit suicide are in a disturbed or distressed mental state. Consequently, there are no clear or easy answers to these questions.

If the person is **NOT** a public figure, there should be no overwhelming editorial reason to report the name. Ask the question: Is the suicide tangential to the story, or does it have a larger impact on the story or participants in the story?

#### **BEFORE REPORTING THE NAME OF A SUICIDE VICTIM, PLEASE CONSULT YOUR SUPERVISOR OR THE BEST PRACTICES EDITOR.**

There may be a situation when a VOA staffer in the field is in a position to intervene in a situation where injury or the loss of life is a very real outcome. When a person decides to take his or her own life as a protest, there is no expectation that a journalist will intervene, nor is there a VOA policy on whether you should or should not intervene. It is up to the individual on the scene to use his or her own best judgment.

[\(Also see Sensitive & Graphic Material, p. 11\)](#)

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### **BREAKING NEWS**

Although breaking news situations don't often present themselves in VOA's daily coverage, there are certain key points to follow when putting that type of information on the air or online.

Producers should use caution before airing live and/or unedited material which may be excessively graphic in visuals or language. Ask the question: Does the news value of the material warrant airing it without reviewing it first?

### **CONSULT WITH YOUR SUPERVISOR AND THE BEST PRACTICES EDITOR IF POTENTIALLY GRAPHIC MATERIAL IS GOING TO BE AIRED OR POSTED ONLINE SIGHT UNSEEN OR WITHOUT A DETAILED DESCRIPTION.**

When airing or posting such material, alert your listeners, viewers and readers as to the nature of the material.

### **REPORTING CROWD ESTIMATES**

When covering rallies or demonstrations, it's important to attribute estimates of size. Organizing groups or official agencies which provide them may have reasons to inflate or downplay the numbers. Where non-official estimates such as "hundreds of thousands" appear to be guesses or inflated a correspondent, producer or photographer on the scene may be able to provide an objective perspective on crowd size. As an example, they can say the crowd is standing shoulder to shoulder for four blocks. If a correspondent, producer or photographer is not covering the event, we should look to the wire services for their reporting on the size of the crowd, keeping in mind VOA's sourcing policies.

[\*\(Also see Attribution, p. 20\)\*](#)

### **STAGING & RE-CREATIONS**

- **VOA REPORTS THE NEWS**
- **WE DO NOT CREATE OR MANIPULATE NEWS STORIES**
- **STAGING A NEWS EVENT OR CONTROLLING HOW IT TURNS OUT -- WHETHER BY ENCOURAGEMENT, PROPS OR PAYMENT -- IS UNACCEPTABLE**

When shooting video with the subject of a story to explain something that happened, don't ask the person to do things they normally don't do. For instance: It's acceptable to shoot video of a family that goes to the cemetery once a week to place flowers on the grave of a family member, but you should explain in the track that this is something the family normally does. However, if you ask someone to go to the cemetery and lay flowers on the grave of a family member, you should explain that as well.

Keep in mind, though, that the more you direct people – having them do things specifically for the camera – the more time you'll have to spend explaining that to the audience.

[\*Return to Table of Contents\*](#)

### **USING VOA EMPLOYEES OR RELATIVES FOR STORIES**

Generally speaking, VOA employees should not be used in radio, TV or web pieces outside of their official capacity. In most cases it is also preferable not to use the relatives or friends of VOA employees. While they may be perfect subjects to help illustrate stories, there is always the possibility of the appearance of a conflict.

However exceptions can be granted; for instance, if a relative or friend is prominent or expert in his or her own right. When in doubt, consult with your supervisor or the Best Practices Editor.

### **WRITING**

Anyone writing for VOA on any platform – radio, TV or the Web – should be familiar with the VOA Stylebook. The Stylebook covers grammar, spelling, definitions and explanations of commonly used terms, as well as the proper use of American English.

**Some of the key points of the Stylebook as they relate to best practices are included in this Guide, but every VOA employee should read and become familiar with the Stylebook.**

[The Stylebook is maintained by the News Center and can be found on Sharepoint.](#)

VOA copy should be simple and straightforward. We are not writing treaties or newspaper stories. For example, use “stop the fighting” rather than “achieve the cessation of hostilities.” Most of our writing is for people whose first language is not English, so avoid excessively difficult words, and explain them when you must use them.

Avoid colloquialisms and jargon, which may be difficult to translate and are not easily understood by foreign audiences. When used, as in a direct quotation, provide an alternative in parentheses to assist language services.

- The convicted hacker said writing the virus was “a piece of cake” (very easy).
- He spoke “off the cuff” (without notes).
- The House Minority Whip (the number two Republican/Democrat in the House).
- He made a killing (made a lot of money) in the stock market.

Words such as “biggest,” “highest,” “first” and others like them should be used judiciously because they often turn out to be incorrect. Ask yourself whether the fact that something is first is truly significant. Avoid superlatives such as “most famous” or “greatest,” which often represent value judgments. Descriptive and colorful words are encouraged, but use caution. Something that is “unique” is the only one of its kind. A thing or event cannot be “somewhat unique.” Other words describing extreme situations should also raise flags for writers and editors, and should be scrutinized to ensure they are justified. “Trouble” in a city does not necessarily mean it is in “chaos.” “Asking urgently” is not necessarily “pleading” or “begging.” If a situation is “desperate” today, what will it be tomorrow when things get worse?

It is acceptable, however, to use words like these when you’re quoting someone directly.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### ATTRIBUTION

#### SIMPLY STATED, WE GIVE CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE.

Aside from the material provided by our own correspondents and stringers, VOA reports news from a number of different outlets: the Associated Press, Reuters and Agence France Presse, as well as from newspapers, television news networks and official news agencies of other nations. In addition, we have the resources of the U.S. government's Open Source Center, which provides translations of broadcasts and other news information put out by other countries.

Story information can also come from press releases put out by corporations or private groups such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs). When using press releases, they must be identified as such, and if applicable, they should be counter-balanced.

When quoting news stories, editorials or opinion pieces, it is preferable to include VOA's own reporting to provide a more complete view of the issue. Simply adding a disclaimer saying that the excerpts come from a media outlet or NGO does not absolve VOA from possible claims of plagiarism and/or copyright infringement.

One method of providing attribution is in the use of block quotes. In the example below, *VOX.com* provided a hyperlink to a *Washington Post* story about "Pizzagate," but also included part of the Post's story in a "block," shown by the solid bar on the left. This is acceptable for use on voanews.com websites, but it should not be used repeatedly.

The conspiracy theory, known as "Pizzagate," apparently connected Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign to a nonexistent child sex ring at the Comet Ping Pong pizzeria, **Faiz Siddiqui and Susan Svrluga reported for the Washington Post:**

The restaurant's owner and employees were threatened on social media in the days before the election after fake news stories circulated claiming that then-Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton and her campaign chief were running a child sex ring from the restaurant's backrooms. Even Michael Flynn, a retired general whom President-elect Trump has tapped to advise him on national security, shared stories about another anti-Clinton conspiracy theory involving pedophilia. None of them were true. But the fake stories and threats persisted, some even aimed at children of Comet Ping Pong employees and patrons. The restaurant's owner was forced to contact the FBI, local police, Facebook and other social-media platforms in an effort to remove the articles.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

There are times when the attribution can be left unstated because the source of a particular statement is both obvious and authoritative.

**An example of over-attribution:**

*The U.S. space agency NASA says astronauts aboard the space shuttle “Discovery” performed a second spacewalk today.*

**It’s better, and easier, to write:**

*Astronauts aboard the U.S space shuttle “Discovery” performed a second spacewalk today.*

### **SOURCING**

Proper sourcing is a fundamental element of good journalism. If two (or 20) sources quote a militia leader as saying the hostages have been released, all we know is what the militia leader says, NOT whether the hostages are actually free.

### **DOUBLE SOURCING**

VOA generally requires double sourcing of **unattributed** information. Look carefully at your sources, and make sure that two separate originating news organizations are reporting the information. For instance, if Reuters and AP are both reporting from the scene of a story, those are two valid double sources. However, it is **NOT** valid double sourcing if a newspaper and a TV news network are carrying a story that they’re both attributing to the AP.

Once you have two valid separate sources, you should go through both stories and identify the facts that are common to both. These are the facts that you can consider to be verified. If one story has facts that are not contained in the other, please check with the News Center to see whether they can provide verification.

### **SINGLE SOURCING**

There will be instances when use of a properly identified single source is permitted.

For instance: on a breaking news story, AP or Reuters quotes a single source – a police official, a government spokesperson – VOA copy will say that AP or Reuters is reporting the information.

### **IN THOSE CASES OUR COPY WILL SAY THAT THERE ARE VARIOUS REPORTS OF AN INCIDENT AND THAT VOA IS WORKING TO CONFIRM THE INFORMATION.**

There will be times when multiple news outlets report information from unnamed sources during a breaking story, as with the Boston Marathon bombing in April 2013.

As happened with Boston – when multiple news organizations said there was an arrest and VOA reported that information – we will later find out that that information is incorrect. In that case VOA will issue a correction as quickly as possible across all platforms.

[\*\(Also see Corrections, p. 78\)\*](#)

[\*Return to Table of Contents\*](#)



Information that comes directly from the U.S. government – the White House, State Department, Pentagon or Congress – is considered valid on its own, **but must still be attributed**. Another accepted use of a single source would be monitoring a live event such as a presidential news conference.

Information in News Center stories is already double-sourced and does not require additional sourcing.

### WIKIPEDIA

#### WIKIPEDIA SHOULD NOT BE CONSIDERED OR USED AS A PRIMARY SOURCE OF INFORMATION

- There have been a number of incidents where material posted on Wikipedia has not been verified or has proven to be incorrect. Any information found on Wikipedia should be confirmed with other, more reliable sources, or with Central News.

### OPENSOURCE

- The U.S. government-funded website [OpenSource](#) is an important tool for finding source information. VOA uses the text material in OpenSource as a second source of news and information.

However, **VOA DOES NOT HAVE ACCESS** to the audio and video which OpenSource posts from news organizations -- BBC, Sky News and Al Jazeera English, for example -- with whom VOA **does not have contractual agreements**.

### **CONFIDENTIAL SOURCES**

Whenever possible, a source should be “on the record” – someone who is willing to be named and quoted – but journalists routinely rely on sources who won’t go on the record. If a source refuses to be named, the information he or she provides should be characterized in other ways, as clearly as possible.

In briefings, particularly in Washington, sources will usually specify the attribution:

- “A senior administration official, or
- “An individual familiar with the secretary’s thinking”

In interviews, sourcing is often a matter of negotiation, but a request for confidentiality should come from the source and not be suggested by the correspondent or producer.

Before using an unnamed source, writers and editors must be certain that there is no other way to get the information on the record. Once you agree to treat a source anonymously, you still should include the fullest possible description of that source’s position: “a senior Pentagon official” is better than “a U.S. official,” but better still might be “a senior Pentagon official involved in planning the operation.”

### **AN UNNAMED SOURCE MUST HAVE VERIFIABLE AND FIRST-HAND KNOWLEDGE OF THE STORY.**

You must be convinced the source knows what he/she is talking about, and you should consider asking for actual evidence to bolster the source’s claim or comment. When contacting a source about third-party information, be sure that the source is actually confirming the information from his or her knowledge of a particular situation, and is not simply hearing it from you and agreeing that it is plausible.

You should be willing to tell our audience why the source cannot be named. For example, you can say, “The source’s name is being withheld to protect against possible reprisals.”

Because even sources who don’t want their names used do have names, the use of phrases such as “unnamed sources” or “unidentified sources” may be confusing. Avoid other extremely vague terms such as “informed sources,” “authoritative sources,” “well-placed sources,” “reliable sources.”

A story that relies on the use of confidential sources should be of public concern. We are not interested in “gotcha” stories just for the sake of the “gotcha,” nor are we interested in scoring scoops just for the sake of being first (and possibly being wrong).

When writing Web headlines or SMS, use caution to qualify controversial information even in this shorter format. “All Hostages Released in Standoff” is quite different from “Rebel Leader Says All Hostages Released.”

The following characterizations may be helpful in establishing with a source what level of confidentiality you have agreed to. In all cases it is always best to clarify with the source how the information may be used:

- **ON THE RECORD**  
All information is suitable for publication and attributable to the source by name and title.
- **OFF THE RECORD**  
Material that is “off the record” is not directly usable, but the information can be used to focus the direction of a story. Off-the-record material may also be a valid second source to confirm information obtained elsewhere.
- **ON BACKGROUND**  
“On background” is generally understood to mean the information given can be used, provided it is attributed to a generic source. “A senior administration official called the election flawed.”
- **DEEP BACKGROUND**  
Information obtained on “deep background” is normally provided with the understanding that it will not be sourced directly in any way. A suitable formulation might be, “It was learned that the delegates agreed to a second meeting on Tuesday.”
- **PUBLICATION OF A SIGNIFICANT STORY BASED UPON A SINGLE SOURCE WHO WILL NOT ALLOW HIS OR HER NAME TO BE USED MUST ALWAYS BE APPROVED IN ADVANCE BY VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT.**
- **UPON REQUEST, DISCLOSURE OF A SOURCE’S IDENTITY TO VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT AND TO THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL MAY BE REQUIRED TO CLEAR THE SOURCED INFORMATION FOR AIR.**
- **WHEN DISCUSSING CONFIDENTIALITY WITH A SOURCE, IT MAY BE ADVISABLE TO EXPLAIN THE POSSIBILITY OF THIS LIMITED DISCLOSURE WITHIN VOA. REFUSAL TO DISCLOSE THE SOURCE MAY RESULT IN THE SOURCE’S INFORMATION NOT BEING USED BY VOA.**

### **RUMORS & SPECULATION**

VOA avoids the use of rumors and speculation in news items. However, this may need to be carefully re-evaluated on a case-by-case basis in instances where a rumor or speculation takes on a life of its own. In such cases, in general, editors should allow responsible officials to respond to the rumors or speculation and use this comment as our entry to the story. Without such an official comment, avoid doing a story unless there are a number of reports in major news outlets. VOA does not want to be the first to publicize a rumor or speculation.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

**PLAGIARISM**

**PLAGIARISM IS ILLEGAL AND UNETHICAL AND STRIKES AT THE VERY HEART OF OUR JOURNALISTIC MISSION.**

**IT CAN COST THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE AGENCY ITS CREDIBILITY AND REPUTATION, AND WILL NOT BE TOLERATED.**

**WE DO NOT PRESENT OTHERS' WORK AS OUR OWN**

**ALLEGATIONS OF PLAGIARISM WILL BE FULLY INVESTIGATED, AND STAFFERS WILL BE NOTIFIED OF ANY SUCH ALLEGATIONS.**

**PLAGIARISM MAY RESULT IN DISCIPLINARY ACTION, UP TO AND INCLUDING REMOVAL FROM FEDERAL SERVICE**

### **CREDITING THE NEWS AGENCIES**

To make sure that our best practices are in sync with our news agency contracts, below is guidance on how VOA should credit the agencies across all platforms. Note that each platform has different guidelines, and everyone should be aware of the differences, especially if you're producing a story that will appear on all platforms.

#### **RADIO**

- AFP, AP and Reuters have all confirmed that VOA radio broadcasts can use their news wire copy verbatim without verbal attribution or credit. All three agencies consider this to be “standard use” of their material.
- However, if one wire service has an exclusive interview or information that other news organizations do not have, we should give that wire service verbal credit in the broadcast.

#### **TELEVISION**

- Although the VOA Dot is burned into agency video as it is being recorded, it is preferable that all video pieces -- whether they are produced by the News Center or a Language Service -- should note in the DaletPlus Asset Management Form the time segments where ABC NewsOne, AFP, AP and Reuters video are used. That is our way of tracking/crediting them for the usage, and for the Senior Archivists to know whether the material is worth keeping.  
([Also see Domestic Dissemination of VOA Programming, p. 67](#) and [The VOA Dot, p. 69](#))
- Verbal credit to the news agencies is not required for video reports, **unless the video is exclusive and is noted as such in the script.**  
([Also see Crediting Other Sources, p. 27](#))

#### **WEB**

It has long been the practice in print to credit the wire services when using their stories in whole or in part. All VOA websites and social media pages should follow this practice.

- [How the credit looks when using a single news agency's wire story in full, with the agency's name at the top.](#)
- [How the credit looks when using more than one agency's wire story, with the agencies' names at the bottom.](#)
- [Agency photos used on VOA websites and on agency-maintained social media pages must include a captioned credit to the agency.](#)

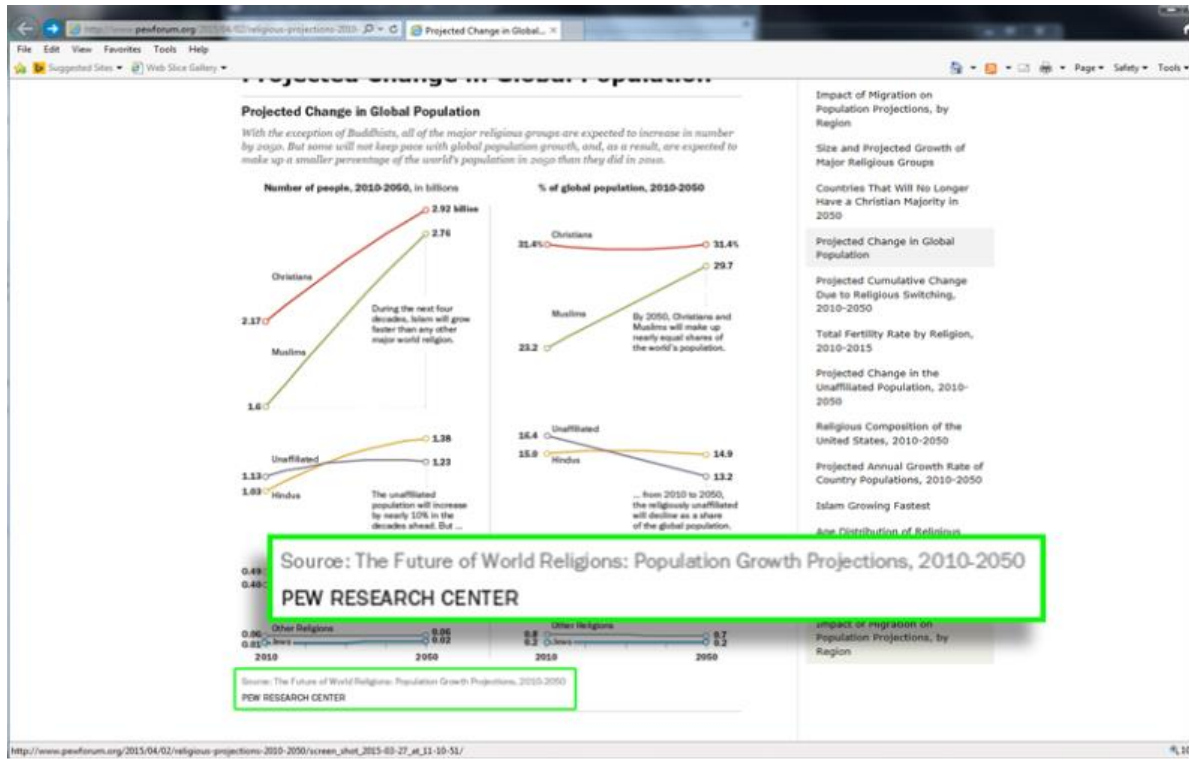
[Return to Table of Contents](#)

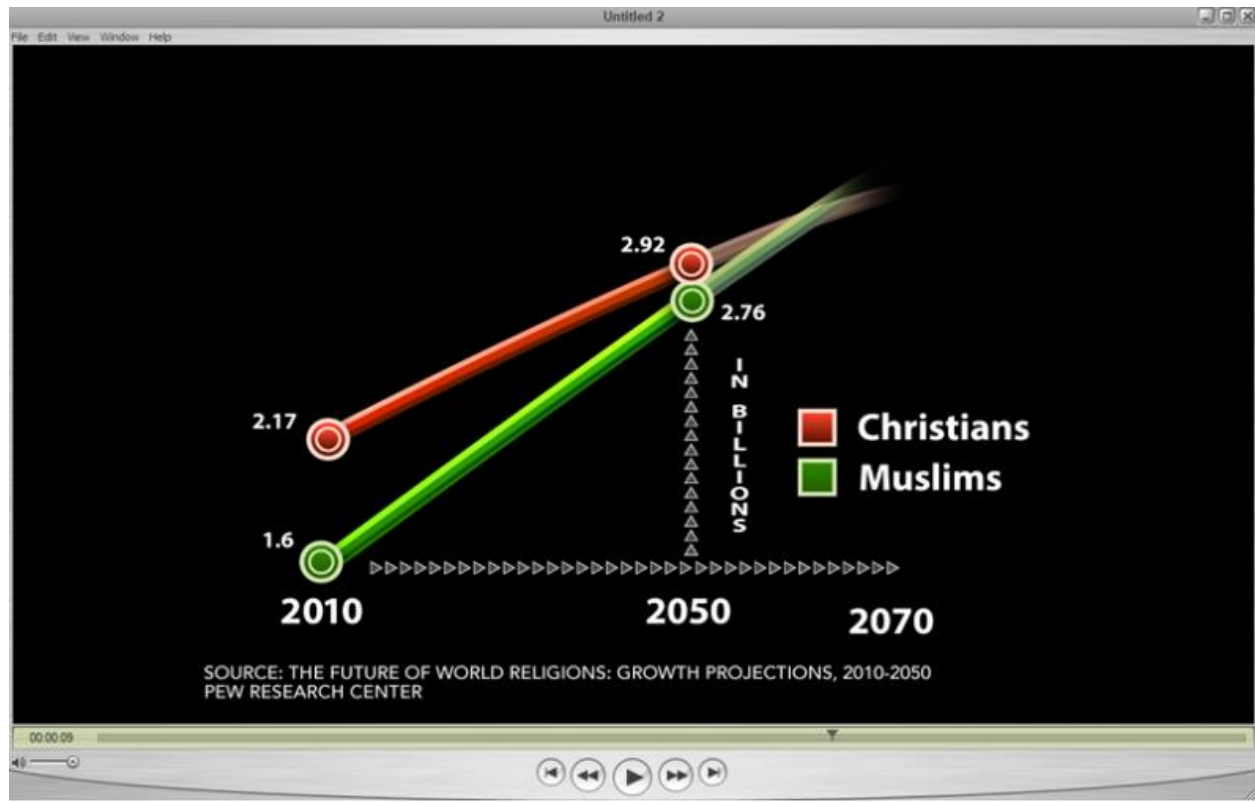
## CREDITING OTHER SOURCES

In the course of our reporting, we often will cite information or statistics that come from think tanks, NGOs, or another government agency. Aside from crediting those groups in scripts, they must also be credited in full-screen graphics, whether as a stand-alone page or within a video package.

## FULL SCREEN GRAPHICS

- While styles and looks may differ for various Language Services, the basic procedure should be the same.
- Any time a graphic is based on information or statistics that are not originally generated by VOA, a small info source attribution needs to be included on the graphic. See the photos below and on the next page, identifying the correct attribution.



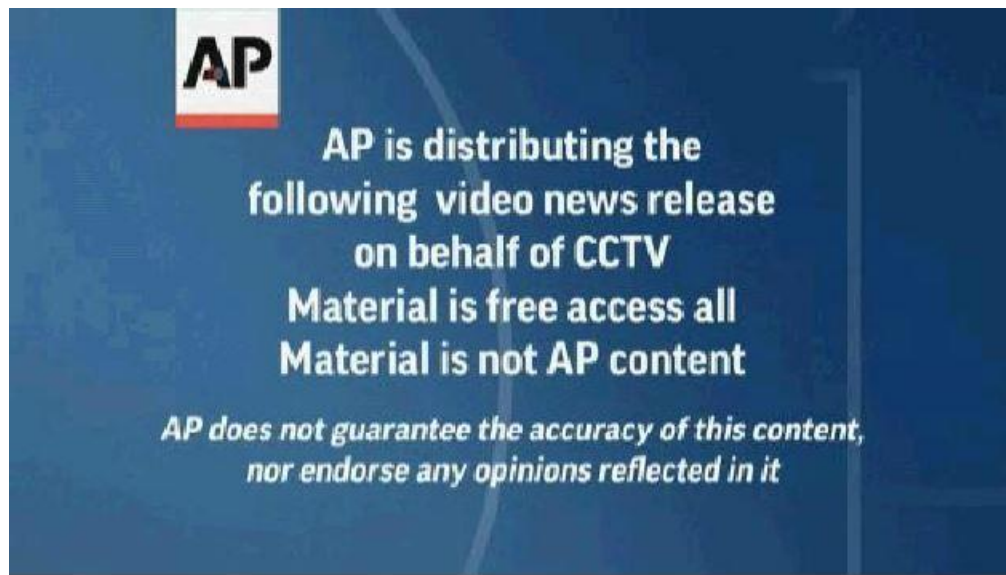


### **USING MATERIAL FROM STATE-RUN MEDIA**

Any country's official news agency is a valid single source **when referring to government policy or news events in that country**. In these cases VOA must identify the news agency in its copy.

Note the distinction, **in that country**. For example, a report by China's official news agency about North Korea would not be a valid single source.

In addition, VOA's newsfeed providers AP and Reuters have agreements in place to distribute material provided by CCTV, Chinese State Television. AP includes a disclaimer for all CCTV material, as seen in this screen grab:



Reuters does not provide a video disclaimer for CCTV material, but this notice appears at the bottom of every script Reuters provides from CCTV:

**© Copyright CCTV. The content in this story, including video and script is provided by China Central Television (CCTV) and is copyright CCTV. Thomson Reuters does not guarantee the accuracy of, or endorse the views or opinions given in, this package. THIS STATEMENT SUPERSEDES ALL OTHER STATEMENTS RELATING TO COPYRIGHT ATTACHED TO THIS CONTENT.**

While the video that CCTV and other state-controlled media outlets like RT or Press TV produces often comes from areas where coverage is otherwise unavailable, VOA policy for using content provided by state-controlled media is that it should be reviewed by senior editors in a service, by Central News or by the agency's Best Practices Editor before any decision is made about airing or publishing the video.

State-run media material that is cleared for broadcast or for use on the web **MUST** include proper credit to that news organization and the disclaimer that VOA cannot confirm the accuracy of the material. For video usage, the on-screen credit should be either: "From CCTV" or "CCTV Video." This guidance is the same for material received from RT or Press TV or similar state-run media outlets.



## ***BEST PRACTICES GUIDE***

It is understood that there may be times when we would want to use the video, such as when it's the only known video of a major news event or if we're comparing how VOA and other news organizations cover stories.

**HOWEVER, ANY USE OF STATE-RUN MEDIA VIDEO SHOULD BE DONE WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF A LARGER PACKAGE THAT IS BEING PRODUCED BY THE NEWS CENTER OR A LANGUAGE SERVICE.**

**WE SHOULD NOT RUN A FULL PACKAGE FROM CCTV, RT, PRESS TV  
OR ANOTHER STATE-RUN OUTLET SIMPLY BECAUSE WE HAVE IT AVAILABLE.**

*(Also see [Video Usage Rights, p. 56](#))*

### **INTERVIEWS**

Even in the era of selfies, photo-bombing and user-generated content, most people are not comfortable being interviewed and consider recording equipment to be invasive, especially when you're dealing with sensitive subjects. One way to reduce that unease or tension is to first talk to an interview subject **WITHOUT** the equipment. Put the person at ease; make him or her feel comfortable talking to you before proceeding with the actual interview.

When setting up an interview, the subject may ask what questions will be asked or how the interview will be treated when produced. It's OK to outline in advance general points of interest and the general subject areas you intend to cover.

### **YOU SHOULD NOT PROVIDE ACTUAL QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED, NOR PROMISE YOU WILL NOT ASK QUESTIONS OUTSIDE THE AREAS YOU HAVE OUTLINED, NOR PROMISE HOW SUBJECTS WILL BE TREATED ON THE AIR.**

Any agreement that certain questions will or will not be asked would be an exception, to be decided on a case-by-case basis in consultation with your supervisor and/or VOA senior management as warranted. If an agreement is approved, the agreement should be mentioned in the introduction to the interview.

If an interviewee requires VOA to use a name or title we ordinarily would not use, that too should be mentioned in the introduction to the interview.

**Do not promise an interviewee that he or she will be able to find the entire interview on the VOA website, or that you will include it in a blog entry, unless you have already confirmed through your assignment process that the interview will be included with a web story or blog.**

### **RECORDING TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS**

- If you are planning to record a telephone interview, it is required that a reporter or producer advise the interview subject that he or she is being recorded, and that their comments will be on the record. If the interview subject objects to being recorded, the reporter or producer should confirm that the interview can be used as off the record information.
- [\*\(Also see Confidential Sources, p. 23\)\*](#)

### **SHOOTING/EDITING TV INTERVIEWS**

- When shooting a two-camera interview, it's acceptable for a reporter to register appropriate visual expressions, such as smiling at a joke. What is NOT acceptable is editing in a visual reaction that is out of sequence to the answer being given.
- Equally unacceptable is separating questions from answers. The 10<sup>th</sup> answer of an interview should not be edited as if it were the response to the 4<sup>th</sup> question, even if it seems to make the reporter's or producer's editorial point clearer.

- Interviews taped with one camera can present editing difficulties and therefore reverse questions (questions asked after the interview is done, with the camera reversed to tape the interviewer), while not ideal, are allowed. Reverse questions should be true to the original questions and if done, the interviewee or representative should be made aware and should be invited to be present.

In this situation, because the reverse shots are happening after the actual interview, the reporter or producer should not reflect an expression (smile, frown, nod) that might be seen as agreement or disagreement with what the subject is saying.

[\*\(Also see Basic Editing Principles, p. 92\)\*](#)

### **PUBLIC FIGURES**

Questions and reporting about the private lives of public figures should be relevant to the story. For example, the questioning is appropriate when the reporting is intended to expose inconsistency, lying, hypocrisy and most certainly, illegal activity. In the case of candidates for public office, information about these actions often enables voters to ascertain the character of a candidate or elected official.

However, VOA's reporting **should not** be based on rumor, speculation or gossip, but instead by applying the rigorous standards for any story. Reporting should rely on "on the record" statements and actions of public figures. Information from normally reliable sources not willing to be identified should be very closely examined.

[\*\(Also see Confidential Sources, p. 23\)\*](#)

The passage of time is an important consideration in determining what is relevant, and may affect current relevance. When information is dated, we should evaluate it carefully. In the case of a political figure, it may be the importance of such information for the public to judge that person's qualifications and fitness to hold public office.

Each situation should be considered separately and there is no blanket rule prohibiting reporting private activities from many years ago.

For interviews, be very discriminating when using information from sources and/or sourced information from another news organization when asking a question to a guest about his/her private life. Sourcing in this, as in any controversial or sensitive story, should follow VOA's two-source rule.

[\*\(Also see Sourcing, p. 21\)\*](#)

Open-ended questions based on little or no evidence are strongly discouraged. For example, the question "Have you ever taken a bribe," should not be asked unless it's based on our reporting, or if there is a compelling and journalistically justifiable reason to ask it.

**IF VOA PRESENTERS, CORRESPONDENTS OR PRODUCERS ARE UNSURE OF THE APPROPRIATENESS OF THEIR QUESTIONING OR REPORTING REGARDING THE PRIVATE LIFE OF A PUBLIC FIGURE, THEY SHOULD CONSULT WITH THEIR SUPERVISOR AND WHEN APPROPRIATE WITH THE BEST PRACTICES EDITOR AND THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL**

[\*Return to Table of Contents\*](#)

### **ANONYMITY**

There may be reasons to agree to anonymity for an interview subject, whether for radio, TV or online. For example, we may not wish to jeopardize the subject's safety or subject him or her or family members to harm or undue embarrassment. But there may be legal considerations as well in granting anonymity to interview subjects.

Always question an interviewee's motives before promising anonymity. Clarify and confirm the conditions agreed to in exchange for the information. Anonymity for interviewees can be defined by degree. In establishing the degree of anonymity, describe the process to be used (e.g. blurring of faces, digitizing the voice, videotaping in shadow) but do not guarantee a particular result.

**THE FAILURE TO ADEQUATELY DISGUISE AN INTERVIEW SUBJECT OR A MISUNDERSTANDING OVER THE STEPS AGREED ON TO DISGUISE AN INTERVIEW SUBJECT CAN RESULT IN A LEGAL CLAIM AGAINST VOA.**

**GENERALLY, WE WANT TO AVOID PROMISING ANONYMITY FOR PEOPLE TRYING TO EVADE LAW ENFORCEMENT.**

**EXCEPTIONS SHOULD BE CLEARED WITH A SUPERVISOR, THE BEST PRACTICES EDITOR AND/OR SENIOR MANAGEMENT AND THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL.**

### **"AMBUSH" INTERVIEWS**

So-called "ambush" interviews, where a person who has refused to be interviewed is approached without notice by a reporter or producer, are discouraged and should be avoided. An "ambush" is different than a "stakeout," where cameras are set up to get comments from individuals who are going to or leaving meetings and/or work.

**DECIDING TO DO AN AMBUSH INTERVIEW SHOULD NOT BE TAKEN LIGHTLY. SUPERVISORS, THE BEST PRACTICES EDITOR AND/OR SENIOR MANAGEMENT AND THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL SHOULD BE ADVISED IN ADVANCE OF ANY SUCH PLANS.**

### **ADVANCE SCRIPTS/SCREENING**

You should not show a script to a third party not affiliated with VOA or BBG in advance of the story's airing. You can call an interviewee and review portions of a script in order to fact check. As part of the reporting process you may also show portions of other interviews or other footage prepared for the report to an interview subject to obtain their reaction or comment for use in the same report. You should videotape the individual watching the other interview or other footage whenever possible.

Advance screenings of VOA news stories are not permitted without the prior approval of senior management. An exception: press screenings for review purposes.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### **REQUESTS FOR UNAired/UNPUBLISHED MATERIAL**

As a general policy, VOA should not give third parties access to unaired or unpublished material or discuss the existence of such materials. Any requests for such information should be referred to senior management and the Office of General Counsel.

[\*\(Also see Domestic Dissemination of VOA Programming, p. 67\)\*](#)

### **SUBJECT TAPING INTERVIEW**

On occasion a subject may ask to do his or her own recording of an interview. That is permissible as long as the subject understands the taping is for personal use only, not for broadcast, publication or other distribution. As noted above, VOA will not provide an audio or video copy of the raw interview to an interview subject.

### **PAYMENT**

VOA does not pay people for interviews. It may, however, be appropriate to pay certain travel-related expenses for an interviewee. Any questions should be referred to VOA senior management and the Office of General Counsel.

### GUESTS

#### **NOTIFYING VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT OF HIGH-LEVEL GUESTS**

As a major international broadcaster, VOA often welcomes to the Cohen Building high-level foreign government officials and other important individuals, such as prominent dissidents and exiles. To better determine when additional protocols may be appropriate, VOA journalists who schedule these meetings or visits should immediately notify senior management through their chain of command. Division Directors will then notify the Language Programming Directorate using the email address [language-programming-directorate@voanews.com](mailto:language-programming-directorate@voanews.com) for coordination with the Office of the VOA Director. Decisions about any special actions that may be needed will be coordinated between the Office of the VOA Director and the CEO's Office. Notification at each stage should occur prior to the visit, with sufficient time for senior management to take any actions that may be necessary.

VOA journalists who schedule meetings at the Cohen Building with audience members, members of the diaspora, or lower-level government officials should also immediately notify their Division Director. That Division Director will then decide whether additional coordination within VOA and the CEO's Office is required.

#### **COHEN BUILDING SECURITY PROCEDURES FOR GUESTS**

Security procedures for entry into the Cohen building is set by the Federal Protective Service (FPS), the agency that provides integrated security and law enforcement services to federally owned and leased facilities. FPS, not BBG Security, manages the contract for the building's Protective Security Officers (PSOs), thus they report to and are represented by the FPS Inspector.

As with other federal buildings, all visitors must show proper photo ID and go through security screening upon arrival.

**FOR PROGRAM GUESTS, THIS PROCESS CAN SEEM CUMBERSOME.**

**CONSEQUENTLY, EMPLOYEES MUST EXPLAIN THE SECURITY PROCEDURES AND PHOTO ID REQUIREMENTS TO ALL PROGRAM GUESTS PRIOR TO THEIR ARRIVAL, AND ASK THAT THEY ANTICIPATE ABOUT 10 MINUTES FOR THE CHECK-IN PROCESS.**

Types of Accepted Identification:

1. U.S. Citizens: Valid U.S. Driver's License or U.S. Passport
2. Non-U.S. Citizens: Valid Passport/Visa

Please notify your guest/visitor that they will be required to process through security screening (walk-through magnetometer and x-ray machine for hand-carried items) prior to arrival.

If you are sponsoring an event, please provide BBG Security with a guest list that includes the date/time of their arrival, along with their full names and your contact information (Sponsor). Please remember that all visitors **MUST** be escorted while in the Cohen Building per FPS requirements. This list should be emailed to the central Security email at: [bbg-security@bbg.gov](mailto:bbg-security@bbg.gov).

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

In those rare cases when an important guest arrives without any ID, contact IBB/SEC immediately so they can work with the FPS to request an exception to normal procedures and allow the guest entry into the building. Please understand that the final decision to waive normal security procedures for your guest rests with FPS, not BBG Security.

Exceptions to these procedures can be made in some cases for VIPs. VIPs are granted access without having to sign in or go through the metal detectors. Under some circumstances, they also enter the building through a different entry point than the C Street visitors' entrance.

The following are automatically considered VIPs:

1. The President and his cabinet, including sitting Ambassadors
2. Sitting and former members of Congress
3. Anyone who has a federal law enforcement detail, such as foreign dignitaries

For these and other special guests, employees can request VIP status from BBG Security managers or from the IBB Chief of Staff.

Please contact Security with any additional questions at 202-382-7777.

### GUEST BOOKING PROCEDURES

- **ALL REQUESTS FOR THE PRESIDENT, VICE PRESIDENT, FIRST LADY AND THE VP's SPOUSE WILL BE MADE THROUGH THE VOA DIRECTOR'S OFFICE.  
THERE ARE ABSOLUTELY NO EXCEPTIONS**
- **ALL REQUESTS FOR OTHER WHITE HOUSE OFFICIALS, CABINET SECRETARIES, THE HOUSE AND SENATE LEADERSHIP AND THE KEY BEATS MUST COME FROM THE NEWS CENTER CORRESPONDENTS AT THOSE BEATS**

### **THE CORRESPONDENTS ARE THE FACE OF VOA FOR THOSE BEATS AND WE CANNOT UNDERCUT THEIR POSITIONS**

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES	Katherine Gypson
INTELLIGENCE/NATIONAL SECURITY	Jeff Seldin
MEDICAL	Carol Pearson
PENTAGON	Carla Babb
POLITICS	Jim Malone
SENATE	Michael Bowman
STATE DEPARTMENT	Steve Herman & Nike Ching
UNITED NATIONS	Margaret Besheer
WHITE HOUSE	Cindy Saine & Mary Alice Salinas

These requests **SHOULD BE SENT FIRST** to the appropriate beat correspondent, News Center managers and to Senior Executive Producer Steven Springer. When an interview has been confirmed, an e-mail will be sent to the Guest Booking group: [guest-booking@voanews.com](mailto:guest-booking@voanews.com)

When we get an interview with the President, Vice President, First Lady, VP's spouse, key Cabinet members or Congressional leadership, VOA Public Relations should be notified immediately: [PublicRelations@voanews.com](mailto:PublicRelations@voanews.com)

When there's a request for deputy secretaries, under-secretaries, spokespeople and those in similar positions, the News Center correspondent responsible for that beat (White House, State, Pentagon, Capitol Hill, intelligence matters, national politics, UN) **SHOULD BE ADVISED IN ADVANCE OF MAKING THE REQUEST**. The Guest Booking e-mail group should be copied on these e-mails.

Otherwise, for the majority of interview requests, a heads-up e-mail to the Guest Booking e-mail group will suffice.

News Center managers and the beat reporters are included in the Guest Booking group, so they will be aware of all requests. The guests that fall into this general category might be from a think tank or NGO, a media rep for an organization, or a lower level member of Congress or a government agency.



When sending your e-mail, please provide as many details as possible: the date of the interview, whether the interview is audio or video, location and time.

When and where possible, stringers for the News Center and the Language Services should keep the field correspondents and/or Washington advised of potential interviews of interest.

**ADDITIONALLY: LARRY LONDON’S BEAT IS MUSIC AND PENELOPE POULOU’S BEAT IS FILM.**

As such, if a Language Service is thinking of interviewing a major musician or musical group, or thinking of getting an interview with a film personality who is on a junket or making an appearance in a bureau city, **an advisory e-mail should go out first to Larry or Penelope accordingly, and to Guest Booking.**

By the same token, when Larry, Penelope or anyone else has a major music interview or movie-related interview scheduled, they should advise the Guest Booking e-mail group.

When there are major awards shows – usually in Los Angeles -- Mike O’Sullivan in the L.A. bureau should be brought into the conversation. As with State, Pentagon or elsewhere – it does not make VOA look good if a studio or a musician’s or filmmaker’s press person is hearing from multiple VOA individuals.

**IT IS STRONGLY RECOMMENDED THAT ALL STAFF RESPONSIBLE FOR BOOKING GUESTS/INTERVIEWS SEND A NOTE TO GUEST BOOKING AND TO THE APPROPRIATE INDIVIDUALS BEFORE MAKING A REQUEST.**

### **GUIDELINES FOR HOSTING A LIVE GUEST ON VOA PROGRAMS**

- All potential live guests should be pre-interviewed to get a sense of what to expect when you are on the air. You can discuss general topics, but do not give the guest the actual interview questions in advance. That pre-interview should be available for review by producers, anchors and management.
- When you know you're going to have a controversial or potentially hostile guest, prepare a game plan with the show staff and the show Director about what to do if the interview goes downhill, so that everyone in the control room and on the set know in advance what to do, including implementation of a back-up plan.
- It is the responsibility of a program's host to do his/her homework about the guest and the subject matter. If a guest starts making unsubstantiated accusations or questionable statements, it is the responsibility of the anchor to challenge the guest about those accusations/statements, whether asking for clarification about the source of the accusations/statements or refuting those accusations/statements with facts.
- If a guest uses language that is unsuitable for air (cursing, insulting, racial or homosexual slurs, for example) it is the responsibility of the host to immediately cut the conversation off and apologize to the audience for the offensive language. It is the responsibility of the Executive Producer to alert the Director about what has happened so the Director can make sure the guest's microphone is silenced. At that point the EP must communicate to the Director and the Line Producer to implement a back-up plan.
- The Executive Producer is responsible for a written report of the incident. Detail the unacceptable or irresponsible language used by the guest, how the anchor handled the situation and what steps were taken to end the interview and go to alternate programming. The report is to be sent to the Service Chief, Division Director, Associate Director for Language Programming and the Associate Director for Operations.
- Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the Executive Producer to ensure that the program is clean and airs correctly. The anchor can only do so much. The EP has his/her finger on the button, so to speak, with the authority and ability to tell the Director and the Line Producer to go to something else. That's why you need to have a backup plan.

**GOING TO BLACK IS A LAST DITCH OPTION, WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS.  
IT IS NEVER THE FIRST OPTION.**

## ***BEST PRACTICES GUIDE***

### **DIGITAL MEDIA**

#### **SOCIAL MEDIA**

All VOA journalists are encouraged to participate in social media. By joining networks that are popular in your target regions you can forge closer relationships with your audience, discover new angles and stories and experiment with different ways of covering the news.

Reporters are encouraged to break news on social media platforms that are most popular in their region, but certain editorial priorities should be followed.

- 1. REPORTERS SHOULD QUICKLY FILE FOR VOA-OWNED PLATFORMS AFTER BREAKING NEWS ON SOCIAL MEDIA, PARTICULARLY FOR HIS OR HER SERVICE'S WEBSITE, BUT ALSO RADIO AND TV WHEN APPROPRIATE.**
- 2. A REPORTER SHOULD USE SOCIAL MEDIA TO BREAK STORIES ONLY THAT HE OR SHE HAS UNCOVERED. STORIES BROKEN BY COLLEAGUES SHOULD BE FIRST DISSEMINATED ON THEIR OWN SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS OR ON THE SERVICE'S OFFICIAL ACCOUNT.**
- 3. REMEMBER THAT ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND OTHER PUBLIC SPACES, YOU ARE A JOURNALIST. IT IS CRITICAL THAT YOU ARE FAIR, IMPARTIAL AND OBJECTIVE IN ALL PUBLIC SPACES.**

It's also important to remember that social media is more than Facebook and Twitter. Niche audiences often have their own niche social networks, like Sina Weibo in China or Orkut in India and Brazil. Get to know which ones are popular with your audience and experiment with them. Whatever your topic or medium, there's a probably a social network around it.

#### **SOCIAL MEDIA AS REPORTING TOOL**

Reporting has always been about amplifying certain voices from the public. But rather than a list of carefully cultivated sources that reporters have traditionally relied upon, social media can present millions of competing voices that we must select from wisely. Whether you call it citizen journalism, user-generated content or social media, our readers often report and share news stories before we are able to verify the facts. While it's good to highlight those voices, it is critical to verify rumors before reporting them as facts.

There are techniques for confirming the validity of certain social media accounts, including examination of how long the account has been in existence, looking at the account's message history, and scrutiny of photo streams or other bits of the user's digital trail. If you have doubts, reach out to your service's or division's social media lead for guidance. You must do your due diligence before relying on a source as credible. In other words, report the story.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

**Do not retweet or pass along unconfirmed rumors without a clear indication that the information is not yet verified.**

For example: *@VOANews Lots of reports and photos of this blast. Working to confirm RT @manonstreet Bomb in front of parliament. Hundreds dead!*

**Finally, adding comments from social media to your reporting is acceptable as long as you clearly identify the source of the comment and it reflects audience opinion, similar to a vox pop in radio or television. Make sure you balance opinions to provide a fair picture of public sentiment, and contextualize those opinions with the larger story.**

### OPINION

If you take a controversial position or make a controversial comment it can reflect poorly on you and the agency. It could lead our readers to believe that we are untrustworthy and unable to fairly cover both sides of a controversial story. VOA has spent 75 years building its reputation, and you have spent your career building yours. To keep that trust intact we must adhere to a high standard of independence and objectivity.

You should not express a point of view on controversial issues, even if your account is set to only be viewable by your friends. This not only includes individual posts or tweets, but also posting your political affiliation or causes in your profile. Privacy policies change and people can take screenshots. Assume nothing is private in social media, even if you have your account visible only to your circle of friends.

In particular, retweeting or “liking” an opinion on one side of the issue or another could be construed as an endorsement from you or from VOA. If you want to put that comment in front of your followers, make sure it is clear you aren’t endorsing the opinion, but simply showing both sides of the conversation.

For example: *@VOANews The budget fight continues RT @AngryPundit Why can’t Washington get its act together?*

Don’t be afraid to engage with either side of a controversial issue. It is okay to follow or friend individuals or interest groups on either side of an issue. Indeed, it should be part of the reporting process; paying attention to what both sides have to say is critical to getting as much information as possible on an issue. But never endorse only one side or the other by “liking” a cause or political figure, and make sure you follow all sides of an issue.

While personal endeavors on other sites are fine, they must not involve the use of agency materials, time or facilities, including information that is available to you because of your position at VOA.

### MANAGING YOUR PROGRAM'S OR SERVICE'S SOCIAL PRESENCE

VOA programs and services are encouraged to maintain official accounts on the major social media platforms in your region. These presences can help you engage with your current audience and reach new audiences with your content.

Before launching a new official social media presence, you and your service chief should answer the following questions:

- Who are you trying to reach and why is this the right way to reach them?
- Who is responsible for keeping each account active and how often?
- How will success be measured and who will track it?
- Does your branding align with the branding already established on your website?

You are also responsible for moderating the comments on your Facebook page, website, or agency blog to remove comments that violate our Terms of Use. In particular, you should be on the lookout for comments that are vulgar, racist or incite others to acts of violence. And be aware that our spam filters sometimes fail; always be vigilant about shaping a lively and responsible conversation by removing comments that distract from the free and civil exchange of ideas.

### POSTING VOA MATERIAL TO OTHER SITES, INCLUDING YOUR OWN

Uploading proprietary VOA or wire agency material directly to personal accounts is prohibited. Not only can you be held legally liable for posting photos or video that belongs to wire and newsfeed agencies, but you will hurt your service's ability to build an audience on official channels.

Instead, you should link to VOA material posted on your service's website or other official VOA accounts, e.g. your service's official YouTube channel.

*Example:* Jack is a video editor in a VOA language service. He regularly combines wire service video and VOA video into packages for broadcast and web. He sometimes takes interesting video from APTN, as well as video he has shot, and uploads it directly to his personal YouTube channel and Facebook page. Is that permitted?

*Answer:* **No.** Jack should only upload VOA material to official VOA YouTube accounts. Once it's there, he can link to it from his personal YouTube account, Facebook or other channels.

*Example:* Jack embeds video from his service's VOA YouTube channel on his own YouTube page and shares VOA reporting with his friends on Facebook. Is this permitted?

*Answer:* **Yes.** Any material shared from your service's official, public-facing website, YouTube channel, or other official outlets is okay if your page is intended for a foreign audience.

### **LINKING TO OTHER SITES**

You are encouraged to provide links that are relevant to story content and suitable for all audiences. Editors should exercise judgment and not use links that may be offensive, or in any way, inappropriate.

Linking does not constitute endorsement. While you should avoid pointing readers to anything that is an affront to common decency, you needn't hesitate when linking to the websites of institutions or causes if they are relevant to a story. And if your link is to the site of a particular candidate or party please be even-handed: if you link to the website of one political party, you should be just as willing to link to the website of the opposition party, when relevant to the story. Failure to do so could not only call into question our objectivity; it could be a violation of the Hatch Act.

[\*\(Also see Political Reporting on VOA Websites, p. 9\)\*](#)

### **BE TRANSPARENT ABOUT YOUR MISTAKES**

Every news outlet makes mistakes. When a piece of reporting on your site contains a factual error it should be corrected as quickly as possible. Talk to a senior editor in your service about what needs to be changed and place a correction at the bottom in italics that notes the original error.

Never just delete a story or video from the site without correcting and acknowledging the mistake. Not only will the incorrect story remain in the caches of major search engines, but your readers will believe that you are trying to cover something up instead of being honest and open. Full disclosure is always best.

While you should not delete incorrect stories or video from your site, you should use the content management system to remove it from major section fronts until it is corrected. The URL will continue to work, but will not be highlighted on the site.

[\*\(Also see Corrections, p. 78\)\*](#)

### **USER-GENERATED CONTENT**

Like all news organizations, VOA receives video, audio and photos from outside sources. The content may be sent for the purpose of showing an up-close look at a news event; to present a particular point of view; to cast a negative light on a government, an organization or individuals.

In all cases, VOA journalists must take every editorial precaution to ensure the legitimacy of the submissions before broadcasting them or publishing them:

- **CONTACT & IDENTIFICATION**

Reach out to individuals or groups who have posted material to verify that they are the owner of the work. Clearly identify yourself as a journalist when making inquiries about user-generated content.

- **NEWSWORTHINESS**

Is there a valid editorial reason to use the video, audio or photos that we receive from an outside source? Does the user-generated content help to further inform our audience about an issue or incident?

- **MOTIVE**

Does the individual or group sending the material have an agenda? If VOA determines the content is agenda-driven and decides to air/publish the content, we should reveal why the material was submitted, and who submitted it.

- **REAL OR STAGED**

Can VOA confirm that the video, audio or photo is real? Or, can VOA determine whether the content is fake or staged, produced in the hope that VOA might air or publish it?

- **COPYCAT INCIDENTS**

Will the broadcasting or publication of the video/photos encourage others to create or produce similar content that in some cases could be life-threatening?

- **RIGHT TO PRIVACY**

Was the material recorded or photographed without the knowledge of the individuals involved? In other words, was the material recorded with a hidden camera or microphone?

- **HOW WILL THE CONTENT BE USED**

Should VOA receive sensitive or graphic content, follow the guidelines in the section on [\*Sensitive and Graphic Material, p. 11.\*](#) In some cases it may be more appropriate for such material to be posted online only, where users can choose what they do or do not want to see or hear.

- **PERMISSION**

Once it's established the content is valid and its owner is identified, ask for permission to use the material. As always, VOA gives credit where credit is due, so the person who created the content should be identified accordingly; it is up to the individual or group whether to use real names or a website/social network username.

- **PAYING FOR MATERIAL**

Other than our existing agreements with the news agencies, VOA does not pay for content. Please keep this in mind when dealing with user-generated content.

*(Also see [Payment](#), p. 34)*

- **DISCLAIMERS**

We must always tell our audiences when we are airing or publishing user-generated content. In addition, we should tell our audiences that while we have checked for the legitimacy of the material, we cannot absolutely verify the content. As with all of VOA's reporting, transparency is key.

[Follow this link to a useful at-your-desk tool for verifying user-generated content.](#)

It provides various case studies that can easily be applied to potential UGC situations at VOA.

If you are uncertain about using photos or video taken from social media, please see the guidance on copyright and fair use in the [Legal Issues](#) section of this Guide, or e-mail the Office of General Counsel at [copyrightclearances@bbg.gov](mailto:copyrightclearances@bbg.gov).

**AUDIO, VIDEO OR PHOTOS THAT ARE FREELY AVAILABLE  
ON THE INTERNET DOES NOT MEAN THEY ARE IN  
THE "PUBLIC DOMAIN."**



### YOUTUBE GUIDELINES

- YouTube videos **SHOULD NOT** be considered a primary means of accessing and using B-roll for a video package. ALWAYS check the ABC NewsOne, AFP, APTN and Reuters folders in DaletPlus first. If necessary, contact the Senior Archivists ([senior-archivists@voanews.com](mailto:senior-archivists@voanews.com)) for assistance.
- The VOA Video Library has extensive file video available; always check with them before relying on YouTube for video needs.
- Use caution and common sense and avoid using videos from YouTube that may violate someone's copyright.

While YouTube is the most popular site for video, similar rules apply to other sites, such as Vimeo and VEVO.

YouTube videos are generally considered fair use. The video can be used full-screen as long as credits, chyron information and other on-screen information is not obscured or deleted.

The actual YouTube logo **MUST** be used as the visual credit:



YouTube should still be credited in narration: "In this video posted on YouTube..." or something similar.

YouTube has a [blurring tool](#) that lets you blur any part of a video, including moving objects. Details on how to use the tool are here:

[\(Also see Sensitive & Graphic Material, p. 11\)](#)

### RADIO

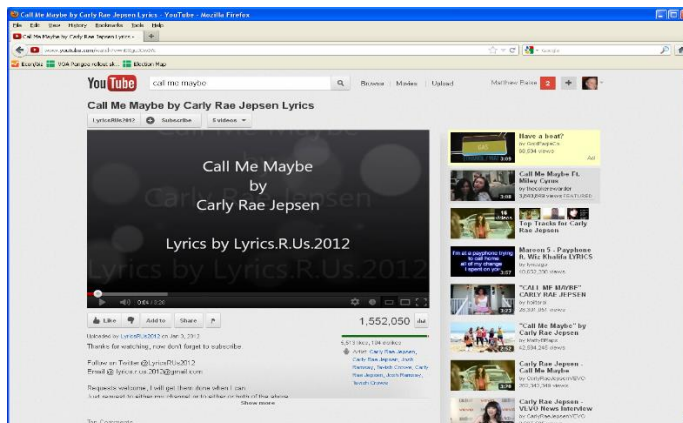
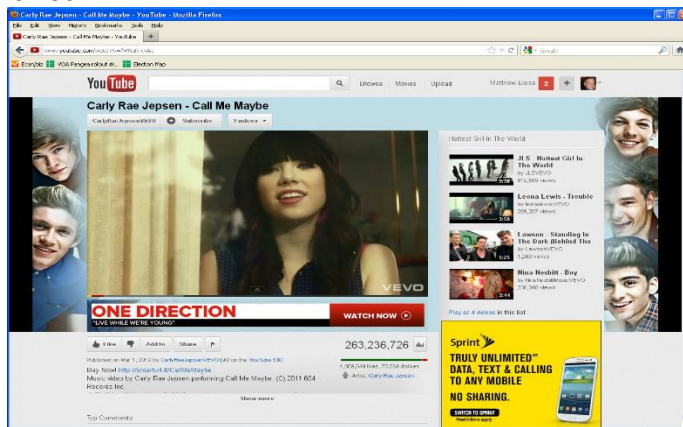
The audio from a YouTube video cannot be used in this manner. YouTube's Terms of Service stipulate that embedded content cannot be manipulated or downloaded for use away from [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com).

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

## EMBEDDING

Embedded video is effectively just a link; no copy of the video is being stored on your server. Therefore, you may use embedded video on the VOA website. However, you should still exercise caution and common sense and avoid posting videos that may violate someone's copyright. In particular, do not post videos that contain music, movies or television broadcasts unless those videos are posted on the official YouTube channel of the copyright holder. Many movie studios and music companies allow you to take embed code for trailers or video clips directly from their main site. In those cases, it's much easier to tell that you're using an official video when it's on the company website.

On the top is the official version of a music video on Vevo, an entertainment consortium of music producers. Below it is the exact same song from a bootleg channel. The first is okay for use; the second is not.



**YOUTUBE MAKES NO REPRESENTATIONS ABOUT THE ACCURACY, USEFULNESS, SAFETY OR INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS OF CONTENT APPEARING ON ITS SITE.**

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### **GOOGLE EARTH GUIDELINES**

VOA has rights to use Google Earth for the following VOA products:

- Television programs (including promotional ads)
- DVDs and video on demand
- Any long-form video products, including documentaries
- Printed materials

Google Earth can be used to create fly-throughs, locator maps, or basic illustrations of cities or geographic features.

**We are required to credit Google Earth with an unobstructed graphic module that clearly shows that the content is provided by Google and, when applicable, a third-party data provider.** [This example](#) from CNN shows how it should be done.

Please work with your EP and Graphics person to make sure Google Earth is clearly credited for any usage.

Also, any Google Maps/Google Earth images used must reflect how they would look online. For example, you are not allowed to make any changes (delete, blur, etc.) to these products that would make them look different than in the actual product.

Because it is a standalone software package, IT will need to install Google Earth on your computer.

### **REVEALING WEBSITES AND ADDRESSES**

In most cases, websites are not considered in the public domain for purposes of publishing pictures of them. They fall under the same fair use guidelines as other copyrighted material. If you have questions about whether you can show a website, please contact the Office of General Counsel.

Generally, website addresses can be revealed, as long as they are not for sites which promote criminal behavior or contain pornography. Avoid showing website addresses if it might be construed as a commercial for the site. Exceptions would include educational or informational sites, or charitable sites raising money for victims of a natural disaster.

When reporting on political campaigns, links to the websites of the candidates mentioned in the piece should be included. ([Also see Political Reporting on VOA Websites, p. 9](#))

### **AFFILIATE/RECIPROCAL LINKS**

Reciprocal links to affiliate websites are permitted, under the following guidelines:

- The decision to establish an online affiliation should reflect the same editorial considerations that go into establishing a broadcast affiliation – including credibility, reputation, trust and audience reach.
- VOA Language Services should consider the total number of affiliates when determining the placement of reciprocal links. A service that has a small number of large, reputable partners is justified in establishing front-page reciprocal links. A service that has dozens of broadcasting affiliates should create an Affiliates page where they may all be listed. Each situation must be considered separately. It may be appropriate to have a homepage reciprocal link with a major web portal that is a primary news source in the language, and a separate Affiliate page with reciprocal links to broadcasting affiliates.
- Affiliate logos or text links may be used to establish reciprocal links, as appropriate.
- Reciprocal links should be reviewed on a regular basis, and VOA must reserve the right to remove the link at any time, if the affiliation ends or the target site no longer reflects the editorial integrity under which the relationship was established.
- Terms of Use must include a disclaimer that “VOA is not responsible for the content of external websites.”

If you have questions about these guidelines, please contact Matthew Baise ([mbaise@voanews.com](mailto:mbaise@voanews.com)) or Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com)).

### **PHOTOGRAPHS**

Photographs add a great deal to VOA stories and are necessary to give the audience a fuller experience and understanding of VOA reports. While VOA has wire and other sources for photographs, original content taken by VOA reporters and staff is always useful.

Keep in mind that some stories will have no wire photos available so it is extra important for the reporter to shoot a few photos while doing the story.

The photo contracts for AFP, AP and Reuters are administered by Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com), x4276). The News Center and Language Services have designated staff that have access to these accounts. When there is a question about news agency photos, please contact Steve.

#### **GENERAL RULES**

- The goal of images is to enhance the readers' understanding of the story – and make it look better on the web. Take photos that add to your story, and submit as many as you can so editors can decide which are best.
- Show the people, places and things that you talk about in your stories - If you emphasize a place or interview a person get a picture. If you cover a demonstration, show the protest signs or faces of the people. However, be aware that minors may be present at demonstrations, and you should use good judgment in photographing them in those situations.  
(Also see [Interviewing & Videotaping Minors, p. 16](#) and [Filming in Public vs. Private Places, p. 82](#))
- Get close up to your subject if you can. Take photos from different perspectives and distances.
- Make sure your subject is clear, focused, and lit as well as possible.
- Always send in the largest file size possible. Photo and web editors can crop as needed and warranted.
- Headshots are good. Also try to get images of the subject in their environment and in action.
- Remember the [rule of thirds](#).
- [Shoot landscape \(horizontal\) instead of portrait](#). Landscape photos look better on social media and in Pangea. That means turning your phone 90 degrees when taking the photo.

### TECHNICAL TIPS

- Use your flash to balance out the light - If you are outside on a sunny day and you are shooting in the shade use your flash to fill heavy shadows if needed. If you are indoors and taking an image of someone in front of a window use your flash.
- Don't shoot portraits with the sun or bright light behind your subject unless you are using a flash to fill the light.
- Be careful of using a flash in front of glass or a mirror - The flash will bounce back into the lens. If you have to do this don't shoot straight on toward the glass, try to shoot at an angle to the glass.
- Be careful of microphones - Try to get a clear shot of the person without a microphone in front of their face

### SENDING IN PHOTO FILES

Always email your service AND [CentralNewsWebMedia@voanews.com](mailto:CentralNewsWebMedia@voanews.com) when submitting photos.

Always include who is paying for the photos and if they are available for use by the house. Always include caption info.

Photos can be submitted via email, any photo sharing service such as flickr or picasa, or via ftp.

### CAPTIONS

Reporters and producers in the field must supply the captions for your photos. Caption info is:-

- Who, what, when and where.
- Credit – who took the photo.
- Keep captions short and clear – photo and web editors will often rewrite and edit them.

VOA's caption style is the same when crediting staff and stringers: **John Doe/VOA**

VOA's contractual agreements with AFP, AP and Reuters allow us to use certain of their photos on VOAnews.com websites. However, it is **MANDATORY** that those photos be given proper credit, as seen on the next page.



**Obama Tells Congress US Deploying Up to 275 Troops to Iraq**

### **EDITING PHOTOGRAPHS**

VOA allows for the adjustment of photos for brightness, contrast and color. However, VOA does not permit altering a photograph in any way that changes the meaning of the photo. While it's permissible to crop a photo, that should not change the meaning of the photo; for instance, cropping a photo that may leave out a key individual in the story.

**CLOSELY EXAMINE DIGITAL PICTURES FROM OUTSIDE SOURCES TO ENSURE THAT THOSE IMAGES HAVE NOT BEEN ALTERED.**

### **MUSIC**

The Music Library serves as the resource and research center for VOA programs containing music. Not only does the library catalog music, it also provides a historical and educational setting for producers and broadcasters to research various sources relating to music: biographies, event-driven materials, periodicals, almanacs, encyclopedias, etc.

The Music Library database currently contains a vast variety of musical recordings dating as far back as the 1930s. The database is catalogued by album titles, song titles, artists, and record company names/numbers.

The Music Library hours are 7:15am until 5:00pm (Monday-Friday), the telephone number is 202-382-7395.

*([Also see YouTube Guidelines, p. 46](#) and [Ambient Music, p. 81](#))*



### AUDIO USAGE RIGHTS

These guidelines **DO NOT** apply to the video news feeds that VOA subscribes to. Please see the next section for that information.

Some of the news organizations listed in this section have given VOA blanket permission to use audio excerpts from some of their news programs. These permissions need to be respected. Requests to use audio not covered by listed blanket clearances should be sent to Steven Springer, ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com)), the Contracting Officer's Representative (COR) for VOA's contracts with the news agencies.

#### **USING AUDIO FROM TV NEWS PROGRAMS**

VOA has had longstanding permission to use the voices of the persons being interviewed on network news programs.

VOA should use the following credit in the radio script for all programs: "As reported on [Network and program name]," or equivalent language giving credit to the appropriate news organization.

While we will always claim fair use for relevant audio excerpts, there are a few exceptions, listed below.

#### **ABC NEWS**

**DO NOT** use the voices of any ABC News anchors, correspondents, reporters, commentators and stringers.

- ***This Week*** – VOA has received permission to record the entire Sunday talk show to use content of particular interest to our audiences. However, with this permission there are some restrictions listed below:
  - We are authorized to excerpt up to two (2) minutes of the program.
  - Material may be posted on VOA's websites only if it is part of a VOA television program.
  - Use of ABC talent should be kept to a minimum in the story. This is the **ONLY** exemption to the restriction on using ABC News talent in VOA programming.
  - Excerpted material cannot be used after three (3) days and the *This Week* program cannot be archived for future use.
  - This permission is **ONLY** for *This Week*.

**AUDIO-ONLY USAGE FROM ALL OTHER ABC NEWS  
OR ENTERTAINMENT PROGRAMS MUST BE CLEARED PRIOR TO USE.**

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### CBS NEWS

**DO NOT USE** the voices of **ANY** CBS News employees, including anchors, reporters, correspondents, commentators or stringers.

**WE DO NOT HAVE PERMISSION TO USE ANY CBS NEWS AUDIO CLIPS ON VOANEWS.COM OR ON ANY OTHER VOA WEB PRESENCE.**

### CNN

VOA has no overall agreement with CNN for use of audio clips, but we will claim editorial “fair use” as necessary on a case-by-case basis.

### FOX NEWS CHANNEL

VOA has permission to excerpt for radio no more than 3 minutes of audio from the *Fox News Sunday* broadcast. VOA must credit *Fox News Sunday*.

**ALL OTHER FOX TV PROGRAMS MUST BE CLEARED PRIOR TO USE.  
FOX DOES NOT ALLOW ANY OF ITS MATERIAL TO BE REBROADCAST OVERSEAS.**

### NBC NEWS, MSNBC & CNBC

VOA has blanket permission to use audio excerpts from *The Today Show*, *Meet the Press* and *NBC Nightly News*. All news specials, documentaries and other special programming must be cleared prior to use. There is no restriction on the use of NBC correspondents’ voices, but use of NBC correspondent reports is limited to U.S datelines. VOA does **NOT** have clearance to use audio actualities from any CNBC programs.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### VIDEO USAGE RIGHTS

VOA has contracts with three different video newsfeed providers: ABC News, Agence France Press (AFP), Associated Press (AP) and Reuters. We receive video from ABC NewsOne through our contract with AP. Each contract is unique and stands on its own.

Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com), x4276) is the COR for the newsfeeds. The Media Asset Management Branch assists in administering and facilitating use of the video and audio newsfeeds. The MAM Branch Chief, Pam Commerford, ([pcommerford@voanews.com](mailto:pcommerford@voanews.com), x7124) also contacts the providers and clears use of specific items.

### BEFORE USING ANY VIDEO, IT IS THE PRODUCER'S RESPONSIBILITY TO REVIEW THE NEWSFEED SCRIPT SOURCE INFORMATION TO CHECK FOR RIGHTS RESTRICTIONS

#### COMMON FEATURES - ALL NEWSFEEDS

Newsfeed scripts for the video stories are provided as basic information for our own script writing, and **do not** constitute a separate element. In other words, **newsfeed scripts cannot be used on the Web as a text-only story**. However, the information contained in video scripts can be used within a VOA story when they are combined with pertinent information from other news sources and follow VOA's sourcing guidelines.

#### RIGHTS RESTRICTIONS

We have negotiated the rights of use with each provider to broadcast and publish our stories containing newsfeed material on TV, radio and internet. Restriction statements vary from provider to provider and cover different ground; the most common restrictions are described on the following pages.

Restrictions are usually listed near the top of the script, but also appear above specific items in the script when necessary. VOA must adhere to rights restrictions as listed in the associated scripts and we must pay attention to the source of the video. Our providers send stories in which the video may come from a variety of sources, from FIFA to ESPN to handout video to other broadcasters and awards programs. The restrictions listed reflect the rules of both the source organization and the newsfeed providers.

Since all VOA programming is available on the web, newsfeed items marked **NO ACCESS INTERNET** or **NO WEB** means the video/audio cannot be used at all, unless permission is granted by the newsfeed provider. Reuters, however, has a special requirement regarding our streaming shows, so please see the Reuters page for details. Please contact Pam or Steve if you need help with this.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

You may see some variation of the following restrictions, regardless of the provider, on all the feeds:

- **TIME-LIMITED USAGE**

You will often see limited windows of usage on stories, especially for entertainment and sports programs. Footage must be pulled off the web by the date and time listed in the script info or in advisories MAM has posted in e-mail.

- **MANDATORY COURTESY**

When noted in the script the courtesy must appear on-screen in TV and web stories, and an audible courtesy must be used on radio.

- **NO LIBRARY / NO ARCHIVE**

Items with this restriction should be deleted soon after use. This material is available in the DaletPlus production system for up to thirty days and is then purged. Using video labeled **NO LIBRARY** or **NO ARCHIVE** after its initial broadcast or web posting puts our contracts in jeopardy.

### USING VIDEO FROM TV NEWS NETWORKS

- We **DO NOT** have blanket permission from ABC, CBS, CNN, FOX or NBC (including MSNBC and CNBC) to record and use clips from their newscasts or weekend talk shows. The only exception is ABC's ***This Week*** program (see next page).
- All soundbites from the other networks' weekend talk shows should be taken from our regular agency newsfeeds. However, we must follow whatever restrictions the networks place on the usage of those clips.
- There are times when we will claim "fair use" for a network news video clip that has not been fed on an agency newsfeed, but you must contact Steve to get clearance. If necessary, Steve or Pam will consult with the General Counsel's office regarding any potential legal considerations.  
[\*\(Also see Copyright and Fair Use, p. 80\)\*](#)

### **ABC NEWS**

ABC News and ABC TV Entertainment programs' on-air talent **cannot** be used, with one exception: the host of the ***This Week*** Sunday talk show.

### **THIS WEEK**

- This exception applies **ONLY** to the host of ***This Week***; absolutely no video that shows or contains audio or video from another ABC News personality can be used. This includes shots of the back of heads, cutaways, walking shots, standups, or anything else that may show those individuals.
- VOA is authorized to excerpt up to two (2) minutes of ***This Week***.
- Material from ***This Week*** may be posted on VOA's websites only if it is part of a VOA television program.
- Material excerpted from ***This Week*** cannot be used after three (3) days and the ***This Week*** program cannot be archived for future use.
- **THIS PERMISSION IS ONLY FOR ABC'S *THIS WEEK* PROGRAM.**

### **ABC NEWSONE**

- VOA receives material daily from the ABC News affiliate service NewsOne. As noted above, VOA cannot use on-camera talent; this applies to anchors, show hosts and reporters, whether for ABC Network or an ABC affiliate station.
- When an ABC item is listed as **PACKAGE ONLY**, it generally means that VOA must run the package as fed by NewsOne. Pam or Steve can contact NewsOne to see if that restriction can be lifted.
- **NO EXCERPTING** is similar to PACKAGE ONLY, in that we cannot lift individual sequences or shots out of a package. The wording may be "No Excerpting Package," "No Excerpting [specific video]." Please contact Pam or Steve to see whether the No Excerpting restriction can be lifted.
- **NO RETRACKING** generally means that VOA cannot translate, summarize, adapt or otherwise make the piece shorter or longer. Please contact Pam or Steve to see whether the No Retracking restriction can be lifted.
- **NNS** is a news-sharing cooperative between ABC News and other news organizations. VOA is cleared to use all video that is marked as NNS.
- Use of all ABC standard graphics must be addressed on a case-by-case basis and users must contact Pam or Steve to seek permission before using.
- 3D graphics can be used **only if the entire package is used. There are no exceptions.**

- If a story is marked **ABC AFFILIATES ONLY**, VOA is cleared to use it. However, if a story is marked **ABC AFFILIATES ONLY, NO INTERNATIONAL CLIENTS**, please contact Pam or Steve to get clearance for use.

**NO INTERNET USE OF ANY COLLEGIATE AND PROFESSIONAL  
SPORTS VIDEO FED BY ABC NewsONE!**

**NO USE ON ANY PLATFORM OF ABC NEWS OR  
ABC ENTERTAINMENT PROMOS!**

### **AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE (AFP)**

AFP shoots and sends most of its own video; VOA has clearance to use all of this material unless otherwise noted in the script.

#### **EXAMPLES OF AFP RESTRICTIONS**

- **Source: NNIS**  
**Restrictions: \*NO RESALE FOR NON-EDITORIAL PURPOSES\***  
VOA broadcast purposes are EDITORIAL, therefore we are clear to use items with this statement. In addition, VOA must version content for our audiences before broadcasting or posting it online.
- **Source: PARLIAMENTARY RECORDING UNIT (British Parliament)**  
**Restrictions: NO RESALE FOR NON-EDITORIAL PURPOSES / NOT FOR USE IN ENTERTAINMENT OR POLITICAL SATIRE PROGRAMMES**  
VOA is clear to use items with this restriction, but not in a satirical, Daily Show-type production.

#### **WEB-RELATED RESTRICTION STATEMENTS**

- **NO WEB USE or NO AFP WEB** - Stories carrying either of these restrictions cannot be used on any VOA websites.
- **NO ENGLISH OR SPANISH WEB** - VOA English and Spanish **CANNOT** post the video to their websites, but all other VOA language services CAN post the video to their websites.

#### **CBS NEWS VIDEO**

- Some AFP items may carry the multiple restrictions listed below, which normally indicates the video comes from CBS News. AFP regularly feeds CBS News video, and we are working with AFP to clarify the restrictions regarding VOA's use of CBS material. In the case of these restrictions, VOA CAN use the video.  
**NO RESALE FOR NON-EDITORIAL PURPOSES**  
**NO JAPAN**  
**NO FREE OVER-THE-AIR BROADCASTERS IN AUSTRALIA, NO U.S. CABLE OUTLETS, FREE OVER-THE-AIR NETWORKS OR STATIONS, THEIR WEBSITES AND THEIR MOBIEL PHONE SERVICES.**

If you have questions about using restricted video fed by AFP, please contact Pam or Steve to see if the restrictions can be lifted.

### ASSOCIATED PRESS (APTN)

- **APTN Clients Only** – VOA is able to use all stories with this restriction
- **Horizons clients and AP Lifestyle, Health and Technology clients Only** – VOA subscribes to these categories and can use any story that carries this restriction.
- **SNTV Clients**- VOA has unlimited use of stories with this restriction, as long as SNTV is the “Original Provider” or “Source” of the video. You will know these stories are SNTV stories, because “SNTV clients only” will be stated somewhere in the rights restrictions section of the script.

However, if the “Original Provider” is a third party, such as *FIFA, IOC, Tennis Properties Ltd., TAF Sports, Dorna*, etc., you must follow the restrictions listed within the “Rights Restrictions” section of script.

- **Check Script For Details** – VOA can use stories with this restriction, but you must follow specific restrictions within the script if there are film clips/music videos.
- **NO ACCESS IRAN AND NO ACCESS VOA PERSIAN TV**  
VOA Persian cannot use APTN stories shot in and sent from Iran. This includes **ALL** video of Iran, even when the restriction isn’t noted on the script and includes video previously received that we have in the Video Library and the VOA Persian video server.  
NOTE: The stories restricted to the Persian Service can be used by the News Center and the other Language Services.
- **OTHER RESTRICTIONS**  
VOA can use stories that have restrictions to other geographic regions. For example, stories marked No Access Russia or No Access Indonesia can be used by those Language Services as well as all other VOA services.

However, non-regional restrictions, such as No Access Internet, must be followed. Sometimes permission will be granted; in those cases please contact Pam or Steve to gain clearance.

- **ABC Talent on APTN-fed stories:** On occasion, APTN will feed an ABC story. ABC talent cannot be used.  
([Also see ABC News, p. 58](#))



### REUTERS

- Most Reuters videos are listed as **NO RIGHTS RESTRICTIONS** or the restriction listed is as **NONE**; those stories can be used across all platforms at any time.
- If a Reuters video is marked **FOR EDITORIAL USE ONLY**, we can use it.
- Reuters videos may sometimes be marked **NO MOBILE USE**. VOA has clearance to use these videos on our Internet and mobile platforms. Please contact Steve or Pam if you have questions about NO MOBILE USE restrictions.
- **NO ACCESS USA/CNN/YAHOO/AOL/WIRELESS**  
Stories with this restriction generally originate from NBC News and cannot be used by VOA

**VOA does not have contractual rights to use NBC material.  
Please be diligent about confirming the source and do not use NBC content.**

**If there is a strong editorial reason to use NBC News or NBC affiliate material –  
and similar material cannot be found on the other newsfeeds – please contact  
Steve or Pam to see whether we can get clearance to use the video.**

- **RESTRICTED POOL** - The five U.S. news networks -- ABC, CBS, CNN, FOX and NBC – shoot video daily that is designated pool material. In most cases, Restricted Pool applies to domestic and overseas coverage of the president, and in election seasons, coverage of presidential candidates.  
**VOA CAN USE THIS RESTRICTED POOL VIDEO.**

**However, VOA cannot use Restricted Pool video of the vice president, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense or other Cabinet members.**

it is strongly recommended that you call Steve or Pam if there is any uncertainty about the Restricted Pool designation of a video.

- **Sports items will often be heavily restricted.** Many have **NO ARCHIVE** restrictions, very often 48 hours but also 15 days or a specific date. As a rule, golf, tennis, cricket and motorcycling are heavily restricted. Stories about U.S. hockey (NHL) can be used until the end of the current hockey season. Soccer matches are often restricted, but we can use video of soccer practice / press conferences.

- Video shot in the UK often carries this restriction:  
**ITN COPYRIGHT: TV: NO ACCESS ALL DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL CHANNELS DISTRIBUTED IN UK & EIRE ON SKY/VIRGIN/FREEVIEW; BBC/BSKYB GROUP: NO ACCESS WORLDWIDE ANY MEDIA; INTERNET: NO ACCESS.CO.UK WEB SITES AND ALL WEBSITES PRINCIPALLY TARGETED AT THE UK AND/OR EIRE; MOBILE: NO ACCESS WORLDWIDE; NO USE AFTER 30 DAYS FROM DATE FIRST USED ON ALL PLATFORMS.**

This is an extremely targeted restriction statement and it is recommended to call Steve or Pam for guidance. Typically we parse the statement to find the relevant info, and call for clearance or clarification when necessary. In this example, “MOBILE: NO ACCESS WORLDWIDE” is the relevant statement we’d need to decipher.

- **NO ACCESS IRAN AND NO ACCESS VOA PERSIAN NEWS NETWORK**  
VOA Persian **cannot** use Reuters material filmed in or sent from Iran, whether shot by Reuters or the national networks. However, stories received at VOA prior to June 9, 2010 are OK to use – for now – even if a restriction is listed.  
NOTE: The stories restricted to the Persian Service **can be used** by the News Center and the other Language Services.
- **OTHER RESTRICTIONS**  
VOA can use stories that have restrictions to other geographic regions. For example, stories with No Access Russia or No Access Indonesia can be used by those Language Services as well as all other VOA services.

However, non-regional restrictions, such as No Access Internet, must be followed. Sometimes permission will be granted; in those cases please contact Pam or Steve to gain clearance.

### **THE RESTRICTIONS OF ANY OF OUR VIDEO PROVIDERS CAN CHANGE AT ANY TIME**

**IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS,  
PLEASE CONTACT STEVE OR PAM**

### **NEWSMARKET**

Newsmarket ([www.thenewsmarket.com](http://www.thenewsmarket.com)) is an online provider of video. Although the site has a lot of available material, there are a number of guidelines that VOA must follow in order to use the video.

- You must be an employee or contractor working with VOA and use your work e-mail (@voanews.com) to access the site. Pam Commerford ([pcommerford@voanews.com](mailto:pcommerford@voanews.com)), chief of the Media Asset Management Branch has done pre-registration for many employees; if you need to establish an account, please contact Pam.
- Keep your password confidential; it is for your use only.
- Registered users are responsible for searching images and **ensuring that no costs are associated with the material. If costs are required, funding must come from your Language Service or Division.** The Office of Information Services will **NOT** pay for material acquired from Newsmarket.
- The VOA producer or Language Service is responsible for obtaining the terms and conditions of use of the material. Newsmarket makes no claims about the accuracy of the content on its website, so producers must be sure to exercise VOA journalistic standards in the choice and use of material.
- Credit must be given for content used and **logos or copyrighted images cannot be changed or obscured.**
- You must use the content for editorial purposes only.
- You **cannot** store the original content for future use. The content from Newsmarket must be deleted from your workspace when you are finished with your initial use. Should you need the content again, you can go back to the website and re-capture it.
- **The material that you use in a VOA story or program can and will be archived;** there is no restriction on this material.
- The content incorporated in your stories and shows can be distributed on all VOA platforms.
- **The Office of Cuba Broadcasting (OCB) is included in this agreement, meaning that VOA and OCB ONLY can share material that is acquired from Newsmarket.**

### **RESTRICTIONS**


- You cannot provide unedited content to other organizations, **including the BBG grantees RFE/RL, RFA and Alhurra.**
- You cannot use the Newsmarket logo or trademark in a way other than how it is presented in your story.

- You cannot use any technology to monitor, copy or deep link with Newsmarket.

Assets should be brought into DaletPlus to the NEWSMARKET folder: INCOMING FEEDS > NEWSMARKET. Associated metadata needs to be added to the Asset Manager Form (AMF), include source information, and a **VOA DOT added to the video**.

*(Also see [Domestic Dissemination of VOA Programming, p. 67](#))*

Example of Newsmarket info to add to AMF in DaletPlus:



**Source Info**

US Distribution: ☐ All Clear ☒ Restricted

Footage Sources: ☐ APTN ☐ ABC NEWSONE

Feed Provider: thenewsmarket.com

Source Comments:

Origin of Video: Source: NATO TV ]

Background Wires:

**US Distribution:** Rights of use do not extend beyond VOA's use, so US DISTRIBUTION should be marked RESTRICTED.

**Footage Sources:** OTHER should be selected.

**Feed Provider:** thenewsmarket.com

**Origin of Video:** Indicate the owner of the source video. In the example, it's NATO TV.

All questions regarding registration on [Newsmarket](#) and the use of its material should go to Pam Commerford ([pcommerford@voanews.com](mailto:pcommerford@voanews.com), 202-382-7124)

### VIDEO NEWS RELEASES (VNRs)

A video news release (VNR) is a video segment made to look like a news report, but is instead created by a public relations firm, advertising agency, marketing firm, corporation, or even a government agency. VNRs are produced with the aim of shaping public opinion, promoting commercial products and services, publicizing individuals or supporting other interests.

VNRs may include interviews with experts (who may be paid by the company or ad agency for their appearance in the VNR); man on the street interviews that may be done with professional actors; and pictures of corporate logos to support the product or brand being promoted.

Although we occasionally receive VNRs from APTN and Reuters that does not make them any more legitimate for use by VOA.

There may be times when material from a VNR is appropriate for **excerpting** in a video package.

#### **Example #1**

If the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York discovers a new treatment for prostate cancer and the Center provides a video of its research work, VOA can, and should, use some of that video to illustrate the story.

- The script must say the video was provided by the Center, and there must be a visual credit to the Center as well.

#### **Example #2**

Apple unveils the latest version of the iPhone and sends out a VNR showing the latest changes in the phone and how it operates. VOA can use some of the video to illustrate its story.

- The script must say the video was provided by Apple, and there must be a visual credit to Apple as well.

Please keep in mind, however, that as with fair use of video, all instances of whether to use material from a VNR will not be the same, so always check first with Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com)) or Pam Commerford ([pcommerford@voanews.com](mailto:pcommerford@voanews.com)).

### VOA SHOULD NEVER AIR A VIDEO NEWS RELEASE IN ITS ENTIRETY

More detailed information about feeds and rights can be found in Rights Usage Guidelines Presentation and the Video Newsfeed Guide found on the [Media Asset Management Branch \(MAM\) page on Sharepoint](#).

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### DOMESTIC DISSEMINATION OF VOA PROGRAMMING

From time to time, VOA staff may receive requests for one-time use of a radio or TV piece, or the request may be for ongoing use of VOA programming. These requests could come from U.S.-based media organizations, diaspora media outlets, overseas media outlets, or from educational institutions.

#### INDIVIDUAL VOA STAFF MEMBERS SHOULD NOT ATTEMPT TO FIELD THE REQUESTS THEMSELVES

Instead, VOA staff should direct requestors to [UsageRequests@voanews.com](mailto:UsageRequests@voanews.com) for more information. *(Also see [Requests for Unaired/Unpublished Material](#), p. 34)*

#### DOCUMENTING SOURCE VIDEO IN DALETPLUS

To be able to share our broadcast programs with U.S. requestors, we must be able to identify non-VOA content, including that provided by our newsfeed suppliers, ABC NewsOne, AFP, APTN and Reuters, in the stories and programs we air.

Everyone who creates a story or program using DaletPlus must take time to enter source info in the Asset Manager Form (AMF). The **Source Info** module is the third section on the AMF form. The example below is an example of source info in an AMF of a story, showing the kind of information expected when available. (Plus signs at the end of each field allow additional space for more info.)



**Source Info**

US Distribution: ☐ All Clear ☒ Restricted ☐ DO NOT Distribute ☐ Other

Footage Sources: ☐ APTN ☒ ABC NEWSONE ☐ REUTERS ☐ OTHER

Feed Provider: ABC NEWSONE wsSavvyCat May 14, 2013

Source Comments: \*\*MUST COURTESY: YouTube/Marjan Kirovski Video has been cleared for use by the owner - per the ABC NEWSONE script info

Origin of Video: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=nLR9HDHlnGM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=nLR9HDHlnGM)

**U.S. Distribution:** A quick reference field to indicate whether the story is cleared for fulfilling a request from a U.S. requestor. If your story or program master is entirely VOA original, **All Clear** should be check-marked. If it has non-VOA content (ABC NewsOne, AFP, APTN or Reuters) **Restricted** will be checked. **This means that some clips will have to be cleared for US distribution.** The default is **DO NOT Distribute**.

**Footage Sources:** A quick way to note the feeds that are included in the story or program master. For **program masters**, the archive liaison may use “select all” for news programs, if in assembling the program the service uses all of our content providers. For **VOA stories**, the producer will need to be specific, so the searcher knows how involved tracking down the sources may be.

**Feed Provider:** A free text field to note specifically the story slug /date and source of vendor-provided clips used in a story. When a U.S. request is being filled, this information will allow the requestor to contact the appropriate newsfeed source to obtain clearance to use the video in the United States.

**Source Comments:** Can be used to further clarify use if necessary / possible.

**Origin of video:** To be used when video is different from the newsfeed source itself; for example, video from YouTube. This field should be used for story AMFs, rather than for use for program master AMFs.

Please e-mail questions or concerns to [senior-archivists@voanews.com](mailto:senior-archivists@voanews.com). You may also call the Video Library’s point person on this project, Bojan Klima at 382-5510.

### THE VOA DOT



Video received from ABC NewsOne, AFP, APTN and Reuters is stamped with a tri-colored dot as those feeds come into the Cohen Building. This indicates that the stamped material cannot be used by domestic VOA clients. The dot appears in the **UPPER LEFT** of the frame **AND MUST NOT BE OBSCURED**.

- IF A SERVICE INCLUDES NEWS AGENCY VIDEO IN ITS PACKAGES, PROGRAMS OR SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS, PLEASE MAKE SURE THE DOT IS ALWAYS VISIBLE.
- THIS IS THE ONLY WAY WE CAN GUARANTEE THAT NON-VOA VIDEO WILL BE PROPERLY NOTED AND AVAILABLE FOR EASY REFERENCE DURING A VIDEO ASSESSMENT.

Here are two examples of how the dot looks on incoming feeds:





**VIDEO LIBRARY FOOTAGE PRIOR TO JULY 3, 2013  
DOES NOT HAVE THE VOA DOT EMBEDDED IN THE VIDEO**

**THEREFORE, IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE REPORTER, PRODUCER  
AND/OR VIDEO EDITOR TO ENSURE THAT THE VOA DOT IS ADDED TO  
THE EDITED MATERIAL**

**THE VOA DOT MUST APPEAR ON CLIPS PRIOR TO 7/3/13 FROM THESE SOURCES**

- ABC NewsOne
- AFP
- APTN
- IRINN
- Journal of American Medicine (JAMA)
- NewsMarket
- Reuters
- UNIFEEDS (United Nations video)
- Other Acquired Material:
  - From VOA Acquisitions Branch
  - Obtained by VOA Reporters
  - Obtained from a Third Party

**THESE SOURCES PRIOR TO 7/3/13 DO NOT REQUIRE THE VOA DOT**

- VOA Original Footage
- House Recording Studio (Including hearings and news conferences)
- NASA
- Pentagon
- Senate Recording Studio (Including hearings and news conferences)
- State Department
- White House

### **VOA DOT EDITING INSTRUCTIONS FOR FINAL CUT PRO**

As noted in the previous section, VOA is **required** to differentiate our originally-shot video from what we receive from our news video sources, such as APTN, Reuters TV and ABC NewsOne. This material is sometime called proprietary video, which means the original supplier is the copyright holder and has licensed the video to VOA only under certain terms and conditions.

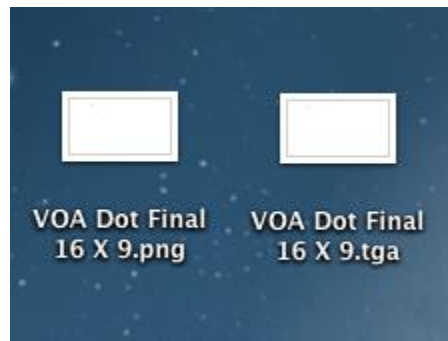
Because of those terms and conditions, these instructions **must** be followed when you are editing material that doesn't already have the VOA Dot burned in. Usually, this video will have come from the video library or newsfeed video you have kept on video tape or transferred digitally onto hard drives or other storage devices.

**Also, any video you have received from other sources or have purchased must have the VOA Dot edited on to it.**

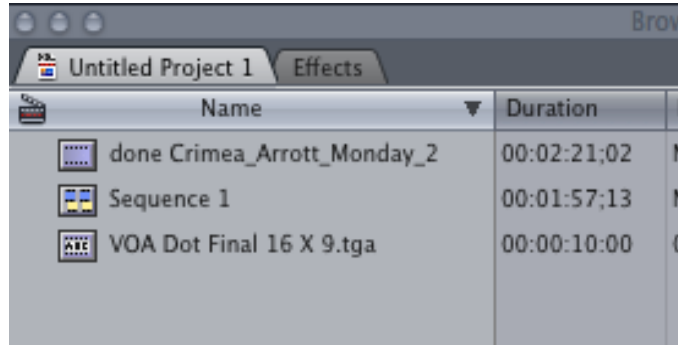
Related to this is the need to enter the appropriate information about this video into the [DaletPlus Asset Management Form, p.67](#)

Follow these steps to add the VOA Dot to all video newsfeed content which doesn't already have it embedded.

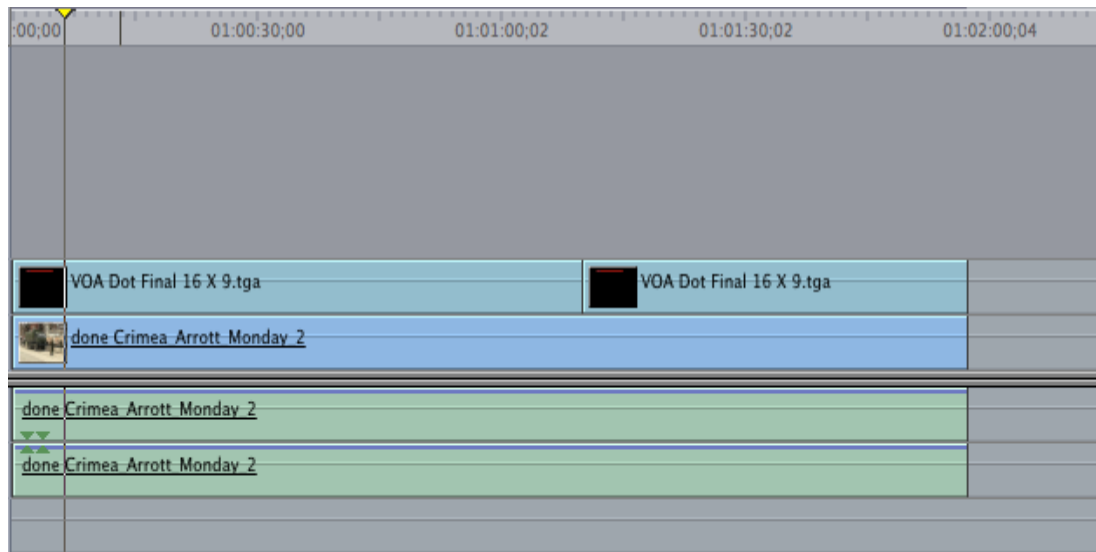
1. Copy the .tga file from: \\es\_video\video\VOA\_Dot Template to a local drive on your computer (or to the desktop).



2. Then drag and drop the .tga file from your local drive/desktop into the tab of the FCP project you are working in.



3. Create a video track above your existing video tracks (in this case “V2” – if you already have 4 tracks of video you would create a new track “V5”)
4. Overwrite the .tga onto your newly created video track (in this case “V2”) on top of the video that is to be identified.



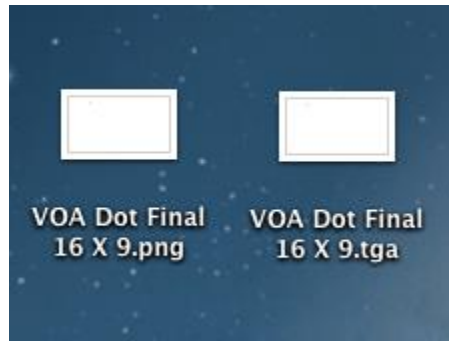
5. Repeat this process until all the proprietary video without the VOA Dot has had it added.



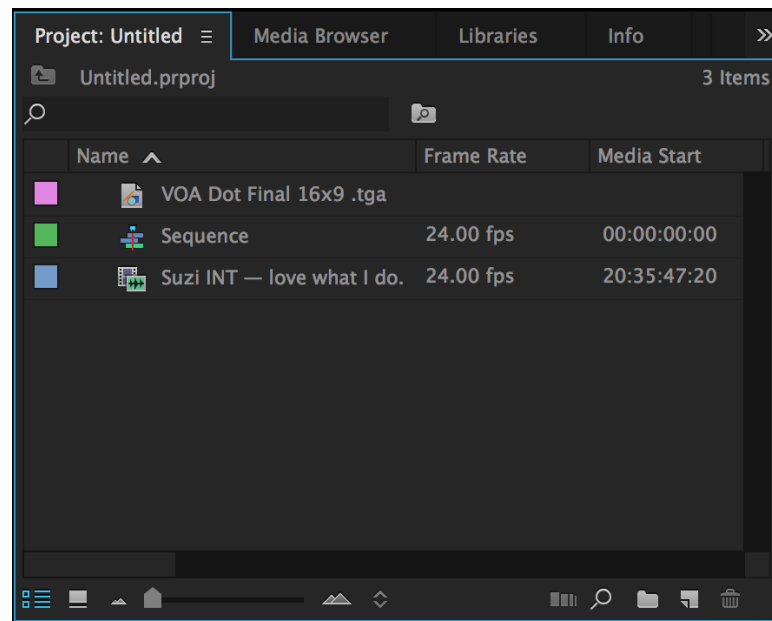
### **VOA DOT EDITING INSTRUCTIONS FOR PREMIERE PRO**

Follow these steps to add the VOA Dot to all video newsfeed content which doesn't already have it embedded.

1. Copy the .tga file from: \\es\_video\video\VOA\_Dot Template to a local drive on your computer (or to the desktop).



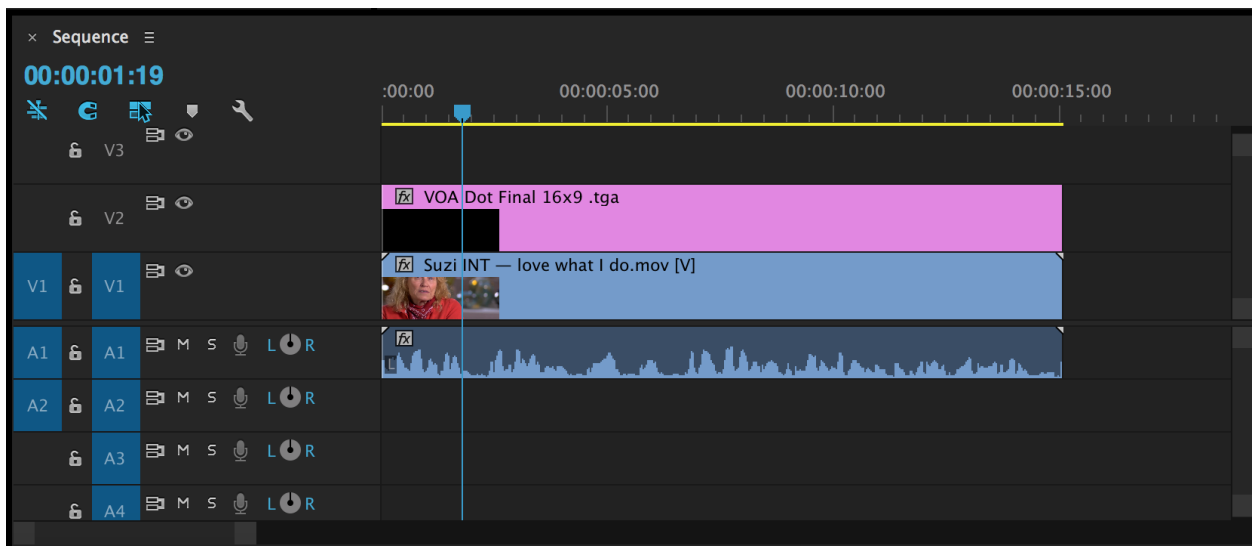
2. Drag and drop the .tga file from your local drive/desktop into the tab of the Premiere Pro project you are working in.



3. Create a video track above your existing video tracks (in this case “V2” – if you already have 4 tracks of video you would create a new track “V5”)

## BEST PRACTICES GUIDE

4. Drag the .tga file into the newly-created video track (in this case “V2”) where the proprietary video is being used.



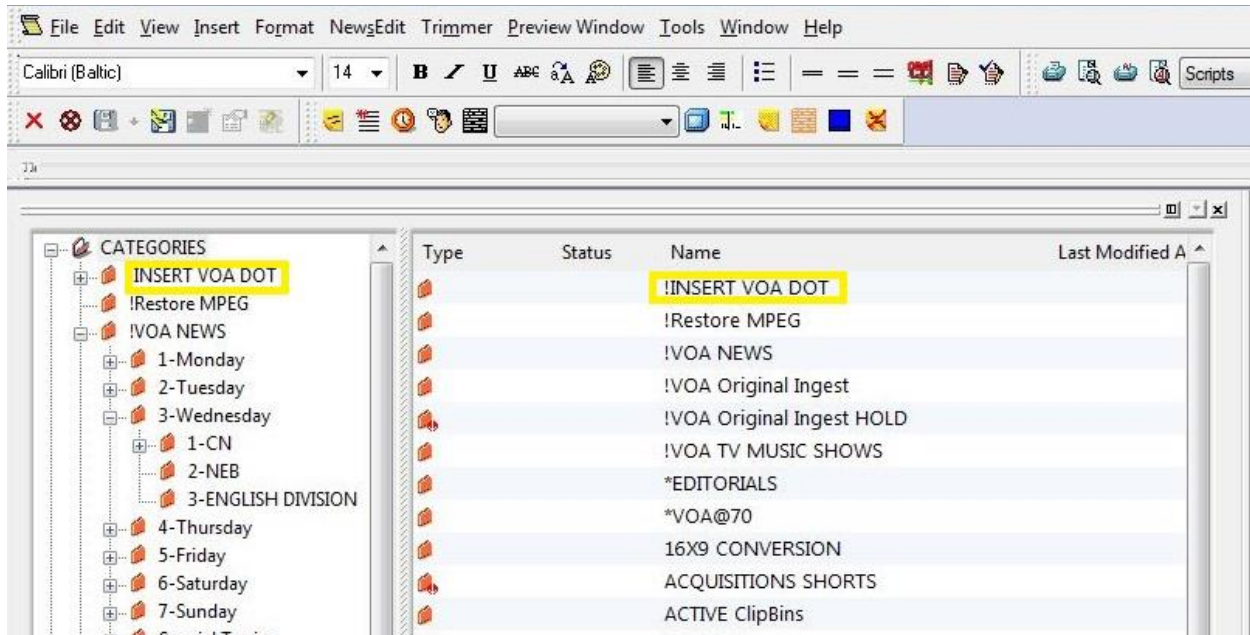
5. Repeat this process until all the proprietary video without the VOA Dot has had it added. Below is how the video looks in playback once the dot has been added.



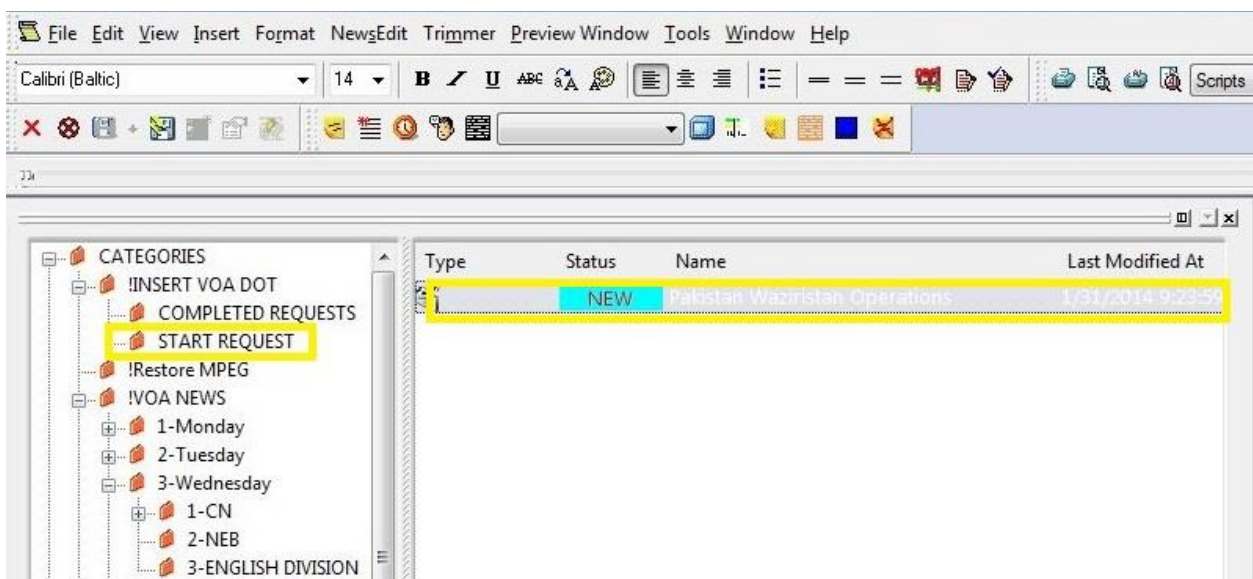
[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### ADDING THE DOT TO VIDEO IN DALETPLUS

DaletPlus users can embed the VOA Dot automatically onto older video in DaletPlus or video restored from the DaletPlus Archive. Use the watch folder: **!INSERT VOA DOT** (located at the top of the main category tree) to drag and drop video without the dot.

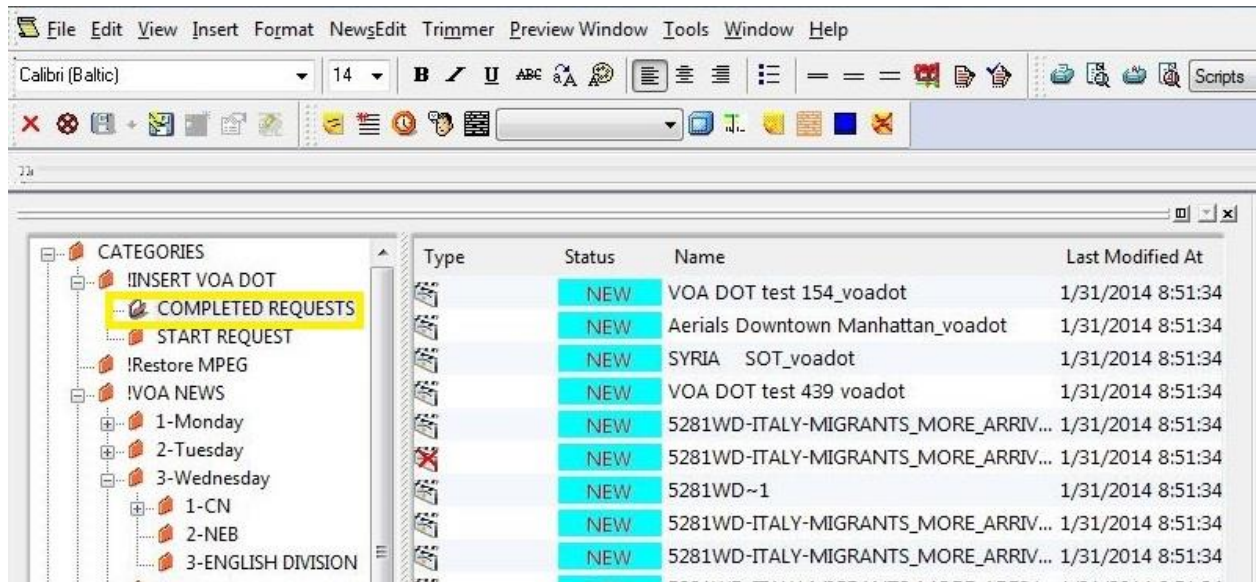


- Right click and drag a video title to the **!INSERT VOA DOT > START REQUEST** category, located at the top of the main category tree in DaletPlus. Select **LINK HERE** on the drop down menu to begin the process.





- After a few minutes (depending on the length of the file), a video with the VOA Dot embedded will appear in the **!INSERT VOA DOT > COMPLETED REQUESTS** category. The video title will have a \*voadot appended to the file's name.



- Users can then move the completed title(s) to their appropriate folders.

**THE VOA DOT MUST BE ADDED TO CERTAIN PROPRIETARY VIDEO!**  
**SEE LIST ON PAGE 70**

**IF THERE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT WHETHER TO ADD THE DOT TO OLDER**  
**LIBRARY VIDEO, PLEASE CONTACT PAM COMMERFORD:**  
[pcommerford@voanews.com](mailto:pcommerford@voanews.com)



### CORRECTIONS

VOA's reputation and credibility are the hallmarks of the organization. The News Center and the Language Services produce news content, programming and services across many platforms and under daily deadline pressures. While our goal is always to be accurate and fair, occasionally we will present incorrect or inaccurate information. A meaningful policy for correcting significant errors will strengthen our trust with viewers, listeners and readers. As such, these errors will be corrected in a clear and timely manner, with appropriate prominence.

#### TV & RADIO BROADCASTS

If we make a mistake that needs correcting, we should do so as quickly as possible while the same show is on the air. If the error is not detected immediately, then preferably the correction should be aired on the same program in which the original error occurred, whether it's the following day or week. Make a point to say "On \_\_\_\_\_ day (state the day and date and time), we erred in our reporting..." then go on to explain what we said that was wrong, make the correction and close by saying, "Voice of America regrets the error."

#### WEBSITES

If the error is a simple typo that does not change facts or understanding of the story, we consider it a minor change and simply correct it without further mention. If the error is substantive or one of fact, we change it, add an asterisk (\*), then a note at the bottom saying when it was corrected and what was wrong originally.

#### SOCIAL MEDIA

**Facebook:** Correcting an error on Facebook should follow the same procedure as on voanews.com websites. Update/edit the Facebook post and explain why the information was corrected.

**Twitter:** A good method for correcting an error on Twitter is to **subtweet** the correction. On the next page you'll see how *Slate* handled posting the wrong photo (actor Javier Bardem) when tweeting about Vladimir Putin.

The correction begins "@Slate CORRECTION:" so that *Slate* is replying to its own original tweet. The result is that anyone viewing the original tweet can see the correction in the stream of replies. Equally important, it refers to the photo without showing it again.

People viewing the correction tweet on its own can also see it is part of a conversation linked to the original, offending tweet.

**NOTE:** If you reply to yourself, then anyone who follows you will see the reply. So in terms of who can see the correction, it's just as good as sending it as a normal tweet.



### **LEGAL ISSUES**

This section provides brief introductions to various areas of the law that may apply to VOA journalists. These guidelines are meant to provide an overview to certain areas of the law and are not a substitute for a legal opinion from the Office of General Counsel (OGC). Please contact OGC when you have a specific legal question.

#### **FIREWALL**

The “firewall” between VOA journalists and the rest of the U.S. government was put in place to maintain the credibility of reporting by U.S. international broadcasters. The firewall is violated whenever a U.S. government official tries to influence the reporting of the news by putting undue pressure on a VOA journalist. The firewall is not meant to discourage VOA journalists from interviewing government officials or USG officials from appearing on VOA programs. It is critical to ensuring that VOA journalists and editors make the final decisions on what stories to cover, and how they are covered.

For example, if you are approached by an FBI agent who asks for your reporting notes or asks that you be an informant for the FBI while you are reporting for VOA, this may be a firewall violation. Another firewall violation might be a U.S. ambassador asking that you not air a particular interview or that you give a particular slant to a VOA news story.

**VOA JOURNALISTS WHO EXPERIENCE POSSIBLE FIREWALL INTERFERENCE  
SHOULD NOT ATTEMPT TO MEDIATE THE SITUATION THEMSELVES.**

**PLEASE NOTIFY YOUR SUPERVISOR AND THE BBG BOARD BY SENDING A MESSAGE TO  
[BBGFIREWALL@BBG.GOV](mailto:BBGFIREWALL@BBG.GOV) OR CALLING 202-203-4545.**

#### **COPYRIGHT AND FAIR USE**

Copyright is a form of protection provided by U.S. law to the authors of original artistic works. Artistic works include photographs, video, audio, music, motion pictures, commercials, written products, as well as footage from other news broadcasters. You should not use a copyrighted work unless (1) you have permission to use, whether via VOA’s contracts (such as VOA’s video feed or photo contracts) or another negotiated license agreement, or (2) your use of the work falls under the “fair use” doctrine.

#### **FAIR USE**

Whether a use of copyrighted material is a fair use requires a balancing of four factors: (1) the purpose and character of your use; (2) the nature of the copyrighted work; (3) the amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole; and (4) the effect of the use upon the potential market for the copyrighted work. Application of these factors and the fair use doctrine is highly fact-specific and requires a case-by-case analysis.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

A use of a copyrighted work is more likely to be a fair use if the material is directly relevant to a news story and the excerpt used is no longer than necessary to achieve the intended purpose. On the other hand, the use of copyrighted material such as a music clip simply to enhance the production value of a television package, for example, is not likely to be a fair use. Keep in mind that just because a video or audio clip is newsworthy does not automatically make VOA's use of it fair. [A Fair Use Self-Help Guide](#) with Frequently Asked Questions is available on the agency's Sharepoint site.

### **AMBIENT MUSIC**

Generally, where music is naturally appearing in the background during an interview or taped event, there is no copyright issue. There may, however, be a copyright issue if the music is incorporated into a news or feature report in other than its incidental form.

(Also see [YouTube Guidelines, p. 46](#) and [Music, p. 53](#))

### **PUBLIC DOMAIN**

Copyright restrictions do not apply to works in the public domain, which include most U.S. federal government works, such as photos, maps, or video found on [whitehouse.gov](#), [state.gov](#), [nasa.gov](#), [cia.gov](#), and other government websites. Be sure to check the Copyright or Terms of Use/Terms of Service pages of these and other websites before using any content.

A work is also in the public domain if it is no longer under copyright protection. This depends on when and where the work was first published, but generally speaking, works published in the U.S. before 1923 are in the public domain. Contact OGC for specific questions about older works or copyright terms in foreign jurisdictions.

### **LICENSED MATERIAL**

VOA has several license agreements with third parties to use their copyrighted material. The terms of these agreements govern use of the material provided by the licenses, notwithstanding the applicability of the fair use doctrine. When using material from one of VOA's feed providers, such as ABC NewsOne, AFP, APTN and Reuters, for example, you must check all restrictions that may limit the story's use. Questions about the video feeds should be directed to the VOA Media Asset Management Branch.

(Also see [Video Usage Rights, p. 56](#))

### **REQUESTING PERMISSION**

Because fair use can sometimes be difficult to determine with certainty, VOA producers are strongly encouraged to seek permission to use copyrighted material from the rightful copyright owner. You should start the process of identifying and contacting the owner of copyrighted content as early in your production process as possible, since it may take several days or weeks to identify the copyright owner and negotiate a license. Please note that obtaining permission in writing, using the standard BBG/VOA release form, is highly preferable to getting permission orally or via email. A template release form -- to be edited and modified, as needed -- is available on the [Best Practices Sharepoint page](#).

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

On occasion, a third party may either request to amend the VOA form or insist on using its own licensing agreement. Such outside agreements may contain terms to which BBG/VOA cannot agree. Please consult OGC when presented with a third party release form or licensing agreement.

### **TRADEMARK**

A trademark is an intellectual property right in a particular "mark" used to identify a good or service, such as a name, slogan, symbol or logo. For example, "Voice of America" is a registered trademark. It is unlawful to use a trademark in a manner that confuses consumers about the source or sponsorship of goods or services. This is rarely an issue in news broadcasting, since the law allows you to use a mark without permission in a news story if the mark is used in an informational sense. For example, if you are reporting on the BP oil spill, it is appropriate to show the BP logo to identify the company. However, if you are launching a new VOA program, avoid using slogans or titles that are trademarked.

### **TRADEMARK & SPORTING EVENTS**

When covering major sporting events such as the Olympics, VOA journalists must be careful with using official trademarks, such as the Olympic mark. For example, it could be argued that a VOA graphic incorporating the VOA background/colors/image with the official Olympic logo creates an unauthorized association between VOA, a non-Olympics marketing partner, and the Olympic brand.

**ALTHOUGH THE PHRASE "VOICE OF AMERICA" IS TRADEMARKED BY THE AGENCY,  
"VOA" AND THE VOA LOGO ARE NOT TRADEMARKED.**

[More information on the above topics can be found at the Best Practices site on Sharepoint.](#)

### **FILMING IN PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE PLACES**

Generally, news media have the right to be in public places and on public property to gather information, photographically or otherwise. VOA journalists should be mindful, however, about rules, permits, or prohibitions on filming or taking of photographs at certain meetings, sporting events, or in private spaces. Similarly, journalists should seek permission from an owner or occupant (even if the occupant is not the owner) before entering private property or a residence.

[\(Also see \*Covering Criminal Activity\*, p. 14\)](#)

### REQUEST FOR PROOF OF INSURANCE

From time to time, VOA staff may be asked to provide a certificate of liability insurance when filming in locations where event organizers or property owners want to protect themselves against third party bodily injury and property damage. While most private sector media organizations have liability insurance, the U.S. Government **self-insures** against liabilities. Therefore, the agency does not purchase liability insurance, and there is no such certificate that we can provide.

Instead, the Office of General Counsel provides a letter explaining this that staff can send to the appropriate parties. Two versions of the letter – one on VOA letterhead and one on BBG letterhead -- are now available in Word documents on the VOA Best Practices Sharepoint page:

[VOA Insurance Letter](#)   [BBG Insurance Letter](#)

Each letter has blanks so that you can fill in the names of VOA staff that will be on location and the name of the property/location you will be working at. Use the VOA letterhead if you choose to have your service chief or division director sign it. Use the BBG letterhead if you prefer to have an attorney in the General Counsel's Office sign it.

Please contact the General Counsel's Office or Best Practices Editor Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com)) if you have any questions about this.

### DEFAMATION/PRIVACY/FALSE LIGHT

Under U.S. law, the central question in an action for defamation or invasion of privacy is whether the statements in question are true or false. Truthful publication or broadcast of matters pertaining to legitimate public interest should generally not expose VOA to liability in the United States, especially if VOA's reporting concerns a public figure.

However, VOA may be liable for invasion of privacy in certain situations for the publicizing of private facts or falsehoods. Not only that, other countries' defamation and "insult" laws are not as protective of the press, so broadcasts that are legal in the U.S. may still expose VOA to liability overseas.

VOA journalists should not intercept or record any private conversations without the permission of the participants, as this may be a crime in certain jurisdictions. OGC should be consulted when a VOA journalist receives intercepted conversations from a third party or in any other special circumstances.

[\(Also see Recording Telephone Interviews, p. 31\)](#)

The following guidance is provided by the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press ([rcfp.org](http://rcfp.org)):

- Check sources thoroughly. Get independent corroboration whenever possible. A source could have a vendetta against the subject and willfully or unintentionally misrepresent the facts for his or her own purposes. Confidential sources may disappear or recant in the face of a lawsuit. Don't rely on someone else to be accurate.
- Do not let your opinion about whether someone is a public figure or official color your decision to verify the accuracy of a story. Juries do not respond favorably to reporters who fail to confront their subjects with defamatory information and provide them with an opportunity to comment.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

- If you cover the police or courthouse beat, make certain you understand criminal and civil procedure and terminology. Be especially careful to restate accurately any information obtained about arrests, investigations and judicial proceedings.
- Be cautious when editing. Make sure the story does not convey the wrong information because of a hasty rewrite.
- Watch for headlines and cutlines that might be defamatory even though the text explains the story.
- **Make sure news promos or teasers used to stir audience interest are not misleading or defamatory.**
- **Do not use generic video footage or file photos when reporting on an activity that might be considered questionable.**
- **Just because someone else said it does not mean that a news organization cannot be sued for republishing it.** This includes letters to the editor. Check out any factual allegations contained in them as carefully as you would statements in a news story.
- Be sensitive about using words that connote dishonest behavior, immorality or other undesirable traits, whether in your published story or in comments in your notes. Remember that a judge may order a news organization to produce reporters' notes, drafts and internal memoranda at a libel trial.
- If contacted by someone threatening a libel suit, be polite, but do not admit error or fault. Talk the case over with your editor, supervisor or attorney immediately, and follow procedures established by your news organization.

### **DO NOT BE RECKLESS WITH THE TRUTH**

#### **REPORTER'S PRIVILEGE AND CONFIDENTIAL SOURCES**

The reporter's privilege originates in the First Amendment's guarantee of a free press, under the rationale that forcing journalists to disclose confidential sources will discourage sources from communicating with reporters, thereby disrupting the free flow of information protected by the First Amendment. In some circumstances, journalists are compelled to disclose confidential sources. Because of BBG's special status as a federal government agency, some internal VOA documents may also be subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

[\*\(Also see Confidential Sources, p. 23\)\*](#)

### **VOA JOURNALISTS SHOULD CONTACT OGC IF APPROACHED BY ANY LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS.**

**IN SOME SITUATIONS, THIS COULD BE A FIREWALL VIOLATION.**

[\*Return to Table of Contents\*](#)

### **SUBPOENAS OR REQUESTS FOR TESTIMONY OR DOCUMENTS**

- **IF YOU RECEIVE A REQUEST OR DEMAND TO TESTIFY IN A LEGAL PROCEEDING ON MATTERS RELATING TO OFFICIAL AGENCY INFORMATION OR YOUR OFFICIAL DUTIES, OR IF YOU RECEIVE A REQUEST TO PRODUCE AGENCY RECORDS OR INFORMATION, CONTACT THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL IMMEDIATELY.**

There is a special regulatory procedure for handling requests for testimony by current and former employees and handling the production of documents in legal proceedings in which the BBG is not a named party.

### **REPORTING ON CLASSIFIED DOCUMENTS**

A number of laws and regulations, including several criminal statutes, regulate access to, and transmission of, classified information. VOA has a specific protocol in place regarding its reporting on classified documents in the public domain, such as the documents released by WikiLeaks in 2010.

**ONLY CERTAIN VOA JOURNALISTS ARE ASSIGNED TO REPORT ON THESE TOPICS.**

**THE SUPERVISORY INVESTIGATIVE EDITOR SHOULD BE CONSULTED BEFORE YOU BEGIN ANY ASSIGNMENT RELATING IN ANY WAY TO CLASSIFIED MATERIAL, EVEN IF THE CLASSIFIED DOCUMENTS ARE PUBLICLY AVAILABLE ON A WEBSITE LIKE WIKILEAKS.**

**THE SUPERVISORY INVESTIGATIVE EDITOR WILL CONSULT WITH SENIOR MANAGEMENT AND THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL REGARDING ALL APPLICABLE LAWS.**

### **INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL BY VOA REPORTERS**

While U.S. government employees must usually obtain a country clearance from the State Department before official government travel abroad, VOA reporters traveling to cover and report on the news may travel to countries in which U.S. Missions are located with minimal formality, which will typically only include a notification of intent to travel to the State Department. Please be mindful that travel to some sanctioned countries may require additional licensing or documentation. Reporters should contact their supervisors and the Travel Office before planning travel to these countries.



### OUTSIDE ACTIVITIES

#### **ALL FULL-TIME VOA STAFF ARE REQUIRED TO FOLLOW THESE PROCEDURES BEFORE RESPONDING TO A REQUEST OR MAKING ANY COMMITMENTS**

Anyone looking to engage in activities outside of VOA is asked to first check with their supervisor to ensure doing so won't conflict with official duty schedules or requirements.

Then, you should forward your proposed activity to [OutsideRequests@voanews.com](mailto:OutsideRequests@voanews.com). This will reach Andrew Krog in the General Counsel's Office ([akrog@bbg.gov](mailto:akrog@bbg.gov)), VOA Public Relations Director Bridget Serchak ([bserchak@voanews.com](mailto:bserchak@voanews.com)) and Best Practices Editor Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com)). We will review your proposal to ensure that it will not violate government ethics regulations or journalistic ethics and best practices.

Federal regulations prohibit employees from receiving compensation for outside teaching, speaking, or writing activities that directly relate to their official duties.

Some activities may not be appropriate if they:

- Constitute a conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest.
- Involve use of agency materials, time, or facilities.
- Involve a particular matter you've worked on in your official capacity.
- Are likely to adversely affect the agency's ability to fulfill its mission
- Would involve working for outlets that broadcast to or publish in the same target area as the employee's VOA language service.

Additionally, if you will be identified as an agency employee in connection with your outside activities, in order to avoid appearances of impropriety, you must include a disclaimer that the views expressed are your own and not that of VOA (or the U.S. Government, as appropriate).

Because the highest standards of journalism require a reputation for impartiality, VOA journalists should not perform public relations or similar representational work, either paid or unpaid. Journalists should also not counsel individuals or organizations, either in the United States or abroad, on how to deal successfully with the news media. Lastly, you should not provide advice to government officials other than to those in VOA, the BBG or any other government broadcasting entity, or to candidates for public office, again regardless of whether in the United States or abroad.

Outside speaking and writing opportunities can be highly beneficial, both personally and professionally, but if not done properly they can have serious consequences. Please don't hesitate to contact Andrew or Steve if you have any questions or need advice.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Aside from the types of activities outlined here, there is also the issue of whether VOA staff can, or should, express themselves outside of the office.

Needless to say, this is a very delicate issue, given our unique status as government employees as well as journalists.

With that in mind, this is the recommended guidance for VOA staff:

- VOA's mission is to provide accurate and objective news and information. To facilitate that mission, as journalists, you are expected to remain neutral and objective. That means that you should be careful and try to avoid conduct or activity that would question your neutrality and objectivity as well as the neutrality and objectivity of VOA.
- For example: If as a VOA journalist you are reporting on or otherwise working on a story regarding "X" situation, it is recommended that you avoid publicly voicing your personal opinion about that situation because such activity may call into question your credibility as a journalist and could compromise VOA's reputation as a reliable and credible news organization.

### **PLEASE EXERCISE GOOD JUDGMENT WHEN CONSIDERING YOUR OPTIONS AND MAKING YOUR DECISIONS.**

#### **CONTRACTORS**

VOA contractors are generally afforded wider latitude to engage in activities outside the scope of their contracts with the Agency, but they should keep in mind that certain activities and actions could jeopardize continued performance on their current contract, or their ability to obtain a follow-on contract.

When doing work outside of VOA, it is important for VOA contractors to refrain from stating or creating the impression that they are employees, agents or representatives of the agency. They should not say that they "work for" VOA or are "correspondents at" VOA. Rather, they should indicate that they are "freelance journalists," "regular contributors to VOA," or use a similar description.

Also, VOA contractors must exercise caution to ensure that their journalistic integrity or impartiality is not compromised by their activities outside the scope of their contract.

VOA contractors employed by the employee management firms should advise the respective on-site managers from each company when they receive offers of work outside VOA. Contractors must also send their requests to the respective VOA Program Manager responsible for their language service, and to Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com)).

VOA contractors with any questions as to whether or not an outside activity poses a potential journalistic conflict are encouraged to contact Steve for advice.

### **COMPETITIONS AND CASH AWARDS**

Any employee who wants to enter a particular journalism competition using his/her VOA-produced work **must** first advise his/her supervisor. If the supervisor determines the entry to be of merit, please advise Pat Bodnar ([pbodnar@voanews.com](mailto:pbodnar@voanews.com)) and Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com)). All entries should be sent to Percy Rogers, the Agency's Incentive Coordinator ([ptrogers@bbg.gov](mailto:ptrogers@bbg.gov)). Percy will compile all entries.

### **ENTRIES FOR JOURNALISM COMPETITIONS ARE TO BE SUBMITTED BY THE AGENCY'S SENIOR MANAGEMENT ONLY**

### **INDIVIDUAL STAFF MEMBERS SHOULD NOT ENTER COMPETITIONS ON THEIR OWN USING WORK PRODUCED FOR VOA**

While the majority of journalism competitions that VOA enters award trophies, plaques or certificates to the winners, a few of them may include cash awards. Should a winning entry result in a cash award, that award will be designated to the agency, **not to the individual**. It will be the responsibility of VOA senior management to determine whether it will accept the cash award under its gift acceptance authority, and how that cash award will be administered.

### APPENDIX A - HOW-TO GUIDES

#### RADIO PRODUCTION BASICS

##### COMMON CUES

<b>Stand By:</b>	Alerts tech to be more than 10 seconds before next event
<b>Open Mic:</b>	Directs tech to turn on mic; "Open Mic" #1-"Open ALL Mics"
<b>Go:</b>	Directs tech to GO to the next source; "Go Navigator" – "Go Mini Disc," etc.
<b>Sneak:</b>	Bring audio in at a low level (-10 dB or less)
<b>Dead Pot:</b>	Start audio with the fader completely closed or off
<b>Sweep:</b>	Bring audio level up to "0 dB"
<b>Fade Out:</b>	Bring audio level to silence

##### CALL-IN SHOW CUES

<b>Seize Hybrid #:</b>	Tells tech to take control of phone line
<b>Hybrid On Audition:</b>	Puts the phone on audition <b>NOT</b> On Air
<b>Hybrid On Air:</b>	Puts phone call "On Air"
<b>Drop Hybrid:</b>	Removes phone call from On Air <b>OR</b> Audition

##### MUSIC SHOW CUES

<b>Cross Fade:</b>	Mixes 2 audio sources, sneaking one source in and fading the other
<b>Segue [seg-way]:</b>	Go from one audio source to another
<b>Hot Mic:</b>	Open mic while another audio element is playing
<b>Hold Music:</b>	Keeps audio

##### OTHER COMMONLY USED CUES

<b>Reload I/O:</b>	Reloads the language I/O
<b>Link:</b>	Connects one audio file to another. <b>ALWAYS</b> link file BELOW to file ABOVE
<b>Auto Pilot:</b>	Connects <b>ALL</b> files in Navigator and plays them "back-to-back"
<b>Drag File:</b>	Moves a file from one place to another; from Base Browser to Navigator; from within Navigator, etc.
<b>Delete:</b>	Removes audio file from Dalet. Can be used in Base Browser, Navigator, Studio I/O or Cart Application

### WORKING WITH MINICAM

#### SIMPLE PRESS CONFERENCES/NEWS INTERVIEWS

The mini cam crews shoot many stories every day and they can be a great resource for ideas. Communication is key; if you are inexperienced as a producer/reporter, say so and they'll help you. It's your story and they need guidance on how and what you want shot. Get to know them and discuss your story ahead of time, as they may have ideas that hadn't occurred to you.

- Try to plan ahead of time what shots you will need and communicate these to the cameraperson. If you don't know what you'll need, ask the cameraperson what they think.
- At news conferences/seminars stay close to the cameraperson so that you can advise when you have the sound bites you need from a speaker, so that they can then move to shoot b-roll, especially if the event is not in English. If you don't do this, the cameraperson won't know what to shoot and may shoot too much or too little. You can also take time code notes from the camera, or ask to have the time code be time of day and you can take notes using your watch. Either way, you won't have to search for the sound bite later when you screen video or edit.
- At news conferences/seminars advise the cameraperson on what type of cutaways you'll need. Ask for them to all be shot on tripod, unless tripods are not allowed. For example: at a conference on women in Islam you might look for women with headscarves in the audience or women not wearing headscarves. Decide ahead of time what you'll need depending on the angle of your story. Ask to have at least 10 cutaway shots of various people. These should not be shot from one spot, but from the side, the front, etc.
- During interviews make sure to give your cameraperson adequate time to set up and properly light the location. This usually takes 30 to 45 minutes for an office interview. At a conference, see if there is a relatively quiet corner where the cameraperson can set up a standing light. If not, they may be able to use their camera light. If you need reversals (at a minimum get a reaction shot of the reporter, as this will allow you to edit between two sound bites) make sure they are shot from tripods and lit to match your interviewee.
- All interviews should have a set up shot. This is a shot that includes both the reporter and the subject -- communicate to the cameraperson you want a "2-shot" from a different angle. This allows you to introduce the subject visually and puts the reporter on the scene. When you write and edit your script, you don't always have to do question/answer/question/answer editing. Put in the two shot and write a piece of track to explain or set up an answer. It helps to make the interview visually interesting and varies the pace.
- Don't forget the option of interviewing one or more of the press conference participants after the event. This will vary the look of your piece and can allow you an opportunity to ask follow-up questions not addressed during the press conference. You can also interview other stakeholders in the story who attended the event but did not participate in it.

All shoots should have these basic shots:

- **Establishing Shots:** These could be wide shots of an event, exteriors of buildings, etc.; these shots are needed to give your story a location.
- **Medium Shots:** These are needed to give your story some visual variety when editing.
- **Close Ups:** Often the most important shots; the visual details of a story. For example, in a story about bad traffic, you'll want to see angry faces in cars, white knuckles on steering wheel and tires coming to a stop.

All camera movements should have a purpose and reveal something. Pans, zooms and tilts should be used sparingly. For example, if shooting a piano player you may want to zoom in to reveal the fingers on the keys or pan from the audience to the piano or tilt from a chandelier on the ceiling to the piano on a stage. See Terminology below for more detail.

### TERMINOLOGY

- **Set up or 2-shot:** A shot of an interview that shows both the reporter and interviewee.
- **Reversal:** Shows the reporter from the reverse angle of the interviewee. These can be both single and/or two shots (over the shoulder of the interviewee is also called "over the shoulder").
- **Establishing shot:** Shows where the event is taking place.
- **Wide shot:** Takes in the whole "scene" of an event. At a press conference this would be the speaker and the audience.
- **Medium shot:** This is a little closer than a wide shot. At the same press conference this may be the speaker and a podium from head to toe or a reverse shot of a group of people in the audience. In an interview, it may be a shot of the interviewee from the waist to the head.
- **Close Up:** A shot that shows detail. A reporter taking notes in a notebook, someone listening intently.
- **Cutaway:** Exactly as it reads; it is shot "away" from the action. At the news conference these would be shots of the audience from the reverse angles. These could also be wide, medium or close up shots. At a rally, it would be shots of the crowd reacting to the speakers.
- **Rack focus:** A shot that changes focus between two subjects, one in the foreground and the other in the background.
- **Pan:** Camera move from left to right or right to left.
- **Tilt:** Camera moves up to down or down to up.
- **Zoom in/out:** Shot moves closer to a subject or moves away.

### **VIDEO EDIT SESSION BASICS**

The production of a video piece is a team effort. Though it may be preferable for the producer and editor to work on a piece together, there will be times when that's not possible. In those instances, producers should ensure that the editor has all the necessary script and video elements to construct the piece.

### **BASIC EDITING PRINCIPLES**

#### **CONTINUITY**

Continuity is vital to a well-edited video piece. This means the edited video should establish and maintain a logical and constant flow of subject, location, movement, color and sound.

#### **COMPLEXITY**

Complexity editing is using different shots (close-up, medium or long shots) or transitions (dissolve) to convey and/or intensify a story. While the B-roll illustrates the story, the voiceover should **support** the visuals, not repeat what it is shown. For example: If the shot is a man looking out the window the voiceover shouldn't say: "As John Doe was looking out his window." Tell the audience **WHY** John was looking out the window and make the edit to the relevant image.

#### **CONTEXT**

When editing news stories, the true context of the event must be shown. For example, if a demonstration is taking place, and not many people participated, it would be misleading to show a close up of a handful of people in a tightly framed or edited shot and say in the script that the demonstration was attended by many.

#### **ETHICS**

Distorting an event or the meaning of an event through video editing is journalistically unethical. Juxtaposition of two images to convey an idea that might distort the facts is unacceptable no matter how powerful the edited images might be. For example, showing bombs dropping from an airplane and cutting to a child crying from a different sequence (earlier or later) in the raw footage would give the viewer the idea the child is crying because of the dropping bombs. It is the responsibility of the producer and the editor to tell the truth to the viewers and respect the trust that the viewer has placed in them. The most effective news editing is when a story is told as accurately and ethically as possible.

### **PRE-EDITING**

To get the most out of edit time, source materials should be marked with an edit decision list (EDL). If the source is tape, make sure it is ready for digitizing with specific time codes. It's important to have specific file names and the correct file location of the required source material. If the material to be edited is located on the DaletPlus or another shared file server, the editor will need to know what it is named and where to find it on the server. To achieve the best results and conserve a considerable amount of time during the session, pick out the good shots, sound bites, and music in advance.

### **PREP TIME**

Video editors will prepare the editing system and associated equipment prior to the start of an editing session to ensure everything is working. Although editors are usually scheduled to work the same shows on a daily basis you never know when someone is going to call in sick or be out for other reasons.

Do not assume that the editor assigned to that editing suite is familiar with editing a particular program. To ensure a good quality product and get the best of an editor's skill the producer should brief the editor on the details of the package (what the package is about, length, sound bites, need for special natural sound, and anything else pertinent to the production of the story).

### **THE EDIT SESSION** **SCRIPTS**

Producers should bring two copies of the script to the session – one for the producer and one for the editor. For language versioning from an English package, the original English script should be included. The editor needs to be able to follow the script, especially when a producer cannot stay with the editor for the full session.

### **AUDIO TRACKING**

When voice tracking, it is extremely important to follow house-standard cues. They are “RETAKE” or “PICKUP” whenever you need to correct a mistake. It is also recommended to use the “3-2-1” countdown before re-starting the track.

### **IN THE EDIT SUITE**

Video editing is collaborative. On many stories, editors are joined by a producer or reporter who functions as producer, working cooperatively throughout the editing session. On other stories, the editor may work alone, using scripts or written instructions as a guide from which to make editing decisions, or uses the visual flow of the material to determine what is shown. In both cases, video material is edited to fit within a pre-determined time.

The producer (or the editor, if no producer is present) is responsible for the final product and he/she will make the final decision on the content and aesthetic aspects of the project. Producers and editors should collaborate on those aspects whenever possible, however. Aesthetic aspects include choice of shots, camera angles, special effects, which video to use, if and where natural sound is needed, the duration of shots, and so on.

The editor is responsible for the final decision on the technical aspects of the project, including correct application of bars and tone, capturing and outputting of video, video level, audio level, chroma level, correct application of effects, and the input and export of video files into different formats.

Producers are responsible for naming their video projects and assigning metadata according to the established naming conventions and procedures. Editors will assist in this process. It is the producer's responsibility (or the editor's, in the absence of a producer) to write the final information on the video, including time code, time or duration and slug.



### **POST-EDITING**

#### **WRAPPING UP**

Producers should leave the editing suite with all of their production material including source tapes, master tape, etc. Editors are not responsible for transporting production materials from their editing suites to producers' offices, library or VTM. In many cases they have other assignments after their current one.

#### **EXTRA EDITING TIME**

If the time scheduled for an edit session is over but the work is not finished, producers must contact the video editing management or the edit scheduling coordinator to arrange for more editing time. Editors do not have the authority to extend editing time – and they may be scheduled for another session.

### **TV CONTROL ROOM BASICS**

*(Also see the [VOA TV Production Guide for more detailed guidance](#))*

The following is intended to clarify and solidify the responsibilities of all those involved in putting a VOA TV broadcast on the air. These responsibilities and procedures are standard operating procedure at all major TV news organizations, and must be the same for all TV programs produced by VOA Language Services.

### **RESPONSIBILITIES**

#### **EXECUTIVE PRODUCER**

For any given set of shows in a language service the Executive Producer must take responsibility for the actions of staff and help Directors in enforcing the "must haves" for smoothly produced shows. In addition, the EP is responsible for helping to enforce the Procedures listed on the following page.

Although an EP may not necessarily have the foreign language skills, he/she does need to be well-qualified and experienced in the TV field so as to mentor, guide and oversee the work of their line producers and other contributing production personnel.

#### **LINE PRODUCER**

The Line Producer is responsible for developing the show rundown and executing the broadcast in the control room. If the Line Producer is not available to do this at the start of set-up time, the Executive Producer should come to the control room to confirm that the Director and crew have any necessary show information. Works with the Executive Producer to make editorial decisions about story lineup, length and editorial treatment and ensures each story is supported with the appropriate video and graphics elements. The Line Producer works with Central News and other support groups to set up live shots, beepers, segments and all other elements of the program.

The Line Producer must develop a strong working relationship with the Director. At least one hour before the broadcast, the Line Producer **MUST** go over the show rundown with the Director. They must discuss all video elements, all graphics, all reporter and guest remotes in advance so that the Director has time to review all of these elements before air. Failure to do so will result in a poorly produced program.

#### **WRITER**

The Writer must be able to write on deadline and write for breaking news as a story is developing. The Writer should view CNVOs, CNPKs, SOTs and packages before air time to make sure their scripts match the material.

#### **DIRECTOR**

The Director must establish a strong working relationship with the Line Producer and learn the different needs of the various programs he/she may direct. The Director should also create a working rapport with the editorial and control room staffs in order to produce a professional broadcast.

At least one hour before the broadcast, the Director **MUST** go over the show rundown with the Line Producer. They must discuss all video elements, all graphics, all reporter and guest remotes in advance so that the Director has time to review all of these elements before air. The Director will also review these elements with the Technical Director, Audio Operator and Camera Operators to ensure that the program is produced cleanly.

### **TECHNICAL DIRECTOR**

The TD must be familiar with the needs of specific programs. The TD is responsible for ensuring that the control room is ready for air and that all production elements – video, graphics, set pieces -- are in place before and during production. The TD should log equipment failures, technical errors and/or deviations from prescribed program log.

The Technical Director should review and preview all show elements with the Director and Audio Operator before air.

### **AUDIO OPERATOR**

The Audio Operator must consult with Director and Technical Director prior to production to ensure that all audio sources are accounted for. Provide accurate countdowns and cues to Director and Technical Director during production, whether live or taped. Should ensure quality check of transmission audio and return of on-air product.

### **PROCEDURES**

- Line Producers should be in the control room at the start of the set-up time. They should have show rundowns and cutsheets with them at that time. Directors and Line Producers must review rundowns and cutsheets as early as possible.
- Show rundowns must properly convey the Line Producer's intentions. For example: DaletPlus IDs should match the story slugs, fullscreens properly noted, graphics numbers filled in.
- Cutsheets (times of CGs, TRTs, story slugs and item numbers) match the rundowns.
- All cues for control room staff are to be noted on scripts and in the prompter. For example: when a v/o is to be inserted/rolled, when to change to a full screen, when a 2-shot is needed, when a live shot is happening, etc.
- The Line Producer is responsible for making sure graphics for his or her program are accurate. If the Director has any questions about the graphics, the Director and Line Producer should review them before air.
- A broadcast is only as smooth as the direction provided in the control room. With that in mind, the Line Producer must give the technical staff ample warning on changes to format and especially to kills, floats and changes during a show. If anything out of the ordinary will be used in a program – a musical instrument, a performer of some kind – the control room staff should be advised in advance of the broadcast. Remember, when in doubt, communicate.

- It is recommended that on-air talent be in the studio 15-20 minutes before air, dressed in clothes that adhere to television standards (avoiding whites, busy patterns, metal accessories around the wrist, etc). After settling in on the set, on-air talent should check IFB, and try to speak with studio and remote guests as soon as possible to ensure that you're hearing them and they're hearing you.

### **TV STUDIOS, SETUP TIME & PRODUCTION DESIGN**

VOA is putting greater effort and resources into production design, branding and continuity to obtain higher quality and more structured products. Too often, shows are being changed on a day of air basis by individual ideas from talent, line producers and/or production staff, which conflicts with VOA Best Practices. Here is a reminder of VOA Best Practices regarding TV studios and production design:

- Set up time is only to be used for the immediate preparation of that particular show. Set up time is not to be used to make changes to camera blocking, graphics, switcher effects, lighting or existing aspects of the show. Talent, line producers or other members of the production staff should not ask daily crew members, lighting or directors for modifications to the established lighting or production design.
- Talent, line producers or production staff must direct their concerns to the Executive Producer, who will then work with the Lead Director, Lighting and other production staff as necessary, at an alternate time (not during setup) to try new ideas or make agreed upon changes. The results must then be previewed on camera and receive executive level sign off before going on air.
- The overall production design of a show (graphics, lighting, camera shots, set design, switcher effects, editing effects, audio design and established format) is as much a part of the VOA brand as a show title or the VOA logo. Just as the title or logo isn't changed day to day, other aspects of the production design shouldn't change in this way.
- DO NOT modify pre-designed graphics or branding elements in any way or use them beyond the original intended purpose and placement.
- Graphics made for one show may not be used for another show without review and approval by the Executive Producers of both shows.

Please contact Lisa Stancik ([lstancik@voanews.com](mailto:lstancik@voanews.com)) if you have any questions.

### **CONTROL ROOM TERMINOLOGY**

Chyron	Manufacturer of Character Generators (see below); also used as general description of the characters generated on screen
CG	Character Generator: The machine used to produce the on-screen text
BKG	Background
EFX	Effects
FS	Full Screen
GFX	Graphics
Lower Third	Graphic taking up lower third portion of screen with text
OTS	Over the Shoulder
TRT	Total Running Time of a video or audio/clip file
Key	Superimpose chyrons or effects over video
Lose	Remove superimposed key
Split Screen	Graphic covering half of the screen
Double Box	2 boxes of equal size on screen
Big/Little Box	2 boxes of unequal size on screen

### **CONTROL ROOM CUES FROM PRODUCER**

#### **Cues to get material on the air:**

"Go to \_\_\_\_\_" (Camera X, Clip X, Chyron X)

"Clip X is good"

"Chyron (X channel) is good"

#### **Cues to give when looking ahead in show rundown:**

"Talent is throwing to ..."

"Talent/Guest is leading to..."

"Next is \_\_\_\_\_ in (Chyron, Plasma, Clip X, etc.)"

### **CONTROL ROOM CUES FROM DIRECTOR \*\***

"ROLL" "TAKE" "TRACK" "KEY"

"PREVIEW \_\_\_\_\_"

**\*\*The Director is the only person in the control room who should be giving these cues because they are standard cues for crew members to immediately take that action.**

### **SKYPE**

Any use of Skype Software broadcast on radio, television or Internet must be identified, whether live or recorded.

#### **RADIO AND AUDIO STREAMING PROGRAMS**

##### ***Less than 15 minutes in length:***

For any radio and streamed audio program where Skype Software is used for 15 minutes or less an identification announcement is required at the beginning and end of use.

##### ***More than 15 minutes in length:***

For any radio and streamed audio program where Skype Software is used for more than 15 minutes an identification announcement is required at the beginning and end of use and over the course of the program in no less than fifteen minute intervals.

**Example:** “Mr. Jones joins us live from Dubai via Skype.”

#### **TELEVISION & WEB PROGRAMS**

For any television or web program the Skype logo must be displayed during use of Skype Software.

The Director or Technical Director will insert the required Chyron containing the Skype logo. The Producer must inform the Director of any pre-recorded use of Skype Software to be aired during the program.

In accordance with VOA’s license agreement, the Director will insert the Skype logo in the Chyron identifying the guest. The logo should be displayed multiple times during the course of the interview.

Due to the occasional sketchy nature of Skype transmissions, most video use of Skype, whether on TV or the web, live or packaged, should be pushed back into a “box” format.

**EXCEPTION FOR LIVE TV PROGRAMS:** If both the Director and TD agree the signal is broadcast quality, it may be used full-screen.

#### **RADIO & TV SIMULCASTS**

For any radio and TV simulcast where Skype Software is used, the identification requirements for **both** radio and television programming as described above must be followed.

**NOTE: SOUNDBITES USED FROM A RECORDED SKYPE  
PHONE CALL DO NOT REQUIRE A COURTESY**

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### **ENCODING VIDEO WHEN UPLOADING TO PEACH**

There are now house-wide standards for encoding files that are uploaded to Peach.

#### **EXPORTING FROM ADOBE PREMIERE OR FINAL CUT PRO**

Regardless of the camera and settings you use to record video, these are parameters for exporting from Adobe Premier or Final Cut Pro before uploading to Peach:

1. Resolution: 1080p or 720p
2. Frame rate: 30fps
3. **Data Rate: Up to 6MBs (VBR)**
4. Codec: H.264 wrapped as .MOV or Mp4

#### **EXPORTING FROM IPHONE**

Regardless of which version of the iPhone you use, these are the parameters for exporting before uploading to Peach:

- **Using the Built-In Camera S**  
Use iPhone's default settings.
- **Usign FiLMiC Pro and/or iMovie Settings**
  1. Resolution: 720P
  2. Frame Rate: 30fps
  3. **Data Rate: 6MBs**

How-to video: [15 ways to improve iPhone videography with FiLMiC Pro](#)

**DO NOT UPLOAD APPLE PRO RES FILES TO PEACH**  
**THE FILES ARE TOO LARGE AND WILL OVERLOAD THE SYSTEM**

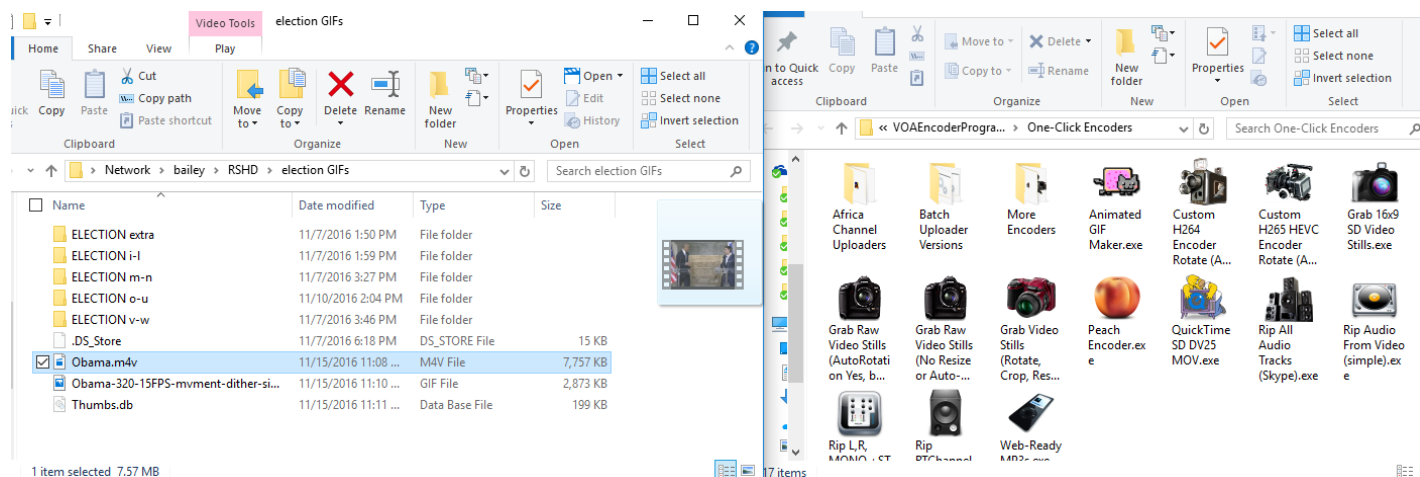
## DESKTOP ANIMATED VIDEO GIF MAKER

This new desktop encoder takes just about ANY video file and converts it into a looping GIF. You can create GIFs one-by-one or in bulk with a wide variety of options.

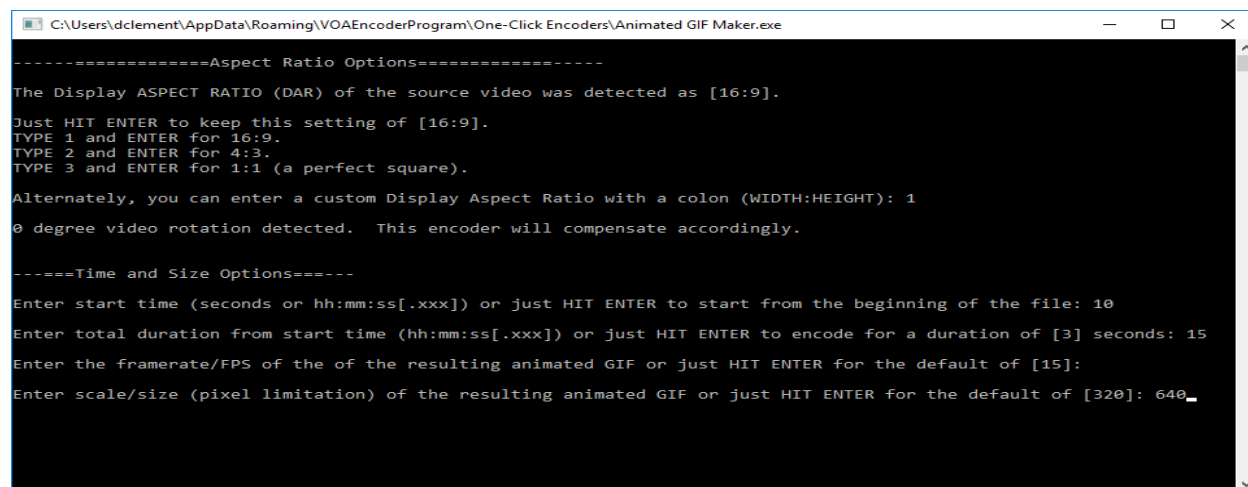
To process a single video, drag the video file onto the Animated GIF Maker icon.

To process video files in bulk, just drop an entire folder full of video files on the Animated GIF Maker icon instead. All GIFs will be created in the folder they were dragged from.

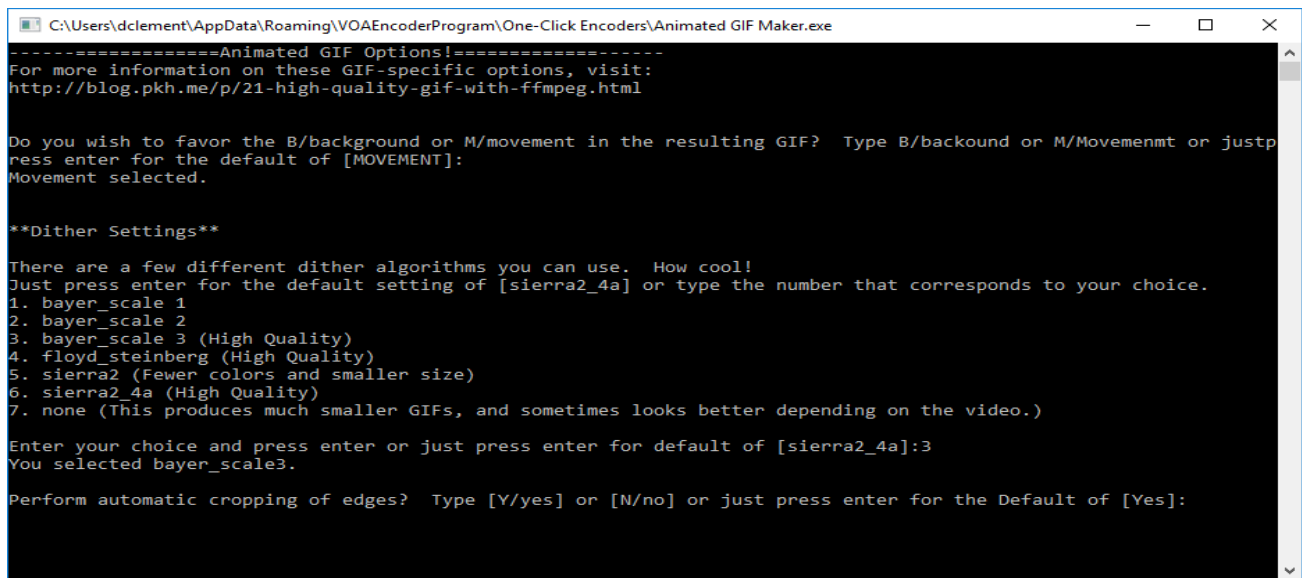
*(Settings from the first video will be applied to all videos in the folder. This encoder should properly handle mixed portrait and landscape sources, different resolutions, and automatic cropping across the entire set.)*



There are many settings you can choose from to tweak the final animated GIFs to your specifications including size, in-point, duration, dithering, etc. It can also automatically crop black bars from the edges of the video to give you a clean look. If you don't know what to select, just hit Enter for the default value(s) and go from there.







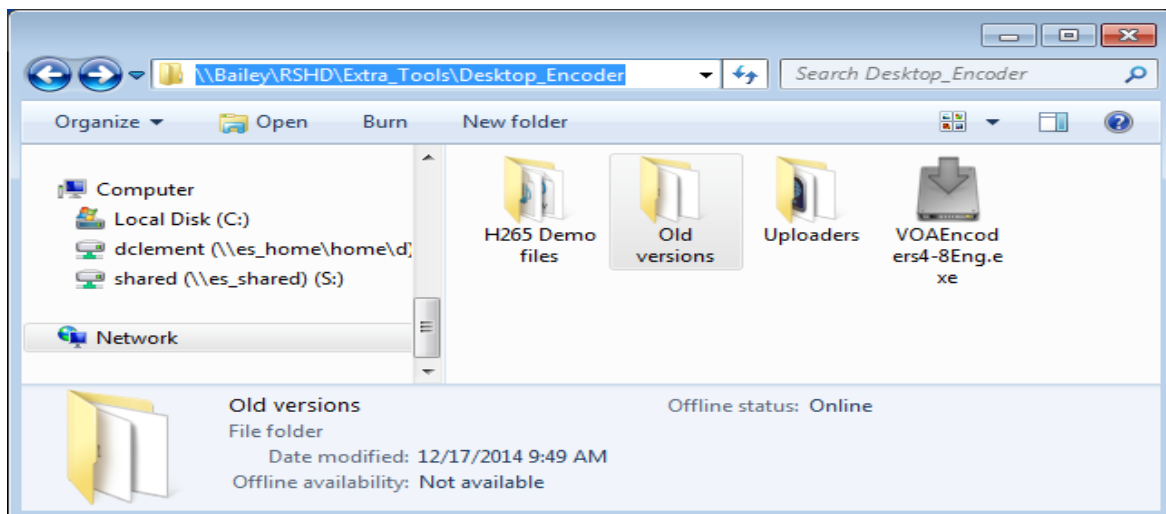
## INSTALLING AND/OR UPDATING VOA ENCODERS

### ALL END USERS MUST DO THIS THEMSELVES!

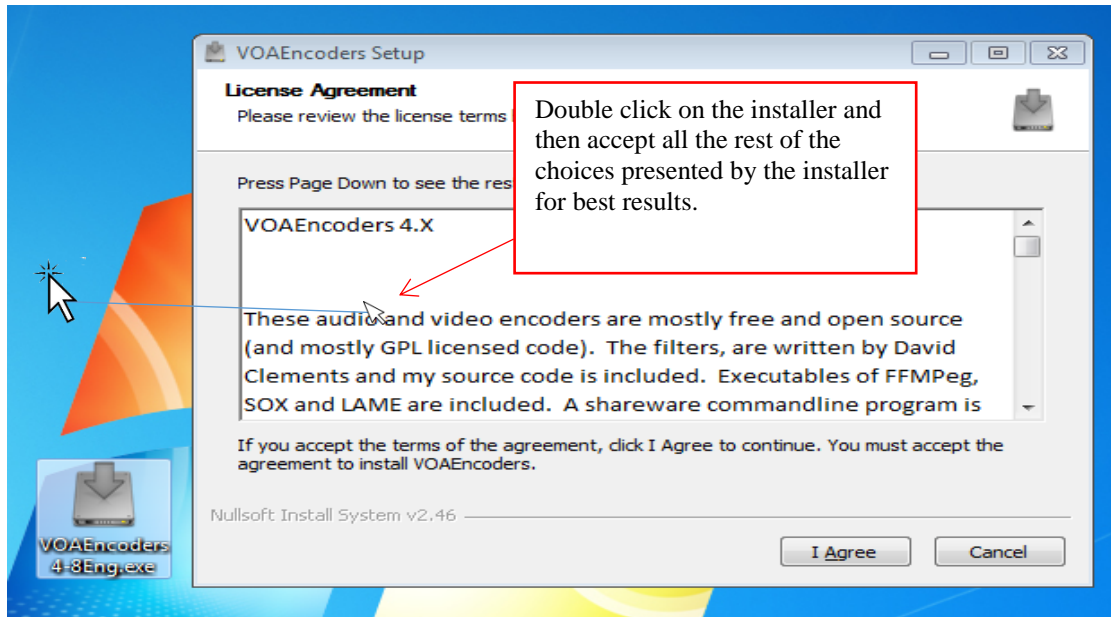
Admin rights are **NOT** required for installation. This is self-serve and should work.

If you have an older version of the encoders on your PC, uninstall the old version first. Also, if you notice that your encoders aren't working after getting new hard drive or a new PC, you should follow these instructions as well.

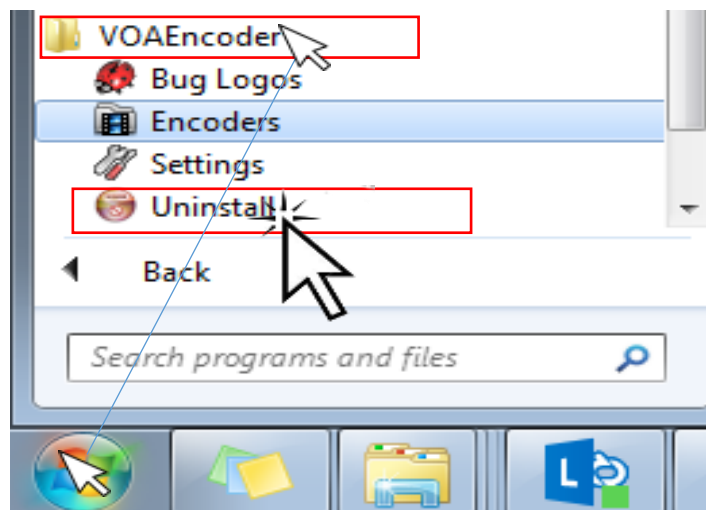
1. Go to [\\Bailey\RSHD\Extra\\_Tools\Desktop\\_Encoder\](#) in a **My Computer** window - **NOT** a web browser) as show below.



- It works best to copy the latest encoder installer to your desktop first and then double click on the installer icon to run the installation.



- Before double clicking a new version's installer, it's recommended that you uninstall the old version first. Just go to **Start Menu -> VOAEncoder -> Uninstall**. Then follow the steps above to install the new version. However, even If you forget to uninstall first, it will probably be OK.



**YOU MUST INSTALL THE VOA ENCODER ON EACH PC YOU PLAN TO USE IT ON. ALSO, YOU CAN ONLY INSTALL IT FOR YOURSELF.**

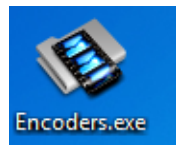
**HOWEVER, YOU CAN INSTALL THE ENCODERS ON AS MANY COMPUTERS AS YOU WISH, INCLUDING HOME COMPUTERS.**

**THIS SOFTWARE IS FREE FROM ANY LICENSE RESTRICTIONS.**

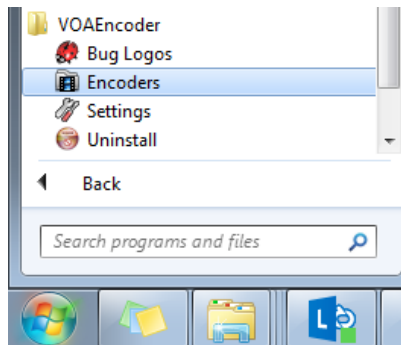
### **VOA ENCODERS Q&A**

**1. I ran the installer. Where are the encoders?**

There should be a folder on the desktop that looks like this:

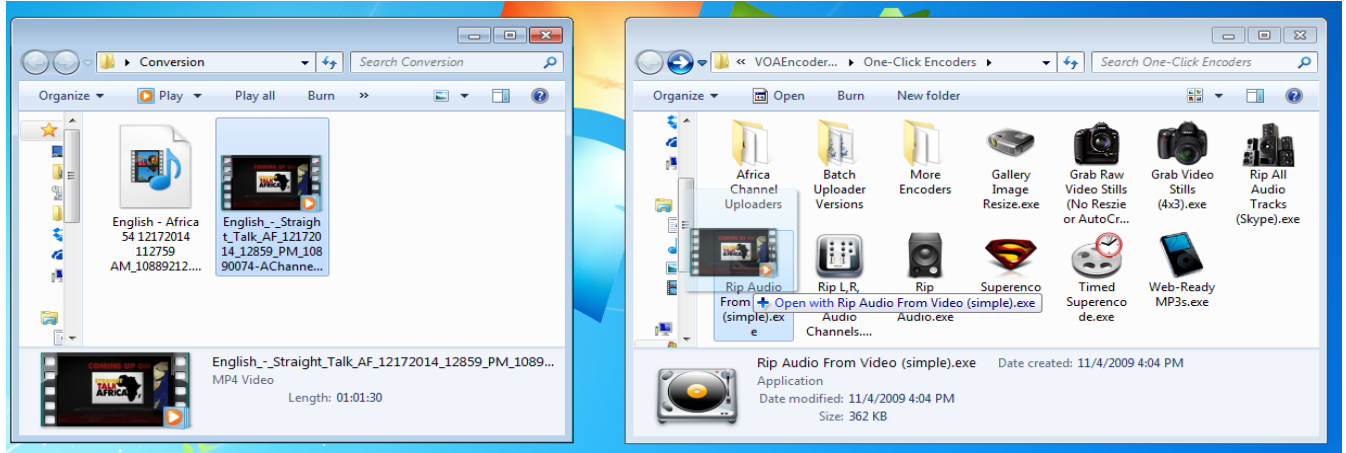


You can also find it in the **Start Menu** under **VOA Encoder -> Encoders:**

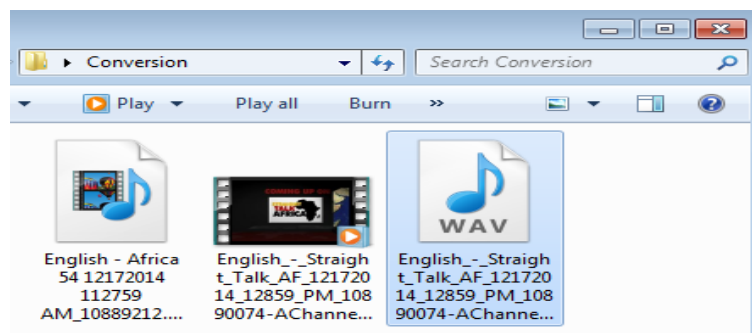
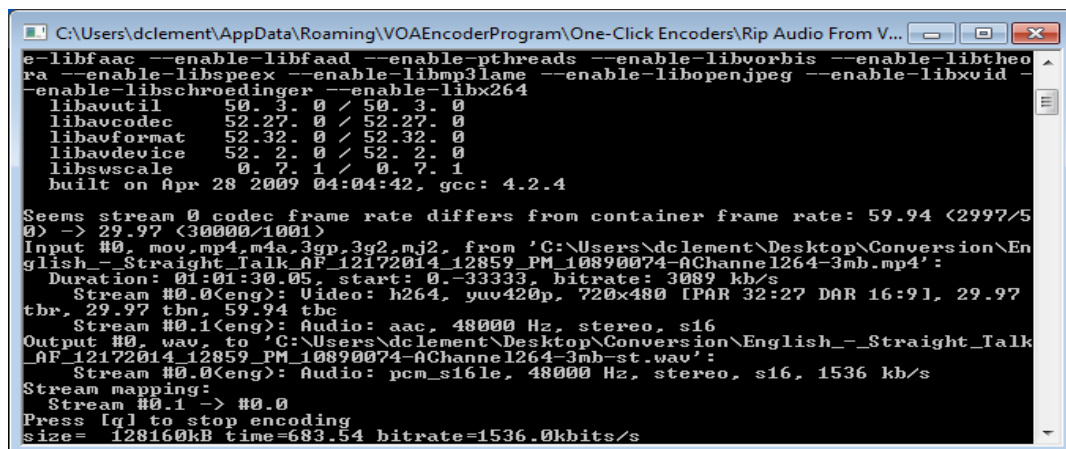


## 2. How do I use the encoders?

The best way to use the encoders is to copy all media you wish to convert to a folder on your desktop PC. Then drag any media files you wish to convert to the appropriate encoder icon.

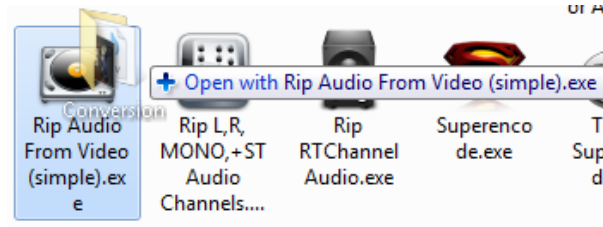


Once you have dragged a media file to an encoder drop icon, a DOS window should pop up showing progress and the new file will be created in the same directory that source file was dragged from.



### 3. Can I encode files in bulk?

In most cases, Yes. If you drag and drop entire folders on encoder icons, the files inside will process sequentially. All of the transcoded files will appear within the same folder along with the source files.



## FAQ

- **Can I encode files on network shares rather than my desktop PC?**

In most cases, yes. However, this is **NOT SUPPORTED** for many reasons. Also, performance of the encoder is generally slower when run across network shares.

- **Can I encode files on USB thumb drives or other removable media?**

Yes, but performance is likely to be degraded. Instead, copy files to your local hard drive before encoding for best results.

- **Can I call the Help Desk for support?**

You can try, but this is the support document you'll get. We're glad this software is helpful for certain things, but this software is provided as is, and as a convenience.

- **Why aren't the encoders preinstalled?**

The reason is that we don't have time to offer official support for it. Also, having users install this themselves makes testing new features easier and allows you to use this software at home as well. (Teleworking was the one of the main reasons this was developed.)

- **Is there a Mac version?**

No. However, there is a very handy Apple Pro Res encoder which is often better than MPEG Streamclip for certain things related to Final Cut.

- **Will there be a Mac version?**

It doesn't appear that there will be.

- **6. Can this be installed for me?**

Administrators cannot install this software for you as it installs to your Windows profile folder and each install is customized to you. It does not install to the regular Program Files directory. Just double click the installer and go.

### APPENDIX B – NATIONAL PARK SERVICE GUIDELINES

The National Park Service maintains many of the historic monuments and sites in Washington, and they have provided the following guidance for shooting video or still photos on those properties.

#### ALL VOA STAFF MUST FOLLOW THESE GUIDELINES AT ALL TIMES

##### WASHINGTON MONUMENT

- The Washington Monument is best photographed from a good distance **away!** The National Park Service suggests going to the MIDDLE of the National Mall between 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and 4<sup>th</sup> Street and placing your tripod and camera there. In one direction a news organization may shoot the Washington Monument; by turning your camera 180-degrees in the opposite direction, photographers may shoot the U.S. Capitol building, including stand-ups, b-roll or “beauty shots” or interviews.
- The NPS does **not** allow interviews, stand-ups, or b-roll or “beauty shots” **inside** the “circle of flags” that form the base of the Washington Monument. There is no news media parking at or on the Washington Monument grounds.
- **ALL** news media requests to go to the 500-foot level of the Washington Monument **MUST** be arranged in advance through the NPS’ Communications Office at 202-619-7222.

##### JEFFERSON MEMORIAL

- The **ONLY** location where b-roll or “beauty shots” of the Jefferson Memorial are allowed is from the “plaza area” next to or closest to the water of the Tidal Basin.
- News photographers are **NOT** allowed to shoot at **any time inside** the rotunda or statue level of the Jefferson Memorial. **No** tripods, lights, reflectors, jib arms, or any other production equipment is allowed **inside** the Jefferson Memorial rotunda or statue level **or** on the steps of the Jefferson Memorial.
- News photographers are **NOT** allowed to shoot **with a tripod** any b-roll or “beauty shots” **from or on the steps** leading up to the Jefferson Memorial. Any b-roll or “beauty shots” **from or on the steps** leading up to the Jefferson Memorial **MUST** be shot off-the-shoulder – **NO EXCEPTIONS!**
- Any interviews, referred to as “man on the street” interviews are to be conducted **on the plaza area ONLY** and **NOT** on any of the steps leading up to the Jefferson Memorial and **NOT inside of the Jefferson Memorial rotunda area.**

News crew parking at or near the Jefferson Memorial: Parking is allowed on either side of East Basin Drive (which is immediately north of I-395 and is one-way, westbound) on an as-available basis. The Jefferson Memorial Parking lot is closed and is **not** available for any parking. Free parking is also available approximately 300 yards from the Jefferson Memorial off of Ohio Drive, S.W. in three, smaller parking lots that are labeled Lots “A,” “B” and “C,” which are located between the spans of Interstate 395 or also known as the 14<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge spans.

### LINCOLN MEMORIAL

- **ALL stand-ups, ALL b-roll and ALL interviews** (i.e. “man on the street” interviews) to be shot at or in the close vicinity of the Lincoln Memorial using a tripod are to be shot from the dark gray field stone plaza area (referred to as “Lincoln Circle”) between the bottom steps of the Lincoln Memorial and the top steps of the Reflecting Pool.  
Stated simply: Stay on the dark gray field stone plaza area, located equidistant between the front of the Lincoln Memorial and the western end of the Reflecting Pool.  
 This location provides photographers wide latitude for a large number of different angles of the Lincoln Memorial, and in the opposite direction, the Reflecting Pool, the World War II Memorial, the Washington Monument and the U.S. Capitol.
- B-roll or “beauty shots” without a tripod, or shot “off the shoulder” are allowed on the steps leading up to the Lincoln Memorial under the following restrictions:
  - a) Photographers do not shoot on the top section of steps closest to the Lincoln Memorial statue level. Said slightly differently, photographers are to shoot, without a tripod, on any of the steps on or below the same step that contains the Martin Luther King, Jr. August 28, 1963, “I have a dream” writing inscribed into the stone step.
  - b) Photographers do not interfere with visitors’ ability to walk up or down the Lincoln Memorial steps.
- Restrictions on news photography inside the Lincoln Memorial statue level and on the top step section of the Lincoln Memorial:
  - News organizations are NOT allowed to bring any lights, reflectors, jib arms, platforms, dollies, ladders or other production gear inside the statue level of the Lincoln Memorial without first obtaining a written permit.
- **ANY and ALL b-roll “beauty shot” photography** inside the statue level must be done off-the-shoulder only (NO tripod) and with available light only. It is each news photographer’s responsibility to perform his or her work with available light. News photographers are admonished to **not** bring lights or extension cords up the Memorial’s steps as there are **no** electrical outlets inside the Lincoln Memorial statue level.
- **No interviews or stand-ups are allowed on any of the steps or on any steps or platforms between the steps leading up to the statue level of the Lincoln Memorial -- either with or without a tripod.** As stated above, **ALL** interviews and **ALL** stand-ups are to be performed on the **dark gray field stone plaza** area, located equidistant between the front of the Lincoln Memorial and the western end of the Reflecting Pool.

### WORLD WAR II MEMORIAL

- Do **NOT** set up your tripod on **ANY** of the granite stones of the WWII Memorial.
- **ALL** b-roll shot inside the WWII Memorial **MUST** be shot **off-the-shoulder**, or **without** a tripod.
- Shoot b-roll or stills **ONLY** on the “**eastern half**” of the Memorial, or on the side closest to 17<sup>th</sup> Street.
- **NO** video or stills are to be shot on the “**western half**” of the WWII Memorial where the “Field of Gold Stars” is located. The western half of the Memorial is the side of the WWII Memorial closest to the Lincoln Memorial.
- For everyone's ease and understanding, all **interviews** are to be shot on one of the three "grass panels" situated immediately **WEST** of 17th Street, and just **EAST** of the granite stone work of the main part of the World War II Memorial. In short, all interviews are to be shot with the news crew, the reporter and the interviewee **ALL** standing on one of the three **grass** panels.
- Although you likely have them, the NPS and USPP require **ALL** tripods to have rubber tips.
- There is **NO** crew car or news vehicle parking at or near the WWII Memorial! **ONLY** your microwave truck is allowed to park at the WWII Memorial. We strongly suggest taking a cab to drop you & your gear off. Make arrangements with a cab company BEFORE getting out of the cab for any return transportation you will need.
- Parking on the WWII Memorial grounds—i.e. on “Home Front Drive”—is limited to **passenger bus or taxi cab** drop-off and pick up of passengers **only**. There are five (5) handicapped-designated parking spaces at the WWII, which are reserved for cars specifically marked as having a **handicapped driver** or passenger **ONLY**. If news organizations park news vehicles there, those vehicles will be ticketed and towed at your expense.

**Parking recommendations:** The NPS suggests parking along Constitution Avenue **AFTER** 9:30 a.m. and walking with your gear to the WWII Memorial. PLEASE note **ALL** lanes of Constitution Ave. re-open for evening rush hour traffic promptly at 3:30 p.m. Any vehicles parked on either side of Constitution Avenue after 3:30 p.m. will be towed at the owner’s expense. IF the need to park earlier than 9:30 a.m. arises, the NPS suggests parking NORTH of Constitution Avenue on one of the numbered streets and walking over. Parking is always at your risk and the National Park Service and the U.S. Park Police have **no** responsibility whatsoever for any parking violations news organizations incur. Parking properly is YOUR responsibility.



### NATIONAL MALL

- Please note the National Mall between 3rd Street and 7th Street is under construction. This area is currently not available and is closed to the public. You may shoot on the National Mall west of 7th Street.

### KOREAN WAR MEMORIAL

- **ALL** stand-ups and **ALL** interviews (i.e. “man on the street” interviews) at the Korean War Memorial **MUST** be shot from and **ON** the grass immediately **NORTH** of the walkway/sidewalk that leads up to the Korean War Memorial (and from the Lincoln Memorial). That means news organizations have to shoot on the opposite side the fence from where all visitors walk to and from the Korean War Memorial. The walkway/sidewalk must be kept open and unobstructed at all times -- **NO EXCEPTIONS!**
- **ANY** and **ALL** b-roll or beauty shots of the Korean War Memorial’s fountain, flag pole, black granite wall or any of the larger-than-life-size soldier statues **MUST** be shot off-the-shoulder/without any tripod. **ALL** b-roll or “beauty shots” with a tripod **MUST** be done from the grass immediately **NORTH** of the walkway/sidewalk that leads up to the Korean War Memorial (and from the Lincoln Memorial)—or, again, on the opposite side of the chain fence from the Korean War Memorial.
- News photographers are **NOT** allowed to place or situate any lights, reflectors, jib arms, platforms or other production gear inside the circular, fountain/flag pole plaza of the Korean War Memorial. **ANY** and **ALL** b-roll or “beauty shot” photography inside the circular, fountain/flag pole plaza is to be performed off-the-shoulder only (NO tripod) and with available light only. News photographers are advised to not bring lights or extension cords to the Korean War Memorial plaza area as there are no electrical outlets inside this plaza area of the Korean War Memorial.
- News photographers are **NEVER** allowed to walk within or to set up a tripod in the rows of low-level cedar bushes in between the rows of larger-than-life-size soldier statues.

### VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL

- The only location where reporter stand-ups, b-roll/beauty shots or interviews with anyone in the vicinity of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is from “Area 5,” an area EAST of an imaginary line IF 20th Street, (and NOT 21st Street) were to have been extended south across the Mall. “Area 5” is entirely contained on green grass to the EAST of a black-painted chain-linked fence and pedestrian walkway that runs perpendicular to the EAST “Wall” of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.
- **You are NOT allowed to shoot ANY b-roll, interviews or stand-ups ANYWHERE, AT ANY TIME on the walkways of this Memorial EXCEPT on Memorial Day (typically the last Monday in May) and Veterans Day (November 11th).** The National Park Service arranges special events, including new media platforms, for events on these two federal holidays. Special arrangements for news media vehicle parking are also made available on these two federal holidays.

### MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., MEMORIAL

- **ALL** B-roll or “beauty shots,” **ALL** reporter stand-ups, **ALL** interviews, including all “person on the street” or impromptu and any prearranged interviews and **ANY AND ALL** live shots at the Martin Luther King, Jr., Memorial **MUST** be performed or conducted from the “Fore Court” area, the area that leads to the main portion of the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial and is the open area **BEFORE** anyone would walk through the “Mountain of Despair.” Said slightly differently, this is the area that is closest to West Basin Drive before West Basin Drive empties onto either eastbound or westbound Independence Avenue, SW.
- Tripods or cables are **NOT** allowed to be placed anywhere inside of the Memorial, or in the area where the “bust” of Martin Luther King, Jr. is located.
- There are **NO** standups -- live or tape -- or interviews allowed to be performed inside of the Memorial in the area where the “bust” of Martin Luther King, Jr. is located. The only b-roll allowed in this area is that which can be shot “hand-held,” or “off-the-shoulder.” This interior area of the Memorial must be kept free of any tripods or cables, as both present tripping hazards to any other visitor. Any injuries to any visitors caused by carelessly or recklessly placed cables or tripods are **YOUR** responsibility.

Parking: All news organization vehicle parking **MUST** be arranged in advance through the Office of Communications at (202) 619-7222. There is very limited parking at the Martin Luther King, Jr., Memorial for news vehicles. Please know and be aware that West Basin Drive is also used at any time by buses, taxis, tour buses, bicyclists, and cars. There is no officially designated location for news media parking at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial.

### U.S. CAPITOL BUILDING

- Please note the U.S. Capitol Building is **NOT** the National Park Service's property, and therefore, the National Park Service does **NOT** have the authority to allow news crews to shoot on the U.S. Capitol grounds. You may call the Senate Radio/T.V. Gallery at (202) 224-6421 or the House Radio/T.V. Gallery at (202) 225-5214. Both Galleries have staff that you need to work with IF you are seeking to perform your work on the U.S. Capitol Building's property.

### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The contents of this Guide represent the contributions of many VOA staffers. In particular: Matthew Baise, Don Benson, Pat Bodnar, Bart Childs, Dave Clements, Louise Coleman-Brown, Pam Commerford, John Featherly, Monte Hatcher, Alan Heil, Mollie King, Drew Krog, Kataryna DeLisle, Jean Michel Mathurin, Lisa Ponzio, Steve Redisch, Lisa Stancik, Jose Vega and Jeff Young. Thanks to all for your input. Other entries in the Guide come from previous House-wide guidance.

In addition, many of the elements in the Guide have been produced with the cooperation of the following news organizations:

CNN

Freedom Forum

Los Angeles Times

New York Times

Project for Excellence in Journalism

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press

Society of Professional Journalists



# ***BEST PRACTICES GUIDE***

---

***FEBRUARY 2017***

***<https://bbg.sharepoint.com/sites/journalist-portal/editorial/Pages/Best-Practices-Guide.aspx>  
DALETPLUS: MEDIA-->CATEGORIES--> MANUALS***

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>THE VOA CHARTER</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>NEWS GATHERING</b>	
-FAIRNESS, OBJECTIVITY & BALANCE	7
-BIAS & DIVERSITY	8
-U.S. ELECTIONS	9
-SENSITIVE & GRAPHIC MATERIAL	11
-COVERING WAR	12
-COVERING TERRORISM	12
-VIDEO & AUDIO OF TERRORISTS, HOSTAGES OR PRISONERS	13
-COVERING CRIMINAL ACTIVITY	14
-HOSTAGE/BARRICADE SITUATIONS	14
-NAMING PEOPLE INVOLVED IN CRIMES	15
-INTERVIEWING & VIDEOTAPING MINORS	16
-COVERING & REPORTING SUICIDES	16
-BREAKING NEWS	17
-REPORTING CROWD ESTIMATES	17
-STAGING & RE-CREATIONS	17
-USING VOA EMPLOYEES OR RELATIVES FOR STORIES	18
-WRITING	19
-ATTRIBUTION	20
-SOURCING	21
-CONFIDENTIAL SOURCES	23
-RUMORS & SPECULATION	24
-PLAGIARISM	25
-CREDITING THE NEWS AGENCIES	26
-CREDITING OTHER SOURCES	27
-USING MATERIAL FROM STATE-RUN MEDIA	29
-INTERVIEWS	31
-PUBLIC FIGURES	32
-ANONYMITY	33
-“AMBUSH” INTERVIEWS	33
-ADVANCE SCRIPTS/SCREENING	33
-REQUESTS FOR UNAIED/UNPUBLISHED MATERIAL	34
-SUBJECT TAPING INTERVIEW	34
-PAYMENT	34

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### GUESTS

-NOTIFYING VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT OF HIGH-LEVEL GUESTS	35
-COHEN BUILDING SECURITY PROCEDURES FOR GUESTS	35
-GUEST BOOKING PROCEDURES	37
-GUIDELINES FOR HOSTING A LIVE GUEST ON VOA PROGRAMS	39

### DIGITAL MEDIA

-SOCIAL MEDIA	40
-USER-GENERATED CONTENT	45
-YOUTUBE GUIDELINES	47
-GOOGLE EARTH GUIDELINES	49
-REVEALING WEBSITES & ADDRESSES	50
-AFFILIATE/RECIPROCAL LINKS	50

### PHOTOGRAPHS

-GENERAL RULES	51
-TECHNICAL TIPS	52
-SENDING IN PHOTO FILES	52
-CAPTIONS	52
-EDITING PHOTOGRAPHS	53

### MUSIC 54

### AUDIO USAGE RIGHTS

-AUDIO CLIPS FROM TV NETWORKS	55
-------------------------------	----

### VIDEO USAGE RIGHTS

-COMMON FEATURES	57
-USING VIDEO FROM TV NEWS NETWORKS	58
-ABC NEWS	59
-AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE (AFP)	61
-ASSOCIATED PRESS (APTN)	62
-REUTERS	63
-NEWSMARKET	65

### VIDEO NEWS RELEASES (VNRs) 67

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b><u>DOMESTIC DISSEMINATION OF VOA PROGRAMMING</u></b>	
-DOCUMENTING SOURCE VIDEO IN DALETPLUS	68
-THE VOA DOT	70
-VOA DOT EDITING INSTRUCTIONS FOR FINAL CUT PRO	72
-VOA DOT EDITING INSTRUCTIONS FOR PREMIERE PRO	75
-ADDING THE DOT TO VIDEO IN DALETPLUS	77
<b><u>CORRECTIONS</u></b>	79
<b><u>LEGAL ISSUES</u></b>	
-FIREWALL	81
-COPYRIGHT & FAIR USE	81
-TRADEMARK	83
-FILMING IN PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE PLACES	83
-DEFAMATION/PRIVACY/FALSE LIGHT	84
-REPORTER'S PRIVILEGE & CONFIDENTIAL SOURCES	85
-SUBPOENAS OR REQUESTS FOR TESTIMONY OR DOCUMENTS	86
-REPORTING ON CLASSIFIED DOCUMENTS	86
-INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL BY VOA REPORTERS	86
<b><u>OUTSIDE ACTIVITIES</u></b>	
-VOA STAFF	87
-CONTRACTORS	88
-COMPETITIONS AND CASH AWARDS	89
<b><u>APPENDIX A - HOW-TO GUIDES</u></b>	
-RADIO PRODUCTION BASICS	90
-WORKING WITH MINICAM	91
-VIDEO EDIT SESSION BASICS	93
-TV CONTROL ROOM BASICS	96
-SKYPE	100
-ENCODING VIDEO WHEN UPLOADING TO PEACH	101
-DESKTOP ANIMATED GIF MAKER	102
<b><u>APPENDIX B – NATIONAL PARK SERVICE GUIDELINES</u></b>	108
<b><u>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</u></b>	113



## ***BEST PRACTICES GUIDE***

### **THE VOA CHARTER**

President Gerald Ford signed the VOA Charter ([Public Law 94-350](#)) into law on July 12, 1976. It protects the independence and integrity of VOA programming.

The long-range interests of the United States are served by communicating directly with the peoples of the world by radio. To be effective, the Voice of America must win the attention and respect of listeners. These principles will therefore govern Voice of America (VOA) broadcasts:

1. VOA will serve as a consistently reliable and authoritative source of news. VOA news will be accurate, objective, and comprehensive.
2. VOA will represent America, not any single segment of American society, and will therefore present a balanced and comprehensive projection of significant American thought and institutions.
3. VOA will present the policies of the United States clearly and effectively, and will also present responsible discussions and opinions on these policies.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)



## **INTRODUCTION**

### **THIS GUIDE APPLIES TO ALL EMPLOYEES, CONTRACTORS AND STRINGERS WHO GATHER, PRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE CONTENT FOR VOA**

The VOA Charter and Journalistic Code lay out in broad terms the journalistic standards that are universally recognized by VOA and other news organizations. The purpose of this Guide is to define in more detail the best practices that VOA employees should follow every day. And it is a **Guide** rather than a rulebook for one very good reason: although the increasingly changing news and information environment requires each of us to have a basic understanding of best practices, it goes without saying that every news event, every radio, TV and web piece, every program, every interview – that is, everything we cover, produce and disseminate – is unique and must be considered in context and on its own merits.

VOA employees are encouraged to bring issues not covered in this guide to the attention of their supervisors, Service Chiefs, Division Directors, VOA Senior Management or the Office of General Counsel as appropriate.

- There may be times when the News Center or a Language Service will be working on stories that allege wrongdoing. In those cases, the Office of General Counsel **must** be consulted.  
[\(Also see Legal Issues, p. 81\)](#)

It is the responsibility of all staff members to understand these best practices as well as to consider one's own sense of right and wrong. Credibility is the most precious commodity of any news organization. The only way to achieve and maintain that credibility is for everyone within VOA to accept responsibility for it.

### **WHEN IN DOUBT, ASK - DO NOT ASSUME**

This guide will help, but should not replace, discussions of difficult issues with co-workers and supervisors. We grow as a news organization -- and policies are formed -- by asking questions and discussing the journalistic issues we face daily.

In addition to these guidelines, as federal employees, all VOA employees are required to comply with the policies laid out by the Office of Government Ethics and the BBG's Ethics Counsel:  
<http://inside.bbg.gov/offices/ethics/default.aspx>

The [Best Practices Guide](#) is a living document and is updated regularly on Sharepoint.

### **NEWS GATHERING**

#### **FAIRNESS, OBJECTIVITY & BALANCE**

- **When performing official duties, VOA broadcasters leave their personal political views behind.**  
All correspondents, producers, writers, editors and hosts should be aware of their own cultural values and personal beliefs and put them aside when preparing a report, conducting an interview, hosting a newscast or an interview program.
- The accuracy, quality and credibility of the Voice of America are its most important assets, and they rest on the audiences' perception of VOA as an objective and reliable source of world, regional and U.S. news and information.
- VOA journalists -- including writers, correspondents, stringers and program hosts -- should avoid at all times use of unattributed negative terms or labels to describe persons or organizations, except when the individuals and groups use those labels to describe themselves or their activities.
- Be fair to all of the people involved in a story. People who are presented in a negative light must be given a reasonable chance to present their side of the issue. If they refuse to comment, that should be noted. This demonstrates to our audience that we made the effort to be fair to all sides.
- A correspondent, producer or host should be well prepared with facts to balance the statement of one side or the other. Don't simply nod in acknowledgement when listening to someone's answer, as this could imply that you agree with that position.
- **THERE IS NO PLACE AT VOA FOR SO-CALLED ADVOCACY JOURNALISM – THE PRESENTATION OF NEWS FROM ONE PARTICULAR VIEWPOINT OR ONE SPECIFIC AGENDA**  
VOA journalists and all those preparing news and feature programming must avoid any action or statement that might convey the appearance of partisanship.
- VOA employees should carry out their work with the utmost professionalism. This applies equally to your work in the Cohen Building and in the field. Professionalism and respect for your colleagues is absolutely vital to maintaining best practices. Whether in a newsroom, studio, control room or in the field, pursuit of a story is not an excuse for arrogance.

### **BIAS & DIVERSITY**

One of the key areas for ensuring fairness, objectivity and balance in our reporting is to stay clear of bias or preconceived notions. Some examples:

- Avoid stereotyping by race, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, geography, sexual orientation, disability, social status or physical appearance.
- The words we use in our scripts should be precise. For example, avoid the casual use of words and phrases like “illegal immigrant,” “Third World” and “terrorist,” or the assumption that “fundamentalism” equals violence.
- Don’t include a description of an individual unless it is essential to the story. If a description doesn’t serve an editorial purpose, it may perpetuate negative stereotypes, possibly anger some members of a community, and in all likelihood doesn’t effectively advance the story.
- Coverage of events in a gay community should not be automatically linked to coverage of HIV/AIDS, because HIV/AIDS is not exclusive to gay communities.
- Correspondents, producers, video, photo and web editors must understand the possibility of racial or ethnic stereotyping when selecting images to include in stories. For example, in a story about unwed mothers in the U.S., should every mother shown be African American? If using file video about drug arrests in the U.S., should every person shown be African American or Hispanic? The clear answer is no.
- This [link](#) leads to guidance from the AP on writing about the “alt-right.” All VOA staff should read the guidance and follow it in our own reporting.

### U.S. ELECTIONS

#### THE HATCH ACT

The Hatch Act is a federal law; its main provision is to prohibit government employees in the Executive Branch from engaging in partisan political activity. The Office of General Counsel has provided some basic guidelines regarding political activity by VOA employees.

Employees **MAY NOT** engage in political activity while:

- On duty
- In any government office
- Using a government vehicle
- Wearing an official uniform or insignia

In addition, the following political activities are prohibited while **on duty**:

- Wearing campaign buttons and/or t-shirts
- Displaying campaign posters in the workplace
- Using **AGENCY** e-mail accounts, social media accounts or blogs to support or criticize a candidate or political position
- Using agency computers to make online campaign donations
- Using screensavers supporting or criticizing a candidate or political position
- Using agency-supplied smartphones to support or criticize a candidate or political position

**NOTE: You are on duty when you are teleworking.**

**IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT THESE GUIDELINES,  
PLEASE CONTACT THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL AT 202-203-4550**

#### POLITICAL REPORTING ON VOA WEBSITES

Reporting on U.S. politics can be a delicate balancing act for VOA. This is especially true because of the provisions of the Hatch Act.

In the case of VOA, the Office of Special Counsel took note of our reporting on U.S. political campaigns. The OSC's concern was that as a federal agency VOA's reporting should abide by the letter and spirit of the Hatch Act. In addition, the OSC's noted that a federal agency's website "...must not create the appearance that the agency, and in turn the federal government, is politically biased."

In response, the BBG's Office of General Counsel made the case that the VOA Charter lawfully empowers the agency to "...present the policies of the United States clearly and effectively, and will also present responsible discussions and opinions on these policies."

In its final ruling, the Office of Special Counsel said that by balancing the requirements of the Hatch Act with the realities of news reporting, it is permissible for VOA to include links to a candidate or party's website in a web story if the website is source material for the article.

So if any VOANews.com website is reporting on a GOP or Democratic presidential debate and the story includes a link to the campaign website of one candidate, we must include the campaign websites of all the candidates who are taking part in the debate. The same holds true if we are reporting on candidates for the Senate, House and for governors.

We follow the same guidelines during the final presidential campaign period, with regard to a sitting president and the opposing candidate/s. But in that case, the link for the sitting president **MUST BE TO THE CAMPAIGN'S WEBSITE, AND NOT TO WWW.WHITEHOUSE.GOV.**

In other words, when reporting on U.S. political campaigns, all VOANews.com websites should follow the same journalistic balance and fairness that we strive for in all of our daily reporting.

For more complete guidance on the Hatch Act, please follow this link to the Office of General Counsel's Ethics page: <http://inside.bbg.gov/offices/ethics/default.aspx>

### **SENSITIVE & GRAPHIC MATERIAL**

Newsworthiness should be the primary determining factor in deciding whether to air or publish audio or video that may be offensive to our audiences. Some examples include murder scenes, acts of war, acts of nature, faces of victims.

**IN THESE CASES, THE BEST PRACTICES EDITOR AND/OR VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT WILL DETERMINE WHETHER THE MATERIAL IS GRAPHIC ENOUGH TO REQUIRE A MANDATORY WARNING AND WILL ISSUE A HOUSE-WIDE NOTE DETAILING THE LANGUAGE OF THE WARNING.**

In most cases, VOA should not broadcast or publish the moment of death in a suicide, execution, or any similar event. Exceptions might include circumstances where an event is being covered live and the action is unexpected or spontaneous, or where the event is so highly newsworthy as to warrant broadcast or posting.

If it happens during live coverage, explain to the audience what has happened as quickly as possible, and move on.

[\*\(Also see Covering and Reporting Suicides, p. 16\)\*](#)

The broadcasting or posting of graphic, profane, racist or other objectionable language should be determined if it is essential to the newsworthiness of the story.

Material of a sexual nature is also a cause for concern, as people of all ages listen to, watch and read VOA news stories. Questions to be asked: Is the material essential to the story? Should video be digitized in some way so as not to be offensive? Would you want your children to see such images?

If it's determined the material will be broadcast, a mandatory warning needs to be provided far enough ahead of the story to make sure children do not see or hear the material. If the material is posted online, it should not be on the homepage. Rather, a link to the story should appear on the homepage, with a warning that sexual/graphic images are included with the story.

YouTube has a [blurring tool](#) that lets you blur any part of a video, including moving objects.

[\*\(Also see YouTube Guidelines, p. 47\)\*](#)

**THE DECISION TO AIR OR POST IMAGES OR AUDIO OF A SUICIDE, EXECUTION OR SIMILAR EVENT WILL BE MADE BY A SUPERVISOR, THE BEST PRACTICES EDITOR AND/OR VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT.**

The following sections explain these guidelines in greater detail.

[\*Return to Table of Contents\*](#)

### **COVERING WAR**

Given the many nationalities and ethnicities that VOA reaches via radio, TV and online, it's imperative that we follow some basic guidelines in covering and reporting conflicts.

#### **LOADED WORDS**

VOA should never use "we," "us," "our" or "they," "them" and "their" in reporting about any side in a conflict. VOA practice is to name the country, as in "U.S. troops" or "Pakistani troops."

No side in a conflict should be referred to as "the enemy," or any territory as "enemy territory" in copy or in graphics. The only exception is if you are directly quoting someone making those references.

Referring to attacks as "punishing," "brutal" or "successful" can imply that VOA is taking sides. Again, the only exception would be if you're directly quoting someone making those claims.

#### **REPORTING COMBAT ACTIVITY**

As a rule, VOA should not report that warplanes or missiles are approaching a target. When an attack is underway, VOA will report it:

- If we're able to independently confirm that bombs/missiles have hit the ground; or
- If the country being attacked confirms it's being attacked; or
- If an official of an attacking country directly tells VOA that an attack is happening; or
- If VOA observes the attack first-hand

In all of the above cases, attribution **MUST** be as clear and as specific as possible.

[\*\(Also see Attribution, p. 20\)\*](#)

When information originates only from state-owned media, we should make that clear to audiences the entire time the information is used.

[\*\(Also see Using Material From State-Run Media, p. 29\)\*](#)

If VOA's reporting is being censored or shut down and/or VOA's movements are being restricted, that should also be reported.

### **COVERING TERRORISM**

Generally, terrorism is defined as "the use of violence and threats to intimidate or coerce, especially for political purposes." Terrorists use violence against (often innocent) individuals to advance their political or ideological agenda. "Terrorism" and "terrorist" carry a lot of weight, and they should be used with extreme care. It is up to editors to determine if they are most appropriate terms to use.

VOA will report the actions of terrorists (bombings, shootings, hostage takings) fully, accurately and without taking sides, as we would cover any other news story. Wherever possible, we should also provide appropriate coverage of the victims, their injuries and their families.

We will provide our audiences with informative analyses of terrorist organizations, their ideology and history, but at the same time VOA must never suggest that reporting the context in which terrorism takes place justifies terrorism in any way.

### **VIDEO & AUDIO OF TERRORISTS, HOSTAGES OR PRISONERS**

Statements from, interviews with, or video of terrorists, hostages or prisoners of war should be judged on their journalistic merits before making a decision on usage.

Some guidelines for making decisions about using video of this kind:

#### ➤ **TERRORISTS**

- Although we will report on the actions of terrorists, **VOA SHOULD NOT BE USED AS A PLATFORM TO SPREAD THEIR MESSAGES.**
- This means that in almost all cases, VOA will not air a terrorist message in its entirety. Senior VOA managers will decide what portions, if any, of the message will be cleared for broadcast and websites based upon its news value.

#### ➤ **HOSTAGES/PRISONERS**

- Pay close attention to whether a hostage or prisoner appears to have been mistreated, is bound in handcuffs or shackles, or has a hood on his/her head.
- In the case of a prisoner's statement, VOA will take special measures to ensure that the individual POW identities are not revealed (i.e. facial blurring, voice alteration, use of pseudonym or nom du guerre).
- Senior VOA managers will decide whether to show video of this nature.

#### ➤ **FULL DISCLOSURE**

- When applicable, all TV and radio scripts and web copy **MUST** state that VOA has not been able to independently verify the source of the video or audio. Should VOA receive the material directly from a group, army or government that should be noted in the script and web copy as well.

#### ➤ **LEGAL ISSUES**

- From the office of General Counsel: The Geneva Convention relative to Treatment of Prisoners of War requires POWs to "at all times be protected, particularly against acts of violence or intimidation and against insults and public curiosity." However, the convention does not define what "public curiosity" means. Nevertheless, the U.S. is a party to the convention and it generally applies it at all times to the maximum extent practicable.

**PLEASE REMEMBER THAT THESE ARE BASIC GUIDELINES.  
EACH INSTANCE IS UNIQUE, AND WHAT IS DECIDED FOR ONE SITUATION WILL  
NOT NECESSARILY BE THE PROPER ACTION FOR THE NEXT SITUATION.  
ALWAYS CONSULT WITH VOA SENIOR MANAGERS BEFORE MAKING ANY  
DECISIONS TO AIR OR PUBLISH MATERIAL OF THIS NATURE.**

[Return to Table of Contents](#)



### **COVERING CRIMINAL ACTIVITY**

VOA staff **must not** interfere in any way with ongoing law enforcement activities. If some orders seem designed to manage or deny news coverage, VOA reporters, producers and photographers at the scene should protest and notify senior management and the Office of General Counsel as quickly as possible. If necessary, the agency will take appropriate legal action to protect access to the news.

There may be occasions where VOA staff has the opportunity to accompany law enforcement on arrests or investigations. These situations can present sensitive legal questions, including trespass and invasion of privacy. These activities should only be undertaken with approval in advance from your supervisor, VOA senior management and the Office of General Counsel. It's important to understand that even though law enforcement may go onto private property, it **DOES NOT** mean that journalists are exempt from trespassing.

[\*\(Also see Filming In Public vs. Private Places, p. 83\)\*](#)

Keep in mind that cameras, microphones and lights can cause relatively passive bystanders to “put on a show.” All VOA staff should use their own best judgment and discretion in these situations; where possible, you should avoid any action that could possibly influence the event.

At the same time, VOA staff covering conflicts, protests or demonstrations should not take one side or another.

Neither the police nor demonstration leaders should be a reporter's only sources for accurate reporting of causes, issues or casualties.

### **HOSTAGE/BARRICADE SITUATIONS**

Coverage of these situations, whether in the U.S. or abroad, presents difficult challenges and usually requires special care. No single statement or guideline can begin to cover every situation that we may report on. The following are intended to guide you in exercising your best judgment.

- The event should be characterized as accurately as possible. Before labeling an event a “riot” or “terrorism,” or referring to someone as a “terrorist,” you should discuss it with your senior editors and managers, and if necessary, with News Center managers or the Best Practices Editor.
- Keep in mind the possibility that a hostage taker may be able to see, hear, or try to manipulate VOA's coverage. Consider whether describing or showing the actions or movements of law enforcement officers could tip off the hostage taker or barricaded person.
- **DO NOT** put yourself in a position where you could be playing a role in the incident. VOA staff should **NEVER** attempt to contact a hostage or hostage taker. This could endanger a hostage and interfere with rescue efforts. It could also possibly subject you to criminal liability. You should not solicit telephone calls from within a hostage or barricade situation or from nearby homes or businesses.

- When reporting on these situations, avoid speculation about the hostage taker, his or her motives, demands, or state of mind. If a guest speculates about these issues, point out that VOA has not verified what the guest has just said, and move the conversation away from such speculation.

### **NAMING PEOPLE INVOLVED IN CRIMES**

Be precise with the language used in reporting about crime or demonstrations.

#### **VICTIMS**

VOA should not name rape victims or other victims of sexual assaults or molestations. These crimes carry a stigma for the victims, and victims should be allowed to decide whether they want to be identified. Be cautious in providing descriptive details so that the person is not inadvertently identified.

There are special difficulties in identifying minors (under 18 years of age) who have been kidnapped or are alleged victims of sexual crimes. In the case of a kidnapping, news outlets may identify minors to help them be found. However, if we learn that a kidnapped minor has been sexually assaulted, the responsible action is to stop both naming the individual and showing his/her picture.

### **EXCEPTIONS TO THE ABOVE MUST BE APPROVED IN ADVANCE BY A SUPERVISOR AND THE BEST PRACTICES EDITOR**

#### **SUSPECTS**

VOA does not identify suspects of criminal investigations who have not been charged or arrested. This has become more difficult in the U.S. in recent years, when law enforcement officials refer to someone as “a person of interest.” This is not a legal term, and VOA should not use it because it can place a person under increasing suspicion and may result in unintended consequences for the individual.

The essential source for identifying the status of a person or group charged or arrested is law enforcement or the court system, **NOT** a supposedly “informed individual.” When someone has been charged with a crime, use caution in choosing language to refer to the accused so as not to imply guilt or innocence. Similarly, if someone identified as a suspect ultimately is not charged with a crime, we must make that known as soon as possible in a follow-up story.

#### **NAMING OR IDENTIFYING MINORS INVOLVED IN CRIMINAL ACTIVITY**

In addition to the guidance above regarding minors who are victims, VOA should not name, show video or play audio of a minor who is a suspect in a crime, or is arrested and charged with a crime. However, exceptions may be made if a minor is charged as an adult, but in this case we should wait until the accused has been formally charged, not just arrested.

There may be other exceptions, such as if a minor is charged with murder or another heinous crime. In some cases, local media may have already widely reported the minor’s identity.

### **BEFORE DECIDING TO IDENTIFY A MINOR, PLEASE CONSULT A SUPERVISOR AND THE BEST PRACTICES EDITOR**

[\*Return to Table of Contents\*](#)

### **INTERVIEWING & VIDEOTAPING MINORS**

Interviewing minors, whether for audio or video, can present special issues, particularly where wrongdoing, criminal activity, private, potentially embarrassing or other sensitive situations are involved. In these situations you **MUST** obtain permission from a parent or adult guardian. Permission should be in writing, where possible. [You can find the release form for minors on Sharepoint.](#)

If that isn't possible, recording audio or video of the parent/guardian giving consent is acceptable.

Generally, minors can be interviewed and recorded, without permission, on non-controversial subjects such as reaction to a movie, talking about a favorite food, going back to school on the first day of the school year.

When recording audio or shooting video at a school in the U.S., ask whether a school has sent out what are known as "negative releases" to parents. These are notifications that a media crew will be visiting a school, asking parents to return the notice only if they **DO NOT** want their child to participate in interviews or tapings. In this situation you may not need additional permission.

In a breaking news situation, provided the minor is out of harm's way, it may be permissible – without parental approval -- to interview the minor if he/she is a witness or has information about the event. However, keep in mind that the minor should not be asked private, personal or other potentially embarrassing questions, should not be asked to name suspects, and is freely willing to talk.

In all cases, ABC NewsOne, AFP, APTN and Reuters video should be carefully screened to follow the same guidelines.

### **COVERING & REPORTING SUICIDES**

Deciding whether to report the name of a suicide victim is a delicate and difficult matter. Did the victim commit suicide publicly in order to achieve notoriety? Will reporting the person's name encourage others who might be contemplating suicide and looking for recognition? Will reporting the victim's name bring unwanted attention to family or friends? Keep in mind that by most accounts, people who commit suicide are in a disturbed or distressed mental state. Consequently, there are no clear or easy answers to these questions.

If the person is **NOT** a public figure, there should be no overwhelming editorial reason to report the name. Ask the question: Is the suicide tangential to the story, or does it have a larger impact on the story or participants in the story?

#### **BEFORE REPORTING THE NAME OF A SUICIDE VICTIM, PLEASE CONSULT YOUR SUPERVISOR OR THE BEST PRACTICES EDITOR.**

There may be a situation when a VOA staffer in the field is in a position to intervene in a situation where injury or the loss of life is a very real outcome. When a person decides to take his or her own life as a protest, there is no expectation that a journalist will intervene, nor is there a VOA policy on whether you should or should not intervene. It is up to the individual on the scene to use his or her own best judgment.

[\(Also see Sensitive & Graphic Material, p. 11\)](#)

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### **BREAKING NEWS**

Although breaking news situations don't often present themselves in VOA's daily coverage, there are certain key points to follow when putting that type of information on the air or online.

Producers should use caution before airing live and/or unedited material which may be excessively graphic in visuals or language. Ask the question: Does the news value of the material warrant airing it without reviewing it first?

### **CONSULT WITH YOUR SUPERVISOR AND THE BEST PRACTICES EDITOR IF POTENTIALLY GRAPHIC MATERIAL IS GOING TO BE AIRED OR POSTED ONLINE SIGHT UNSEEN OR WITHOUT A DETAILED DESCRIPTION.**

When airing or posting such material, alert your listeners, viewers and readers as to the nature of the material.

### **REPORTING CROWD ESTIMATES**

When covering rallies or demonstrations, it's important to attribute estimates of size. Organizing groups or official agencies which provide them may have reasons to inflate or downplay the numbers. Where non-official estimates such as "hundreds of thousands" appear to be guesses or inflated a correspondent, producer or photographer on the scene may be able to provide an objective perspective on crowd size. As an example, they can say the crowd is standing shoulder to shoulder for four blocks. If a correspondent, producer or photographer is not covering the event, we should look to the wire services for their reporting on the size of the crowd, keeping in mind VOA's sourcing policies.

[\*\(Also see Attribution, p. 20\)\*](#)

### **STAGING & RE-CREATIONS**

- **VOA REPORTS THE NEWS**
- **WE DO NOT CREATE OR MANIPULATE NEWS STORIES**
- **STAGING A NEWS EVENT OR CONTROLLING HOW IT TURNS OUT -- WHETHER BY ENCOURAGEMENT, PROPS OR PAYMENT -- IS UNACCEPTABLE**

When shooting video with the subject of a story to explain something that happened, don't ask the person to do things they normally don't do. For instance: It's acceptable to shoot video of a family that goes to the cemetery once a week to place flowers on the grave of a family member, but you should explain in the track that this is something the family normally does. However, if you ask someone to go to the cemetery and lay flowers on the grave of a family member, you should explain that as well.

Keep in mind, though, that the more you direct people – having them do things specifically for the camera – the more time you'll have to spend explaining that to the audience.

[\*Return to Table of Contents\*](#)

### **USING VOA EMPLOYEES OR RELATIVES FOR STORIES**

Generally speaking, VOA employees should not be used in radio, TV or web pieces outside of their official capacity. In most cases it is also preferable not to use the relatives or friends of VOA employees. While they may be perfect subjects to help illustrate stories, there is always the possibility of the appearance of a conflict.

However exceptions can be granted; for instance, if a relative or friend is prominent or expert in his or her own right. When in doubt, consult with your supervisor or the Best Practices Editor.

### **WRITING**

Anyone writing for VOA on any platform – radio, TV or the Web – should be familiar with the VOA Stylebook. The Stylebook covers grammar, spelling, definitions and explanations of commonly used terms, as well as the proper use of American English.

**Some of the key points of the Stylebook as they relate to best practices are included in this Guide, but every VOA employee should read and become familiar with the Stylebook.**

[The Stylebook is maintained by the News Center and can be found on Sharepoint.](#)

VOA copy should be simple and straightforward. We are not writing treaties or newspaper stories. For example, use “stop the fighting” rather than “achieve the cessation of hostilities.” Most of our writing is for people whose first language is not English, so avoid excessively difficult words, and explain them when you must use them.

Avoid colloquialisms and jargon, which may be difficult to translate and are not easily understood by foreign audiences. When used, as in a direct quotation, provide an alternative in parentheses to assist language services.

- The convicted hacker said writing the virus was “a piece of cake” (very easy).
- He spoke “off the cuff” (without notes).
- The House Minority Whip (the number two Republican/Democrat in the House).
- He made a killing (made a lot of money) in the stock market.

Words such as “biggest,” “highest,” “first” and others like them should be used judiciously because they often turn out to be incorrect. Ask yourself whether the fact that something is first is truly significant. Avoid superlatives such as “most famous” or “greatest,” which often represent value judgments. Descriptive and colorful words are encouraged, but use caution. Something that is “unique” is the only one of its kind. A thing or event cannot be “somewhat unique.” Other words describing extreme situations should also raise flags for writers and editors, and should be scrutinized to ensure they are justified. “Trouble” in a city does not necessarily mean it is in “chaos.” “Asking urgently” is not necessarily “pleading” or “begging.” If a situation is “desperate” today, what will it be tomorrow when things get worse?

It is acceptable, however, to use words like these when you’re quoting someone directly.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### ATTRIBUTION

#### SIMPLY STATED, WE GIVE CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE.

Aside from the material provided by our own correspondents and stringers, VOA reports news from a number of different outlets: the Associated Press, Reuters and Agence France Presse, as well as from newspapers, television news networks and official news agencies of other nations. In addition, we have the resources of the U.S. government's Open Source Center, which provides translations of broadcasts and other news information put out by other countries.

Story information can also come from press releases put out by corporations or private groups such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs). When using press releases, they must be identified as such, and if applicable, they should be counter-balanced.

When quoting news stories, editorials or opinion pieces, it is preferable to include VOA's own reporting to provide a more complete view of the issue. Simply adding a disclaimer saying that the excerpts come from a media outlet or NGO does not absolve VOA from possible claims of plagiarism and/or copyright infringement.

One method of providing attribution is in the use of block quotes. In the example below, *VOX.com* provided a hyperlink to a *Washington Post* story about "Pizzagate," but also included part of the Post's story in a "block," shown by the solid bar on the left. This is acceptable for use on voanews.com websites, but it should not be used repeatedly.

The conspiracy theory, known as "Pizzagate," apparently connected Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign to a nonexistent child sex ring at the Comet Ping Pong pizzeria, **Faiz Siddiqui and Susan Svrluga reported for the Washington Post:**

The restaurant's owner and employees were threatened on social media in the days before the election after fake news stories circulated claiming that then-Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton and her campaign chief were running a child sex ring from the restaurant's backrooms. Even Michael Flynn, a retired general whom President-elect Trump has tapped to advise him on national security, shared stories about another anti-Clinton conspiracy theory involving pedophilia. None of them were true. But the fake stories and threats persisted, some even aimed at children of Comet Ping Pong employees and patrons. The restaurant's owner was forced to contact the FBI, local police, Facebook and other social-media platforms in an effort to remove the articles.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

There are times when the attribution can be left unstated because the source of a particular statement is both obvious and authoritative.

**An example of over-attribution:**

*The U.S. space agency NASA says astronauts aboard the space shuttle “Discovery” performed a second spacewalk today.*

**It’s better, and easier, to write:**

*Astronauts aboard the U.S space shuttle “Discovery” performed a second spacewalk today.*

### **SOURCING**

Proper sourcing is a fundamental element of good journalism. If two (or 20) sources quote a militia leader as saying the hostages have been released, all we know is what the militia leader says, NOT whether the hostages are actually free.

### **DOUBLE SOURCING**

VOA generally requires double sourcing of **unattributed** information. Look carefully at your sources, and make sure that two separate originating news organizations are reporting the information. For instance, if Reuters and AP are both reporting from the scene of a story, those are two valid double sources. However, it is **NOT** valid double sourcing if a newspaper and a TV news network are carrying a story that they’re both attributing to the AP.

Once you have two valid separate sources, you should go through both stories and identify the facts that are common to both. These are the facts that you can consider to be verified. If one story has facts that are not contained in the other, please check with the News Center to see whether they can provide verification.

### **SINGLE SOURCING**

There will be instances when use of a properly identified single source is permitted.

For instance: on a breaking news story, AP or Reuters quotes a single source – a police official, a government spokesperson – VOA copy will say that AP or Reuters is reporting the information.

### **IN THOSE CASES OUR COPY WILL SAY THAT THERE ARE VARIOUS REPORTS OF AN INCIDENT AND THAT VOA IS WORKING TO CONFIRM THE INFORMATION.**

There will be times when multiple news outlets report information from unnamed sources during a breaking story, as with the Boston Marathon bombing in April 2013.

As happened with Boston – when multiple news organizations said there was an arrest and VOA reported that information – we will later find out that that information is incorrect. In that case VOA will issue a correction as quickly as possible across all platforms.

[\(Also see Corrections, p. 79\)](#)

[Return to Table of Contents](#)



Information that comes directly from the U.S. government – the White House, State Department, Pentagon or Congress – is considered valid on its own, **but must still be attributed**. Another accepted use of a single source would be monitoring a live event such as a presidential news conference.

Information in News Center stories is already double-sourced and does not require additional sourcing.

### WIKIPEDIA

#### WIKIPEDIA SHOULD NOT BE CONSIDERED OR USED AS A PRIMARY SOURCE OF INFORMATION

- There have been a number of incidents where material posted on Wikipedia has not been verified or has proven to be incorrect. Any information found on Wikipedia should be confirmed with other, more reliable sources, or with Central News.

### OPENSOURCE

- The U.S. government-funded website [OpenSource](#) is an important tool for finding source information. VOA uses the text material in OpenSource as a second source of news and information.

However, **VOA DOES NOT HAVE ACCESS** to the audio and video which OpenSource posts from news organizations -- BBC, Sky News and Al Jazeera English, for example -- with whom VOA **does not have contractual agreements**.

### **CONFIDENTIAL SOURCES**

Whenever possible, a source should be “on the record” – someone who is willing to be named and quoted – but journalists routinely rely on sources who won’t go on the record. If a source refuses to be named, the information he or she provides should be characterized in other ways, as clearly as possible.

In briefings, particularly in Washington, sources will usually specify the attribution:

- “A senior administration official, or
- “An individual familiar with the secretary’s thinking”

In interviews, sourcing is often a matter of negotiation, but a request for confidentiality should come from the source and not be suggested by the correspondent or producer.

Before using an unnamed source, writers and editors must be certain that there is no other way to get the information on the record. Once you agree to treat a source anonymously, you still should include the fullest possible description of that source’s position: “a senior Pentagon official” is better than “a U.S. official,” but better still might be “a senior Pentagon official involved in planning the operation.”

### **AN UNNAMED SOURCE MUST HAVE VERIFIABLE AND FIRST-HAND KNOWLEDGE OF THE STORY.**

You must be convinced the source knows what he/she is talking about, and you should consider asking for actual evidence to bolster the source’s claim or comment. When contacting a source about third-party information, be sure that the source is actually confirming the information from his or her knowledge of a particular situation, and is not simply hearing it from you and agreeing that it is plausible.

You should be willing to tell our audience why the source cannot be named. For example, you can say, “The source’s name is being withheld to protect against possible reprisals.”

Because even sources who don’t want their names used do have names, the use of phrases such as “unnamed sources” or “unidentified sources” may be confusing. Avoid other extremely vague terms such as “informed sources,” “authoritative sources,” “well-placed sources,” “reliable sources.”

A story that relies on the use of confidential sources should be of public concern. We are not interested in “gotcha” stories just for the sake of the “gotcha,” nor are we interested in scoring scoops just for the sake of being first (and possibly being wrong).

When writing Web headlines or SMS, use caution to qualify controversial information even in this shorter format. “All Hostages Released in Standoff” is quite different from “Rebel Leader Says All Hostages Released.”

The following characterizations may be helpful in establishing with a source what level of confidentiality you have agreed to. In all cases it is always best to clarify with the source how the information may be used:

- **ON THE RECORD**  
All information is suitable for publication and attributable to the source by name and title.
- **OFF THE RECORD**  
Material that is “off the record” is not directly usable, but the information can be used to focus the direction of a story. Off-the-record material may also be a valid second source to confirm information obtained elsewhere.
- **ON BACKGROUND**  
“On background” is generally understood to mean the information given can be used, provided it is attributed to a generic source. “A senior administration official called the election flawed.”
- **DEEP BACKGROUND**  
Information obtained on “deep background” is normally provided with the understanding that it will not be sourced directly in any way. A suitable formulation might be, “It was learned that the delegates agreed to a second meeting on Tuesday.”
- **PUBLICATION OF A SIGNIFICANT STORY BASED UPON A SINGLE SOURCE WHO WILL NOT ALLOW HIS OR HER NAME TO BE USED MUST ALWAYS BE APPROVED IN ADVANCE BY VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT.**
- **UPON REQUEST, DISCLOSURE OF A SOURCE’S IDENTITY TO VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT AND TO THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL MAY BE REQUIRED TO CLEAR THE SOURCED INFORMATION FOR AIR.**
- **WHEN DISCUSSING CONFIDENTIALITY WITH A SOURCE, IT MAY BE ADVISABLE TO EXPLAIN THE POSSIBILITY OF THIS LIMITED DISCLOSURE WITHIN VOA. REFUSAL TO DISCLOSE THE SOURCE MAY RESULT IN THE SOURCE’S INFORMATION NOT BEING USED BY VOA.**

### **RUMORS & SPECULATION**

VOA avoids the use of rumors and speculation in news items. However, this may need to be carefully re-evaluated on a case-by-case basis in instances where a rumor or speculation takes on a life of its own. In such cases, in general, editors should allow responsible officials to respond to the rumors or speculation and use this comment as our entry to the story. Without such an official comment, avoid doing a story unless there are a number of reports in major news outlets. VOA does not want to be the first to publicize a rumor or speculation.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

**PLAGIARISM**

**PLAGIARISM IS ILLEGAL AND UNETHICAL AND STRIKES AT THE VERY HEART OF OUR JOURNALISTIC MISSION.**

**IT CAN COST THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE AGENCY ITS CREDIBILITY AND REPUTATION, AND WILL NOT BE TOLERATED.**

**WE DO NOT PRESENT OTHERS' WORK AS OUR OWN**

**ALLEGATIONS OF PLAGIARISM WILL BE FULLY INVESTIGATED, AND STAFFERS WILL BE NOTIFIED OF ANY SUCH ALLEGATIONS.**

**PLAGIARISM MAY RESULT IN DISCIPLINARY ACTION, UP TO AND INCLUDING REMOVAL FROM FEDERAL SERVICE**

### **CREDITING THE NEWS AGENCIES**

To make sure that our best practices are in sync with our news agency contracts, below is guidance on how VOA should credit the agencies across all platforms. Note that each platform has different guidelines, and everyone should be aware of the differences, especially if you're producing a story that will appear on all platforms.

#### **RADIO**

- AFP, AP and Reuters have all confirmed that VOA radio broadcasts can use their news wire copy verbatim without verbal attribution or credit. All three agencies consider this to be “standard use” of their material.
- However, if one wire service has an exclusive interview or information that other news organizations do not have, we should give that wire service verbal credit in the broadcast.

#### **TELEVISION**

- Although the VOA Dot is burned into agency video as it is being recorded, it is preferable that all video pieces -- whether they are produced by the News Center or a Language Service -- should note in the DaletPlus Asset Management Form the time segments where ABC NewsOne, AFP, AP and Reuters video are used. That is our way of tracking/crediting them for the usage, and for the Senior Archivists to know whether the material is worth keeping.  
([Also see Domestic Dissemination of VOA Programming, p. 68](#) and [The VOA Dot, p. 70](#))
- Verbal credit to the news agencies is not required for video reports, **unless the video is exclusive and is noted as such in the script.**  
([Also see Crediting Other Sources, p. 27](#))

#### **WEB**

It has long been the practice in print to credit the wire services when using their stories in whole or in part. All VOA websites and social media pages should follow this practice.

- [How the credit looks when using a single news agency's wire story in full, with the agency's name at the top.](#)
- [How the credit looks when using more than one agency's wire story, with the agencies' names at the bottom.](#)
- [Agency photos used on VOA websites and on agency-maintained social media pages must include a captioned credit to the agency.](#)

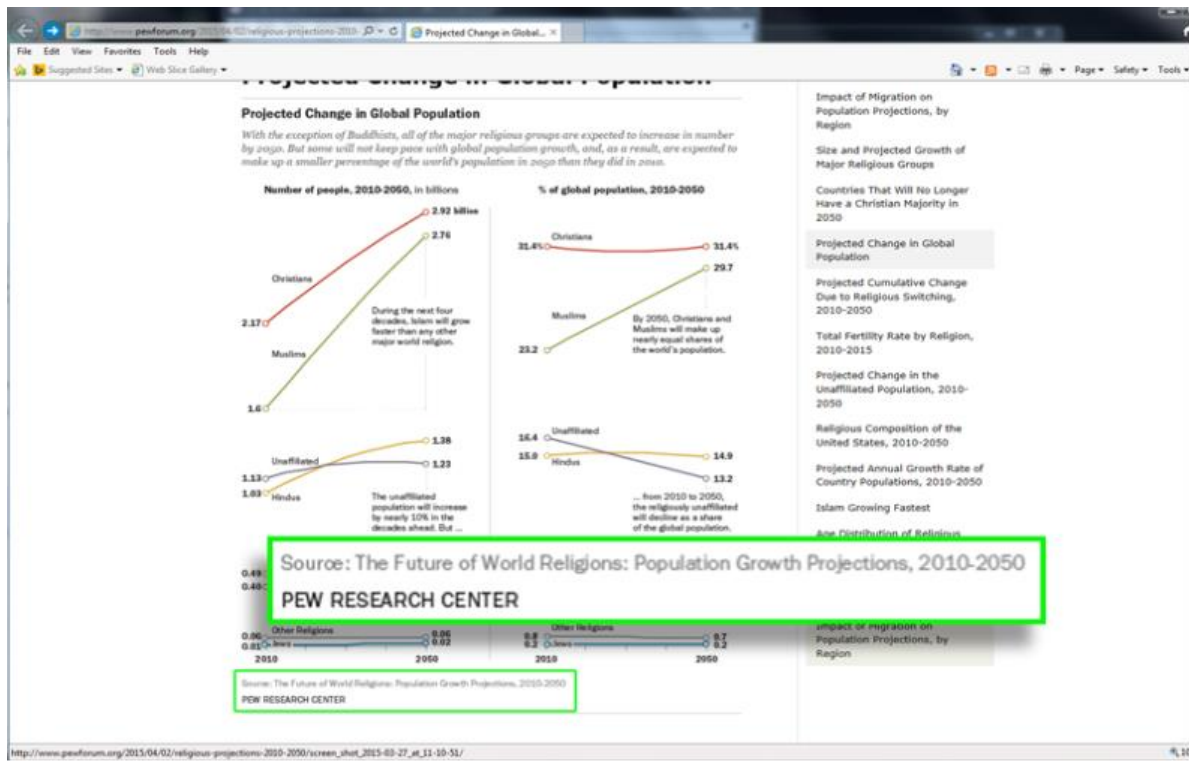
[Return to Table of Contents](#)

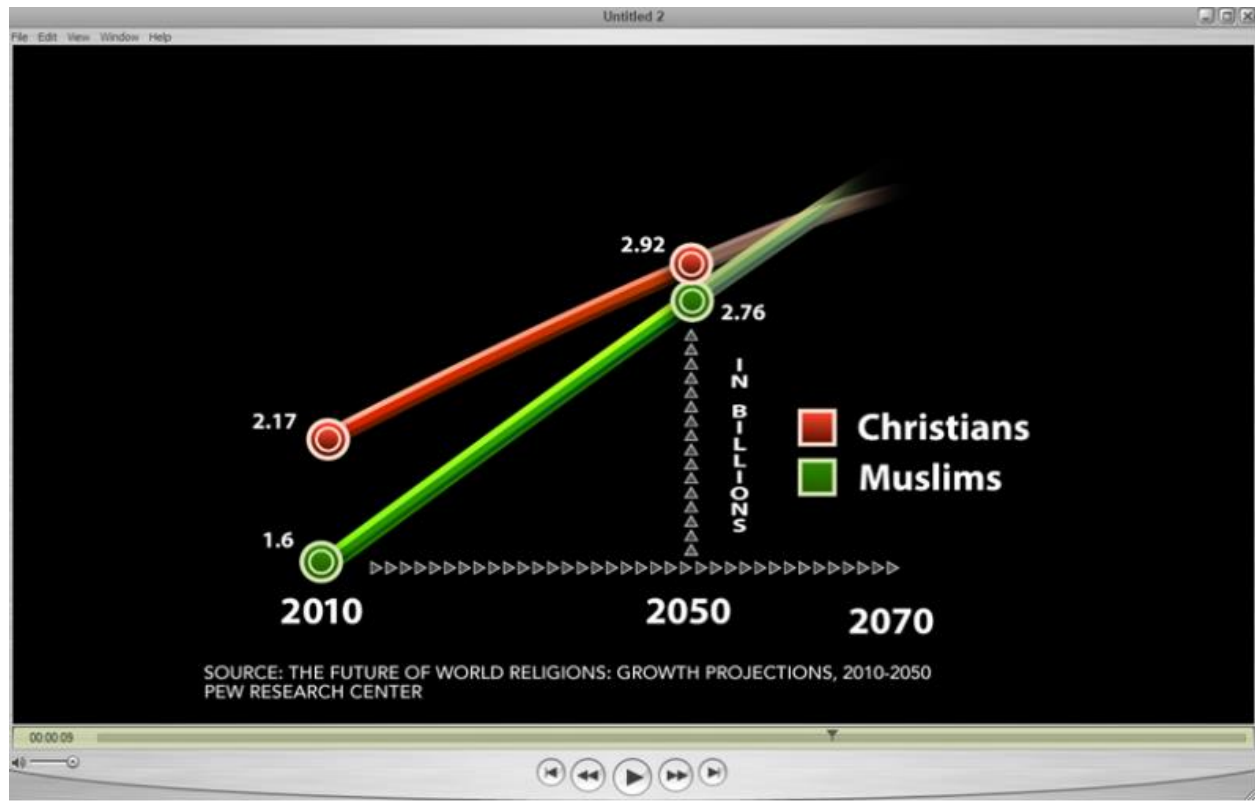
## CREDITING OTHER SOURCES

In the course of our reporting, we often will cite information or statistics that come from think tanks, NGOs, or another government agency. Aside from crediting those groups in scripts, they must also be credited in full-screen graphics, whether as a stand-alone page or within a video package.

## FULL SCREEN GRAPHICS

- While styles and looks may differ for various Language Services, the basic procedure should be the same.
- Any time a graphic is based on information or statistics that are not originally generated by VOA, a small info source attribution needs to be included on the graphic. See the photos below and on the next page, identifying the correct attribution.



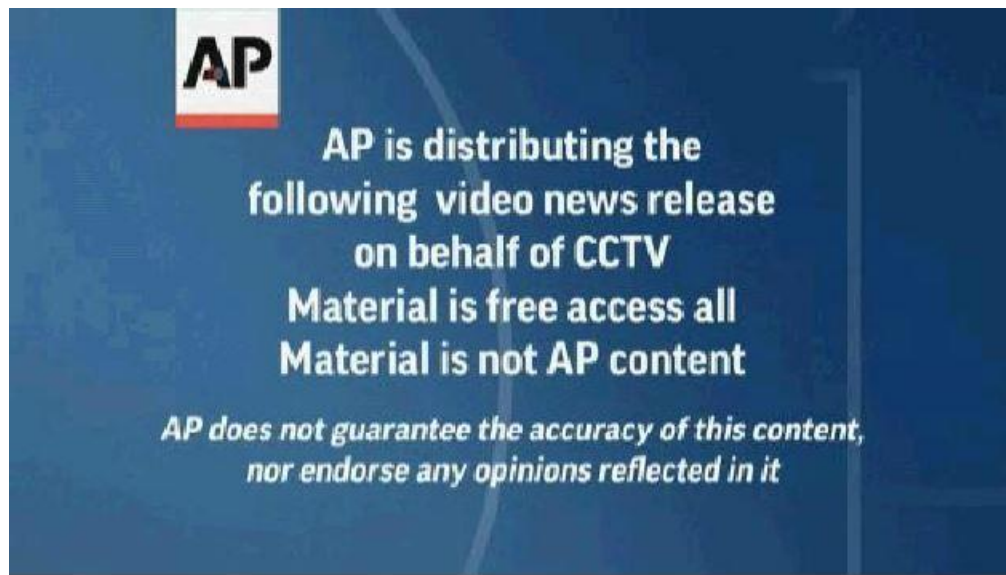


### **USING MATERIAL FROM STATE-RUN MEDIA**

Any country's official news agency is a valid single source **when referring to government policy or news events in that country**. In these cases VOA must identify the news agency in its copy.

Note the distinction, **in that country**. For example, a report by China's official news agency about North Korea would not be a valid single source.

In addition, VOA's newsfeed providers AP and Reuters have agreements in place to distribute material provided by CCTV, Chinese State Television. AP includes a disclaimer for all CCTV material, as seen in this screen grab:



Reuters does not provide a video disclaimer for CCTV material, but this notice appears at the bottom of every script Reuters provides from CCTV:

**© Copyright CCTV. The content in this story, including video and script is provided by China Central Television (CCTV) and is copyright CCTV. Thomson Reuters does not guarantee the accuracy of, or endorse the views or opinions given in, this package. THIS STATEMENT SUPERSEDES ALL OTHER STATEMENTS RELATING TO COPYRIGHT ATTACHED TO THIS CONTENT.**

While the video that CCTV and other state-controlled media outlets like RT or Press TV produces often comes from areas where coverage is otherwise unavailable, VOA policy for using content provided by state-controlled media is that it should be reviewed by senior editors in a service, by Central News or by the agency's Best Practices Editor before any decision is made about airing or publishing the video.

State-run media material that is cleared for broadcast or for use on the web **MUST** include proper credit to that news organization and the disclaimer that VOA cannot confirm the accuracy of the material. For video usage, the on-screen credit should be either: "From CCTV" or "CCTV Video." This guidance is the same for material received from RT or Press TV or similar state-run media outlets.



## ***BEST PRACTICES GUIDE***

It is understood that there may be times when we would want to use the video, such as when it's the only known video of a major news event or if we're comparing how VOA and other news organizations cover stories.

**HOWEVER, ANY USE OF STATE-RUN MEDIA VIDEO SHOULD BE DONE WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF A LARGER PACKAGE THAT IS BEING PRODUCED BY THE NEWS CENTER OR A LANGUAGE SERVICE.**

**WE SHOULD NOT RUN A FULL PACKAGE FROM CCTV, RT, PRESS TV  
OR ANOTHER STATE-RUN OUTLET SIMPLY BECAUSE WE HAVE IT AVAILABLE.**

*(Also see [Video Usage Rights, p. 57](#))*

### **INTERVIEWS**

Even in the era of selfies, photo-bombing and user-generated content, most people are not comfortable being interviewed and consider recording equipment to be invasive, especially when you're dealing with sensitive subjects. One way to reduce that unease or tension is to first talk to an interview subject **WITHOUT** the equipment. Put the person at ease; make him or her feel comfortable talking to you before proceeding with the actual interview.

When setting up an interview, the subject may ask what questions will be asked or how the interview will be treated when produced. It's OK to outline in advance general points of interest and the general subject areas you intend to cover.

### **YOU SHOULD NOT PROVIDE ACTUAL QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED, NOR PROMISE YOU WILL NOT ASK QUESTIONS OUTSIDE THE AREAS YOU HAVE OUTLINED, NOR PROMISE HOW SUBJECTS WILL BE TREATED ON THE AIR.**

Any agreement that certain questions will or will not be asked would be an exception, to be decided on a case-by-case basis in consultation with your supervisor and/or VOA senior management as warranted. If an agreement is approved, the agreement should be mentioned in the introduction to the interview.

If an interviewee requires VOA to use a name or title we ordinarily would not use, that too should be mentioned in the introduction to the interview.

**Do not promise an interviewee that he or she will be able to find the entire interview on the VOA website, or that you will include it in a blog entry, unless you have already confirmed through your assignment process that the interview will be included with a web story or blog.**

### **RECORDING TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS**

- If you are planning to record a telephone interview, it is required that a reporter or producer advise the interview subject that he or she is being recorded, and that their comments will be on the record. If the interview subject objects to being recorded, the reporter or producer should confirm that the interview can be used as off the record information.
- [\*\(Also see Confidential Sources, p. 23\)\*](#)

### **SHOOTING/EDITING TV INTERVIEWS**

- When shooting a two-camera interview, it's acceptable for a reporter to register appropriate visual expressions, such as smiling at a joke. What is NOT acceptable is editing in a visual reaction that is out of sequence to the answer being given.
- Equally unacceptable is separating questions from answers. The 10<sup>th</sup> answer of an interview should not be edited as if it were the response to the 4<sup>th</sup> question, even if it seems to make the reporter's or producer's editorial point clearer.

- Interviews taped with one camera can present editing difficulties and therefore reverse questions (questions asked after the interview is done, with the camera reversed to tape the interviewer), while not ideal, are allowed. Reverse questions should be true to the original questions and if done, the interviewee or representative should be made aware and should be invited to be present.

In this situation, because the reverse shots are happening after the actual interview, the reporter or producer should not reflect an expression (smile, frown, nod) that might be seen as agreement or disagreement with what the subject is saying.

[\*\(Also see Basic Editing Principles, p. 93\)\*](#)

### **PUBLIC FIGURES**

Questions and reporting about the private lives of public figures should be relevant to the story. For example, the questioning is appropriate when the reporting is intended to expose inconsistency, lying, hypocrisy and most certainly, illegal activity. In the case of candidates for public office, information about these actions often enables voters to ascertain the character of a candidate or elected official.

However, VOA's reporting **should not** be based on rumor, speculation or gossip, but instead by applying the rigorous standards for any story. Reporting should rely on "on the record" statements and actions of public figures. Information from normally reliable sources not willing to be identified should be very closely examined.

[\*\(Also see Confidential Sources, p. 23\)\*](#)

The passage of time is an important consideration in determining what is relevant, and may affect current relevance. When information is dated, we should evaluate it carefully. In the case of a political figure, it may be the importance of such information for the public to judge that person's qualifications and fitness to hold public office.

Each situation should be considered separately and there is no blanket rule prohibiting reporting private activities from many years ago.

For interviews, be very discriminating when using information from sources and/or sourced information from another news organization when asking a question to a guest about his/her private life. Sourcing in this, as in any controversial or sensitive story, should follow VOA's two-source rule.

[\*\(Also see Sourcing, p. 21\)\*](#)

Open-ended questions based on little or no evidence are strongly discouraged. For example, the question "Have you ever taken a bribe," should not be asked unless it's based on our reporting, or if there is a compelling and journalistically justifiable reason to ask it.

**IF VOA PRESENTERS, CORRESPONDENTS OR PRODUCERS ARE UNSURE OF THE APPROPRIATENESS OF THEIR QUESTIONING OR REPORTING REGARDING THE PRIVATE LIFE OF A PUBLIC FIGURE, THEY SHOULD CONSULT WITH THEIR SUPERVISOR AND WHEN APPROPRIATE WITH THE BEST PRACTICES EDITOR AND THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL**

[\*Return to Table of Contents\*](#)

### **ANONYMITY**

There may be reasons to agree to anonymity for an interview subject, whether for radio, TV or online. For example, we may not wish to jeopardize the subject's safety or subject him or her or family members to harm or undue embarrassment. But there may be legal considerations as well in granting anonymity to interview subjects.

Always question an interviewee's motives before promising anonymity. Clarify and confirm the conditions agreed to in exchange for the information. Anonymity for interviewees can be defined by degree. In establishing the degree of anonymity, describe the process to be used (e.g. blurring of faces, digitizing the voice, videotaping in shadow) but do not guarantee a particular result.

**THE FAILURE TO ADEQUATELY DISGUISE AN INTERVIEW SUBJECT OR A MISUNDERSTANDING OVER THE STEPS AGREED ON TO DISGUISE AN INTERVIEW SUBJECT CAN RESULT IN A LEGAL CLAIM AGAINST VOA.**

**GENERALLY, WE WANT TO AVOID PROMISING ANONYMITY FOR PEOPLE TRYING TO EVADE LAW ENFORCEMENT.**

**EXCEPTIONS SHOULD BE CLEARED WITH A SUPERVISOR, THE BEST PRACTICES EDITOR AND/OR SENIOR MANAGEMENT AND THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL.**

### **"AMBUSH" INTERVIEWS**

So-called "ambush" interviews, where a person who has refused to be interviewed is approached without notice by a reporter or producer, are discouraged and should be avoided. An "ambush" is different than a "stakeout," where cameras are set up to get comments from individuals who are going to or leaving meetings and/or work.

**DECIDING TO DO AN AMBUSH INTERVIEW SHOULD NOT BE TAKEN LIGHTLY. SUPERVISORS, THE BEST PRACTICES EDITOR AND/OR SENIOR MANAGEMENT AND THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL SHOULD BE ADVISED IN ADVANCE OF ANY SUCH PLANS.**

### **ADVANCE SCRIPTS/SCREENING**

You should not show a script to a third party not affiliated with VOA or BBG in advance of the story's airing. You can call an interviewee and review portions of a script in order to fact check. As part of the reporting process you may also show portions of other interviews or other footage prepared for the report to an interview subject to obtain their reaction or comment for use in the same report. You should videotape the individual watching the other interview or other footage whenever possible.

Advance screenings of VOA news stories are not permitted without the prior approval of senior management. An exception: press screenings for review purposes.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### **REQUESTS FOR UNAIED/UNPUBLISHED MATERIAL**

As a general policy, VOA should not give third parties access to unaired or unpublished material or discuss the existence of such materials. Any requests for such information should be referred to senior management and the Office of General Counsel.

[\*\(Also see Domestic Dissemination of VOA Programming, p. 68\)\*](#)

### **SUBJECT TAPING INTERVIEW**

On occasion a subject may ask to do his or her own recording of an interview. That is permissible as long as the subject understands the taping is for personal use only, not for broadcast, publication or other distribution. As noted above, VOA will not provide an audio or video copy of the raw interview to an interview subject.

### **PAYMENT**

VOA does not pay people for interviews. It may, however, be appropriate to pay certain travel-related expenses for an interviewee. Any questions should be referred to VOA senior management and the Office of General Counsel.

### GUESTS

#### **NOTIFYING VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT OF HIGH-LEVEL GUESTS**

As a major international broadcaster, VOA often welcomes to the Cohen Building high-level foreign government officials and other important individuals, such as prominent dissidents and exiles. To better determine when additional protocols may be appropriate, VOA journalists who schedule these meetings or visits should immediately notify senior management through their chain of command. Division Directors will then notify the Language Programming Directorate using the email address [language-programming-directorate@voanews.com](mailto:language-programming-directorate@voanews.com) for coordination with the Office of the VOA Director. Decisions about any special actions that may be needed will be coordinated between the Office of the VOA Director and the CEO's Office. Notification at each stage should occur prior to the visit, with sufficient time for senior management to take any actions that may be necessary.

VOA journalists who schedule meetings at the Cohen Building with audience members, members of the diaspora, or lower-level government officials should also immediately notify their Division Director. That Division Director will then decide whether additional coordination within VOA and the CEO's Office is required.

#### **COHEN BUILDING SECURITY PROCEDURES FOR GUESTS**

Security procedures for entry into the Cohen building is set by the Federal Protective Service (FPS), the agency that provides integrated security and law enforcement services to federally owned and leased facilities. FPS, not BBG Security, manages the contract for the building's Protective Security Officers (PSOs), thus they report to and are represented by the FPS Inspector.

As with other federal buildings, all visitors must show proper photo ID and go through security screening upon arrival.

**FOR PROGRAM GUESTS, THIS PROCESS CAN SEEM CUMBERSOME.**

**CONSEQUENTLY, EMPLOYEES MUST EXPLAIN THE SECURITY PROCEDURES AND PHOTO ID REQUIREMENTS TO ALL PROGRAM GUESTS PRIOR TO THEIR ARRIVAL, AND ASK THAT THEY ANTICIPATE ABOUT 10 MINUTES FOR THE CHECK-IN PROCESS.**

Types of Accepted Identification:

1. U.S. Citizens: Valid U.S. Driver's License or U.S. Passport
2. Non-U.S. Citizens: Valid Passport/Visa

Please notify your guest/visitor that they will be required to process through security screening (walk-through magnetometer and x-ray machine for hand-carried items) prior to arrival.

If you are sponsoring an event, please provide BBG Security with a guest list that includes the date/time of their arrival, along with their full names and your contact information (Sponsor). Please remember that all visitors **MUST** be escorted while in the Cohen Building per FPS requirements. This list should be emailed to the central Security email at: [bbg-security@bbg.gov](mailto:bbg-security@bbg.gov).

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

In those rare cases when an important guest arrives without any ID, contact IBB/SEC immediately so they can work with the FPS to request an exception to normal procedures and allow the guest entry into the building. Please understand that the final decision to waive normal security procedures for your guest rests with FPS, not BBG Security.

Exceptions to these procedures can be made in some cases for VIPs. VIPs are granted access without having to sign in or go through the metal detectors. Under some circumstances, they also enter the building through a different entry point than the C Street visitors' entrance.

The following are automatically considered VIPs:

1. The President and his cabinet, including sitting Ambassadors
2. Sitting and former members of Congress
3. Anyone who has a federal law enforcement detail, such as foreign dignitaries

For these and other special guests, employees can request VIP status from BBG Security managers or from the IBB Chief of Staff.

Please contact Security with any additional questions at 202-382-7777.

### GUEST BOOKING PROCEDURES

- **ALL REQUESTS FOR THE PRESIDENT, VICE PRESIDENT, FIRST LADY AND THE VP's SPOUSE WILL BE MADE THROUGH THE VOA DIRECTOR'S OFFICE.  
THERE ARE ABSOLUTELY NO EXCEPTIONS**
- **ALL REQUESTS FOR OTHER WHITE HOUSE OFFICIALS, CABINET SECRETARIES, THE HOUSE AND SENATE LEADERSHIP AND THE KEY BEATS MUST COME FROM THE NEWS CENTER CORRESPONDENTS AT THOSE BEATS**

### **THE CORRESPONDENTS ARE THE FACE OF VOA FOR THOSE BEATS AND WE CANNOT UNDERCUT THEIR POSITIONS**

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES	Katherine Gypson
INTELLIGENCE/NATIONAL SECURITY	Jeff Seldin
MEDICAL	Carol Pearson
PENTAGON	Carla Babb
POLITICS	Jim Malone
SENATE	Michael Bowman
STATE DEPARTMENT	Steve Herman & Nike Ching
UNITED NATIONS	Margaret Besheer
WHITE HOUSE	Cindy Saine & Mary Alice Salinas

These requests **SHOULD BE SENT FIRST** to the appropriate beat correspondent, News Center managers and to Senior Executive Producer Steven Springer. When an interview has been confirmed, an e-mail will be sent to the Guest Booking group: [guest-booking@voanews.com](mailto:guest-booking@voanews.com)

When we get an interview with the President, Vice President, First Lady, VP's spouse, key Cabinet members or Congressional leadership, VOA Public Relations should be notified immediately: [PublicRelations@voanews.com](mailto:PublicRelations@voanews.com)

When there's a request for deputy secretaries, under-secretaries, spokespeople and those in similar positions, the News Center correspondent responsible for that beat (White House, State, Pentagon, Capitol Hill, intelligence matters, national politics, UN) **SHOULD BE ADVISED IN ADVANCE OF MAKING THE REQUEST**. The Guest Booking e-mail group should be copied on these e-mails.

Otherwise, for the majority of interview requests, a heads-up e-mail to the Guest Booking e-mail group will suffice.

News Center managers and the beat reporters are included in the Guest Booking group, so they will be aware of all requests. The guests that fall into this general category might be from a think tank or NGO, a media rep for an organization, or a lower level member of Congress or a government agency.



When sending your e-mail, please provide as many details as possible: the date of the interview, whether the interview is audio or video, location and time.

When and where possible, stringers for the News Center and the Language Services should keep the field correspondents and/or Washington advised of potential interviews of interest.

**ADDITIONALLY: LARRY LONDON’S BEAT IS MUSIC AND PENELOPE POULOU’S BEAT IS FILM.**

As such, if a Language Service is thinking of interviewing a major musician or musical group, or thinking of getting an interview with a film personality who is on a junket or making an appearance in a bureau city, **an advisory e-mail should go out first to Larry or Penelope accordingly, and to Guest Booking.**

By the same token, when Larry, Penelope or anyone else has a major music interview or movie-related interview scheduled, they should advise the Guest Booking e-mail group.

When there are major awards shows – usually in Los Angeles -- Mike O’Sullivan in the L.A. bureau should be brought into the conversation. As with State, Pentagon or elsewhere – it does not make VOA look good if a studio or a musician’s or filmmaker’s press person is hearing from multiple VOA individuals.

**IT IS STRONGLY RECOMMENDED THAT ALL STAFF RESPONSIBLE FOR BOOKING GUESTS/INTERVIEWS SEND A NOTE TO GUEST BOOKING AND TO THE APPROPRIATE INDIVIDUALS BEFORE MAKING A REQUEST.**

### **GUIDELINES FOR HOSTING A LIVE GUEST ON VOA PROGRAMS**

- All potential live guests should be pre-interviewed to get a sense of what to expect when you are on the air. You can discuss general topics, but do not give the guest the actual interview questions in advance. That pre-interview should be available for review by producers, anchors and management.
- When you know you're going to have a controversial or potentially hostile guest, prepare a game plan with the show staff and the show Director about what to do if the interview goes downhill, so that everyone in the control room and on the set know in advance what to do, including implementation of a back-up plan.
- It is the responsibility of a program's host to do his/her homework about the guest and the subject matter. If a guest starts making unsubstantiated accusations or questionable statements, it is the responsibility of the anchor to challenge the guest about those accusations/statements, whether asking for clarification about the source of the accusations/statements or refuting those accusations/statements with facts.
- If a guest uses language that is unsuitable for air (cursing, insulting, racial or homosexual slurs, for example) it is the responsibility of the host to immediately cut the conversation off and apologize to the audience for the offensive language. It is the responsibility of the Executive Producer to alert the Director about what has happened so the Director can make sure the guest's microphone is silenced. At that point the EP must communicate to the Director and the Line Producer to implement a back-up plan.
- The Executive Producer is responsible for a written report of the incident. Detail the unacceptable or irresponsible language used by the guest, how the anchor handled the situation and what steps were taken to end the interview and go to alternate programming. The report is to be sent to the Service Chief, Division Director, Associate Director for Language Programming and the Associate Director for Operations.
- Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the Executive Producer to ensure that the program is clean and airs correctly. The anchor can only do so much. The EP has his/her finger on the button, so to speak, with the authority and ability to tell the Director and the Line Producer to go to something else. That's why you need to have a backup plan.

**GOING TO BLACK IS A LAST DITCH OPTION, WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS.  
IT IS NEVER THE FIRST OPTION.**

### **DIGITAL MEDIA**

#### **SOCIAL MEDIA**

All VOA journalists are encouraged to participate in social media. By joining networks that are popular in your target regions you can forge closer relationships with your audience, discover new angles and stories and experiment with different ways of covering the news.

Reporters are encouraged to break news on social media platforms that are most popular in their region, but certain editorial priorities should be followed.

**REMEMBER THAT ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND OTHER PUBLIC SPACES,  
YOU ARE A JOURNALIST.**

**IT IS CRITICAL THAT YOU ARE FAIR, IMPARTIAL AND OBJECTIVE  
IN ALL PUBLIC SPACES.**

#### **PROTECTING YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL BRAND IN SOCIAL MEDIA**

Using social media can have as many pitfalls as pluses. If your account is hacked, or you find that an imposter account is impersonating you, your reputation and that of VOA can be damaged.

Your first line of defense – maintaining good online security practices.

- Monitor your digital identity by periodically conducting an online search for your name using several of the leading search engines, e.g. Google, Yahoo, Bing, etc. Examine the results on the first two or three pages to make sure there are no unfamiliar accounts.
- Use strong passwords (combining uppercase letters, lowercase letters, numbers, and special characters)
- Change passwords frequently
- Do not use the same passwords for multiple accounts
- Keep your passwords safe
- Make sure your email address is secure
- Be sure who you are actually connecting with or following; connect with Verified public profiles
- Get Verified for your own social media accounts used for VOA work

**Twitter:** log in then visit [verification.twitter.com](https://verification.twitter.com)

**Facebook:** log in and visit [this page](#) in Facebook's [Help Center](#)

The second option is to take images used for your profile picture and do a reverse image search, since impersonators will often use pictures you've posted online to create fake accounts. [This primer](#) from Google is a good place to start and will show you how to find all the places your pictures are showing up across the internet.

If you find or suspect problems with your accounts:

- Contact the Office of VOA Digital Strategy as soon as possible [voadigital@voanews.com](mailto:voadigital@voanews.com). They will work with the social media companies to help take care of hacks or imposter accounts.

To help prevent security problems, or once your account has been fixed, please follow these best practices for securing your account:

- Change your password
- Make sure your email address is secure
- Revoke connections to third-party applications
- Update your password in your trusted third-party applications

More details on these practices, and additional steps to protect your accounts:

- Twitter: <https://support.twitter.com/articles/31796>
- Facebook: [Keeping Your Account Secure](#) (part of the Facebook Help Center)

### SOCIAL MEDIA AS REPORTING TOOL

- **REPORTERS SHOULD QUICKLY FILE FOR VOA-OWNED PLATFORMS AFTER BREAKING NEWS ON SOCIAL MEDIA, PARTICULARLY FOR HIS OR HER SERVICE'S WEBSITE, BUT ALSO FOR RADIO AND TV WHEN APPROPRIATE.**
- **IF A VOA REPORTER/PRODUCER HAS A BREAKING STORY, HE OR SHE SHOULD BE THE ONE TO FIRST REPORT THAT ON THEIR OWN SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS OR ON THE SERVICE'S OFFICIAL ACCOUNT. DON'T BIG FOOT YOUR COLLEAGUES.**

It's also important to remember that social media is more than Facebook and Twitter. Niche audiences often have their own niche social networks, like Sina Weibo in China or Orkut in India and Brazil. Get to know which ones are popular with your audience and experiment with them. Whatever your topic or medium, there's a probably a social network around it.

Reporting has always been about amplifying certain voices from the public. But rather than a list of carefully cultivated sources that reporters have traditionally relied upon, social media can present millions of competing voices that we must select from wisely. Whether you call it citizen journalism, user-generated content or social media, our readers often report and share news stories before we are able to verify the facts. While it's good to highlight those voices, it is critical to verify rumors before reporting them as facts.

There are techniques for confirming the validity of certain social media accounts, including examination of how long the account has been in existence, looking at the account's message history, and scrutiny of photo streams or other bits of the user's digital trail. If you have doubts, reach out to your service's or division's social media lead for guidance. You must do your due diligence before relying on a source as credible. In other words, report the story.

**Do not retweet or pass along unconfirmed rumors without a clear indication that the information is not yet verified.**

For example: *@VOANews Lots of reports and photos of this blast. Working to confirm RT @manonstreet Bomb in front of parliament. Hundreds dead!*

**Finally, adding comments from social media to your reporting is acceptable as long as you clearly identify the source of the comment and it reflects audience opinion, similar to a vox pop in radio or television. Make sure you balance opinions to provide a fair picture of public sentiment, and contextualize those opinions with the larger story.**

### OPINION

If you take a controversial position or make a controversial comment it can reflect poorly on you and the agency. It could lead our readers to believe that we are untrustworthy and unable to fairly cover both sides of a controversial story. VOA has spent 75 years building its reputation, and you have spent your career building yours. To keep that trust intact we must adhere to a high standard of independence and objectivity.

You should not express a point of view on controversial issues, even if your account is set to only be viewable by your friends. This not only includes individual posts or tweets, but also posting your political affiliation or causes in your profile. Privacy policies change and people can take screenshots. Assume nothing is private in social media, even if you have your account visible only to your circle of friends.

In particular, retweeting or “liking” an opinion on one side of the issue or another could be construed as an endorsement from you or from VOA. If you want to put that comment in front of your followers, make sure it is clear you aren’t endorsing the opinion, but simply showing both sides of the conversation.

For example: *@VOANews The budget fight continues RT @AngryPundit Why can’t Washington get its act together?*

Don’t be afraid to engage with either side of a controversial issue. It is okay to follow or friend individuals or interest groups on either side of an issue. Indeed, it should be part of the reporting process; paying attention to what both sides have to say is critical to getting as much information as possible on an issue. But never endorse only one side or the other by “liking” a cause or political figure, and make sure you follow all sides of an issue.

While personal endeavors on other sites are fine, they must not involve the use of agency materials, time or facilities, including information that is available to you because of your position at VOA.

### MANAGING YOUR PROGRAM'S OR SERVICE'S SOCIAL PRESENCE

VOA programs and services are encouraged to maintain official accounts on the major social media platforms in your region. These presences can help you engage with your current audience and reach new audiences with your content.

Before launching a new official social media presence, you and your service chief should answer the following questions:

- Who are you trying to reach and why is this the right way to reach them?
- Who is responsible for keeping each account active and how often?
- How will success be measured and who will track it?
- Does your branding align with the branding already established on your website?

You are also responsible for moderating the comments on your Facebook page, website, or agency blog to remove comments that violate our Terms of Use. In particular, you should be on the lookout for comments that are vulgar, racist or incite others to acts of violence. And be aware that our spam filters sometimes fail; always be vigilant about shaping a lively and responsible conversation by removing comments that distract from the free and civil exchange of ideas.

### POSTING VOA MATERIAL TO OTHER SITES, INCLUDING YOUR OWN

Uploading proprietary VOA or wire agency material directly to personal accounts is prohibited. Not only can you be held legally liable for posting photos or video that belongs to wire and newsfeed agencies, but you will hurt your service's ability to build an audience on official channels.

Instead, you should link to VOA material posted on your service's website or other official VOA accounts, e.g. your service's official YouTube channel.

*Example:* Jack is a video editor in a VOA language service. He regularly combines wire service video and VOA video into packages for broadcast and web. He sometimes takes interesting video from APTN, as well as video he has shot, and uploads it directly to his personal YouTube channel and Facebook page. Is that permitted?

*Answer:* **No.** Jack should only upload VOA material to official VOA YouTube accounts. Once it's there, he can link to it from his personal YouTube account, Facebook or other channels.

*Example:* Jack embeds video from his service's VOA YouTube channel on his own YouTube page and shares VOA reporting with his friends on Facebook. Is this permitted?

*Answer:* **Yes.** Any material shared from your service's official, public-facing website, YouTube channel, or other official outlets is okay.

### LINKING TO OTHER SITES

You are encouraged to provide links that are relevant to story content and suitable for all audiences. Editors should exercise judgment and not use links that may be offensive, or in any way, inappropriate.

Linking does not constitute endorsement. While you should avoid pointing readers to anything that is an affront to common decency, you needn't hesitate when linking to the websites of institutions or causes if they are relevant to a story. And if your link is to the site of a particular candidate or party please be even-handed: if you link to the website of one political party, you should be just as willing to link to the website of the opposition party, when relevant to the story. Failure to do so could not only call into question our objectivity; it could be a violation of the Hatch Act.

*[\(Also see Political Reporting on VOA Websites, p. 9\)](#)*

### BE TRANSPARENT ABOUT YOUR MISTAKES

Every news outlet makes mistakes. When a piece of reporting on your site contains a factual error it should be corrected as quickly as possible. Talk to a senior editor in your service about what needs to be changed and place a correction at the bottom in italics that notes the original error.

Never just delete a story or video from the site without correcting and acknowledging the mistake. Not only will the incorrect story remain in the caches of major search engines, but your readers will believe that you are trying to cover something up instead of being honest and open. Full disclosure is always best.

While you should not delete incorrect stories or video from your site, you should use the content management system to remove it from major section fronts until it is corrected. The URL will continue to work, but will not be highlighted on the site.

*[\(Also see Corrections, p. 79\)](#)*

### **USER-GENERATED CONTENT**

Like all news organizations, VOA receives video, audio and photos from outside sources. The content may be sent for the purpose of showing an up-close look at a news event; to present a particular point of view; to cast a negative light on a government, an organization or individuals.

In all cases, VOA journalists must take every editorial precaution to ensure the legitimacy of the submissions before broadcasting them or publishing them:

- **CONTACT & IDENTIFICATION**

Reach out to individuals or groups who have posted material to verify that they are the owner of the work. Clearly identify yourself as a journalist when making inquiries about user-generated content.

- **NEWSWORTHINESS**

Is there a valid editorial reason to use video, audio or photos that we receive from an outside source? Does the user-generated content help to further inform our audience about an issue or incident?

- **MOTIVE**

Does the individual or group sending the material have an agenda? If VOA determines the content is agenda-driven and decides to air/publish the content, we should reveal why the material was submitted, and who submitted it.

- **REAL OR STAGED**

Can VOA confirm that the video, audio or photo is real? Or, can VOA determine whether the content is fake or staged, produced in the hope that VOA might air or publish it?

- **COPYCAT INCIDENTS**

Will the broadcasting or publication of the video/photos encourage others to create or produce similar content that in some cases could be life-threatening?

- **RIGHT TO PRIVACY**

Was the material recorded or photographed without the knowledge of the individuals involved? In other words, was the material recorded with a hidden camera or microphone?

- **HOW WILL THE CONTENT BE USED**

Should VOA receive sensitive or graphic content, follow the guidelines in the section on [\*Sensitive and Graphic Material, p. 11.\*](#) In some cases it may be more appropriate for such material to be posted online only, where users can choose what they do or do not want to see or hear.

- **PERMISSION**

Once it's established the content is valid and its owner is identified, ask for permission to use the material. As always, VOA gives credit where credit is due, so the person who created the content should be identified accordingly; it is up to the individual or group whether to use real names or a website/social network username.



- **PAYING FOR MATERIAL**

Other than our existing agreements with the news agencies and our freelancers, VOA does not pay for content. Please keep this in mind when dealing with user-generated content.

*(Also see [Payment, p. 34](#))*

- **DISCLAIMERS**

We must always tell our audiences when we are airing or publishing user-generated content. In addition, we should tell our audiences that while we have checked for the legitimacy of the material, we cannot absolutely verify the content. As with all of VOA's reporting, transparency is key.

[Follow this link to a useful at-your-desk tool for verifying user-generated content.](#)

It provides various case studies that can easily be applied to potential UGC situations at VOA.

If you are uncertain about using photos or video taken from social media, please see the guidance on copyright and fair use in the [Legal Issues](#) section of this Guide, or e-mail the Office of General Counsel at [copyrightclearances@bbg.gov](mailto:copyrightclearances@bbg.gov).

**AUDIO, VIDEO OR PHOTOS THAT ARE FREELY AVAILABLE  
ON THE INTERNET DOES NOT MEAN THEY ARE IN  
THE "PUBLIC DOMAIN."**

### YOUTUBE GUIDELINES

- YouTube videos **SHOULD NOT** be considered a primary means of accessing and using B-roll for a video package. ALWAYS check the ABC NewsOne, AFP, APTN and Reuters folders in DaletPlus first. If necessary, contact the Senior Archivists ([senior-archivists@voanews.com](mailto:senior-archivists@voanews.com)) for assistance.
- The VOA Video Library has extensive file video available; always check with them before relying on YouTube for video needs.
- Use caution and common sense and avoid using videos from YouTube that may violate someone's copyright.

While YouTube is the most popular site for video, similar rules apply to other sites, such as Vimeo and VEVO.

Although YouTube videos may seem to be considered fair use, each video should be cleared through the Best Practices Editor before using it. The video can be used full-screen as long as credits, chyron information and other on-screen information is not obscured or deleted.

The actual YouTube logo **MUST** be used as the visual credit:



YouTube should still be credited in narration: "In this video posted on YouTube..." or something similar.

YouTube has a [blurring tool](#) that lets you blur any part of a video, including moving objects. Details on how to use the tool are here:

[\(Also see Sensitive & Graphic Material, p. 11\)](#)

### RADIO

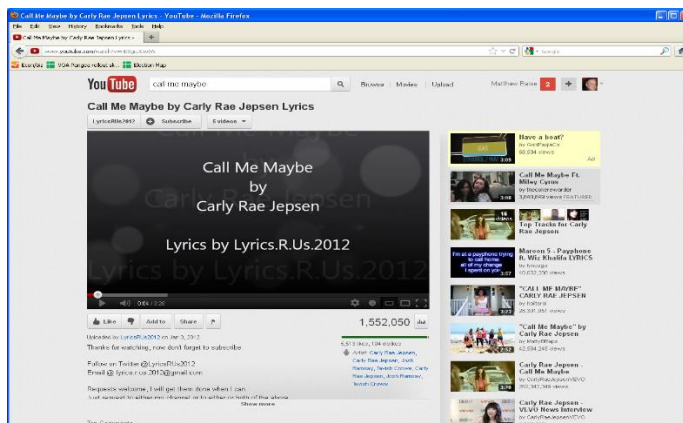
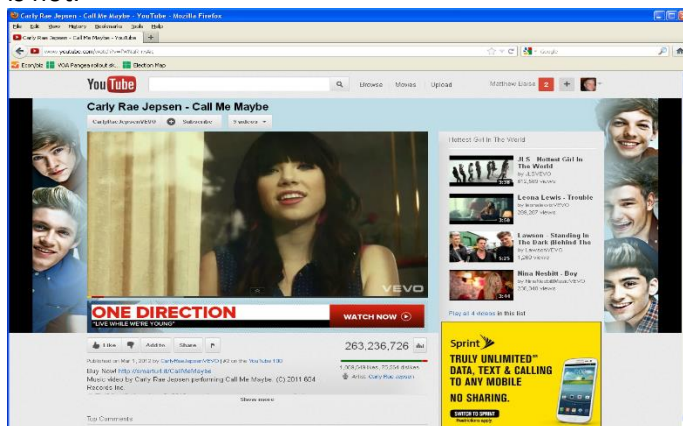
The audio from a YouTube video cannot be used in this manner. YouTube's Terms of Service stipulate that embedded content cannot be manipulated or downloaded for use away from [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com).

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

## EMBEDDING

Embedded video is effectively just a link; no copy of the video is being stored on your server. Therefore, you may use embedded video on VOA websites. However, you should still exercise caution and common sense and avoid posting videos that may violate someone's copyright. In particular, do not post videos that contain music, movies or television broadcasts unless those videos are posted on the official YouTube channel of the copyright holder. Many movie studios and music companies allow you to take embed code for trailers or video clips directly from their main site. In those cases, it's much easier to tell that you're using an official video when it's on the company website.

On the top is the official version of a music video on Vevo, an entertainment consortium of music producers. Below it is the exact same song from a bootleg channel. The first is okay for use; the second is not.



**YOUTUBE MAKES NO REPRESENTATIONS ABOUT THE ACCURACY, USEFULNESS, SAFETY OR INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS OF CONTENT APPEARING ON ITS SITE.**

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### **GOOGLE EARTH GUIDELINES**

VOA has rights to use Google Earth for the following VOA products:

- Television programs (including promotional ads)
- DVDs and video on demand
- Any long-form video products, including documentaries
- Printed materials

Google Earth can be used to create fly-throughs, locator maps, or basic illustrations of cities or geographic features.

**We are required to credit Google Earth with an unobstructed graphic module that clearly shows that the content is provided by Google and, when applicable, a third-party data provider.** [This example](#) from CNN shows how it should be done.

Please work with your EP and Graphics person to make sure Google Earth is clearly credited for any usage.

Also, any Google Maps/Google Earth images used must reflect how they would look online. For example, you are not allowed to make any changes (delete, blur, etc.) to these products that would make them look different than in the actual product.

Because it is a standalone software package, IT will need to install Google Earth on your computer.

### **REVEALING WEBSITES AND ADDRESSES**

In most cases, websites are not considered in the public domain for purposes of publishing pictures of them. They fall under the same fair use guidelines as other copyrighted material. If you have questions about whether you can show a website, please contact the Office of General Counsel.

Generally, website addresses can be revealed, as long as they are not for sites which promote criminal behavior or contain pornography. Avoid showing website addresses if it might be construed as a commercial for the site. Exceptions would include educational or informational sites, or charitable sites raising money for victims of a natural disaster.

When reporting on political campaigns, links to the websites of the candidates mentioned in the piece should be included. ([Also see Political Reporting on VOA Websites, p. 9](#))

### **AFFILIATE/RECIPROCAL LINKS**

Reciprocal links to affiliate websites are permitted, under the following guidelines:

- The decision to establish an online affiliation should reflect the same editorial considerations that go into establishing a broadcast affiliation – including credibility, reputation, trust and audience reach.
- VOA Language Services should consider the total number of affiliates when determining the placement of reciprocal links. A service that has a small number of large, reputable partners is justified in establishing front-page reciprocal links. A service that has dozens of broadcasting affiliates should create an Affiliates page where they may all be listed. Each situation must be considered separately. It may be appropriate to have a homepage reciprocal link with a major web portal that is a primary news source in the language, and a separate Affiliate page with reciprocal links to broadcasting affiliates.
- Affiliate logos or text links may be used to establish reciprocal links, as appropriate.
- Reciprocal links should be reviewed on a regular basis, and VOA must reserve the right to remove the link at any time, if the affiliation ends or the target site no longer reflects the editorial integrity under which the relationship was established.
- Terms of Use must include a disclaimer that “VOA is not responsible for the content of external websites.”

If you have questions about these guidelines, please contact Matthew Baise ([mbaise@voanews.com](mailto:mbaise@voanews.com)) or Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com)).

### **PHOTOGRAPHS**

Photographs add a great deal to VOA stories and are necessary to give the audience a fuller experience and understanding of VOA reports. While VOA has wire and other sources for photographs, original content taken by VOA reporters and staff is always useful.

Keep in mind that some stories will have no wire photos available so it is extra important for the reporter to shoot a few photos while doing the story.

The photo contracts for AFP, AP and Reuters are administered by Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com), x4276). The News Center and Language Services have designated staff that have access to these accounts. When there is a question about news agency photos, please contact Steve.

#### **GENERAL RULES**

- The goal of images is to enhance the readers' understanding of the story – and make it look better on the web. Take photos that add to your story, and submit as many as you can so editors can decide which are best.
- Show the people, places and things that you talk about in your stories - If you emphasize a place or interview a person get a picture. If you cover a demonstration, show the protest signs or faces of the people. However, be aware that minors may be present at demonstrations, and you should use good judgment in photographing them in those situations.  
(Also see [Interviewing & Videotaping Minors, p. 16](#) and [Filming in Public vs. Private Places, p. 83](#))
- Get close up to your subject if you can. Take photos from different perspectives and distances.
- Make sure your subject is clear, focused, and lit as well as possible.
- Always send in the largest file size possible. Photo and web editors can crop as needed and warranted.
- Headshots are good. Also try to get images of the subject in their environment and in action.
- Remember the [rule of thirds](#).
- [Shoot landscape \(horizontal\) instead of portrait](#). Landscape photos look better on social media and in Pangea. That means turning your phone 90 degrees when taking the photo.

### TECHNICAL TIPS

- Use your flash to balance out the light - If you are outside on a sunny day and you are shooting in the shade use your flash to fill heavy shadows if needed. If you are indoors and taking an image of someone in front of a window use your flash.
- Don't shoot portraits with the sun or bright light behind your subject unless you are using a flash to fill the light.
- Be careful of using a flash in front of glass or a mirror - The flash will bounce back into the lens. If you have to do this don't shoot straight on toward the glass, try to shoot at an angle to the glass.
- Be careful of microphones - Try to get a clear shot of the person without a microphone in front of their face

### SENDING IN PHOTO FILES

Always email your service AND [CentralNewsWebMedia@voanews.com](mailto:CentralNewsWebMedia@voanews.com) when submitting photos.

Always include who is paying for the photos and if they are available for use by the house. Always include caption info.

Photos can be submitted via email, any photo sharing service such as flickr or picasa, or via ftp.

### CAPTIONS

Reporters and producers in the field must supply the captions for your photos. Caption info is:-

- Who, what, when and where.
- Credit – who took the photo.
- Keep captions short and clear – photo and web editors will often rewrite and edit them.

VOA's caption style is the same when crediting staff and stringers: **John Doe/VOA**

VOA's contractual agreements with AFP, AP and Reuters allow us to use certain of their photos on VOAnews.com websites. However, it is **MANDATORY** that those photos be given proper credit, as seen on the next page.



**Obama Tells Congress US Deploying Up to 275  
Troops to Iraq**

### **EDITING PHOTOGRAPHS**

VOA allows for the adjustment of photos for brightness, contrast and color. However, VOA does not permit altering a photograph in any way that changes the meaning of the photo. While it's permissible to crop a photo, that should not change the meaning of the photo; for instance, cropping a photo that may leave out a key individual in the story.

**CLOSELY EXAMINE DIGITAL PICTURES FROM OUTSIDE SOURCES TO  
ENSURE THAT THOSE IMAGES HAVE NOT BEEN ALTERED.**



### **MUSIC**

The Music Library serves as the resource and research center for VOA programs containing music. Not only does the library catalog music, it also provides a historical and educational setting for producers and broadcasters to research various sources relating to music: biographies, event-driven materials, periodicals, almanacs, encyclopedias, etc.

The Music Library database currently contains a vast variety of musical recordings dating as far back as the 1930s. The database is catalogued by album titles, song titles, artists, and record company names/numbers.

The Music Library hours are 7:15am until 5:00pm (Monday-Friday), the telephone number is 202-382-7395.

*([Also see YouTube Guidelines, p. 47](#) and [Ambient Music, p. 82](#))*

### AUDIO USAGE RIGHTS

These guidelines **DO NOT** apply to the video news feeds that VOA subscribes to. Please see the next section for that information.

Some of the news organizations listed in this section have given VOA blanket permission to use audio excerpts from some of their news programs. These permissions need to be respected. Requests to use audio not covered by listed blanket clearances should be sent to Steven Springer, ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com)), the Contracting Officer's Representative (COR) for VOA's contracts with the news agencies.

#### **USING AUDIO FROM TV NEWS PROGRAMS**

VOA has had longstanding permission to use the voices of the persons being interviewed on network news programs.

VOA should use the following credit in the radio script for all programs: "As reported on [Network and program name]," or equivalent language giving credit to the appropriate news organization.

While we will always claim fair use for relevant audio excerpts, there are a few exceptions, listed below.

#### **ABC NEWS**

**DO NOT** use the voices of any ABC News anchors, correspondents, reporters, commentators and stringers.

- ***This Week*** – VOA has received permission to record the entire Sunday talk show to use content of particular interest to our audiences. However, with this permission there are some restrictions listed below:
  - We are authorized to excerpt up to two (2) minutes of the program.
  - Material may be posted on VOA's websites only if it is part of a VOA television program.
  - Use of ABC talent should be kept to a minimum in the story. This is the **ONLY** exemption to the restriction on using ABC News talent in VOA programming.
  - Excerpted material cannot be used after three (3) days and the *This Week* program cannot be archived for future use.
  - This permission is **ONLY** for *This Week*.

**AUDIO-ONLY USAGE FROM ALL OTHER ABC NEWS  
OR ENTERTAINMENT PROGRAMS MUST BE CLEARED PRIOR TO USE.**

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### CBS NEWS

**DO NOT USE** the voices of **ANY** CBS News employees, including anchors, reporters, correspondents, commentators or stringers.

**WE DO NOT HAVE PERMISSION TO USE ANY CBS NEWS AUDIO CLIPS ON VOANEWS.COM OR ON ANY OTHER VOA WEB PRESENCE.**

### CNN

VOA has no overall agreement with CNN for use of audio clips, but we will claim editorial “fair use” as necessary on a case-by-case basis.

### FOX NEWS CHANNEL

VOA has permission to excerpt for radio no more than 3 minutes of audio from the *Fox News Sunday* broadcast. VOA must credit *Fox News Sunday*.

**ALL OTHER FOX TV PROGRAMS MUST BE CLEARED PRIOR TO USE.  
FOX DOES NOT ALLOW ANY OF ITS MATERIAL TO BE REBROADCAST OVERSEAS.**

### NBC NEWS, MSBNC & CNBC

VOA has blanket permission to use audio excerpts from *The Today Show*, *Meet the Press* and *NBC Nightly News*. All news specials, documentaries and other special programming must be cleared prior to use. There is no restriction on the use of NBC correspondents’ voices, but use of NBC correspondent reports is limited to U.S datelines. VOA does **NOT** have clearance to use audio actualities from any CNBC programs.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### VIDEO USAGE RIGHTS

VOA has contracts with three different video newsfeed providers: ABC News, Agence France Press (AFP), Associated Press (AP) and Reuters. We receive video from ABC NewsOne through our contract with AP. Each contract is unique and stands on its own.

Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com), x4276) is the COR for the newsfeeds. The Media Asset Management Branch assists in administering and facilitating use of the video and audio newsfeeds. The MAM Branch Chief, Pam Commerford, ([pcommerford@voanews.com](mailto:pcommerford@voanews.com), x7124) also contacts the providers and clears use of specific items.

### **BEFORE USING ANY VIDEO, IT IS THE PRODUCER'S RESPONSIBILITY TO REVIEW THE NEWSFEED SCRIPT SOURCE INFORMATION TO CHECK FOR RIGHTS RESTRICTIONS**

#### **COMMON FEATURES - ALL NEWSFEEDS**

Newsfeed scripts for the video stories are provided as basic information for our own script writing, and **do not** constitute a separate element. In other words, **newsfeed scripts cannot be used on the Web as a text-only story**. However, the information contained in video scripts can be used within a VOA story when they are combined with pertinent information from other news sources and follow VOA's sourcing guidelines.

#### **RIGHTS RESTRICTIONS**

We have negotiated the rights of use with each provider to broadcast and publish our stories containing newsfeed material on TV, radio and internet. Restriction statements vary from provider to provider and cover different ground; the most common restrictions are described on the following pages.

Restrictions are usually listed near the top of the script, but also appear above specific items in the script when necessary. VOA must adhere to rights restrictions as listed in the associated scripts and we must pay attention to the source of the video. Our providers send stories in which the video may come from a variety of sources, from FIFA to ESPN to handout video to other broadcasters and awards programs. The restrictions listed reflect the rules of both the source organization and the newsfeed providers.

Since all VOA programming is available on the web, newsfeed items marked **NO ACCESS INTERNET** or **NO WEB** means the video/audio cannot be used at all, unless permission is granted by the newsfeed provider. Reuters, however, has a special requirement regarding our streaming shows, so please see the Reuters page for details. Please contact Pam or Steve if you need help with this.

You may see some variation of the following restrictions, regardless of the provider, on all the feeds:

- **TIME-LIMITED USAGE**  
You will often see limited windows of usage on stories, especially for entertainment and sports programs. Footage must be pulled off the web by the date and time listed in the script info or in advisories MAM has posted in e-mail.
- **MANDATORY COURTESY**  
When noted in the script the courtesy must appear on-screen in TV and web stories, and an audible courtesy must be used on radio.
- **NO LIBRARY / NO ARCHIVE**  
Items with this restriction should be deleted soon after use. This material is available in the DaletPlus production system for up to thirty days and is then purged. Using video labeled **NO LIBRARY** or **NO ARCHIVE** after its initial broadcast or web posting puts our contracts in jeopardy.

### USING VIDEO FROM TV NEWS NETWORKS

- We **DO NOT** have blanket permission from ABC, CBS, CNN, FOX or NBC (including MSNBC and CNBC) to record and use clips from their newscasts or weekend talk shows. The only exception is ABC's ***This Week*** program (see next page).
- All soundbites from the other networks' weekend talk shows should be taken from our regular agency newsfeeds. However, we must follow whatever restrictions the networks place on the usage of those clips.
- There are times when we will claim "fair use" for a network news video clip that has not been fed on an agency newsfeed, but you must contact Steve to get clearance. If necessary, Steve or Pam will consult with the General Counsel's office regarding any potential legal considerations.  
[\(Also see Copyright and Fair Use, p. 81\)](#)

### **ABC NEWS**

ABC News and ABC TV Entertainment programs' on-air talent **cannot** be used, with one exception: the host of the ***This Week*** Sunday talk show.

### **THIS WEEK**

- This exception applies **ONLY** to the host of ***This Week***; absolutely no video that shows or contains audio or video from another ABC News personality can be used. This includes shots of the back of heads, cutaways, walking shots, standups, or anything else that may show those individuals.
- VOA is authorized to excerpt up to two (2) minutes of ***This Week***.
- Material from ***This Week*** may be posted on VOA's websites only if it is part of a VOA television program.
- Material excerpted from ***This Week*** cannot be used after three (3) days and the ***This Week*** program cannot be archived for future use.
- **THIS PERMISSION IS ONLY FOR ABC'S *THIS WEEK* PROGRAM.**

### **ABC NEWSONE**

- VOA receives material daily from the ABC News affiliate service NewsOne. As noted above, VOA cannot use on-camera talent; this applies to anchors, show hosts and reporters, whether for ABC Network or an ABC affiliate station.
- When an ABC item is listed as **PACKAGE ONLY**, it generally means that VOA must run the package as fed by NewsOne. Pam or Steve can contact NewsOne to see if that restriction can be lifted.
- **NO EXCERPTING** is similar to PACKAGE ONLY, in that we cannot lift individual sequences or shots out of a package. The wording may be "No Excerpting Package," "No Excerpting [specific video]." Please contact Pam or Steve to see whether the No Excerpting restriction can be lifted.
- **NO RETRACKING** generally means that VOA cannot translate, summarize, adapt or otherwise make the piece shorter or longer. Please contact Pam or Steve to see whether the No Retracking restriction can be lifted.
- **NNS** is a news-sharing cooperative between ABC News and other news organizations. VOA is cleared to use all video that is marked as NNS.
- Use of all ABC standard graphics must be addressed on a case-by-case basis and users must contact Pam or Steve to seek permission before using.
- 3D graphics can be used **only if the entire package is used. There are no exceptions.**

- If a story is marked **ABC AFFILIATES ONLY**, VOA is cleared to use it. However, if a story is marked **ABC AFFILIATES ONLY, NO INTERNATIONAL CLIENTS**, please contact Pam or Steve to get clearance for use.

**NO INTERNET USE OF ANY COLLEGIATE AND PROFESSIONAL  
SPORTS VIDEO FED BY ABC NewsONE!**

**NO USE ON ANY PLATFORM OF ABC NEWS OR  
ABC ENTERTAINMENT PROMOS!**

### **AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE (AFP)**

AFP shoots and sends most of its own video; VOA has clearance to use all of this material unless otherwise noted in the script.

#### **EXAMPLES OF AFP RESTRICTIONS**

- **Source: NNIS**  
**Restrictions: \*NO RESALE FOR NON-EDITORIAL PURPOSES\***  
VOA broadcast purposes are EDITORIAL, therefore we are clear to use items with this statement. In addition, VOA must version content for our audiences before broadcasting or posting it online.
- **Source: PARLIAMENTARY RECORDING UNIT (British Parliament)**  
**Restrictions: NO RESALE FOR NON-EDITORIAL PURPOSES / NOT FOR USE IN ENTERTAINMENT OR POLITICAL SATIRE PROGRAMMES**  
VOA is clear to use items with this restriction, but not in a satirical, Daily Show-type production.

#### **WEB-RELATED RESTRICTION STATEMENTS**

- **NO WEB USE or NO AFP WEB** - Stories carrying either of these restrictions cannot be used on any VOA websites.
- **NO ENGLISH OR SPANISH WEB** - VOA English and Spanish **CANNOT** post the video to their websites, but all other VOA language services CAN post the video to their websites.

#### **CBS NEWS VIDEO**

- Some AFP items may carry the multiple restrictions listed below, which normally indicates the video comes from CBS News. AFP regularly feeds CBS News video, and we are working with AFP to clarify the restrictions regarding VOA's use of CBS material. In the case of these restrictions, VOA CAN use the video.  
**NO RESALE FOR NON-EDITORIAL PURPOSES**  
**NO JAPAN**  
**NO FREE OVER-THE-AIR BROADCASTERS IN AUSTRALIA, NO U.S. CABLE OUTLETS, FREE OVER-THE-AIR NETWORKS OR STATIONS, THEIR WEBSITES AND THEIR MOBIEL PHONE SERVICES.**

If you have questions about using restricted video fed by AFP, please contact Pam or Steve to see if the restrictions can be lifted.



### ASSOCIATED PRESS (APTN)

- **APTN Clients Only** – VOA is able to use all stories with this restriction
- **Horizons clients and AP Lifestyle, Health and Technology clients Only** – VOA subscribes to these categories and can use any story that carries this restriction.
- **SNTV Clients**- VOA has unlimited use of stories with this restriction, as long as SNTV is the “Original Provider” or “Source” of the video. You will know these stories are SNTV stories, because “SNTV clients only” will be stated somewhere in the rights restrictions section of the script.

However, if the “Original Provider” is a third party, such as *FIFA, IOC, Tennis Properties Ltd., TAF Sports, Dorna*, etc., you must follow the restrictions listed within the “Rights Restrictions” section of script.

- **Check Script For Details** – VOA can use stories with this restriction, but you must follow specific restrictions within the script if there are film clips/music videos.
- **NO ACCESS IRAN AND NO ACCESS VOA PERSIAN TV**  
VOA Persian cannot use APTN stories shot in and sent from Iran. This includes **ALL** video of Iran, even when the restriction isn’t noted on the script and includes video previously received that we have in the Video Library and the VOA Persian video server.  
NOTE: The stories restricted to the Persian Service can be used by the News Center and the other Language Services.
- **OTHER RESTRICTIONS**  
VOA can use stories that have restrictions to other geographic regions. For example, stories marked No Access Russia or No Access Indonesia can be used by those Language Services as well as all other VOA services.

However, non-regional restrictions, such as No Access Internet, must be followed. Sometimes permission will be granted; in those cases please contact Pam or Steve to gain clearance.

- **ABC Talent on APTN-fed stories:** On occasion, APTN will feed an ABC story. ABC talent cannot be used.  
([Also see ABC News, p. 59](#))

### REUTERS

- Most Reuters videos are listed as **NO RIGHTS RESTRICTIONS** or the restriction listed is as **NONE**; those stories can be used across all platforms at any time.
- If a Reuters video is marked **FOR EDITORIAL USE ONLY**, we can use it.
- Reuters videos may sometimes be marked **NO MOBILE USE**. VOA has clearance to use these videos on our Internet and mobile platforms. Please contact Steve or Pam if you have questions about NO MOBILE USE restrictions.
- **NO ACCESS USA/CNN/YAHOO/AOL/WIRELESS**  
Stories with this restriction generally originate from NBC News and cannot be used by VOA

**VOA does not have contractual rights to use NBC material.  
Please be diligent about confirming the source and do not use NBC content.**

**If there is a strong editorial reason to use NBC News or NBC affiliate material –  
and similar material cannot be found on the other newsfeeds – please contact  
Steve or Pam to see whether we can get clearance to use the video.**

- **RESTRICTED POOL** - The five U.S. news networks -- ABC, CBS, CNN, FOX and NBC – shoot video daily that is designated pool material. In most cases, Restricted Pool applies to domestic and overseas coverage of the president, and in election seasons, coverage of presidential candidates.  
**VOA CAN USE THIS RESTRICTED POOL VIDEO.**

**However, VOA cannot use Restricted Pool video of the vice president, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense or other Cabinet members.**

it is strongly recommended that you call Steve or Pam if there is any uncertainty about the Restricted Pool designation of a video.

- **Sports items will often be heavily restricted.** Many have **NO ARCHIVE** restrictions, very often 48 hours but also 15 days or a specific date. As a rule, golf, tennis, cricket and motorcycling are heavily restricted. Stories about U.S. hockey (NHL) can be used until the end of the current hockey season. Soccer matches are often restricted, but we can use video of soccer practice / press conferences.

- Video shot in the UK often carries this restriction:  
**ITN COPYRIGHT: TV: NO ACCESS ALL DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL CHANNELS DISTRIBUTED IN UK & EIRE ON SKY/VIRGIN/FREEVIEW; BBC/BSKYB GROUP: NO ACCESS WORLDWIDE ANY MEDIA; INTERNET: NO ACCESS.CO.UK WEB SITES AND ALL WEBSITES PRINCIPALLY TARGETED AT THE UK AND/OR EIRE; MOBILE: NO ACCESS WORLDWIDE; NO USE AFTER 30 DAYS FROM DATE FIRST USED ON ALL PLATFORMS.**

This is an extremely targeted restriction statement and it is recommended to call Steve or Pam for guidance. Typically we parse the statement to find the relevant info, and call for clearance or clarification when necessary. In this example, “MOBILE: NO ACCESS WORLDWIDE” is the relevant statement we’d need to decipher.

- **NO ACCESS IRAN AND NO ACCESS VOA PERSIAN NEWS NETWORK**  
VOA Persian **cannot** use Reuters material filmed in or sent from Iran, whether shot by Reuters or the national networks. However, stories received at VOA prior to June 9, 2010 are OK to use – for now – even if a restriction is listed.  
NOTE: The stories restricted to the Persian Service **can be used** by the News Center and the other Language Services.
- **OTHER RESTRICTIONS**  
VOA can use stories that have restrictions to other geographic regions. For example, stories with No Access Russia or No Access Indonesia can be used by those Language Services as well as all other VOA services.

However, non-regional restrictions, such as No Access Internet, must be followed. Sometimes permission will be granted; in those cases please contact Pam or Steve to gain clearance.

### **THE RESTRICTIONS OF ANY OF OUR VIDEO PROVIDERS CAN CHANGE AT ANY TIME**

**IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS,  
PLEASE CONTACT STEVE OR PAM**

### **NEWSMARKET**

Newsmarket ([www.thenewsmarket.com](http://www.thenewsmarket.com)) is an online provider of video. Although the site has a lot of available material, there are a number of guidelines that VOA must follow in order to use the video.

- You must be an employee or contractor working with VOA and use your work e-mail (@voanews.com) to access the site. Pam Commerford ([pcommerford@voanews.com](mailto:pcommerford@voanews.com)), chief of the Media Asset Management Branch has done pre-registration for many employees; if you need to establish an account, please contact Pam.
- Keep your password confidential; it is for your use only.
- Registered users are responsible for searching images and **ensuring that no costs are associated with the material. If costs are required, funding must come from your Language Service or Division.** The Office of Information Services will **NOT** pay for material acquired from Newsmarket.
- The VOA producer or Language Service is responsible for obtaining the terms and conditions of use of the material. Newsmarket makes no claims about the accuracy of the content on its website, so producers must be sure to exercise VOA journalistic standards in the choice and use of material.
- Credit must be given for content used and **logos or copyrighted images cannot be changed or obscured.**
- You must use the content for editorial purposes only.
- You **cannot** store the original content for future use. The content from Newsmarket must be deleted from your workspace when you are finished with your initial use. Should you need the content again, you can go back to the website and re-capture it.
- **The material that you use in a VOA story or program can and will be archived;** there is no restriction on this material.
- The content incorporated in your stories and shows can be distributed on all VOA platforms.
- **The Office of Cuba Broadcasting (OCB) is included in this agreement, meaning that VOA and OCB ONLY can share material that is acquired from Newsmarket.**

### **RESTRICTIONS**


- You cannot provide unedited content to other organizations, **including the BBG grantees RFE/RL, RFA and Alhurra.**
- You cannot use the Newsmarket logo or trademark in a way other than how it is presented in your story.

- You cannot use any technology to monitor, copy or deep link with Newsmarket.

Assets should be brought into DaletPlus to the NEWSMARKET folder: INCOMING FEEDS > NEWSMARKET. Associated metadata needs to be added to the Asset Manager Form (AMF), include source information, and **a VOA DOT added to the video.**

*(Also see [Domestic Dissemination of VOA Programming, p. 68](#))*

Example of Newsmarket info to add to AMF in DaletPlus:



**Source Info**

US Distribution: ☐ All Clear ☒ Restricted

Footage Sources: ☐ APTN ☐ ABC NEWSONE

Feed Provider: thenewsmarket.com

Source Comments:

Origin of Video: Source: NATO TV ]

Background Wires:

**US Distribution:** Rights of use do not extend beyond VOA's use, so US DISTRIBUTION should be marked RESTRICTED.

**Footage Sources:** OTHER should be selected.

**Feed Provider:** thenewsmarket.com

**Origin of Video:** Indicate the owner of the source video. In the example, it's NATO TV.

All questions regarding registration on [Newsmarket](#) and the use of its material should go to Pam Commerford ([pcommerford@voanews.com](mailto:pcommerford@voanews.com), 202-382-7124)

### VIDEO NEWS RELEASES (VNRs)

A video news release (VNR) is a video segment made to look like a news report, but is instead created by a public relations firm, advertising agency, marketing firm, corporation, or even a government agency. VNRs are produced with the aim of shaping public opinion, promoting commercial products and services, publicizing individuals or supporting other interests.

VNRs may include interviews with experts (who may be paid by the company or ad agency for their appearance in the VNR); man on the street interviews that may be done with professional actors; and pictures of corporate logos to support the product or brand being promoted.

Although we occasionally receive VNRs from APTN and Reuters that does not make them any more legitimate for use by VOA.

There may be times when material from a VNR is appropriate for **excerpting** in a video package.

#### **Example #1**

If the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York discovers a new treatment for prostate cancer and the Center provides a video of its research work, VOA can, and should, use some of that video to illustrate the story.

- The script must say the video was provided by the Center, and there must be a visual credit to the Center as well.

#### **Example #2**

Apple unveils the latest version of the iPhone and sends out a VNR showing the latest changes in the phone and how it operates. VOA can use some of the video to illustrate its story.

- The script must say the video was provided by Apple, and there must be a visual credit to Apple as well.

Please keep in mind, however, that as with fair use of video, all instances of whether to use material from a VNR will not be the same, so always check first with Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com)) or Pam Commerford ([pcommerford@voanews.com](mailto:pcommerford@voanews.com)).

### VOA SHOULD NEVER AIR A VIDEO NEWS RELEASE IN ITS ENTIRETY

More detailed information about feeds and rights can be found in Rights Usage Guidelines Presentation and the Video Newsfeed Guide found on the [Media Asset Management Branch \(MAM\) page on Sharepoint](#).

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### DOMESTIC DISSEMINATION OF VOA PROGRAMMING

From time to time, VOA staff may receive requests for one-time use of a radio or TV piece, or the request may be for ongoing use of VOA programming. These requests could come from U.S.-based media organizations, diaspora media outlets, overseas media outlets, or from educational institutions.

#### INDIVIDUAL VOA STAFF MEMBERS SHOULD NOT ATTEMPT TO FIELD THE REQUESTS THEMSELVES

Instead, VOA staff should direct requestors to [UsageRequests@voanews.com](mailto:UsageRequests@voanews.com) for more information. *(Also see [Requests for Unaired/Unpublished Material](#), p. 34)*

#### DOCUMENTING SOURCE VIDEO IN DALETPLUS

To be able to share our broadcast programs with U.S. requestors, we must be able to identify non-VOA content, including that provided by our newsfeed suppliers, ABC NewsOne, AFP, APTN and Reuters, in the stories and programs we air.

Everyone who creates a story or program using DaletPlus must take time to enter source info in the Asset Manager Form (AMF). The **Source Info** module is the third section on the AMF form. The example below is an example of source info in an AMF of a story, showing the kind of information expected when available. (Plus signs at the end of each field allow additional space for more info.)



**Source Info**

US Distribution: ☐ All Clear ☒ Restricted ☐ DO NOT Distribute ☐ Other

Footage Sources: ☐ APTN ☒ ABC NEWSONE ☐ REUTERS ☐ OTHER

Feed Provider: ABC NEWSONE wsSavvyCat May 14, 2013

Source Comments: \*\*MUST COURTESY: YouTube/Marjan Kirovski Video has been cleared for use by the owner - per the ABC NEWSONE script info

Origin of Video: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=nLR9HDHlnGM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=nLR9HDHlnGM)

**U.S. Distribution:** A quick reference field to indicate whether the story is cleared for fulfilling a request from a U.S. requestor. If your story or program master is entirely VOA original, **All Clear** should be check-marked. If it has non-VOA content (ABC NewsOne, AFP, APTN or Reuters) **Restricted** will be checked. **This means that some clips will have to be cleared for US distribution.** The default is **DO NOT Distribute**.

**Footage Sources:** A quick way to note the feeds that are included in the story or program master. For **program masters**, the archive liaison may use “select all” for news programs, if in assembling the program the service uses all of our content providers. For **VOA stories**, the producer will need to be specific, so the searcher knows how involved tracking down the sources may be.

**Feed Provider:** A free text field to note specifically the story slug /date and source of vendor-provided clips used in a story. When a U.S. request is being filled, this information will allow the requestor to contact the appropriate newsfeed source to obtain clearance to use the video in the United States.

**Source Comments:** Can be used to further clarify use if necessary / possible.

**Origin of video:** To be used when video is different from the newsfeed source itself; for example, video from YouTube. This field should be used for story AMFs, rather than for use for program master AMFs.

Please e-mail questions or concerns to [senior-archivists@voanews.com](mailto:senior-archivists@voanews.com). You may also call the Video Library’s point person on this project, Bojan Klima at 382-5510.



### **THE VOA DOT**



Video received from ABC NewsOne, AFP, APTN and Reuters is stamped with a tri-colored dot as those feeds come into the Cohen Building. This indicates that the stamped material cannot be used by domestic VOA clients. The dot appears in the **UPPER LEFT** of the frame **AND MUST NOT BE OBSCURED**.

- **IF A SERVICE INCLUDES NEWS AGENCY VIDEO IN ITS PACKAGES, PROGRAMS OR SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS, PLEASE MAKE SURE THE DOT IS ALWAYS VISIBLE.**
- **THIS IS THE ONLY WAY WE CAN GUARANTEE THAT NON-VOA VIDEO WILL BE PROPERLY NOTED AND AVAILABLE FOR EASY REFERENCE DURING A VIDEO ASSESSMENT.**

Here are two examples of how the dot looks on incoming feeds:



**VIDEO LIBRARY FOOTAGE PRIOR TO JULY 3, 2013  
DOES NOT HAVE THE VOA DOT EMBEDDED IN THE VIDEO**

**THEREFORE, IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE REPORTER, PRODUCER  
AND/OR VIDEO EDITOR TO ENSURE THAT THE VOA DOT IS ADDED TO  
THE EDITED MATERIAL**

**THE VOA DOT MUST APPEAR ON CLIPS PRIOR TO 7/3/13 FROM THESE SOURCES**

- ABC NewsOne
- AFP
- APTN
- IRINN
- Journal of American Medicine (JAMA)
- NewsMarket
- Reuters
- UNIFEEDS (United Nations video)
- Other Acquired Material:
  - From VOA Acquisitions Branch
  - Obtained by VOA Reporters
  - Obtained from a Third Party

**THESE SOURCES PRIOR TO 7/3/13 DO NOT REQUIRE THE VOA DOT**

- VOA Original Footage
- House Recording Studio (Including hearings and news conferences)
- NASA
- Pentagon
- Senate Recording Studio (Including hearings and news conferences)
- State Department
- White House

### **VOA DOT EDITING INSTRUCTIONS FOR FINAL CUT PRO**

As noted in the previous section, VOA is **required** to differentiate our originally-shot video from what we receive from our news video sources, such as APTN, Reuters TV and ABC NewsOne. This material is sometime called proprietary video, which means the original supplier is the copyright holder and has licensed the video to VOA only under certain terms and conditions.

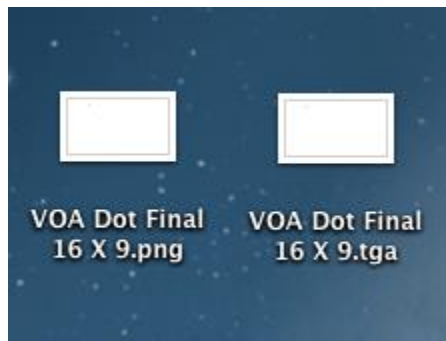
Because of those terms and conditions, these instructions **must** be followed when you are editing material that doesn't already have the VOA Dot burned in. Usually, this video will have come from the video library or newsfeed video you have kept on video tape or transferred digitally onto hard drives or other storage devices.

**Also, any video you have received from other sources or have purchased must have the VOA Dot edited on to it.**

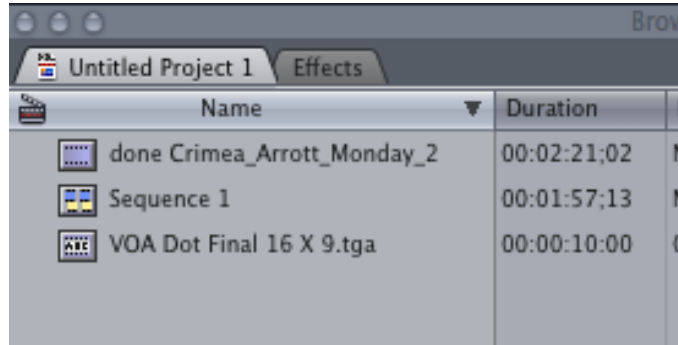
Related to this is the need to enter the appropriate information about this video into the [DaletPlus Asset Management Form, p.67](#)

Follow these steps to add the VOA Dot to all video newsfeed content which doesn't already have it embedded.

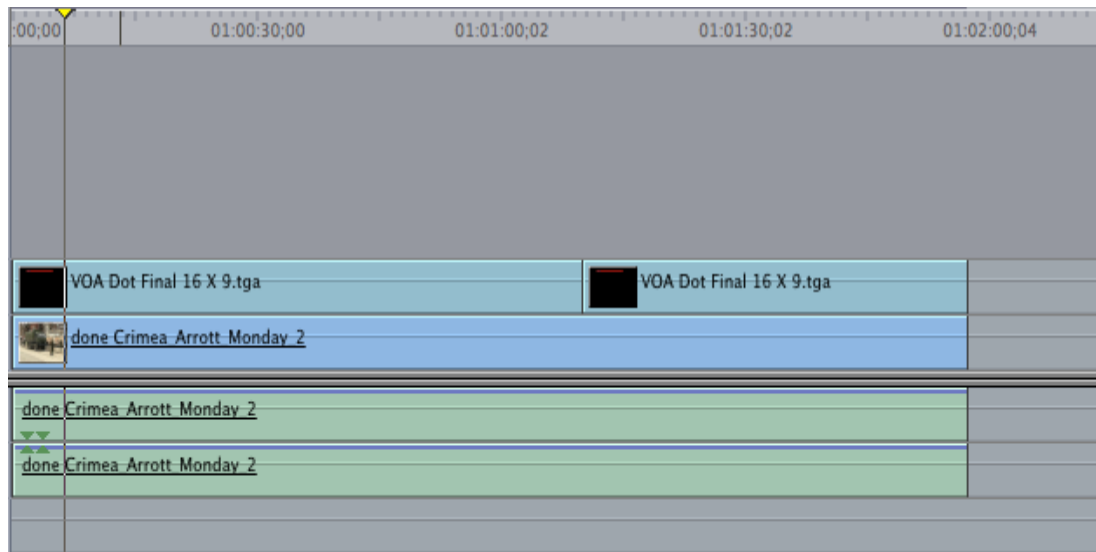
1. Copy the .tga file from: \\es\_video\video\VOA\_Dot Template to a local drive on your computer (or to the desktop).



- Then drag and drop the .tga file from your local drive/desktop into the tab of the FCP project you are working in.



- Create a video track above your existing video tracks (in this case "V2" – if you already have 4 tracks of video you would create a new track "V5")
- Overwrite the .tga onto your newly created video track (in this case "V2") on top of the video that is to be identified.



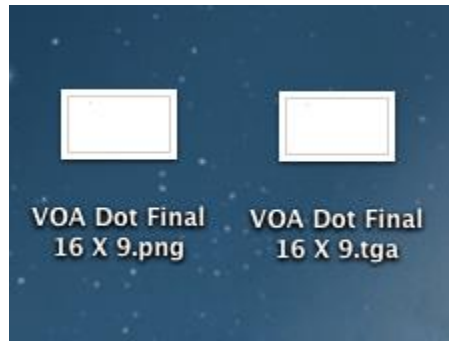
5. Repeat this process until all the proprietary video without the VOA Dot has had it added.



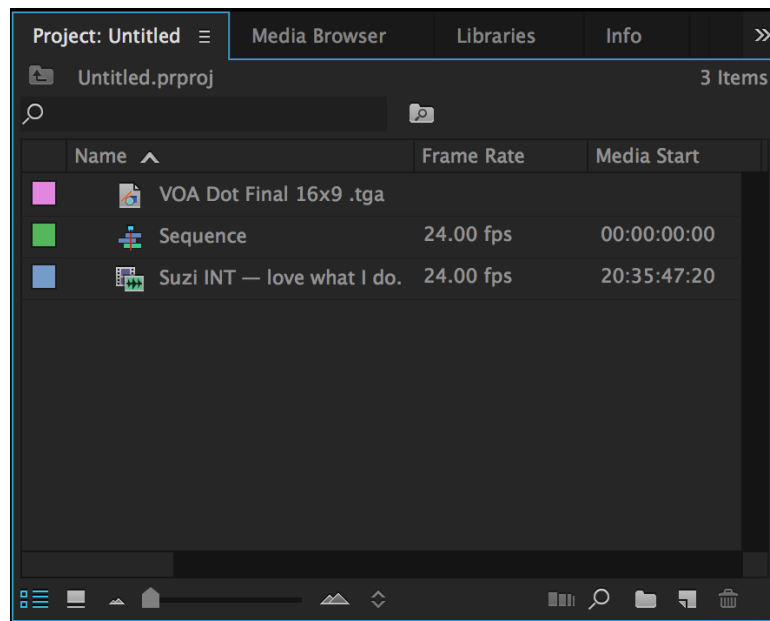
### **VOA DOT EDITING INSTRUCTIONS FOR PREMIERE PRO**

Follow these steps to add the VOA Dot to all video newsfeed content which doesn't already have it embedded.

1. Copy the .tga file from: \\es\_video\video\VOA\_Dot Template to a local drive on your computer (or to the desktop).



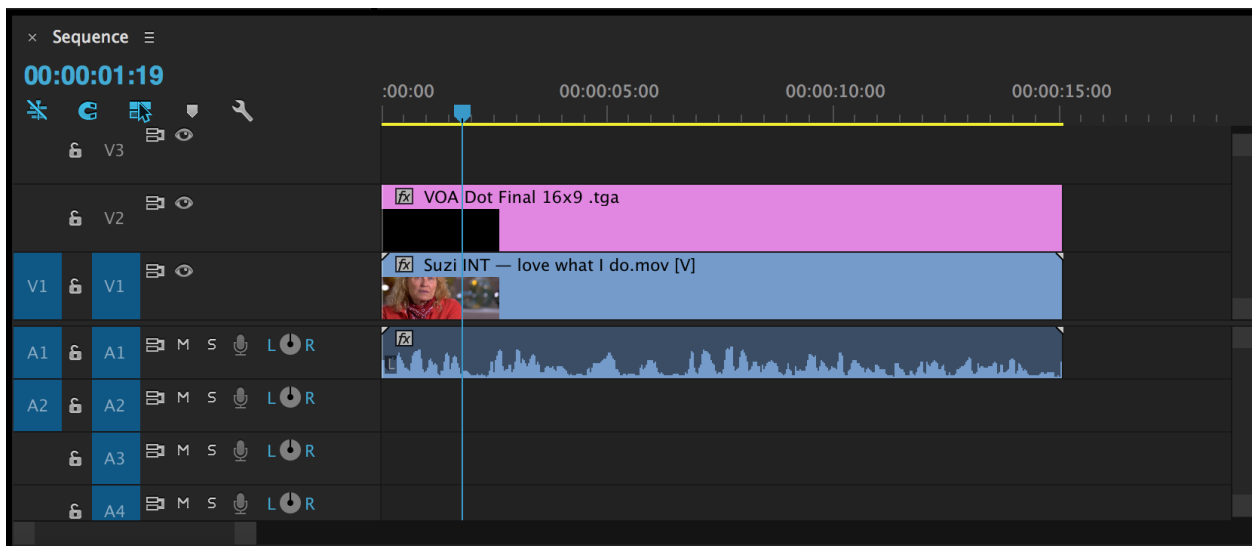
2. Drag and drop the .tga file from your local drive/desktop into the tab of the Premiere Pro project you are working in.



3. Create a video track above your existing video tracks (in this case "V2" – if you already have 4 tracks of video you would create a new track "V5")

## BEST PRACTICES GUIDE

4. Drag the .tga file into the newly-created video track (in this case “V2”) where the proprietary video is being used.



5. Repeat this process until all the proprietary video without the VOA Dot has had it added. Below is how the video looks in playback once the dot has been added.

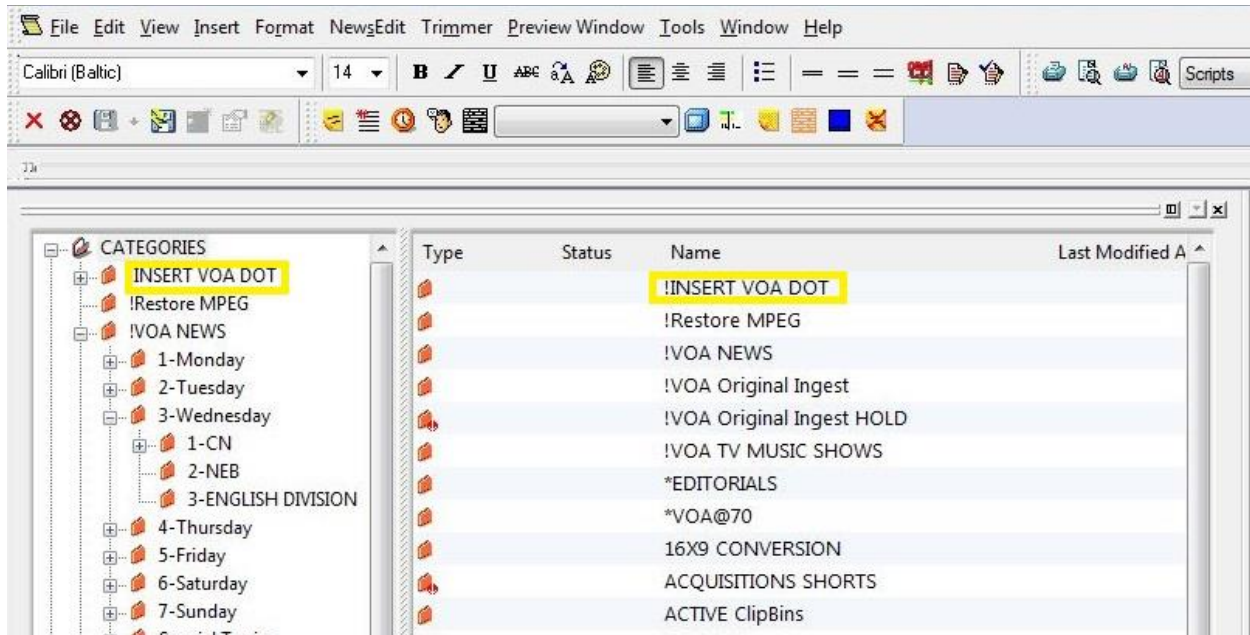


[Return to Table of Contents](#)

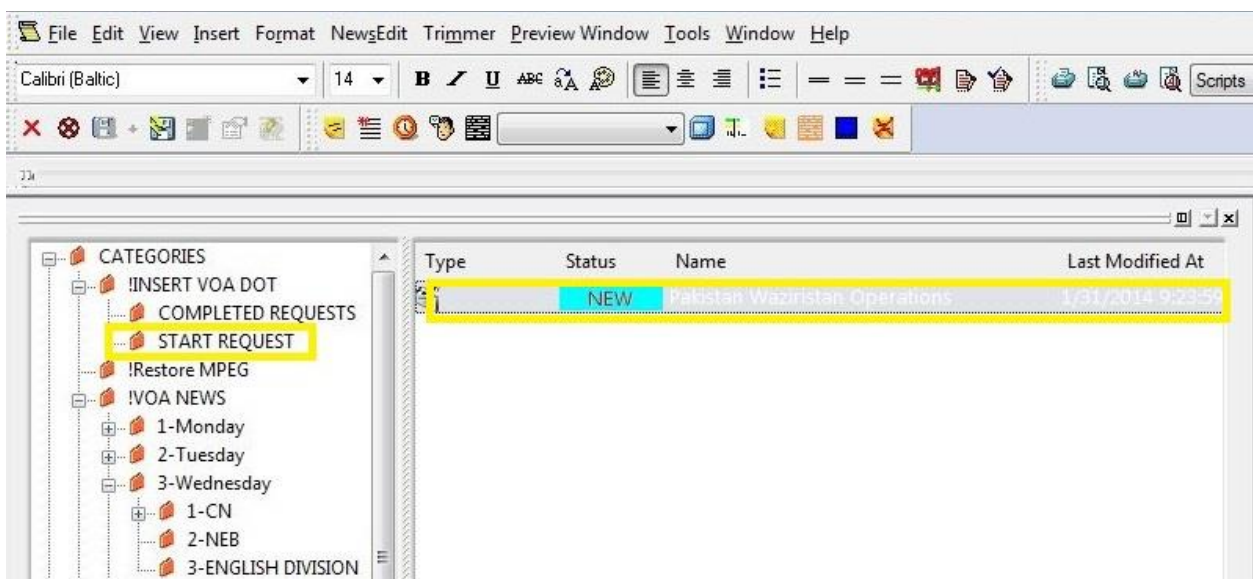


### ADDING THE DOT TO VIDEO IN DALETPLUS

DaletPlus users can embed the VOA Dot automatically onto older video in DaletPlus or video restored from the DaletPlus Archive. Use the watch folder: **!INSERT VOA DOT** (located at the top of the main category tree) to drag and drop video without the dot.

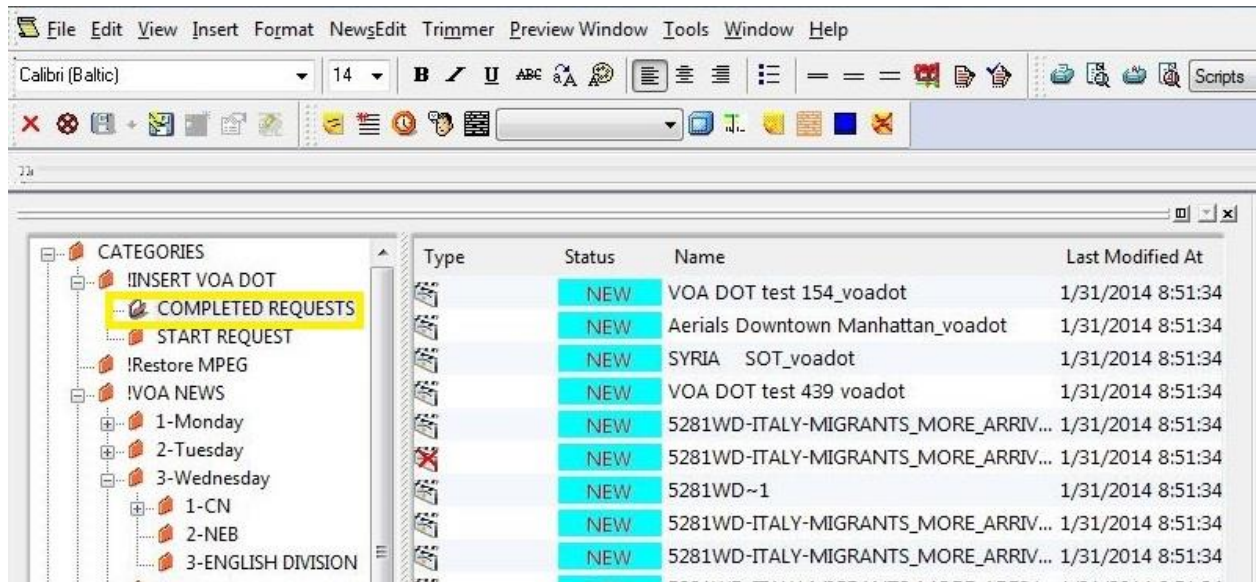


- Right click and drag a video title to the **!INSERT VOA DOT > START REQUEST** category, located at the top of the main category tree in DaletPlus. Select **LINK HERE** on the drop down menu to begin the process.





- After a few minutes (depending on the length of the file), a video with the VOA Dot embedded will appear in the **!INSERT VOA DOT > COMPLETED REQUESTS** category. The video title will have a \*voadot appended to the file's name.



- Users can then move the completed title(s) to their appropriate folders.

**THE VOA DOT MUST BE ADDED TO CERTAIN PROPRIETARY VIDEO!**  
**SEE LIST ON PAGE 71**

**IF THERE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT WHETHER TO ADD THE DOT TO OLDER LIBRARY VIDEO, PLEASE CONTACT PAM COMMERFORD:**  
[pcommerford@voanews.com](mailto:pcommerford@voanews.com)

### CORRECTIONS

VOA's reputation and credibility are the hallmarks of the organization. The News Center and the Language Services produce news content, programming and services across many platforms and under daily deadline pressures. While our goal is always to be accurate and fair, occasionally we will present incorrect or inaccurate information. A meaningful policy for correcting significant errors will strengthen our trust with viewers, listeners and readers. As such, these errors will be corrected in a clear and timely manner, with appropriate prominence.

#### TV & RADIO BROADCASTS

If we make a mistake that needs correcting, we should do so as quickly as possible while the same show is on the air. If the error is not detected immediately, then preferably the correction should be aired on the same program in which the original error occurred, whether it's the following day or week. Make a point to say "On \_\_\_\_\_ day (state the day and date and time), we erred in our reporting..." then go on to explain what we said that was wrong, make the correction and close by saying, "Voice of America regrets the error."

#### WEBSITES

If the error is a simple typo that does not change facts or understanding of the story, we consider it a minor change and simply correct it without further mention. If the error is substantive or one of fact, we change it, add an asterisk (\*), then a note at the bottom saying when it was corrected and what was wrong originally.

#### SOCIAL MEDIA

**Facebook:** Correcting an error on Facebook should follow the same procedure as on voanews.com websites. Update/edit the Facebook post and explain why the information was corrected.

**Twitter:** A good method for correcting an error on Twitter is to **subtweet** the correction. On the next page you'll see how *Slate* handled posting the wrong photo (actor Javier Bardem) when tweeting about Vladimir Putin.

The correction begins "@Slate CORRECTION:" so that *Slate* is replying to its own original tweet. The result is that anyone viewing the original tweet can see the correction in the stream of replies. Equally important, it refers to the photo without showing it again.

People viewing the correction tweet on its own can also see it is part of a conversation linked to the original, offending tweet.

**NOTE:** If you reply to yourself, then anyone who follows you will see the reply. So in terms of who can see the correction, it's just as good as sending it as a normal tweet.

**Slate** @Slate Follow

Could Crimea become Putin's Waterloo? [slate.me/1jJIRFd](http://slate.me/1jJIRFd)  
[pic.twitter.com/OdvDLVLPRS](https://pic.twitter.com/OdvDLVLPRS)

Reply Retweet Favorite Buffer ...

8:59 PM - 1 Mar 2014 · Flag media



RETWEETS 299 FAVORITES 151

Reply to @Slate

**Blake Hounshell** @blakehounshell · Mar 1  
 @Slate Leave Javier Bardem out of this. 43 10

**Slate** @Slate · Mar 1  
 @Slate CORRECTION: This photo is of Javier Bardem, and not Vladimir Putin. 807 787

### **LEGAL ISSUES**

This section provides brief introductions to various areas of the law that may apply to VOA journalists. These guidelines are meant to provide an overview to certain areas of the law and are not a substitute for a legal opinion from the Office of General Counsel (OGC). Please contact OGC when you have a specific legal question.

#### **FIREWALL**

The “firewall” between VOA journalists and the rest of the U.S. government was put in place to maintain the credibility of reporting by U.S. international broadcasters. The firewall is violated whenever a U.S. government official tries to influence the reporting of the news by putting undue pressure on a VOA journalist. The firewall is not meant to discourage VOA journalists from interviewing government officials or USG officials from appearing on VOA programs. It is critical to ensuring that VOA journalists and editors make the final decisions on what stories to cover, and how they are covered.

For example, if you are approached by an FBI agent who asks for your reporting notes or asks that you be an informant for the FBI while you are reporting for VOA, this may be a firewall violation. Another firewall violation might be a U.S. ambassador asking that you not air a particular interview or that you give a particular slant to a VOA news story.

**VOA JOURNALISTS WHO EXPERIENCE POSSIBLE FIREWALL INTERFERENCE  
SHOULD NOT ATTEMPT TO MEDIATE THE SITUATION THEMSELVES.**

**PLEASE NOTIFY YOUR SUPERVISOR AND THE BBG BOARD BY SENDING A MESSAGE TO  
[BBGFIREWALL@BBG.GOV](mailto:BBGFIREWALL@BBG.GOV) OR CALLING 202-203-4545.**

#### **COPYRIGHT AND FAIR USE**

Copyright is a form of protection provided by U.S. law to the authors of original artistic works. Artistic works include photographs, video, audio, music, motion pictures, commercials, written products, as well as footage from other news broadcasters. You should not use a copyrighted work unless (1) you have permission to use, whether via VOA’s contracts (such as VOA’s video feed or photo contracts) or another negotiated license agreement, or (2) your use of the work falls under the “fair use” doctrine.

#### **FAIR USE**

Whether a use of copyrighted material is a fair use requires a balancing of four factors: (1) the purpose and character of your use; (2) the nature of the copyrighted work; (3) the amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole; and (4) the effect of the use upon the potential market for the copyrighted work. Application of these factors and the fair use doctrine is highly fact-specific and requires a case-by-case analysis.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

A use of a copyrighted work is more likely to be a fair use if the material is directly relevant to a news story and the excerpt used is no longer than necessary to achieve the intended purpose. On the other hand, the use of copyrighted material such as a music clip simply to enhance the production value of a television package, for example, is not likely to be a fair use. Keep in mind that just because a video or audio clip is newsworthy does not automatically make VOA's use of it fair. [A Fair Use Self-Help Guide](#) with Frequently Asked Questions is available on the agency's Sharepoint site.

### **AMBIENT MUSIC**

Generally, where music is naturally appearing in the background during an interview or taped event, there is no copyright issue. There may, however, be a copyright issue if the music is incorporated into a news or feature report in other than its incidental form.

(Also see [YouTube Guidelines, p. 47](#) and [Music, p. 54](#))

### **PUBLIC DOMAIN**

Copyright restrictions do not apply to works in the public domain, which include most U.S. federal government works, such as photos, maps, or video found on [whitehouse.gov](#), [state.gov](#), [nasa.gov](#), [cia.gov](#), and other government websites. Be sure to check the Copyright or Terms of Use/Terms of Service pages of these and other websites before using any content.

A work is also in the public domain if it is no longer under copyright protection. This depends on when and where the work was first published, but generally speaking, works published in the U.S. before 1923 are in the public domain. Contact OGC for specific questions about older works or copyright terms in foreign jurisdictions.

### **LICENSED MATERIAL**

VOA has several license agreements with third parties to use their copyrighted material. The terms of these agreements govern use of the material provided by the licenses, notwithstanding the applicability of the fair use doctrine. When using material from one of VOA's feed providers, such as ABC NewsOne, AFP, APTN and Reuters, for example, you must check all restrictions that may limit the story's use. Questions about the video feeds should be directed to the VOA Media Asset Management Branch.

(Also see [Video Usage Rights, p. 57](#))

### **REQUESTING PERMISSION**

Because fair use can sometimes be difficult to determine with certainty, VOA producers are strongly encouraged to seek permission to use copyrighted material from the rightful copyright owner. You should start the process of identifying and contacting the owner of copyrighted content as early in your production process as possible, since it may take several days or weeks to identify the copyright owner and negotiate a license. Please note that obtaining permission in writing, using the standard BBG/VOA release form, is highly preferable to getting permission orally or via email. A template release form -- to be edited and modified, as needed -- is available on the [Best Practices Sharepoint page](#).

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

On occasion, a third party may either request to amend the VOA form or insist on using its own licensing agreement. Such outside agreements may contain terms to which BBG/VOA cannot agree. Please consult OGC when presented with a third party release form or licensing agreement.

### **TRADEMARK**

A trademark is an intellectual property right in a particular "mark" used to identify a good or service, such as a name, slogan, symbol or logo. For example, "Voice of America" is a registered trademark. It is unlawful to use a trademark in a manner that confuses consumers about the source or sponsorship of goods or services. This is rarely an issue in news broadcasting, since the law allows you to use a mark without permission in a news story if the mark is used in an informational sense. For example, if you are reporting on the BP oil spill, it is appropriate to show the BP logo to identify the company. However, if you are launching a new VOA program, avoid using slogans or titles that are trademarked.

### **TRADEMARK & SPORTING EVENTS**

When covering major sporting events such as the Olympics, VOA journalists must be careful with using official trademarks, such as the Olympic mark. For example, it could be argued that a VOA graphic incorporating the VOA background/colors/image with the official Olympic logo creates an unauthorized association between VOA, a non-Olympics marketing partner, and the Olympic brand.

**ALTHOUGH THE PHRASE "VOICE OF AMERICA" IS TRADEMARKED BY THE AGENCY,  
"VOA" AND THE VOA LOGO ARE NOT TRADEMARKED.**

[More information on the above topics can be found at the Best Practices site on Sharepoint.](#)

### **FILMING IN PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE PLACES**

Generally, news media have the right to be in public places and on public property to gather information, photographically or otherwise. VOA journalists should be mindful, however, about rules, permits, or prohibitions on filming or taking of photographs at certain meetings, sporting events, or in private spaces. Similarly, journalists should seek permission from an owner or occupant (even if the occupant is not the owner) before entering private property or a residence.

[\(Also see \*Covering Criminal Activity\*, p. 14\)](#)

### REQUEST FOR PROOF OF INSURANCE

From time to time, VOA staff may be asked to provide a certificate of liability insurance when filming in locations where event organizers or property owners want to protect themselves against third party bodily injury and property damage. While most private sector media organizations have liability insurance, the U.S. Government **self-insures** against liabilities. Therefore, the agency does not purchase liability insurance, and there is no such certificate that we can provide.

Instead, the Office of General Counsel provides a letter explaining this that staff can send to the appropriate parties. Two versions of the letter – one on VOA letterhead and one on BBG letterhead -- are now available in Word documents on the VOA Best Practices Sharepoint page:

[VOA Insurance Letter](#)   [BBG Insurance Letter](#)

Each letter has blanks so that you can fill in the names of VOA staff that will be on location and the name of the property/location you will be working at. Use the VOA letterhead if you choose to have your service chief or division director sign it. Use the BBG letterhead if you prefer to have an attorney in the General Counsel's Office sign it.

Please contact the General Counsel's Office or Best Practices Editor Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com)) if you have any questions about this.

### DEFAMATION/PRIVACY/FALSE LIGHT

Under U.S. law, the central question in an action for defamation or invasion of privacy is whether the statements in question are true or false. Truthful publication or broadcast of matters pertaining to legitimate public interest should generally not expose VOA to liability in the United States, especially if VOA's reporting concerns a public figure.

However, VOA may be liable for invasion of privacy in certain situations for the publicizing of private facts or falsehoods. Not only that, other countries' defamation and "insult" laws are not as protective of the press, so broadcasts that are legal in the U.S. may still expose VOA to liability overseas.

VOA journalists should not intercept or record any private conversations without the permission of the participants, as this may be a crime in certain jurisdictions. OGC should be consulted when a VOA journalist receives intercepted conversations from a third party or in any other special circumstances.

[\(Also see Recording Telephone Interviews, p. 31\)](#)

The following guidance is provided by the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press ([rcfp.org](http://rcfp.org)):

- Check sources thoroughly. Get independent corroboration whenever possible. A source could have a vendetta against the subject and willfully or unintentionally misrepresent the facts for his or her own purposes. Confidential sources may disappear or recant in the face of a lawsuit. Don't rely on someone else to be accurate.
- Do not let your opinion about whether someone is a public figure or official color your decision to verify the accuracy of a story. Juries do not respond favorably to reporters who fail to confront their subjects with defamatory information and provide them with an opportunity to comment.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)



- If you cover the police or courthouse beat, make certain you understand criminal and civil procedure and terminology. Be especially careful to restate accurately any information obtained about arrests, investigations and judicial proceedings.
- Be cautious when editing. Make sure the story does not convey the wrong information because of a hasty rewrite.
- Watch for headlines and cutlines that might be defamatory even though the text explains the story.
- **Make sure news promos or teasers used to stir audience interest are not misleading or defamatory.**
- **Do not use generic video footage or file photos when reporting on an activity that might be considered questionable.**
- **Just because someone else said it does not mean that a news organization cannot be sued for republishing it.** This includes letters to the editor. Check out any factual allegations contained in them as carefully as you would statements in a news story.
- Be sensitive about using words that connote dishonest behavior, immorality or other undesirable traits, whether in your published story or in comments in your notes. Remember that a judge may order a news organization to produce reporters' notes, drafts and internal memoranda at a libel trial.
- If contacted by someone threatening a libel suit, be polite, but do not admit error or fault. Talk the case over with your editor, supervisor or attorney immediately, and follow procedures established by your news organization.

### **DO NOT BE RECKLESS WITH THE TRUTH**

#### **REPORTER'S PRIVILEGE AND CONFIDENTIAL SOURCES**

The reporter's privilege originates in the First Amendment's guarantee of a free press, under the rationale that forcing journalists to disclose confidential sources will discourage sources from communicating with reporters, thereby disrupting the free flow of information protected by the First Amendment. In some circumstances, journalists are compelled to disclose confidential sources. Because of BBG's special status as a federal government agency, some internal VOA documents may also be subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

[\*\(Also see Confidential Sources, p. 23\)\*](#)

### **VOA JOURNALISTS SHOULD CONTACT OGC IF APPROACHED BY ANY LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS.**

**IN SOME SITUATIONS, THIS COULD BE A FIREWALL VIOLATION.**

[\*Return to Table of Contents\*](#)



### **SUBPOENAS OR REQUESTS FOR TESTIMONY OR DOCUMENTS**

- **IF YOU RECEIVE A REQUEST OR DEMAND TO TESTIFY IN A LEGAL PROCEEDING ON MATTERS RELATING TO OFFICIAL AGENCY INFORMATION OR YOUR OFFICIAL DUTIES, OR IF YOU RECEIVE A REQUEST TO PRODUCE AGENCY RECORDS OR INFORMATION, CONTACT THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL IMMEDIATELY.**

There is a special regulatory procedure for handling requests for testimony by current and former employees and handling the production of documents in legal proceedings in which the BBG is not a named party.

### **REPORTING ON CLASSIFIED DOCUMENTS**

A number of laws and regulations, including several criminal statutes, regulate access to, and transmission of, classified information. VOA has a specific protocol in place regarding its reporting on classified documents in the public domain, such as the documents released by WikiLeaks in 2010.

**ONLY CERTAIN VOA JOURNALISTS ARE ASSIGNED TO REPORT ON THESE TOPICS.**

**THE SUPERVISORY INVESTIGATIVE EDITOR SHOULD BE CONSULTED BEFORE YOU BEGIN ANY ASSIGNMENT RELATING IN ANY WAY TO CLASSIFIED MATERIAL, EVEN IF THE CLASSIFIED DOCUMENTS ARE PUBLICLY AVAILABLE ON A WEBSITE LIKE WIKILEAKS.**

**THE SUPERVISORY INVESTIGATIVE EDITOR WILL CONSULT WITH SENIOR MANAGEMENT AND THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL REGARDING ALL APPLICABLE LAWS.**

### **INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL BY VOA REPORTERS**

While U.S. government employees must usually obtain a country clearance from the State Department before official government travel abroad, VOA reporters traveling to cover and report on the news may travel to countries in which U.S. Missions are located with minimal formality, which will typically only include a notification of intent to travel to the State Department. Please be mindful that travel to some sanctioned countries may require additional licensing or documentation. Reporters should contact their supervisors and the Travel Office before planning travel to these countries.

### OUTSIDE ACTIVITIES

#### **ALL FULL-TIME VOA STAFF ARE REQUIRED TO FOLLOW THESE PROCEDURES BEFORE RESPONDING TO A REQUEST OR MAKING ANY COMMITMENTS**

Anyone looking to engage in activities outside of VOA is asked to first check with their supervisor to ensure doing so won't conflict with official duty schedules or requirements.

Then, you should forward your proposed activity to [OutsideRequests@voanews.com](mailto:OutsideRequests@voanews.com). This will reach Andrew Krog in the General Counsel's Office ([akrog@bbg.gov](mailto:akrog@bbg.gov)), VOA Public Relations Director Bridget Serchak ([bserchak@voanews.com](mailto:bserchak@voanews.com)) and Best Practices Editor Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com)). We will review your proposal to ensure that it will not violate government ethics regulations or journalistic ethics and best practices.

Federal regulations prohibit employees from receiving compensation for outside teaching, speaking, or writing activities that directly relate to their official duties.

Some activities may not be appropriate if they:

- Constitute a conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest.
- Involve use of agency materials, time, or facilities.
- Involve a particular matter you've worked on in your official capacity.
- Are likely to adversely affect the agency's ability to fulfill its mission
- Would involve working for outlets that broadcast to or publish in the same target area as the employee's VOA language service.

Additionally, if you will be identified as an agency employee in connection with your outside activities, in order to avoid appearances of impropriety, you must include a disclaimer that the views expressed are your own and not that of VOA (or the U.S. Government, as appropriate).

Because the highest standards of journalism require a reputation for impartiality, VOA journalists should not perform public relations or similar representational work, either paid or unpaid. Journalists should also not counsel individuals or organizations, either in the United States or abroad, on how to deal successfully with the news media. Lastly, you should not provide advice to government officials other than to those in VOA, the BBG or any other government broadcasting entity, or to candidates for public office, again regardless of whether in the United States or abroad.

Outside speaking and writing opportunities can be highly beneficial, both personally and professionally, but if not done properly they can have serious consequences. Please don't hesitate to contact Andrew or Steve if you have any questions or need advice.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Aside from the types of activities outlined here, there is also the issue of whether VOA staff can, or should, express themselves outside of the office.

Needless to say, this is a very delicate issue, given our unique status as government employees as well as journalists.

With that in mind, this is the recommended guidance for VOA staff:

- VOA's mission is to provide accurate and objective news and information. To facilitate that mission, as journalists, you are expected to remain neutral and objective. That means that you should be careful and try to avoid conduct or activity that would question your neutrality and objectivity as well as the neutrality and objectivity of VOA.
- For example: If as a VOA journalist you are reporting on or otherwise working on a story regarding "X" situation, it is recommended that you avoid publicly voicing your personal opinion about that situation because such activity may call into question your credibility as a journalist and could compromise VOA's reputation as a reliable and credible news organization.

### **PLEASE EXERCISE GOOD JUDGMENT WHEN CONSIDERING YOUR OPTIONS AND MAKING YOUR DECISIONS.**

#### **CONTRACTORS**

VOA contractors are generally afforded wider latitude to engage in activities outside the scope of their contracts with the Agency, but they should keep in mind that certain activities and actions could jeopardize continued performance on their current contract, or their ability to obtain a follow-on contract.

When doing work outside of VOA, it is important for VOA contractors to refrain from stating or creating the impression that they are employees, agents or representatives of the agency. They should not say that they "work for" VOA or are "correspondents at" VOA. Rather, they should indicate that they are "freelance journalists," "regular contributors to VOA," or use a similar description.

Also, VOA contractors must exercise caution to ensure that their journalistic integrity or impartiality is not compromised by their activities outside the scope of their contract.

VOA contractors employed by the employee management firms should advise the respective on-site managers from each company when they receive offers of work outside VOA. Contractors must also send their requests to the respective VOA Program Manager responsible for their language service, and to Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com)).

VOA contractors with any questions as to whether or not an outside activity poses a potential journalistic conflict are encouraged to contact Steve for advice.

### **COMPETITIONS AND CASH AWARDS**

Any employee who wants to enter a particular journalism competition using his/her VOA-produced work **must** first advise his/her supervisor. If the supervisor determines the entry to be of merit, please advise Pat Bodnar ([pbodnar@voanews.com](mailto:pbodnar@voanews.com)) and Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com)). All entries should be sent to Percy Rogers, the Agency's Incentive Coordinator ([ptrogers@bbg.gov](mailto:ptrogers@bbg.gov)). Percy will compile all entries.

### **ENTRIES FOR JOURNALISM COMPETITIONS ARE TO BE SUBMITTED BY THE AGENCY'S SENIOR MANAGEMENT ONLY**

### **INDIVIDUAL STAFF MEMBERS SHOULD NOT ENTER COMPETITIONS ON THEIR OWN USING WORK PRODUCED FOR VOA**

While the majority of journalism competitions that VOA enters award trophies, plaques or certificates to the winners, a few of them may include cash awards. Should a winning entry result in a cash award, that award will be designated to the agency, **not to the individual**. It will be the responsibility of VOA senior management to determine whether it will accept the cash award under its gift acceptance authority, and how that cash award will be administered.

### APPENDIX A - HOW-TO GUIDES

#### RADIO PRODUCTION BASICS

##### COMMON CUES

<b>Stand By:</b>	Alerts tech to be more than 10 seconds before next event
<b>Open Mic:</b>	Directs tech to turn on mic; "Open Mic" #1-"Open ALL Mics"
<b>Go:</b>	Directs tech to GO to the next source; "Go Navigator" – "Go Mini Disc," etc.
<b>Sneak:</b>	Bring audio in at a low level (-10 dB or less)
<b>Dead Pot:</b>	Start audio with the fader completely closed or off
<b>Sweep:</b>	Bring audio level up to "0 dB"
<b>Fade Out:</b>	Bring audio level to silence

##### CALL-IN SHOW CUES

<b>Seize Hybrid #:</b>	Tells tech to take control of phone line
<b>Hybrid On Audition:</b>	Puts the phone on audition <b>NOT</b> On Air
<b>Hybrid On Air:</b>	Puts phone call "On Air"
<b>Drop Hybrid:</b>	Removes phone call from On Air <b>OR</b> Audition

##### MUSIC SHOW CUES

<b>Cross Fade:</b>	Mixes 2 audio sources, sneaking one source in and fading the other
<b>Segue [seg-way]:</b>	Go from one audio source to another
<b>Hot Mic:</b>	Open mic while another audio element is playing
<b>Hold Music:</b>	Keeps audio

##### OTHER COMMONLY USED CUES

<b>Reload I/O:</b>	Reloads the language I/O
<b>Link:</b>	Connects one audio file to another. <b>ALWAYS</b> link file BELOW to file ABOVE
<b>Auto Pilot:</b>	Connects <b>ALL</b> files in Navigator and plays them "back-to-back"
<b>Drag File:</b>	Moves a file from one place to another; from Base Browser to Navigator; from within Navigator, etc.
<b>Delete:</b>	Removes audio file from Dalet. Can be used in Base Browser, Navigator, Studio I/O or Cart Application

### **WORKING WITH MINICAM**

#### **SIMPLE PRESS CONFERENCES/NEWS INTERVIEWS**

The mini cam crews shoot many stories every day and they can be a great resource for ideas. Communication is key; if you are inexperienced as a producer/reporter, say so and they'll help you. It's your story and they need guidance on how and what you want shot. Get to know them and discuss your story ahead of time, as they may have ideas that hadn't occurred to you.

- Try to plan ahead of time what shots you will need and communicate these to the cameraperson. If you don't know what you'll need, ask the cameraperson what they think.
- At news conferences/seminars stay close to the cameraperson so that you can advise when you have the sound bites you need from a speaker, so that they can then move to shoot b-roll, especially if the event is not in English. If you don't do this, the cameraperson won't know what to shoot and may shoot too much or too little. You can also take time code notes from the camera, or ask to have the time code be time of day and you can take notes using your watch. Either way, you won't have to search for the sound bite later when you screen video or edit.
- At news conferences/seminars advise the cameraperson on what type of cutaways you'll need. Ask for them to all be shot on tripod, unless tripods are not allowed. For example: at a conference on women in Islam you might look for women with headscarves in the audience or women not wearing headscarves. Decide ahead of time what you'll need depending on the angle of your story. Ask to have at least 10 cutaway shots of various people. These should not be shot from one spot, but from the side, the front, etc.
- During interviews make sure to give your cameraperson adequate time to set up and properly light the location. This usually takes 30 to 45 minutes for an office interview. At a conference, see if there is a relatively quiet corner where the cameraperson can set up a standing light. If not, they may be able to use their camera light. If you need reversals (at a minimum get a reaction shot of the reporter, as this will allow you to edit between two sound bites) make sure they are shot from tripods and lit to match your interviewee.
- All interviews should have a set up shot. This is a shot that includes both the reporter and the subject -- communicate to the cameraperson you want a "2-shot" from a different angle. This allows you to introduce the subject visually and puts the reporter on the scene. When you write and edit your script, you don't always have to do question/answer/question/answer editing. Put in the two shot and write a piece of track to explain or set up an answer. It helps to make the interview visually interesting and varies the pace.
- Don't forget the option of interviewing one or more of the press conference participants after the event. This will vary the look of your piece and can allow you an opportunity to ask follow-up questions not addressed during the press conference. You can also interview other stakeholders in the story who attended the event but did not participate in it.

All shoots should have these basic shots:

- **Establishing Shots:** These could be wide shots of an event, exteriors of buildings, etc.; these shots are needed to give your story a location.
- **Medium Shots:** These are needed to give your story some visual variety when editing.
- **Close Ups:** Often the most important shots; the visual details of a story. For example, in a story about bad traffic, you'll want to see angry faces in cars, white knuckles on steering wheel and tires coming to a stop.

All camera movements should have a purpose and reveal something. Pans, zooms and tilts should be used sparingly. For example, if shooting a piano player you may want to zoom in to reveal the fingers on the keys or pan from the audience to the piano or tilt from a chandelier on the ceiling to the piano on a stage. See Terminology below for more detail.

### TERMINOLOGY

- **Set up or 2-shot:** A shot of an interview that shows both the reporter and interviewee.
- **Reversal:** Shows the reporter from the reverse angle of the interviewee. These can be both single and/or two shots (over the shoulder of the interviewee is also called "over the shoulder").
- **Establishing shot:** Shows where the event is taking place.
- **Wide shot:** Takes in the whole "scene" of an event. At a press conference this would be the speaker and the audience.
- **Medium shot:** This is a little closer than a wide shot. At the same press conference this may be the speaker and a podium from head to toe or a reverse shot of a group of people in the audience. In an interview, it may be a shot of the interviewee from the waist to the head.
- **Close Up:** A shot that shows detail. A reporter taking notes in a notebook, someone listening intently.
- **Cutaway:** Exactly as it reads; it is shot "away" from the action. At the news conference these would be shots of the audience from the reverse angles. These could also be wide, medium or close up shots. At a rally, it would be shots of the crowd reacting to the speakers.
- **Rack focus:** A shot that changes focus between two subjects, one in the foreground and the other in the background.
- **Pan:** Camera move from left to right or right to left.
- **Tilt:** Camera moves up to down or down to up.
- **Zoom in/out:** Shot moves closer to a subject or moves away.

### **VIDEO EDIT SESSION BASICS**

The production of a video piece is a team effort. Though it may be preferable for the producer and editor to work on a piece together, there will be times when that's not possible. In those instances, producers should ensure that the editor has all the necessary script and video elements to construct the piece.

### **BASIC EDITING PRINCIPLES**

#### **CONTINUITY**

Continuity is vital to a well-edited video piece. This means the edited video should establish and maintain a logical and constant flow of subject, location, movement, color and sound.

#### **COMPLEXITY**

Complexity editing is using different shots (close-up, medium or long shots) or transitions (dissolve) to convey and/or intensify a story. While the B-roll illustrates the story, the voiceover should **support** the visuals, not repeat what it is shown. For example: If the shot is a man looking out the window the voiceover shouldn't say: "As John Doe was looking out his window." Tell the audience **WHY** John was looking out the window and make the edit to the relevant image.

#### **CONTEXT**

When editing news stories, the true context of the event must be shown. For example, if a demonstration is taking place, and not many people participated, it would be misleading to show a close up of a handful of people in a tightly framed or edited shot and say in the script that the demonstration was attended by many.

#### **ETHICS**

Distorting an event or the meaning of an event through video editing is journalistically unethical. Juxtaposition of two images to convey an idea that might distort the facts is unacceptable no matter how powerful the edited images might be. For example, showing bombs dropping from an airplane and cutting to a child crying from a different sequence (earlier or later) in the raw footage would give the viewer the idea the child is crying because of the dropping bombs. It is the responsibility of the producer and the editor to tell the truth to the viewers and respect the trust that the viewer has placed in them. The most effective news editing is when a story is told as accurately and ethically as possible.

### **PRE-EDITING**

To get the most out of edit time, source materials should be marked with an edit decision list (EDL). If the source is tape, make sure it is ready for digitizing with specific time codes. It's important to have specific file names and the correct file location of the required source material. If the material to be edited is located on the DaletPlus or another shared file server, the editor will need to know what it is named and where to find it on the server. To achieve the best results and conserve a considerable amount of time during the session, pick out the good shots, sound bites, and music in advance.



### **PREP TIME**

Video editors will prepare the editing system and associated equipment prior to the start of an editing session to ensure everything is working. Although editors are usually scheduled to work the same shows on a daily basis you never know when someone is going to call in sick or be out for other reasons.

Do not assume that the editor assigned to that editing suite is familiar with editing a particular program. To ensure a good quality product and get the best of an editor's skill the producer should brief the editor on the details of the package (what the package is about, length, sound bites, need for special natural sound, and anything else pertinent to the production of the story).

### **THE EDIT SESSION**

#### **SCRIPTS**

Producers should bring two copies of the script to the session – one for the producer and one for the editor. For language versioning from an English package, the original English script should be included. The editor needs to be able to follow the script, especially when a producer cannot stay with the editor for the full session.

#### **AUDIO TRACKING**

When voice tracking, it is extremely important to follow house-standard cues. They are “RETAKE” or “PICKUP” whenever you need to correct a mistake. It is also recommended to use the “3-2-1” countdown before re-starting the track.

#### **IN THE EDIT SUITE**

Video editing is collaborative. On many stories, editors are joined by a producer or reporter who functions as producer, working cooperatively throughout the editing session. On other stories, the editor may work alone, using scripts or written instructions as a guide from which to make editing decisions, or uses the visual flow of the material to determine what is shown. In both cases, video material is edited to fit within a pre-determined time.

The producer (or the editor, if no producer is present) is responsible for the final product and he/she will make the final decision on the content and aesthetic aspects of the project. Producers and editors should collaborate on those aspects whenever possible, however. Aesthetic aspects include choice of shots, camera angles, special effects, which video to use, if and where natural sound is needed, the duration of shots, and so on.

The editor is responsible for the final decision on the technical aspects of the project, including correct application of bars and tone, capturing and outputting of video, video level, audio level, chroma level, correct application of effects, and the input and export of video files into different formats.

Producers are responsible for naming their video projects and assigning metadata according to the established naming conventions and procedures. Editors will assist in this process. It is the producer's responsibility (or the editor's, in the absence of a producer) to write the final information on the video, including time code, time or duration and slug.

### **POST-EDITING**

#### **WRAPPING UP**

Producers should leave the editing suite with all of their production material including source tapes, master tape, etc. Editors are not responsible for transporting production materials from their editing suites to producers' offices, library or VTM. In many cases they have other assignments after their current one.

#### **EXTRA EDITING TIME**

If the time scheduled for an edit session is over but the work is not finished, producers must contact the video editing management or the edit scheduling coordinator to arrange for more editing time. Editors do not have the authority to extend editing time – and they may be scheduled for another session.

### **TV CONTROL ROOM BASICS**

*(Also see the [VOA TV Production Guide for more detailed guidance](#))*

The following is intended to clarify and solidify the responsibilities of all those involved in putting a VOA TV broadcast on the air. These responsibilities and procedures are standard operating procedure at all major TV news organizations, and must be the same for all TV programs produced by VOA Language Services.

### **RESPONSIBILITIES**

#### **EXECUTIVE PRODUCER**

For any given set of shows in a language service the Executive Producer must take responsibility for the actions of staff and help Directors in enforcing the "must haves" for smoothly produced shows. In addition, the EP is responsible for helping to enforce the Procedures listed on the following page.

Although an EP may not necessarily have the foreign language skills, he/she does need to be well-qualified and experienced in the TV field so as to mentor, guide and oversee the work of their line producers and other contributing production personnel.

#### **LINE PRODUCER**

The Line Producer is responsible for developing the show rundown and executing the broadcast in the control room. If the Line Producer is not available to do this at the start of set-up time, the Executive Producer should come to the control room to confirm that the Director and crew have any necessary show information. Works with the Executive Producer to make editorial decisions about story lineup, length and editorial treatment and ensures each story is supported with the appropriate video and graphics elements. The Line Producer works with Central News and other support groups to set up live shots, beepers, segments and all other elements of the program.

The Line Producer must develop a strong working relationship with the Director. At least one hour before the broadcast, the Line Producer MUST go over the show rundown with the Director. They must discuss all video elements, all graphics, all reporter and guest remotes in advance so that the Director has time to review all of these elements before air. Failure to do so will result in a poorly produced program.

#### **WRITER**

The Writer must be able to write on deadline and write for breaking news as a story is developing. The Writer should view CNVOs, CNPKs, SOTs and packages before air time to make sure their scripts match the material.

#### **DIRECTOR**

The Director must establish a strong working relationship with the Line Producer and learn the different needs of the various programs he/she may direct. The Director should also create a working rapport with the editorial and control room staffs in order to produce a professional broadcast.

At least one hour before the broadcast, the Director **MUST** go over the show rundown with the Line Producer. They must discuss all video elements, all graphics, all reporter and guest remotes in advance so that the Director has time to review all of these elements before air. The Director will also review these elements with the Technical Director, Audio Operator and Camera Operators to ensure that the program is produced cleanly.

### **TECHNICAL DIRECTOR**

The TD must be familiar with the needs of specific programs. The TD is responsible for ensuring that the control room is ready for air and that all production elements – video, graphics, set pieces -- are in place before and during production. The TD should log equipment failures, technical errors and/or deviations from prescribed program log.

The Technical Director should review and preview all show elements with the Director and Audio Operator before air.

### **AUDIO OPERATOR**

The Audio Operator must consult with Director and Technical Director prior to production to ensure that all audio sources are accounted for. Provide accurate countdowns and cues to Director and Technical Director during production, whether live or taped. Should ensure quality check of transmission audio and return of on-air product.

### **PROCEDURES**

- Line Producers should be in the control room at the start of the set-up time. They should have show rundowns and cutsheets with them at that time. Directors and Line Producers must review rundowns and cutsheets as early as possible.
- Show rundowns must properly convey the Line Producer's intentions. For example: DaletPlus IDs should match the story slugs, fullscreens properly noted, graphics numbers filled in.
- Cutsheets (times of CGs, TRTs, story slugs and item numbers) match the rundowns.
- All cues for control room staff are to be noted on scripts and in the prompter. For example: when a v/o is to be inserted/rolled, when to change to a full screen, when a 2-shot is needed, when a live shot is happening, etc.
- The Line Producer is responsible for making sure graphics for his or her program are accurate. If the Director has any questions about the graphics, the Director and Line Producer should review them before air.
- A broadcast is only as smooth as the direction provided in the control room. With that in mind, the Line Producer must give the technical staff ample warning on changes to format and especially to kills, floats and changes during a show. If anything out of the ordinary will be used in a program – a musical instrument, a performer of some kind – the control room staff should be advised in advance of the broadcast. Remember, when in doubt, communicate.

- It is recommended that on-air talent be in the studio 15-20 minutes before air, dressed in clothes that adhere to television standards (avoiding whites, busy patterns, metal accessories around the wrist, etc). After settling in on the set, on-air talent should check IFB, and try to speak with studio and remote guests as soon as possible to ensure that you're hearing them and they're hearing you.

### **TV STUDIOS, SETUP TIME & PRODUCTION DESIGN**

VOA is putting greater effort and resources into production design, branding and continuity to obtain higher quality and more structured products. Too often, shows are being changed on a day of air basis by individual ideas from talent, line producers and/or production staff, which conflicts with VOA Best Practices. Here is a reminder of VOA Best Practices regarding TV studios and production design:

- Set up time is only to be used for the immediate preparation of that particular show. Set up time is not to be used to make changes to camera blocking, graphics, switcher effects, lighting or existing aspects of the show. Talent, line producers or other members of the production staff should not ask daily crew members, lighting or directors for modifications to the established lighting or production design.
- Talent, line producers or production staff must direct their concerns to the Executive Producer, who will then work with the Lead Director, Lighting and other production staff as necessary, at an alternate time (not during setup) to try new ideas or make agreed upon changes. The results must then be previewed on camera and receive executive level sign off before going on air.
- The overall production design of a show (graphics, lighting, camera shots, set design, switcher effects, editing effects, audio design and established format) is as much a part of the VOA brand as a show title or the VOA logo. Just as the title or logo isn't changed day to day, other aspects of the production design shouldn't change in this way.
- DO NOT modify pre-designed graphics or branding elements in any way or use them beyond the original intended purpose and placement.
- Graphics made for one show may not be used for another show without review and approval by the Executive Producers of both shows.

Please contact Lisa Stancik ([lstancik@voanews.com](mailto:lstancik@voanews.com)) if you have any questions.

### **CONTROL ROOM TERMINOLOGY**

Chyron	Manufacturer of Character Generators (see below); also used as general description of the characters generated on screen
CG	Character Generator: The machine used to produce the on-screen text
BKG	Background
EFX	Effects
FS	Full Screen
GFX	Graphics
Lower Third	Graphic taking up lower third portion of screen with text
OTS	Over the Shoulder
TRT	Total Running Time of a video or audio/clip file
Key	Superimpose chyrons or effects over video
Lose	Remove superimposed key
Split Screen	Graphic covering half of the screen
Double Box	2 boxes of equal size on screen
Big/Little Box	2 boxes of unequal size on screen

### **CONTROL ROOM CUES FROM PRODUCER**

#### **Cues to get material on the air:**

"Go to \_\_\_\_\_" (Camera X, Clip X, Chyron X)

"Clip X is good"

"Chyron (X channel) is good"

#### **Cues to give when looking ahead in show rundown:**

"Talent is throwing to ..."

"Talent/Guest is leading to..."

"Next is \_\_\_\_\_ in (Chyron, Plasma, Clip X, etc.)"

### **CONTROL ROOM CUES FROM DIRECTOR\*\***

"ROLL" "TAKE" "TRACK" "KEY"

"PREVIEW \_\_\_\_\_"

**\*\*The Director is the only person in the control room who should be giving these cues because they are standard cues for crew members to immediately take that action.**

### **SKYPE**

Any use of Skype Software broadcast on radio, television or Internet must be identified, whether live or recorded.

#### **RADIO AND AUDIO STREAMING PROGRAMS**

##### ***Less than 15 minutes in length:***

For any radio and streamed audio program where Skype Software is used for 15 minutes or less an identification announcement is required at the beginning and end of use.

##### ***More than 15 minutes in length:***

For any radio and streamed audio program where Skype Software is used for more than 15 minutes an identification announcement is required at the beginning and end of use and over the course of the program in no less than fifteen minute intervals.

**Example:** “Mr. Jones joins us live from Dubai via Skype.”

#### **TELEVISION & WEB PROGRAMS**

For any television or web program the Skype logo must be displayed during use of Skype Software.

The Director or Technical Director will insert the required Chyron containing the Skype logo. The Producer must inform the Director of any pre-recorded use of Skype Software to be aired during the program.

In accordance with VOA’s license agreement, the Director will insert the Skype logo in the Chyron identifying the guest. The logo should be displayed multiple times during the course of the interview.

Due to the occasional sketchy nature of Skype transmissions, most video use of Skype, whether on TV or the web, live or packaged, should be pushed back into a “box” format.

**EXCEPTION FOR LIVE TV PROGRAMS:** If both the Director and TD agree the signal is broadcast quality, it may be used full-screen.

#### **RADIO & TV SIMULCASTS**

For any radio and TV simulcast where Skype Software is used, the identification requirements for **both** radio and television programming as described above must be followed.

**NOTE: SOUNDBITES USED FROM A RECORDED SKYPE  
PHONE CALL DO NOT REQUIRE A COURTESY**

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### **ENCODING VIDEO WHEN UPLOADING TO PEACH**

There are now house-wide standards for encoding files that are uploaded to Peach.

#### **EXPORTING FROM ADOBE PREMIERE OR FINAL CUT PRO**

Regardless of the camera and settings you use to record video, these are parameters for exporting from Adobe Premier or Final Cut Pro before uploading to Peach:

1. Resolution: 1080p or 720p
2. Frame rate: 30fps
3. **Data Rate: Up to 6MBs (VBR)**
4. Codec: H.264 wrapped as .MOV or Mp4

#### **EXPORTING FROM IPHONE**

Regardless of which version of the iPhone you use, these are the parameters for exporting before uploading to Peach:

- **Using the Built-In Camera S**  
Use iPhone's default settings.
- **Usign FiLMiC Pro and/or iMovie Settings**
  1. Resolution: 720P
  2. Frame Rate: 30fps
  3. **Data Rate: 6MBs**

How-to video: [15 ways to improve iPhone videography with FiLMiC Pro](#)

If you have any questions about these instructions, please contact Jose Vega ([jvega@bbg.gov](mailto:jvega@bbg.gov)) or Natalia Ardanza ([nardanza@voanews.com](mailto:nardanza@voanews.com))

**DO NOT UPLOAD APPLE PRO RES FILES TO PEACH**  
**THE FILES ARE TOO LARGE AND WILL OVERLOAD THE SYSTEM**



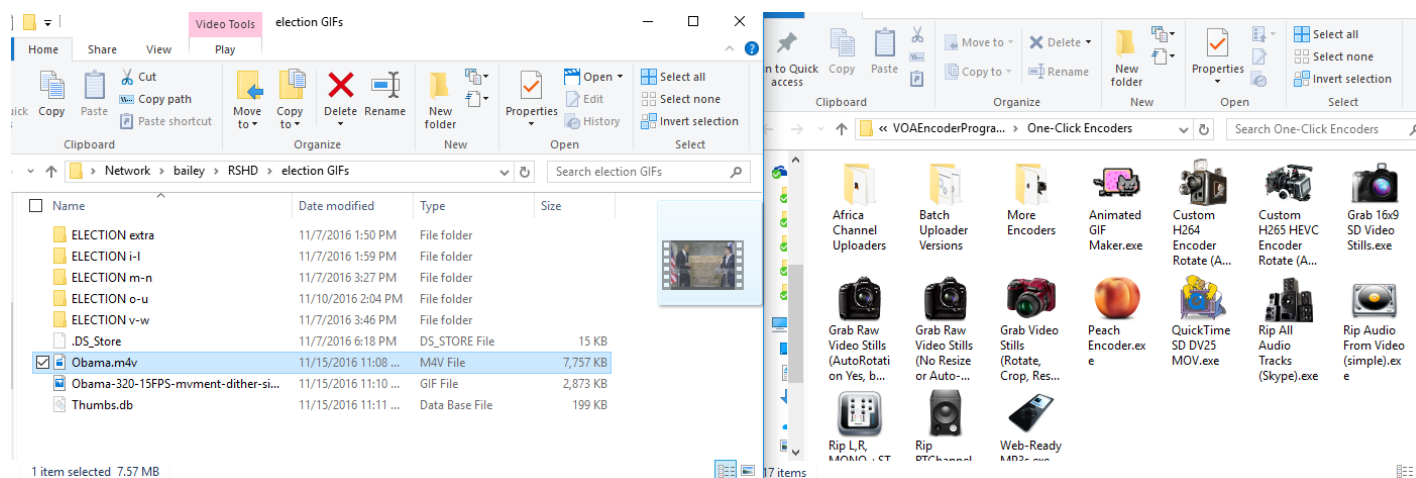
## DESKTOP ANIMATED VIDEO GIF MAKER

This new desktop encoder takes just about ANY video file and converts it into a looping GIF. You can create GIFs one-by-one or in bulk with a wide variety of options.

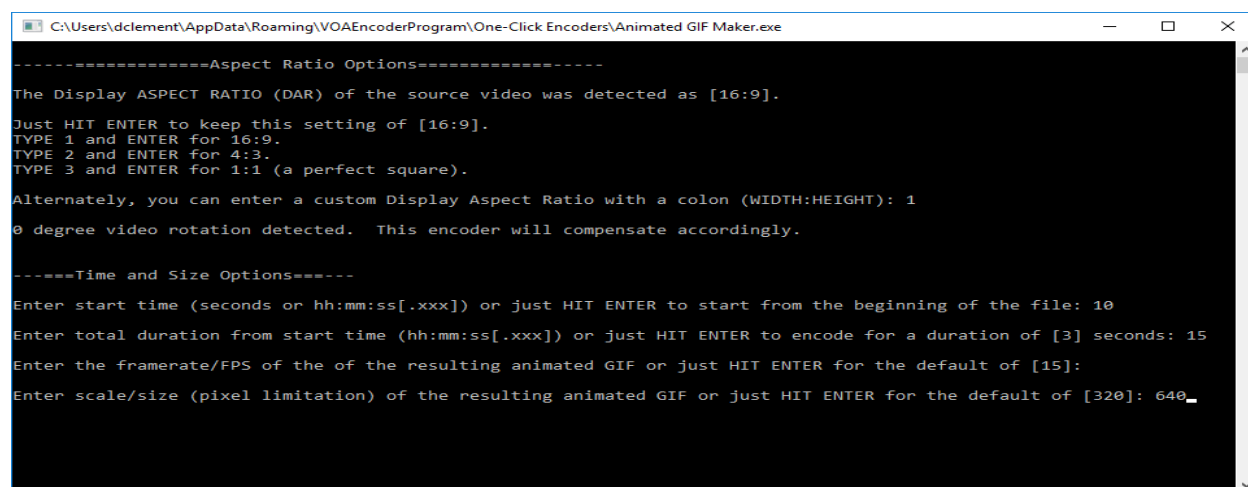
To process a single video, drag the video file onto the Animated GIF Maker icon.

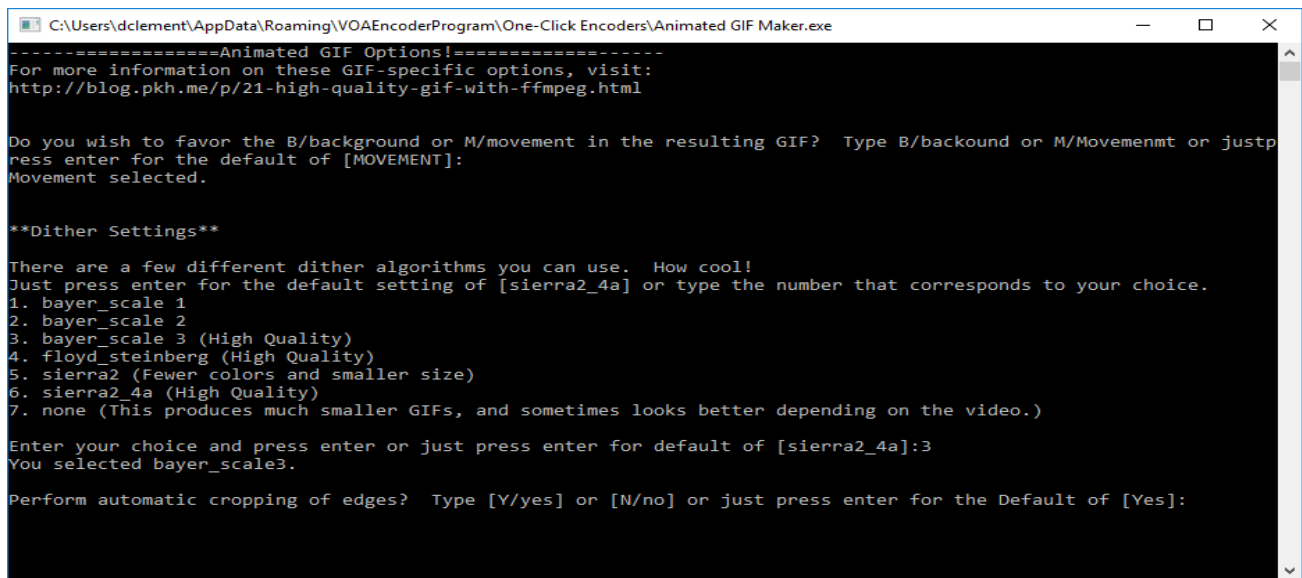
To process video files in bulk, just drop an entire folder full of video files on the Animated GIF Maker icon instead. All GIFs will be created in the folder they were dragged from.

*(Settings from the first video will be applied to all videos in the folder. This encoder should properly handle mixed portrait and landscape sources, different resolutions, and automatic cropping across the entire set.)*



There are many settings you can choose from to tweak the final animated GIFs to your specifications including size, in-point, duration, dithering, etc. It can also automatically crop black bars from the edges of the video to give you a clean look. If you don't know what to select, just hit Enter for the default value(s) and go from there.





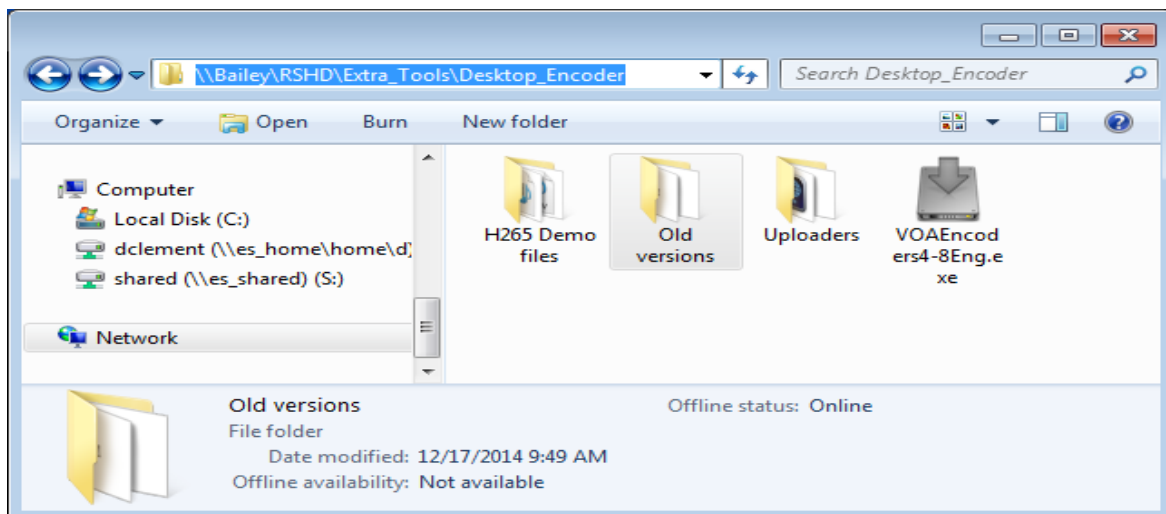
## INSTALLING AND/OR UPDATING VOA ENCODERS

### ALL END USERS MUST DO THIS THEMSELVES!

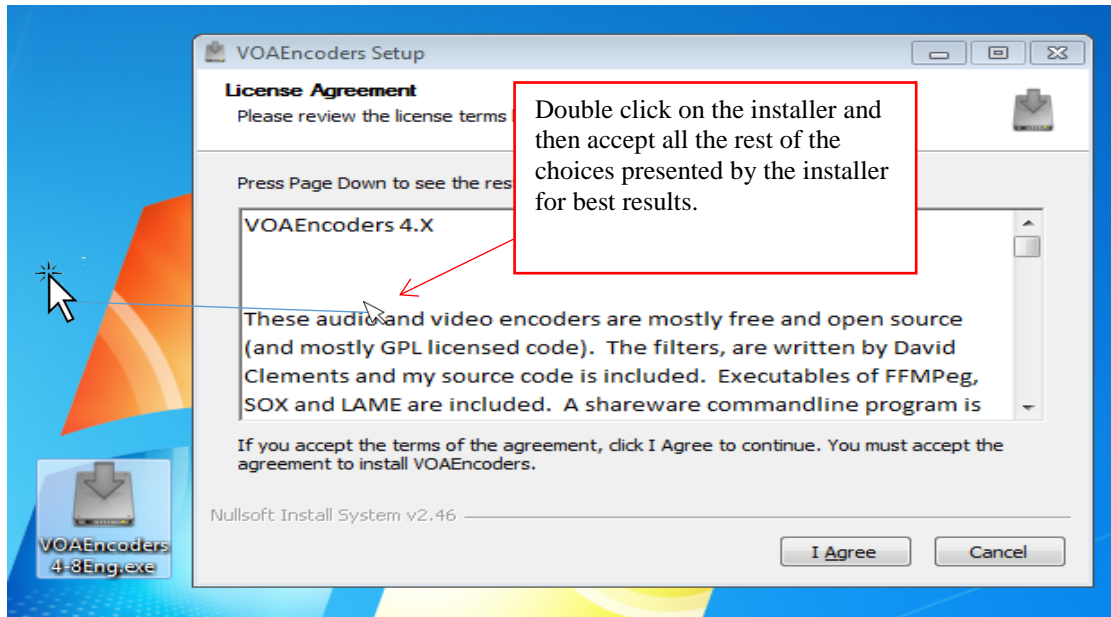
Admin rights are **NOT** required for installation. This is self-serve and should work.

If you have an older version of the encoders on your PC, uninstall the old version first. Also, if you notice that your encoders aren't working after getting new hard drive or a new PC, you should follow these instructions as well.

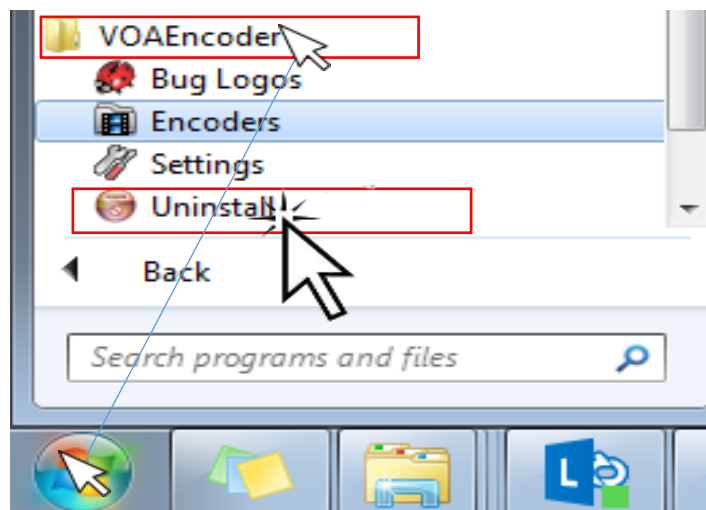
1. Go to [\\Bailey\RSHD\Extra\\_Tools\Desktop\\_Encoder\](#) in a **My Computer** window - **NOT** a web browser) as show below.



- It works best to copy the latest encoder installer to your desktop first and then double click on the installer icon to run the installation.



- Before double clicking a new version's installer, it's recommended that you uninstall the old version first. Just go to **Start Menu -> VOAEncoder -> Uninstall**. Then follow the steps above to install the new version. However, even If you forget to uninstall first, it will probably be OK.



**YOU MUST INSTALL THE VOA ENCODER ON EACH PC YOU PLAN TO USE IT ON. ALSO, YOU CAN ONLY INSTALL IT FOR YOURSELF.**

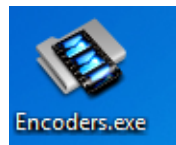
**HOWEVER, YOU CAN INSTALL THE ENCODERS ON AS MANY COMPUTERS AS YOU WISH, INCLUDING HOME COMPUTERS.**

**THIS SOFTWARE IS FREE FROM ANY LICENSE RESTRICTIONS.**

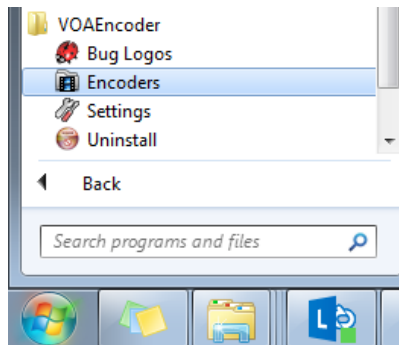
### **VOA ENCODERS Q&A**

**1. I ran the installer. Where are the encoders?**

There should be a folder on the desktop that looks like this:

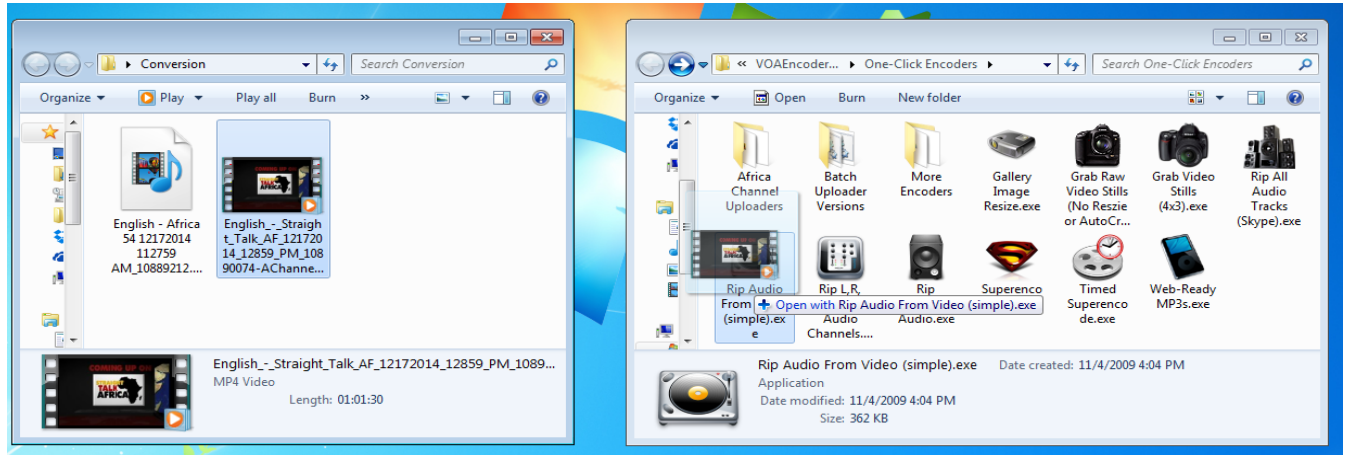


You can also find it in the **Start Menu** under **VOA Encoder -> Encoders:**



## 2. How do I use the encoders?

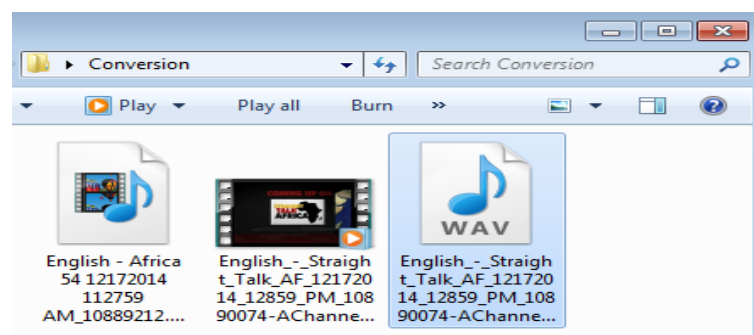
The best way to use the encoders is to copy all media you wish to convert to a folder on your desktop PC. Then drag any media files you wish to convert to the appropriate encoder icon.



Once you have dragged a media file to an encoder drop icon, a DOS window should pop up showing progress and the new file will be created in the same directory that source file was dragged from.

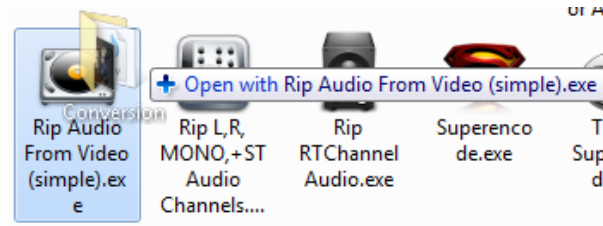
```
C:\Users\dclement\AppData\Roaming\VOAEncoderProgram\One-Click Encoders\Rip Audio From V...
e-libfaac --enable-libfaad --enable-pthreads --enable-libvorbis --enable-libtheora
ra --enable-libspeex --enable-libmp3lame --enable-libopenjpeg --enable-libxvid
--enable-libschrödinger --enable-libx264
libavutil 50. 3. 0 / 50. 3. 0
libavcodec 52.27. 0 / 52.27. 0
libavformat 52.32. 0 / 52.32. 0
libavdevice 52. 2. 0 / 52. 2. 0
libswscale 0. 2. 1 / 0. 2. 1
built on Apr 28 2009 04:04:42, gcc: 4.2.4

Seems stream 0 codec frame rate differs from container frame rate: 59.94 <2997/5
0) -> 29.97 (30000/1001)
Input #00, mov,mp4,m4a,3gp,3g2,mj2, from 'C:\Users\dclement\Desktop\Conversion\En
glish_-_Straight_Talk_AF_12172014_12859_PM_10890074-AChannel1264-3mb.mp4':
Duration: 01:01:30.05, start: 0.-33333, bitrate: 3089 kb/s
Stream #0.0<eng>: Video: h264, yuv420p, 720x480 [PAR 32:27 DAR 16:9], 29.97
tbr, 29.97 tbn, 59.94 tbc
Stream #0.1<eng>: Audio: aac, 48000 Hz, stereo, s16
Output #00, wav, to 'C:\Users\dclement\Desktop\Conversion\English_-_Straight_Talk
_AF_12172014_12859_PM_10890074-AChannel1264-3mb-st.wav':
Stream #0.0<eng>: Audio: pcm_s16le, 48000 Hz, stereo, s16, 1536 kb/s
Stream mapping:
Stream #0.1 -> #0.0
Press [q] to stop encoding
size= 128160kB time=683.54 bitrate=1536.0kb/s
```



### 3. Can I encode files in bulk?

In most cases, Yes. If you drag and drop entire folders on encoder icons, the files inside will process sequentially. All of the transcoded files will appear within the same folder along with the source files.



## FAQ

- **Can I encode files on network shares rather than my desktop PC?**

In most cases, yes. However, this is **NOT SUPPORTED** for many reasons. Also, performance of the encoder is generally slower when run across network shares.

- **Can I encode files on USB thumb drives or other removable media?**

Yes, but performance is likely to be degraded. Instead, copy files to your local hard drive before encoding for best results.

- **Can I call the Help Desk for support?**

You can try, but this is the support document you'll get. We're glad this software is helpful for certain things, but this software is provided as is, and as a convenience.

- **Why aren't the encoders preinstalled?**

The reason is that we don't have time to offer official support for it. Also, having users install this themselves makes testing new features easier and allows you to use this software at home as well. (Teleworking was the one of the main reasons this was developed.)

- **Is there a Mac version?**

No. However, there is a very handy Apple Pro Res encoder which is often better than MPEG Streamclip for certain things related to Final Cut.

- **Will there be a Mac version?**

It doesn't appear that there will be.

- **6. Can this be installed for me?**

Administrators cannot install this software for you as it installs to your Windows profile folder and each install is customized to you. It does not install to the regular Program Files directory. Just double click the installer and go.

If you have any questions, please contact Dave Clements ([dclement@voanews.com](mailto:dclement@voanews.com))

### APPENDIX B – NATIONAL PARK SERVICE GUIDELINES

The National Park Service maintains many of the historic monuments and sites in Washington, and they have provided the following guidance for shooting video or still photos on those properties.

#### ALL VOA STAFF MUST FOLLOW THESE GUIDELINES AT ALL TIMES

##### WASHINGTON MONUMENT

- The Washington Monument is best photographed from a good distance **away!** The National Park Service suggests going to the MIDDLE of the National Mall between 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and 4<sup>th</sup> Street and placing your tripod and camera there. In one direction a news organization may shoot the Washington Monument; by turning your camera 180-degrees in the opposite direction, photographers may shoot the U.S. Capitol building, including stand-ups, b-roll or “beauty shots” or interviews.
- The NPS does **not** allow interviews, stand-ups, or b-roll or “beauty shots” **inside** the “circle of flags” that form the base of the Washington Monument. There is no news media parking at or on the Washington Monument grounds.
- **ALL** news media requests to go to the 500-foot level of the Washington Monument **MUST** be arranged in advance through the NPS’ Communications Office at 202-619-7222.

##### JEFFERSON MEMORIAL

- The **ONLY** location where b-roll or “beauty shots” of the Jefferson Memorial are allowed is from the “plaza area” next to or closest to the water of the Tidal Basin.
- News photographers are **NOT** allowed to shoot at **any time inside** the rotunda or statue level of the Jefferson Memorial. **No** tripods, lights, reflectors, jib arms, or any other production equipment is allowed **inside** the Jefferson Memorial rotunda or statue level **or** on the steps of the Jefferson Memorial.
- News photographers are **NOT** allowed to shoot **with a tripod** any b-roll or “beauty shots” **from or on the steps** leading up to the Jefferson Memorial. Any b-roll or “beauty shots” **from or on the steps** leading up to the Jefferson Memorial **MUST** be shot off-the-shoulder – **NO EXCEPTIONS!**
- Any interviews, referred to as “man on the street” interviews are to be conducted **on the plaza area ONLY** and **NOT** on any of the steps leading up to the Jefferson Memorial and **NOT inside of the Jefferson Memorial rotunda area.**



News crew parking at or near the Jefferson Memorial: Parking is allowed on either side of East Basin Drive (which is immediately north of I-395 and is one-way, westbound) on an as-available basis. The Jefferson Memorial Parking lot is closed and is **not** available for any parking. Free parking is also available approximately 300 yards from the Jefferson Memorial off of Ohio Drive, S.W. in three, smaller parking lots that are labeled Lots “A,” “B” and “C,” which are located between the spans of Interstate 395 or also known as the 14<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge spans.

### LINCOLN MEMORIAL

- **ALL stand-ups, ALL b-roll and ALL interviews** (i.e. “man on the street” interviews) to be shot at or in the close vicinity of the Lincoln Memorial using a tripod are to be shot from the dark gray field stone plaza area (referred to as “Lincoln Circle”) between the bottom steps of the Lincoln Memorial and the top steps of the Reflecting Pool.  
Stated simply: Stay on the dark gray field stone plaza area, located equidistant between the front of the Lincoln Memorial and the western end of the Reflecting Pool.  
 This location provides photographers wide latitude for a large number of different angles of the Lincoln Memorial, and in the opposite direction, the Reflecting Pool, the World War II Memorial, the Washington Monument and the U.S. Capitol.
- B-roll or “beauty shots” without a tripod, or shot “off the shoulder” are allowed on the steps leading up to the Lincoln Memorial under the following restrictions:
  - a) Photographers do not shoot on the top section of steps closest to the Lincoln Memorial statue level. Said slightly differently, photographers are to shoot, without a tripod, on any of the steps on or below the same step that contains the Martin Luther King, Jr. August 28, 1963, “I have a dream” writing inscribed into the stone step.
  - b) Photographers do not interfere with visitors’ ability to walk up or down the Lincoln Memorial steps.
- Restrictions on news photography inside the Lincoln Memorial statue level and on the top step section of the Lincoln Memorial:
  - News organizations are NOT allowed to bring any lights, reflectors, jib arms, platforms, dollies, ladders or other production gear inside the statue level of the Lincoln Memorial without first obtaining a written permit.
- **ANY and ALL b-roll “beauty shot” photography** inside the statue level must be done off-the-shoulder only (NO tripod) and with available light only. It is each news photographer’s responsibility to perform his or her work with available light. News photographers are admonished to **not** bring lights or extension cords up the Memorial’s steps as there are **no** electrical outlets inside the Lincoln Memorial statue level.
- **No interviews or stand-ups are allowed on any of the steps or on any steps or platforms between the steps leading up to the statue level of the Lincoln Memorial -- either with or without a tripod.** As stated above, **ALL** interviews and **ALL** stand-ups are to be performed on the **dark gray field stone plaza** area, located equidistant between the front of the Lincoln Memorial and the western end of the Reflecting Pool.



### WORLD WAR II MEMORIAL

- Do **NOT** set up your tripod on **ANY** of the granite stones of the WWII Memorial.
- **ALL** b-roll shot inside the WWII Memorial **MUST** be shot **off-the-shoulder, or without** a tripod.
- Shoot b-roll or stills **ONLY** on the “**eastern half**” of the Memorial, or on the side closest to 17<sup>th</sup> Street.
- **NO** video or stills are to be shot on the “**western half**” of the WWII Memorial where the “Field of Gold Stars” is located. The western half of the Memorial is the side of the WWII Memorial closest to the Lincoln Memorial.
- For everyone's ease and understanding, all **interviews** are to be shot on one of the three "grass panels" situated immediately **WEST** of 17th Street, and just **EAST** of the granite stone work of the main part of the World War II Memorial. In short, all interviews are to be shot with the news crew, the reporter and the interviewee **ALL** standing on one of the three **grass** panels.
- Although you likely have them, the NPS and USPP require **ALL** tripods to have rubber tips.
- There is **NO** crew car or news vehicle parking at or near the WWII Memorial! **ONLY** your microwave truck is allowed to park at the WWII Memorial. We strongly suggest taking a cab to drop you & your gear off. Make arrangements with a cab company BEFORE getting out of the cab for any return transportation you will need.
- Parking on the WWII Memorial grounds—i.e. on “Home Front Drive”—is limited to **passenger bus or taxi cab** drop-off and pick up of passengers **only**. There are five (5) handicapped-designated parking spaces at the WWII, which are reserved for cars specifically marked as having a **handicapped driver** or passenger **ONLY**. If news organizations park news vehicles there, those vehicles will be ticketed and towed at your expense.

**Parking recommendations:** The NPS suggests parking along Constitution Avenue **AFTER** 9:30 a.m. and walking with your gear to the WWII Memorial. PLEASE note **ALL** lanes of Constitution Ave. re-open for evening rush hour traffic promptly at 3:30 p.m. Any vehicles parked on either side of Constitution Avenue after 3:30 p.m. will be towed at the owner’s expense. IF the need to park earlier than 9:30 a.m. arises, the NPS suggests parking NORTH of Constitution Avenue on one of the numbered streets and walking over. Parking is always at your risk and the National Park Service and the U.S. Park Police have **no** responsibility whatsoever for any parking violations news organizations incur. Parking properly is YOUR responsibility.

### NATIONAL MALL

- Please note the National Mall between 3rd Street and 7th Street is under construction. This area is currently not available and is closed to the public. You may shoot on the National Mall west of 7th Street.

### KOREAN WAR MEMORIAL

- **ALL** stand-ups and **ALL** interviews (i.e. “man on the street” interviews) at the Korean War Memorial **MUST** be shot from and **ON** the grass immediately **NORTH** of the walkway/sidewalk that leads up to the Korean War Memorial (and from the Lincoln Memorial). That means news organizations have to shoot on the opposite side the fence from where all visitors walk to and from the Korean War Memorial. The walkway/sidewalk must be kept open and unobstructed at all times -- **NO EXCEPTIONS!**
- **ANY** and **ALL** b-roll or beauty shots of the Korean War Memorial’s fountain, flag pole, black granite wall or any of the larger-than-life-size soldier statues **MUST** be shot off-the-shoulder/without any tripod. **ALL** b-roll or “beauty shots” with a tripod **MUST** be done from the grass immediately **NORTH** of the walkway/sidewalk that leads up to the Korean War Memorial (and from the Lincoln Memorial)—or, again, on the opposite side of the chain fence from the Korean War Memorial.
- News photographers are **NOT** allowed to place or situate any lights, reflectors, jib arms, platforms or other production gear inside the circular, fountain/flag pole plaza of the Korean War Memorial. **ANY** and **ALL** b-roll or “beauty shot” photography inside the circular, fountain/flag pole plaza is to be performed off-the-shoulder only (NO tripod) and with available light only. News photographers are advised to not bring lights or extension cords to the Korean War Memorial plaza area as there are no electrical outlets inside this plaza area of the Korean War Memorial.
- News photographers are **NEVER** allowed to walk within or to set up a tripod in the rows of low-level cedar bushes in between the rows of larger-than-life-size soldier statues.

### VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL

- The only location where reporter stand-ups, b-roll/beauty shots or interviews with anyone in the vicinity of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is from “Area 5,” an area EAST of an imaginary line IF 20th Street, (and NOT 21st Street) were to have been extended south across the Mall. “Area 5” is entirely contained on green grass to the EAST of a black-painted chain-linked fence and pedestrian walkway that runs perpendicular to the EAST “Wall” of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.
- **You are NOT allowed to shoot ANY b-roll, interviews or stand-ups ANYWHERE, AT ANY TIME on the walkways of this Memorial EXCEPT on Memorial Day (typically the last Monday in May) and Veterans Day (November 11th).** The National Park Service arranges special events, including new media platforms, for events on these two federal holidays. Special arrangements for news media vehicle parking are also made available on these two federal holidays.

### MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., MEMORIAL

- **ALL** B-roll or “beauty shots,” **ALL** reporter stand-ups, **ALL** interviews, including all “person on the street” or impromptu and any prearranged interviews and **ANY AND ALL** live shots at the Martin Luther King, Jr., Memorial **MUST** be performed or conducted from the “Fore Court” area, the area that leads to the main portion of the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial and is the open area **BEFORE** anyone would walk through the “Mountain of Despair.” Said slightly differently, this is the area that is closest to West Basin Drive before West Basin Drive empties onto either eastbound or westbound Independence Avenue, SW.
- Tripods or cables are **NOT** allowed to be placed anywhere inside of the Memorial, or in the area where the “bust” of Martin Luther King, Jr. is located.
- There are **NO** standups -- live or tape -- or interviews allowed to be performed inside of the Memorial in the area where the “bust” of Martin Luther King, Jr. is located. The only b-roll allowed in this area is that which can be shot “hand-held,” or “off-the-shoulder.” This interior area of the Memorial must be kept free of any tripods or cables, as both present tripping hazards to any other visitor. Any injuries to any visitors caused by carelessly or recklessly placed cables or tripods are **YOUR** responsibility.

Parking: All news organization vehicle parking **MUST** be arranged in advance through the Office of Communications at (202) 619-7222. There is very limited parking at the Martin Luther King, Jr., Memorial for news vehicles. Please know and be aware that West Basin Drive is also used at any time by buses, taxis, tour buses, bicyclists, and cars. There is no officially designated location for news media parking at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial.

### U.S. CAPITOL BUILDING

- Please note the U.S. Capitol Building is **NOT** the National Park Service's property, and therefore, the National Park Service does **NOT** have the authority to allow news crews to shoot on the U.S. Capitol grounds. You may call the Senate Radio/T.V. Gallery at (202) 224-6421 or the House Radio/T.V. Gallery at (202) 225-5214. Both Galleries have staff that you need to work with IF you are seeking to perform your work on the U.S. Capitol Building's property.

### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The contents of this Guide represent the contributions of many VOA staffers. In particular: Matthew Baise, Don Benson, Pat Bodnar, Bart Childs, Dave Clements, Louise Coleman-Brown, Pam Commerford, John Featherly, Monte Hatcher, Alan Heil, Mollie King, Drew Krog, Kataryna DeLisle, Jean Michel Mathurin, Lisa Ponzio, Steve Redisch, Lisa Stancik, Jose Vega and Jeff Young. Thanks to all for your input. Other entries in the Guide come from previous House-wide guidance.

In addition, many of the elements in the Guide have been produced with the cooperation of the following news organizations:

CNN

Freedom Forum

Los Angeles Times

New York Times

Project for Excellence in Journalism

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press

Society of Professional Journalists



# ***BEST PRACTICES GUIDE***

---

***DECEMBER 2018***

**[SharePoint: Best Practices Guide](#)**

**DALETPLUS: MEDIA-->CATEGORIES-->MANUALS**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>THE VOA CHARTER</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>NEWS GATHERING</b>	
-FAIRNESS, OBJECTIVITY & BALANCE	7
-BIAS & DIVERSITY	9
-POLITICAL ACTIVITY	10
-DRONES	12
-SENSITIVE & GRAPHIC MATERIAL	18
-COVERING WAR	19
-COVERING TERRORISM	18
-VIDEO & AUDIO OF TERRORISTS, HOSTAGES OR PRISONERS	20
-COVERING CRIMINAL ACTIVITY	21
-HOSTAGE/BARRICADE SITUATIONS	21
-NAMING PEOPLE INVOLVED IN CRIMES	22
-INTERVIEWING & VIDEOTAPING MINORS	23
-COVERING & REPORTING SUICIDES	24
-BREAKING NEWS	24
-REPORTING CROWD ESTIMATES	25
-STAGING & RE-CREATIONS	25
-USING VOA EMPLOYEES OR RELATIVES FOR STORIES	25
-WRITING	26
-SOURCING	27
-RUMORS & SPECULATION	28
-ATTRIBUTION	29
-CREDITING THE NEWS AGENCIES	33
-PLAGIARISM	34
-INTERVIEWS	35
-PUBLIC FIGURES	36
-ANONYMITY	37
-“AMBUSH” INTERVIEWS	38
-ADVANCE SCRIPTS/SCREENING	38
-REQUESTS FOR UNAIED/UNPUBLISHED MATERIAL	38
-SUBJECT TAPING INTERVIEW	38
-PAYMENT	38

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### GUESTS

-NOTIFYING VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT OF HIGH-LEVEL GUESTS	39
-SECURITY PROCEDURES FOR GUESTS	39
-GUEST BOOKING PROCEDURES	41
-HOSTING A GUEST ON VOA PROGRAMS	43

### DIGITAL MEDIA

-SOCIAL MEDIA-GENERAL	45
-SOCIAL MEDIA AS REPORTING TOOL	46
-OPINION	47
-MANAGING YOUR PROGRAM'S OR SERVICE'S SOCIAL PRESENCE	48
-POSTING VOA CONTENT TO OTHER SITES, INCLUDING YOUR OWN	48
-LINKING TO OTHER SITES	49
-BE TRANSPARENT ABOUT YOUR MISTAKES	49
-USER-GENERATED CONTENT	50
-YOUTUBE GUIDELINES	52
-GOOGLE EARTH GUIDELINES	55
-REVEALING WEBSITES & ADDRESSES	56
-AFFILIATE/RECIPROCAL LINKS	56

### PHOTOGRAPHS

-GENERAL RULES	57
-EDITING PHOTOGRAPHS	57
-PHOTO ILLUSTRATIONS	58
-TECHNICAL TIPS	58
-SENDING IN PHOTO FILES	59
-CAPTIONS/CREDITS	59

### MUSIC

-GENERAL GUIDELINES	61
-SOCIAL MEDIA & MUSIC	61

### AUDIO USAGE RIGHTS

-AUDIO CLIPS FROM TV NETWORKS	62
-------------------------------	----

### VIDEO USAGE RIGHTS

-COMMON FEATURES	64
-USING VIDEO FROM TV NETWORKS	65
-ABC NEWS	66
-AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE (AFP)	68

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

-ASSOCIATED PRESS (APTN)	69
-REUTERS	70
-NEWSMARKET	72
-USING CONTENT FROM STATE-RUN MEDIA	74
<b>VIDEO NEWS RELEASES (VNRs)</b>	<b>76</b>
<b><u>DOMESTIC DISTRIBUTION OF VOA CONTENT</u></b>	
-SMITH-MUNDT REGULATIONS	77
-USAGE REQUESTS	77
-TALKING ABOUT VOA CONTENT & PROGRAMMING	78
-TOWN HALLS, FORUMS, OTHER EVENTS, PARTNERSHIPS	79
-SUMMARY	79
-DOCUMENTING SOURCE VIDEO IN DALETPLUS	80
-NEWS AGENCY IDs & THE DOT	81
-ADDING AN AGENCY ID/DOT IN PREMIERE PRO	84
-ADDING AN AGENCY ID/DOT IN DALETPLUS	86
<b>CORRECTIONS</b>	<b>88</b>
<b><u>LEGAL ISSUES</u></b>	
-VOA FIREWALL	90
-COPYRIGHT & FAIR USE	92
-TRADEMARK	93
-FILMING IN PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE PLACES	94
-PROOF OF INSURANCE	94
-DEFAMATION/PRIVACY/FALSE LIGHT	94
-REPORTER'S PRIVILEGE & CONFIDENTIAL SOURCES	96
-REPORTING ON CLASSIFIED DOCUMENTS	96
-SUBPOENAS OR REQUESTS FOR TESTIMONY OR DOCUMENTS	97
-INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL BY VOA REPORTERS	97
<b><u>OUTSIDE ACTIVITIES</u></b>	
-VOA STAFF	98
-CONTRACTORS	99
-COMPETITIONS AND CASH AWARDS	100
<b>APPENDIX – CONTROL ROOM EMERGENCY PROCEDURES</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</b>	<b>103</b>





## ***BEST PRACTICES GUIDE***

### **THE VOA CHARTER**

President Gerald Ford signed the VOA Charter ([Public Law 94-350](#)) into law on July 12, 1976. It protects the independence and integrity of VOA programming.

The long-range interests of the United States are served by communicating directly with the peoples of the world by radio. To be effective, the Voice of America must win the attention and respect of listeners. These principles will therefore govern Voice of America (VOA) broadcasts:

1. VOA will serve as a consistently reliable and authoritative source of news. VOA news will be accurate, objective, and comprehensive.
2. VOA will represent America, not any single segment of American society, and will therefore present a balanced and comprehensive projection of significant American thought and institutions.
3. VOA will present the policies of the United States clearly and effectively, and will also present responsible discussions and opinions on these policies.

# **BEST PRACTICES GUIDE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **THIS GUIDE APPLIES TO ALL EMPLOYEES, CONTRACTORS AND STRINGERS WHO GATHER, PRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE CONTENT FOR VOA**

The purpose of this Guide is to define in more detail the journalistic standards and best practices that VOA employees should follow every day. And it is a **guide** rather than a rulebook for one very good reason: although the increasingly changing news and information environment requires each of us to have a basic understanding of best practices, it goes without saying that every news event, every radio, TV and web piece, every social media post, every program, every interview – that is, **everything we cover, produce and disseminate – is unique and must be considered in context and on its own merits.**

VOA employees are encouraged to bring issues not covered in this guide to the attention of their supervisors, Service Chiefs, Division Directors, the Editor for News Standards & Best Practices, VOA Senior Management or the Office of General Counsel as appropriate.

- There may be times when the News Center or a Language Service will be working on stories that allege wrongdoing. In those cases, the Office of General Counsel **must** be consulted.  
[\(Also see Legal Issues, p. 90\)](#)

It is the responsibility of all staff members to understand these best practices as well as to consider one's own sense of right and wrong. Credibility is the most precious commodity of any news organization. The only way to achieve and maintain that credibility is for everyone within VOA to accept responsibility for it.

### **WHEN IN DOUBT, ASK - DO NOT ASSUME**

This guide will help, but should not replace, discussions of difficult issues with co-workers and supervisors. We grow as a news organization -- and policies are formed -- by asking questions and discussing the journalistic issues we face daily.

In addition to these journalistic guidelines, as federal employees, [we are also required to follow the policies laid out by the Office of Government Ethics and the BBG's Ethics Counsel.](#)

The [Best Practices Guide](#) is a living document and is updated regularly on Sharepoint.

### NEWS GATHERING

#### FAIRNESS, OBJECTIVITY & BALANCE

WHEN PERFORMING OFFICIAL DUTIES, VOA STAFF LEAVE THEIR PERSONAL POLITICAL VIEWS BEHIND

- All correspondents, producers, writers, editors and hosts should be aware of their own cultural values and personal beliefs and put them aside when preparing a report, conducting an interview, hosting a newscast, an interview program or posting on social media.
- The accuracy, quality and credibility of the Voice of America are its most important assets, and they rest on the audiences' perception of VOA as an objective and reliable source of U.S., regional and world news and information.
- VOA journalists -- including writers, correspondents, stringers, program hosts, and social media administrators -- should always avoid the use of unattributed negative terms or labels to describe persons or organizations. The exception is when the individuals and groups use those labels to describe themselves or their activities.
- Be fair to all of the people involved in a story. People who are presented in a negative light must be given a reasonable chance to present their side of the issue. If they refuse to comment, that should be noted. This demonstrates to our audience that we made the effort to be fair to all sides.
- A correspondent, producer or host should be well prepared with facts to balance the statement of one side or the other. Don't simply nod in acknowledgment when listening to someone's answer, as this could imply that you agree with that position.
- VOA journalists and all those preparing broadcast, website and social media programming must avoid any action or statement that might give the appearance of partisanship.
  - **THIS INCLUDES THE WEARING OF LAPEL PINS, RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS, CLOTHING DESIGNS OR COLOR SCHEMES THAT APPEAR TO SUPPORT ONE PARTY OR INDIVIDUAL OVER ANOTHER.**
- **THERE IS NO PLACE AT VOA FOR ADVOCACY JOURNALISM - THE PRESENTATION OF NEWS FROM ONE PARTICULAR VIEWPOINT OR ONE SPECIFIC AGENDA.**
- **VOA JOURNALISTS CANNOT ACCEPT MONETARY PAYMENT OR GIFTS FROM ANY INDIVIDUAL, SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP, OR POLITICAL ORGANIZATION IN EXCHANGE FOR NEWS COVERAGE. IT IS A VIOLATION OF JOURNALISTIC ETHICS.**

- Other conflicts of interest, real or apparent, may come up, such as the relationship of staff members with VOA and USAGM management.
  - For instance, VOA journalists should avoid, where possible, covering an event where a speaker or panelist is from VOA – simply because VOA is represented at the event. If the event is one of journalistic value, the report should disclose and explain that VOA is represented at the event and cite the editorial reason for covering the event.
- VOA employees should carry out their work with the utmost professionalism. This applies equally to your work in the Cohen Building and in the field. Professionalism and respect for your colleagues is absolutely vital to maintaining best practices. Whether in a newsroom, studio, control room or in the field, pursuit of a story is not an excuse for arrogance.

### **BIAS & DIVERSITY**

One of the key areas for ensuring fairness, objectivity and balance in our reporting is to stay clear of bias or preconceived notions. Some examples:

- Avoid stereotyping by race, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, geography, sexual orientation, disability, social status or physical appearance.
- The words we use in our scripts should be precise. For example, avoid the casual use of words and phrases like “illegal immigrant,” “Third World” and “terrorist,” or the assumption that “fundamentalism” equals violence. [This is the latest guidance from the AP](#) on writing about the “alt-right” and related terms. All VOA staff should read the guidance and follow it in our own reporting.
- Don’t include a description of an individual unless it is essential to the story. If a description doesn’t serve an editorial purpose, it may perpetuate negative stereotypes, possibly anger some members of a community and in all likelihood doesn’t effectively advance the story.
- Coverage of events in a gay community should not be automatically linked to coverage of HIV/AIDS, because HIV/AIDS is not exclusive to gay communities.
- Correspondents, producers, video, photo and web editors must understand the possibility of racial or ethnic stereotyping when selecting images to include in stories. For example, in a story about unwed mothers in the U.S., should every mother shown be African American? If using file video about drug arrests in the U.S., should every person shown be African American or Hispanic? The clear answer is no.

### **POLITICAL ACTIVITY**

#### **VOA STAFF CANNOT CAMPAIGN FOR OR ORGANIZE EVENTS FOR POLITICAL CANDIDATES**

#### **THAT IS A VIOLATION OF THE JOURNALISTIC ETHICS OF OBJECTIVITY, FAIRNESS AND BALANCE AND SHOULD BE AVOIDED AT ALL TIMES**

#### **THE HATCH ACT**

The Hatch Act is a federal law; its main provision is to prohibit government employees in the Executive Branch from engaging in partisan political activity. The Office of General Counsel has provided some basic guidelines regarding political activity by VOA employees.

Employees **MAY NOT** engage in political activity while:

- On duty
- In any government office
- Using a government vehicle
- Wearing an official uniform or insignia

In addition, the following political activities are prohibited while **on duty**:

- Wearing campaign buttons and/or t-shirts
- Displaying campaign posters in the workplace
- Using **AGENCY** e-mail accounts, social media accounts or blogs to support or criticize a candidate or political position
- Using agency computers to make online campaign donations
- Using screensavers supporting or criticizing a candidate or political position
- Using agency-supplied smartphones to support or criticize a candidate or political position

**NOTE: You are on duty when you are teleworking.**

**IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT THESE GUIDELINES,  
PLEASE CONTACT THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL AT 202-203-4550**

#### **POLITICAL REPORTING ON VOA WEBSITES**

Reporting on U.S. politics can be a delicate balancing act for VOA. This is especially true because of the provisions of the Hatch Act.

In the case of VOA, the Office of Special Counsel took note of our reporting on U.S. political campaigns. The OSC's concern was that as a federal agency VOA's reporting should abide by the letter and spirit of the Hatch Act. In addition, the OSC noted that a federal agency's website "...must not create the appearance that the agency, and in turn the federal government, is politically biased."

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

## ***BEST PRACTICES GUIDE***

In response, the BBG's Office of General Counsel noted that the VOA Charter lawfully empowers the agency to "...present the policies of the United States clearly and effectively, and will also present responsible discussions and opinions on these policies."

The OSC ultimately determined that the requirements of the Hatch Act could be effectively balanced with the realities of news reporting, and declared that it is permissible for VOA to report on political campaigns and to include links to a candidate or party's website in a web story if the website is source material for the article, and can be presented in a way that avoids appearances of agency endorsement or support for the candidate or party.

To avoid appearances of inappropriate endorsement or bias, if any VOANews.com website reports on a GOP or Democratic presidential debate and the story includes a link to the campaign website of one candidate, we must include the campaign websites of all the candidates who are taking part in the debate. The same holds true if we are reporting on candidates for the Senate, House and for governors.

We follow the same guidelines during the final presidential campaign period with regard to a sitting president and the opposing candidate/s. But in that case, the link for the sitting president **MUST BE TO THE CAMPAIGN'S WEBSITE, AND NOT TO WWW.WHITEHOUSE.GOV.**

In other words, when reporting on U.S. political campaigns, all VOANews.com websites should follow the same journalistic balance and fairness that we strive for in all of our daily reporting.

For more complete guidance on the Hatch Act, [please follow this link to the Office of General Counsel's Ethics page.](#)

### **DRONES**

Drones are special-purpose aerial camera platforms. Their use is heavily regulated, and VOA journalists must follow both governmental restrictions and VOA policies.

It is illegal to operate an unmanned aerial system/drone (UAS) for business purposes in the United States without advance approval from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Therefore, prospective VOA drone users must obtain a Remote Pilot Certificate (the official title for a drone pilot license) prior to any field usage of a drone<sup>1</sup>.

### **DRONE USAGE BY VOA-AFFILIATED PERSONNEL IS RESTRICTED TO PROPERLY LICENSED DRONE PILOTS.**

VOA drone pilots will follow the FAA'S rules and respect all restrictions, including those imposed locally by police or emergency service agencies. VOA journalists contracting for drone services must also be aware of laws and safety regulations governing their use.

When the use of a drone is requested to cover a VOA story, advance approval is required from the VOA Deputy Director for Programming ([jlippman@voanews.com](mailto:jlippman@voanews.com); 202-203-4325) or his designee. Requests for flight authorization must be in writing and include story information (including personnel and justification of the need for a drone), flight plans, site maps, and other specifics detailed in this section.

VOA will use guidelines from the Professional Society of Drone Journalists ([www.dronejournalism.org](http://www.dronejournalism.org)) as determinates of its drone usage:

- **NEWSPWORTHINESS:** The story must be of sufficient importance to risk using a potentially harmful drone. Do not use a drone if the information or aerial perspective can be gathered by other, safer means.
- **SAFETY:** A drone pilot must be properly trained in the operation of the equipment. The equipment must be in a condition suitable to safe and controlled flight. A drone must not fly in weather conditions that exceed the limits of the drone's ability to operate safely. A drone must be flown in a manner that ensures the safety of the public and is least disruptive to the general population in a public setting. A Pilot's first drone flight should **not** be when shooting a story.
- **REGULATIONS AND PUBLIC SPACES:** A drone pilot must follow the regulations that apply to the airspace where the drone is used.
- **PRIVACY:** Use of a drone must never compromise the privacy of non-public figures. VOA journalists should not use images of private citizens in private spaces that are encountered beyond the scope of their stories.

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.faa.gov/uas/getting\\_started/fly\\_for\\_work\\_business/becoming\\_a\\_pilot/](https://www.faa.gov/uas/getting_started/fly_for_work_business/becoming_a_pilot/)  
[https://www.faa.gov/uas/media/Part\\_107\\_Summary.pdf](https://www.faa.gov/uas/media/Part_107_Summary.pdf)



VOA will own and operate drones for use in the United States subject to government regulations and VOA procedures ([See Flight Operations, p. 13](#)).

Drones will be standardized as specified by VOA Broadcast Operations, which will inventory and house them in Washington, D.C. or selected domestic bureaus. Drones will be registered with the Federal Aviation Administration (<https://registermyuas.faa.gov/>) in the name of VOA. Like other VOA technical equipment, purchases of drones will be approved in advance by the VOA Chief Digital Officer ([jtunnessen@voanews.com](mailto:jtunnessen@voanews.com); 202-382-5420) or his designee.

Although VOA will operate drones within the United States, VOA will **not** own and operate drones outside of the United States.

Unlike the Federal Aviation Administration in the U.S., neither the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) nor the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) have established general usage or legal guidelines for drone operations. Regulations vary from country to country, frequently change, and may not yet be codified (for instance, there is no listing of drone regulations for Iran). The Global Drone Regulations Database ([www.droneregulations.info](http://www.droneregulations.info)), however, is an international directory containing summaries of countries' drone laws, if known.

VOA journalists requiring a drone outside the U.S. will need to rent drone services from a pilot/operator licensed for the particular country in which the shoot is planned. They will also be expected to search the database to make sure VOA will not inadvertently violate regulations for the country in which the shoot is planned.

Contracting for drone services outside the country, like contracting for other external services, should be requested in advance from VOA Broadcast Operations, which will work with the IBB Office of Contracts to arrange services. Once drone services are secured, language services should advise the Deputy Director of Programming ([jlippman@voanews.com](mailto:jlippman@voanews.com)) or his designee of the name of the drone pilot and the drone's registration information.

**NOTE: Nothing in this section prevents VOA journalists from obtaining drone footage taken by non-VOA personnel who have acted independently of VOA.** User-generated drone video will be governed by the same standards and verifications as other independently gathered video used by VOA, prior to its use. ([Also see User-Generated Content, p. 50](#))

### **THE DRONE CREW**

VOA uses the Operations Manual of The Drone Journalism Lab as the basis for its drone operations procedures. VOA-registered drone pilots must follow procedures as outlined in the Operations Manual<sup>2</sup>.

The Manual defines three operations roles in drone flight: Pilot, Observer, and Journalist. Although a single individual can fill all three roles, VOA will normally have at least two people involved in any drone flight: a Pilot and a combination Observer/Journalist. The three roles are defined on the next page.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/32pi2e2gv6huyzg/AAAwGq7b1mO5ekikCn-7JFiMa?dl=0&preview=opsmanual.pdf>

- **PILOT:** Responsible for all flight operations and the ultimate authority on any flight. The Pilot determines if the aircraft is airworthy and capable of conducting the proposed operations in the available airspace, and is responsible for conducting operations within all FAA regulations (and any restrictions set forth by a “grant of exemption” from the FAA). The Pilot must brief the other members of the crew about the specifics of the mission, their roles and responsibilities, and what is expected of them before, during and after flight operations. The Pilot – the person holding the FAA-issued Part 107 certificate – is by regulation the final authority on whether the drone flies or not. The Pilot’s decision on flight safety is final.
- **OBSERVER:** Responsible for monitoring the operational area to ensure that there are no hazards that may endanger the flight or people. The Observer is the only member of the team who should speak to the Pilot during flight operations. The Observer is to alert the Pilot if any aircraft come into the area, or if any person or vehicle comes near the operation. The Observer should remain within speaking distance of the Pilot.
- **JOURNALIST:** Responsible for communicating flight goals before the flight and verifying results after the drone lands. Defines the aerial elements needed for the story, but is subordinate to the Pilot, who has responsibility for determining if the Journalist’s goals are possible under the conditions presented.

### **FLIGHT OPERATIONS**

Pre-trip and pre-flight inspections help ensure airworthiness and will serve as an early warning for both maintenance issues and for mechanical issues that could substantially affect or cancel flight operations or safety.

**PRE-TRIP:** Pre-trip and prior to embarking on any drone operation, the Pilot must gather information about the proposed flight area to ensure safe operations that comply with Federal Aviation Agency regulations. The Pilot should view publicly available aerial images of the area or personally conduct a site survey that will enable him/her to answer questions about the proposed flight location and be confident of success in the mission, including:

- What is there?
- Are there hazards to aviation?
- What airspace is it in?
- Do we need permission from air traffic control (ATC)?
- Are we flying on or over private property? Do we have permission of the landowner to operate there?
- How many people can we expect around the area? What is our plan to prevent flight over people?
- How high above sea level is the location? How will the altitude affect the performance of your drone during flight?

Prior to the day of the shoot, the Pilot and Journalist should meet to define the goals of the drone shoot and specific mission goals, including:

- What shots do you need (specific expected shots, angles, or subjects)?
- What purpose is the drone serving in your story?
- What context is the drone adding to your story?

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

- How much drone video or photography do you need to tell the story?
- What privacy issues can you anticipate and what steps have you taken to mitigate them?
- What the operations area looks like.
- What the expected weather will be.
- Any known hazards.

Prior to the shoot itself, the Pilot should also practice with the drone assigned for use.

**PRE-FLIGHT:** Pre-flight operations are done immediately before any flight work is to occur. The pre-flight checklist repeats some of the pre-trip checklist, such as inspecting the aircraft and some of the control surfaces. On the day of the shoot, before leaving for the operations area, the Pilot should conduct a pre-trip inspection of the drone, including:

- Charging batteries.
- That there are sufficient fully charged batteries to compensate for the possible effects of temperature on the drone's batteries.
- Checking various mounting hardware.
- Checking the camera and storage media to ensure it is sufficient for the task.
- Verifying that weather parameters are within FAA Part 107 minimums, as determined by consulting an aviation weather forecast or weather report (METAR) or from obtaining a flight briefing from Flight Services.
- Verifying that the Journalist has informed local police or fire agencies that we will be using news-gathering drones.

Once on site, the Pilot will conduct the pre-flight inspection, connect the batteries, etc., and delineate a takeoff and landing area of at least 10 feet x 10 feet and ensure it is free of debris. S/he may also assign the Journalist or other VOA personnel on site to ensure that bystanders don't inadvertently walk into either the takeoff/landing zone or under the drone's flight path.

**IN FLIGHT:** The "In Flight" checklist isn't really a checklist. It's a "Do Constantly" list, noted as a reminder here for all journalists using drones. While in flight, personnel involved in the shoot must:

- Be constantly scanning for airborne traffic or obstacles. The Observer (in most cases, the Journalist) must report them immediately to the Pilot.
- Be constantly scanning for people on the ground in the flight area. The Observer must report them immediately to the Pilot.
- Be constantly checking battery levels, ensuring that the drone is returned to the landing area before reaching 25% of capacity remaining.
- Be constantly checking flight parameters such as altitude to ensure they remain within restrictions and operational goals.

Any changes to the operational plan should be discussed only at the time of battery changes.

**POST-FLIGHT:** The post-flight checklist is broken into three parts: shutting down the drone, inspecting the aircraft, and filling out logs. Logging is an essential part of drone safety. It forms the basis of the permanent record documenting maintenance of the drone VOA needs. Among other things, Pilots should document in logs (part of each VOA drone kit)<sup>3</sup> any issue that should be checked or fixed between flights, drone usage (times of takeoffs and landings), problems during flight, and battery usage.

### **DRONE RESTRICTIONS**

The FAA's website<sup>4</sup> provides complete information on approved flights and operations. VOA personnel involved in drone use should familiarize themselves with the contents of the site. For news coverage by drone within the United States, these restrictions are most relevant:

- Cannot fly anywhere in the District of Columbia.
- Cannot fly within five miles of an airport (that limit extends to 30 miles from Reagan National Airport).
- Cannot be operated within a U.S. National Park.
- Cannot fly at night.
- Cannot fly over people (not over protests, not over celebrations, not over sidewalks when pedestrians are present, etc.).
- Cannot fly higher than 400 feet (unless you're within 400 feet of a building; skyscraper climbing is OK).
- Cannot fly further away than the drone pilot can see with the naked eye.
- Cannot fly at speeds of more than 100 miles per hour
- Cannot be operated from a moving vehicle or inside a covered stationary vehicle.

Waivers to restrictions must be obtained in writing from the FAA. They generally are time-consuming to apply for and slow in being granted. Absent a written waiver, VOA will operate its drones in compliance with laws and regulations.

### **ACCIDENTS**

By using licensed drone pilots and having a rigorous system of approvals of drone usage, VOA will minimize the instances of mishaps or accidents involving drones. Should VOA personnel be involved in accidents or injuries involving drones, both the pilot of the drone and the VOA reporter/producer of the story must separately notify their service chief and division director, plus the VOA Deputy Director of Programming ([jlippman@voanews.com](mailto:jlippman@voanews.com)) or his designee. The drone pilot is required by law to notify both the Federal Aviation Agency and the National Transportation Safety Board of accidents that either cause injuries or at least \$500 in damage to property.

Applicable website contacts for the FAA and NTSB are below:

[https://www.faa.gov/uas/report\\_accident/](https://www.faa.gov/uas/report_accident/)

<https://www.nts.gov/investigations/process/Documents/NTSB-Advisory-Drones.pdf>

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/32pi2e2gv6huyzg/AAAwGq7b1mO5ekikCn-7JFiMa?dl=0&preview=logs.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.faa.gov/uas/where\\_to\\_fly/](https://www.faa.gov/uas/where_to_fly/)

### **ARCHIVING DRONE FOOTAGE**

All high quality drone footage must go in the archives within 3 weeks of the original shoot.

If the drone operator will be editing the video, he/she should copy the footage, edit down to the best footage, and work with the Media Asset Management team to supply the metadata and get the video into Dalet. If the operator does not edit, the producer must take on the responsibility.

No one will be granted continued access to a drone unless the footage from their previous shoot has been processed in the archive system. The Media Asset Management team has been alerted to tag the content as DRONE footage in the metadata, so users can easily search the database for the video.

This is a critical part of the return on the investment of training, purchasing and maintaining the drones.

### **SENSITIVE & GRAPHIC MATERIAL**

Newsworthiness should be the primary factor in deciding whether to air or publish audio or video that may be offensive to our audiences. Some examples include murder scenes, acts of war, acts of nature, or faces of victims.

In most cases, VOA should not broadcast or publish the moment of death in a suicide, execution, or any similar event. Exceptions might include circumstances where an event is being covered live and the action is unexpected or spontaneous, or where the event is so highly newsworthy as to warrant broadcast or posting. If it happens during live coverage, explain to the audience what has happened as quickly as possible, and move on.

The broadcasting or posting of graphic, profane, racist or other objectionable language should be determined if it is essential to the newsworthiness of the story.

Material of a sexual nature is also a cause for concern, as people of all ages listen to, watch and read VOA news stories. Questions to be asked: Is the material essential to the story? Should video be digitized in some way so as not to be offensive? Would you want your children to see such images?

If it's determined the material will be broadcast or posted online, a mandatory warning needs to be provided far enough ahead of the story to make sure children do not see or hear the material. If the material is posted online, it should not be on the homepage. Rather, a link to the story should appear on the homepage, with a warning that sexual/graphic images are included with the story.

YouTube has a [blurring tool](#) that lets you blur any part of a video, including moving objects.  
(Also see [YouTube Guidelines, p. 52](#))

**IN THESE CASES, THE EDITOR FOR NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES  
AND/OR VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT WILL DETERMINE WHETHER TO POST  
SUCH IMAGES OR AUDIO, AND WILL ISSUE A HOUSE-WIDE NOTE DETAILING  
MANDATORY LANGUAGE TO ADVISE OUR AUDIENCE OF THE CONTENT.**

The following sections explain these guidelines in greater detail.

### **COVERING WAR**

Given the many nationalities and ethnicities that VOA reaches via radio, TV and online, it's important to follow some basic guidelines in covering and reporting conflicts.

#### **LOADED WORDS**

VOA should never use “we,” “us,” “our” or “they,” “them” and “their” in reporting about any side in a conflict. VOA practice is to name the country, as in “U.S. troops” or “Pakistani troops.”

No side in a conflict should be referred to as “the enemy,” or any territory as “enemy territory” in copy or in graphics. The only exception is if you are directly quoting someone making those references.

Referring to attacks as “punishing,” “brutal” or “successful” can imply that VOA is taking sides. Again, the only exception would be if you’re directly quoting someone making those claims.

#### **REPORTING COMBAT ACTIVITY**

As a rule, VOA should not report that warplanes or missiles are approaching a target. When an attack is underway, VOA will report it:

- If we’re able to independently confirm that bombs/missiles have hit the ground; or
- If the country being attacked confirms it’s being attacked; or
- If an official of an attacking country directly tells VOA that an attack is happening; or
- If VOA observes the attack first-hand

In all of the above cases, attribution **MUST** be as clear and as specific as possible.

[\*\(Also see Attribution, p. 29\)\*](#)

When information originates only from state-owned media, we should make that clear to audiences the entire time the information is used.

[\*\(Also see Using Content From State-Run Media, p. 74\)\*](#)

If VOA’s reporting is being censored or shut down and/or VOA’s movements are being restricted, that should also be reported.

### **COVERING TERRORISM**

Generally, terrorism is defined as “the use of violence and threats to intimidate or coerce, especially for political purposes.” Terrorists use violence against (often innocent) individuals to advance their political or ideological agenda. “Terrorism” and “terrorist” carry a lot of weight, and they should be used with extreme care. It is up to editors to determine if they are most appropriate terms to use.

VOA will report the actions of terrorists (bombings, shootings, hostage takings) fully, accurately and without taking sides, as we would cover any other news story. Wherever possible, we should also provide appropriate coverage of the victims, their injuries and their families.

We will provide our audiences with informative analyses of terrorist organizations, their ideology and history, but at the same time VOA must never suggest that reporting the context in which terrorism takes place justifies terrorism in any way.

### **VIDEO & AUDIO OF TERRORISTS, HOSTAGES OR PRISONERS**

Statements from, interviews with, or video of terrorists, hostages or prisoners of war should be judged on their journalistic merits before making a decision on usage.

Some guidelines for making those decisions:

➤ **TERRORISTS**

- Although we will report on the actions of terrorists, **VOA SHOULD NOT BE USED AS A PLATFORM TO SPREAD THEIR MESSAGES.**
- This means that in almost all cases, VOA will not air a terrorist message in its entirety. Senior VOA managers will decide what portions, if any, of the message will be cleared for broadcast and websites based upon its news value.

➤ **HOSTAGES/PRISONERS**

- Pay close attention to whether a hostage or prisoner appears to have been mistreated, is bound in handcuffs or shackles, or has a hood on his/her head.
- In the case of a prisoner's statement, VOA will take special measures to ensure that the individual POW identities are not revealed (i.e. facial blurring, voice alteration, use of pseudonym or nom du guerre).
- Senior VOA managers will decide whether to show video of this nature.

➤ **FULL DISCLOSURE**

- When applicable, all TV and radio scripts and web copy **MUST** state that VOA has not been able to independently verify the source of the video or audio. Should VOA receive the material directly from a group, army or government, that should be noted in the script and web copy as well.

➤ **LEGAL ISSUES**

- From the Office of General Counsel: The Geneva Convention relative to Treatment of Prisoners of War requires POWs to "at all times be protected, particularly against acts of violence or intimidation and against insults and public curiosity." Although the Convention does not define what "public curiosity" means, the U.S. is a party to the Convention and it generally applies it at all times to the maximum extent practicable.

**PLEASE REMEMBER THAT THESE ARE BASIC GUIDELINES.  
EACH INSTANCE IS UNIQUE, AND A DECISION IN ONE SITUATION WILL NOT  
NECESSARILY BE THE PROPER ACTION FOR THE NEXT SITUATION.  
ALWAYS CONSULT WITH VOA SENIOR MANAGERS BEFORE MAKING ANY  
DECISIONS TO AIR OR PUBLISH MATERIAL OF THIS NATURE.**



### **COVERING CRIMINAL ACTIVITY**

VOA staff **must not** interfere in any way with ongoing law enforcement activities. If some orders seem designed to manage or deny news coverage, VOA reporters, producers and photographers at the scene should protest and notify senior management and the Office of General Counsel as quickly as possible. If necessary, the agency will take appropriate legal action to protect access to the news.

There may be occasions where VOA staff has the opportunity to accompany law enforcement on arrests or investigations. These situations can present sensitive legal questions, including trespass and invasion of privacy.

**THESE ACTIVITIES SHOULD ONLY BE UNDERTAKEN WITH APPROVAL IN ADVANCE FROM YOUR SUPERVISOR, VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT AND THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL.**

It's important to understand that even though law enforcement may go onto private property, it **DOES NOT** mean that journalists are exempt from trespassing.

[\*\(Also see Filming In Public vs. Private Places, p. 94\)\*](#)

Keep in mind that cameras, microphones and lights can cause relatively passive bystanders to act and/or react for the cameras. All VOA staff should use their own best judgment and discretion in these situations; where possible, you should avoid any action that could possibly influence the event.

At the same time, VOA staff covering conflicts, protests or demonstrations should not take one side or another.

[\*\(Also see Fairness, Objectivity and Balance, p. 7\)\*](#)

Neither the police nor demonstration leaders should be a reporter's only sources for accurate reporting of causes, issues or casualties.

### **HOSTAGE/BARRICADE SITUATIONS**

Coverage of these situations, whether in the U.S. or overseas, presents difficult challenges and usually requires special care. No single statement or guideline can begin to cover every situation that we may report on. The following are intended to guide you in exercising your best judgment.

- The event should be characterized as accurately as possible. Before labeling an event a "riot" or "terrorism," or referring to someone as a "terrorist," you should discuss it with your senior editors and managers, and if necessary, with News Center managers or the Editor for News Standards and Best Practices.
- Keep in mind the possibility that a hostage taker may be able to see, hear, or try to manipulate VOA's coverage. Consider whether describing or showing the actions or movements of law enforcement officers could tip off the hostage taker or barricaded person.

[\*Return to Table of Contents\*](#)

- **DO NOT** put yourself in a position where you could be playing a role in the incident. VOA staff should **NEVER** attempt to contact a hostage or hostage taker. This could endanger a hostage and interfere with rescue efforts. It could also possibly subject you to criminal liability. You should not attempt to make or receive telephone calls from a hostage or barricade situation or from nearby homes or businesses.
- When reporting on these situations, avoid speculation about the hostage taker, his or her motives, demands, or state of mind. If a guest speculates about these issues, the host should point out that VOA has not verified what the guest has just said, and move the conversation away from such speculation.

### **NAMING PEOPLE INVOLVED IN CRIMES**

Be precise with the language used in reporting about crime or demonstrations.

#### **VICTIMS**

VOA should not name rape victims or other victims of sexual assaults or molestations. These crimes carry a stigma for the victims, and victims should be allowed to decide whether they want to be identified. Be cautious in providing descriptive details so that the person is not inadvertently identified.

There are special difficulties in identifying minors (under 18 years of age) who have been kidnapped or are alleged victims of sexual crimes. In the case of a kidnapping, news outlets may identify minors to help them be found. However, if we learn that a kidnapped minor has been sexually assaulted, the responsible action is to stop both naming the individual and showing his/her picture.

#### **EXCEPTIONS TO THE ABOVE MUST BE APPROVED IN ADVANCE BY A SUPERVISOR AND THE EDITOR FOR NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES**

#### **SUSPECTS**

VOA does not identify suspects of criminal investigations who have not been charged or arrested. This has become more difficult in the U.S. in recent years, when law enforcement officials refer to someone as “a person of interest.” This is not a legal term, and VOA should not use it because it can place a person under increasing suspicion and may result in unintended consequences for the individual.

The essential source for identifying the status of a person or group charged or arrested is law enforcement or the court system, **NOT** an unidentified “informed individual.” When someone has been charged with a crime, use caution in choosing language so as not to imply guilt or innocence. Similarly, if someone originally identified as a suspect is not charged with a crime, we must make that known as soon as possible in a follow-up story.

### **NAMING OR IDENTIFYING MINORS INVOLVED IN CRIMINAL ACTIVITY**

In addition to the guidance above regarding minors who are victims, VOA should not name, show video or play audio of a minor who is a suspect in a crime, or is arrested and charged with a crime. Exceptions may be made if a minor is charged as an adult, but in those cases we should wait until the accused has been formally charged, not just arrested.

There may be other exceptions, such as if a minor is charged with murder or another heinous crime. In some cases, local media may have already widely reported the minor's identity.

### **BEFORE DECIDING TO IDENTIFY A MINOR, PLEASE CONSULT A SUPERVISOR AND THE EDITOR FOR NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES**

## **INTERVIEWING & VIDEOTAPING MINORS**

Interviewing minors, whether for audio or video, can present special issues, particularly where wrongdoing, criminal activity, private, potentially embarrassing or other sensitive situations are involved. In these situations you **MUST** obtain permission from a parent or adult guardian. Permission should be in writing, where possible. [You can find the release form on Sharepoint.](#)

If that isn't possible, recording audio or video of the parent/guardian giving consent is acceptable.

Generally, minors can be interviewed and recorded, without permission, on non-controversial subjects such as reaction to a movie, talking about a favorite food, going back to school on the first day of the school year.

When recording audio or shooting video at a school in the U.S., ask whether a school has sent out what are known as "negative releases" to parents. These are notifications that a media crew will be visiting a school, asking parents to return the notice only if they **DO NOT** want their child to participate in interviews or tapings. In this situation you may not need additional permission.

In a breaking news situation, if the minor is out of harm's way, it may be permissible – without parental approval -- to interview the minor if he/she is a witness or has information about the event. However, keep in mind that the minor must be freely willing to talk, and should not be asked private, personal or other potentially embarrassing questions and should not be asked to name suspects.

In all cases, ABC NewsOne, AFP, APTN and Reuters video should be carefully screened to follow the same guidelines.

### **COVERING & REPORTING SUICIDES**

Deciding whether to report the name of a suicide victim is a delicate and difficult matter. Did the victim commit suicide publicly in order to achieve notoriety? Will reporting the person's name encourage others who might be contemplating suicide and looking for recognition? Will reporting the victim's name bring unwanted attention to family or friends? Keep in mind that by most accounts, people who commit suicide are in a disturbed or distressed mental state. Consequently, there are no clear or easy answers to these questions.

If the person is **NOT** a public figure, there should be no overwhelming editorial reason to report the name. Ask the question: Is the suicide tangential to the story, or does it have a larger impact on the story or participants in the story?

#### **BEFORE REPORTING THE NAME OF A SUICIDE VICTIM, PLEASE CONSULT A SUPERVISOR OR THE EDITOR FOR NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES**

There may be a situation when a VOA staffer in the field is in a position to intervene in a situation where injury or the loss of life is a very real outcome. When a person decides to take his or her own life as a protest, there is no expectation that a journalist will intervene, nor is there a VOA policy on whether you should or should not intervene. It is up to the individual on the scene to use his or her own best judgment.

[\*\(Also see Sensitive & Graphic Material, p. 18\)\*](#)

### **BREAKING NEWS**

Although breaking news situations don't often present themselves in VOA's daily coverage, there are certain key points to follow when putting that type of information on the air or online.

Producers should use caution before airing live and/or unedited material which may be excessively graphic in visuals or language. Ask the question: Does the news value of the material warrant airing it without reviewing it first?

#### **CONSULT WITH YOUR SUPERVISOR AND THE EDITOR FOR NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES IF POTENTIALLY GRAPHIC MATERIAL IS GOING TO BE AIRED OR POSTED ONLINE BEFORE BEING VIEWED OR WITHOUT A DETAILED DESCRIPTION.**

When airing or posting such material, alert your listeners, viewers and readers as to the nature of the material.

[\*\(Also see Sensitive & Graphic Material, p. 18\)\*](#)

### **REPORTING CROWD ESTIMATES**

When covering rallies or demonstrations, it's important to attribute estimates of size. Organizing groups or official agencies which provide them may have reasons to inflate or downplay the numbers. Where non-official estimates such as "hundreds of thousands" appear to be guesses or inflated, a correspondent, producer or photographer on the scene may be able to provide a better perspective on crowd size. As an example, they can say the crowd is standing shoulder to shoulder for four blocks. If a correspondent, producer or photographer is not covering the event, we should look to the wire services for their reporting on the size of the crowd.

[\*\(Also see Attribution, p. 29\)\*](#)

### **STAGING & RE-CREATIONS**

➤ **VOA DOES NOT DO "AS LIVE," "LOOK LIVE" OR "LIVE TO TAPE" VIDEO REPORTS.**

"As Live" pieces are video playbacks of a correspondent reporting from a location, but are manipulated in the control room to give the illusion that this is a true live shot by placing the video in a double box and having the anchor appear to interact with the correspondent. Presenting a correspondent in this manner goes against the VOA Charter's principle of being a reliable and credible source of news, and should be discouraged at all times.

➤ **VOA REPORTS THE NEWS**

➤ **WE DO NOT CREATE OR MANIPULATE NEWS STORIES**

➤ **STAGING A NEWS EVENT OR CONTROLLING HOW IT TURNS OUT -- WHETHER BY ENCOURAGEMENT, PROPS OR PAYMENT -- IS UNACCEPTABLE**

When shooting video with the subject of a story to explain something that happened, don't ask the person to do things they normally don't do. For instance: It's acceptable to shoot video of a family that goes to the cemetery once a week to place flowers on the grave of a family member, but you should explain in the track that this is something the family normally does. However, if you ask someone to go to the cemetery and lay flowers on the grave of a family member, you should explain that as well.

Keep in mind, though, that the more you direct people – having them do things specifically for the camera – the more time you'll have to spend explaining that to the audience.

### **USING VOA EMPLOYEES OR RELATIVES FOR STORIES**

Generally speaking, VOA employees should not be used in radio, TV or web pieces outside of their official capacity. In most cases it is also preferable not to use the relatives or friends of VOA employees. While they may be perfect subjects to help illustrate stories, there is always the possibility of the appearance of a conflict.

However exceptions can be granted; for instance, if a relative or friend is prominent or expert in his or her own right. When in doubt, consult with your supervisor or the Editor for News Standards & Best Practices.

[\*Return to Table of Contents\*](#)

### **WRITING**

Anyone writing for VOA on any platform – radio, TV or online – should be familiar with the VOA Stylebook. The Stylebook covers grammar, spelling, definitions and explanations of commonly used terms, as well as the proper use of American English.

**Some of the key points of the Stylebook as they relate to best practices are included in this Guide, but every VOA employee should read and become familiar with the Stylebook.**

[The Stylebook is maintained by the News Center and can be found on Sharepoint.](#)

VOA copy should be simple and straightforward. We are not writing treaties or scholarly reports. For example, use “stop the fighting” rather than “achieve the cessation of hostilities.” Most of our writing is for people whose first language is not English, so avoid excessively difficult words, and explain them when you must use them.

Avoid colloquialisms and jargon, which may be difficult to translate and are not easily understood by foreign audiences. When used, as in a direct quotation, provide an alternative in parentheses to assist language services.

- The convicted hacker said writing the virus was “a piece of cake” (very easy).
- He spoke “off the cuff” (without notes).
- The House Minority Whip (the number two Republican/Democrat in the House).
- He made a killing (made a lot of money) in the stock market.

Words such as “biggest,” “highest,” “first” and others like them should be used judiciously because they often turn out to be incorrect. Ask yourself whether the fact that something is first is truly significant. Avoid superlatives such as “most famous” or “greatest,” which often represent value judgments. Descriptive and colorful words are encouraged, but use caution. Something that is “unique” is the only one of its kind. A thing or event cannot be “somewhat unique.” Other words describing extreme situations should also raise flags for writers and editors, and should be scrutinized to ensure they are justified. “Trouble” in a city does not necessarily mean it is in “chaos.” “Asking urgently” is not necessarily “pleading” or “begging.” If a situation is “desperate” today, what will it be tomorrow when things get worse?

It is acceptable, however, to use words like these when you’re quoting someone directly.

### **SOURCING**

Whenever possible, a source should be “on the record” – someone who is willing to be named and quoted. However, journalists routinely rely on sources who won’t go on the record. If a source refuses to be named, the information he or she provides should be characterized in other ways, as clearly as possible.

Sourcing is often a matter of negotiation, but **a request for confidentiality should come from the source and not suggested by the correspondent or producer.** However, your editor has a right to know the name of the source if he or she asks for it.

### **AN UNNAMED SOURCE MUST HAVE VERIFIABLE AND FIRST-HAND KNOWLEDGE OF THE STORY**

Before using an unnamed source, you must be certain that there is no other way to get the information on the record. You must be convinced the source knows what he/she is talking about, and you should consider asking for actual evidence to bolster the source’s claim or comment. When discussing third-party information with a source, be sure that the source is actually confirming the information from his or her knowledge of a particular situation, and is not simply hearing it from you and agreeing that it is plausible.

Avoid other extremely vague terms such as “unnamed sources” or “unidentified sources,” “informed sources,” “authoritative sources,” “well-placed sources,” “reliable sources.”

You should be willing to tell our audience why the source cannot be named. For example, you can say, “The source’s name is being withheld to protect against possible reprisals.”

A story that relies on the use of confidential/unnamed sources should be of public concern. We are not interested in “gotcha” stories just for the sake of the “gotcha,” nor are we interested in scoring scoops just for the sake of being first (and possibly being wrong).

There will be times when multiple news outlets report information from unnamed sources during a breaking story, as with the Boston Marathon bombing in April 2013.

As happened with Boston – when multiple news organizations said there was an arrest and VOA reported that information – we will later find out that that information is incorrect. In those cases VOA will issue a correction as quickly as possible across all platforms.

[\(Also see Corrections, p. 88\)](#)

The following characterizations may be helpful in establishing with a source what level of confidentiality you have agreed to. In all cases it is always best to clarify with the source how the information may be used:

- **ON THE RECORD**  
All information is suitable for publication and attributable to the source by name and title.
  - **OFF THE RECORD**  
Material that is “off the record” is not directly usable, but the information can be used to focus the direction of a story. Off-the-record material may also be a valid second source to confirm information obtained elsewhere.
  - **ON BACKGROUND**  
“On background” is generally understood to mean the information given can be used, provided it is attributed to a generic source. “A senior administration official called the election flawed.”
  - **DEEP BACKGROUND**  
Information obtained on “deep background” is normally provided with the understanding that it will not be sourced directly in any way. Acceptable wording might be, “It was learned that the delegates agreed to a second meeting on Tuesday.”
- 
- **PUBLICATION OF A SIGNIFICANT STORY BASED UPON A SINGLE SOURCE WHO WILL NOT ALLOW HIS OR HER NAME TO BE USED MUST ALWAYS BE APPROVED IN ADVANCE BY VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT.**
  - **UPON REQUEST, DISCLOSURE OF A SOURCE’S IDENTITY TO VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT AND TO THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL MAY BE REQUIRED TO CLEAR THE SOURCED INFORMATION FOR AIR.**
  - **WHEN DISCUSSING CONFIDENTIALITY WITH A SOURCE, IT MAY BE ADVISABLE TO EXPLAIN THE POSSIBILITY OF THIS LIMITED DISCLOSURE WITHIN VOA. REFUSAL TO DISCLOSE THE SOURCE MAY RESULT IN THE SOURCE’S INFORMATION NOT BEING USED BY VOA.**

[\*\(Also see Reporter’s Privilege & Confidential Sources, p. 96\)\*](#)

## **RUMORS & SPECULATION**

VOA avoids the use of rumors and speculation in news items. However, this should be carefully evaluated on a case-by-case basis in instances where a rumor or speculation takes on a life of its own. In general, reporters, producers and editors should seek out responsible officials to respond to the rumors or speculation and use those comments as our entry to the story. Without an official comment, VOA should avoid being first to publicize a rumor or speculation.

[\*Return to Table of Contents\*](#)



### ATTRIBUTION

#### WE GIVE CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE

Proper attribution is a fundamental element of good journalism.

Aside from the material provided by our own correspondents and stringers, VOA receives news from a number of different outlets: ABC News, Agence France Presse, the Associated Press and Reuters, as well as from newspapers, television news networks and official news agencies of other nations.

Story information can also come from press releases put out by corporations or private groups such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs). When using press releases, they must be identified as such, and if applicable, they should be counter-balanced.

When VOA quotes exclusive information from news stories or uses quotes from editorials, opinion pieces or social media posts, it is mandatory to credit the media organization, NGO or other outlet. Not including that information can open VOA to possible claims of plagiarism and/or copyright infringement.

*(Also see [Crediting the News Agencies, p. 33](#) and [Plagiarism, p. 34](#))*

One method of providing attribution is in the use of block quotes. In the example below, *VOX.com* provided a hyperlink to a *Washington Post* story about “Pizzagate,” but also included part of the Post’s story in a “block,” shown by the solid bar on the left. This is acceptable for use on voanews.com websites, but it should not be used repeatedly.

The conspiracy theory, known as “Pizzagate,” apparently connected Hillary Clinton’s presidential campaign to a nonexistent child sex ring at the Comet Ping Pong pizzeria, **Faiz Siddiqui and Susan Svrluga reported for the Washington Post:**

The restaurant’s owner and employees were threatened on social media in the days before the election after fake news stories circulated claiming that then-Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton and her campaign chief were running a child sex ring from the restaurant’s backrooms. Even Michael Flynn, a retired general whom President-elect Trump has tapped to advise him on national security, shared stories about another anti-Clinton conspiracy theory involving pedophilia. None of them were true. But the fake stories and threats persisted, some even aimed at children of Comet Ping Pong employees and patrons. The restaurant’s owner was forced to contact the FBI, local police, Facebook and other social-media platforms in an effort to remove the articles.

## BEST PRACTICES GUIDE

Information that comes directly from the U.S. government – the White House, State Department, Pentagon or Congress – is considered valid on its own, **but must still be attributed**.

On a breaking news story, AP or Reuters may quote a single source such as a police official or a government spokesperson. In those cases our copy will attribute the information to the wire service and say that VOA is working to confirm the information.

Information in News Center stories does not require additional sourcing.

There are times when the attribution can be left unstated because the source of a particular statement is both obvious and authoritative.

**An example of over-attribution:**

*The U.S. space agency NASA says astronauts aboard the space shuttle “Discovery” performed a second spacewalk today.*

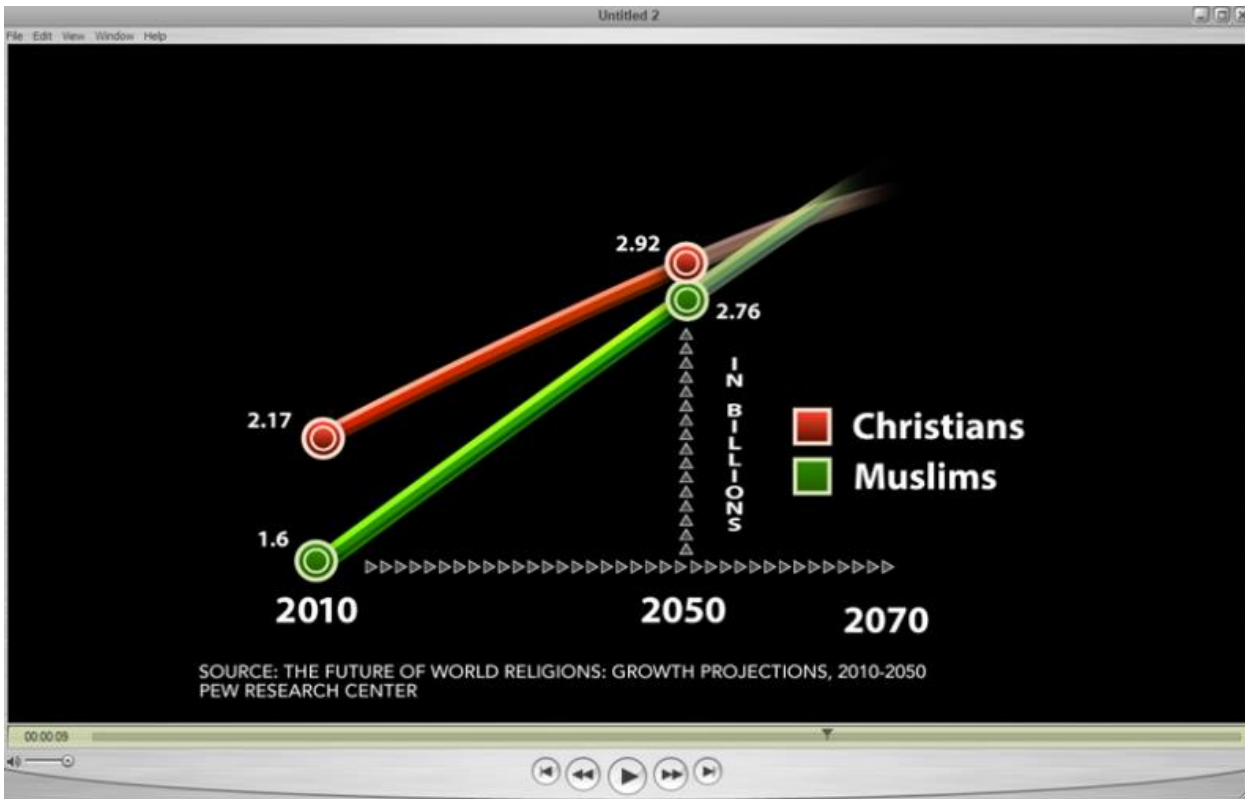
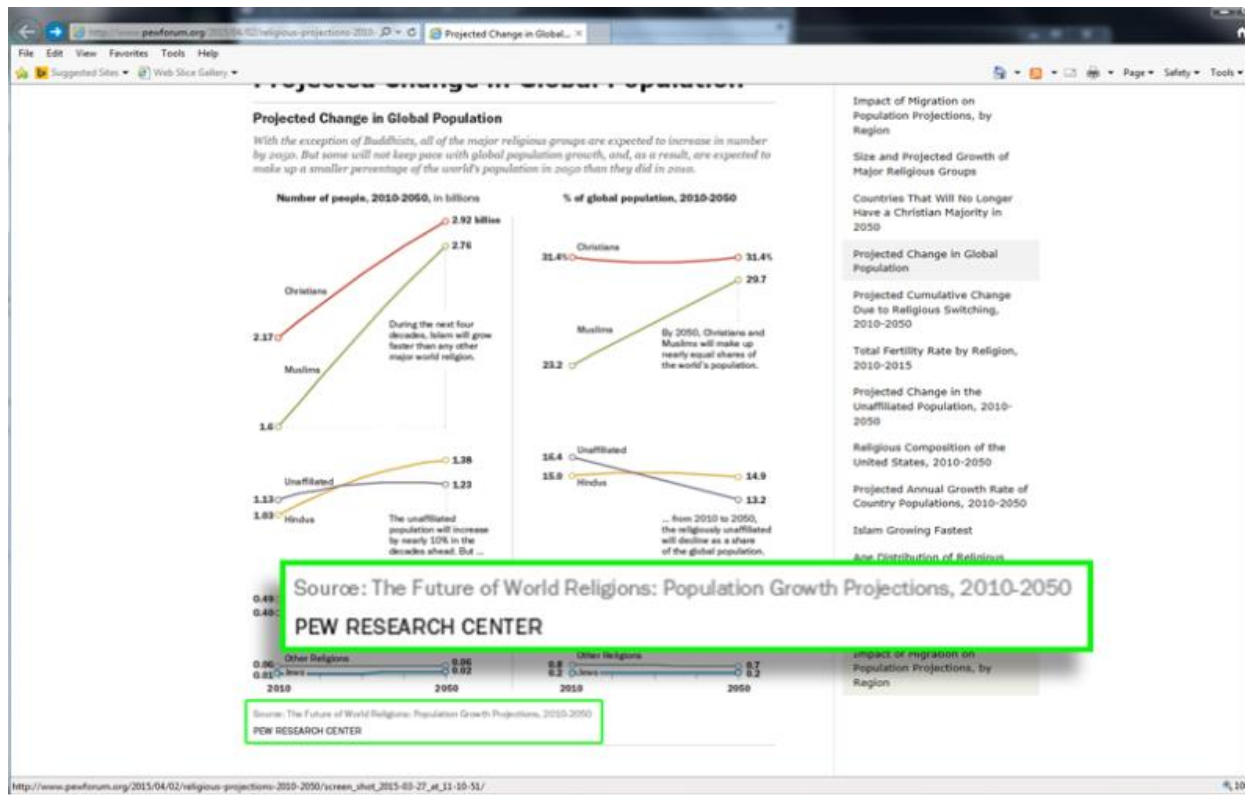
**It’s better, and easier, to write:**

*Astronauts aboard the U.S space shuttle “Discovery” performed a second spacewalk today.*

In the course of our reporting, we often will cite information or statistics that come from think tanks, NGOs, or another government agency. Aside from crediting those groups in scripts, they must also be credited in full-screen graphics, whether as a stand-alone page or within a video package.

### FULL SCREEN GRAPHICS

- While styles and looks may differ for various Language Services, the basic procedure should be the same.
- Any time a graphic is based on information or statistics that are not originally generated by VOA, a small info source attribution needs to be included on the graphic. See the photos on the next page, identifying the correct attribution.



[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### **WIKIPEDIA**

There have been a number of incidents where material posted on Wikipedia has not been verified or has proven to be incorrect. Any information found on Wikipedia should be confirmed with other, more reliable sources, or with the News Center.

### **WIKIPEDIA SHOULD NOT BE CONSIDERED OR USED AS A PRIMARY SOURCE OF INFORMATION**

### **OPENSOURCE**

The U.S. government-funded news portal [OpenSource](#) is an important tool for finding source information. VOA uses the text material in OpenSource as a second source of news and information.

OpenSource can be found in DaletPlus/Webspace at **WIRES→OPENSOURCE→ALL WIRES**

However, **VOA DOES NOT HAVE ACCESS** to the audio and video which OpenSource posts from news organizations -- BBC, Sky News and Al Jazeera English, for example -- with whom VOA **does not have contractual agreements.**

### **CREDITING THE NEWS AGENCIES**

To make sure that our best practices are in sync with our news agency contracts, below is guidance on how VOA should credit the agencies across all platforms. Note that each platform has different guidelines, and everyone should be aware of the differences, especially if you're producing a story that will appear on all platforms.

#### **RADIO**

- AFP, AP and Reuters have all confirmed that VOA radio broadcasts can use their news wire copy verbatim without verbal attribution or credit. All three agencies consider this to be “standard use” of their material.
- However, if one wire service has an exclusive interview or information that other news organizations do not have, we should give that wire service verbal credit in the broadcast.  
[\*\(Also see Audio Usage Rights, p. 62\)\*](#)

#### **TELEVISION**

- Although the individual news agency IDs and the Dot are burned into agency video as they are being recorded in DaletPlus, it is preferable that all video pieces -- whether produced by the News Center or by a Language Service -- should note in the DaletPlus Asset Management Form the time segments where ABC NewsOne, AFP, AP and Reuters video are used. That is our way of tracking/crediting them for the usage, and for the Senior Archivists to know whether the material is worth keeping.  
[\*\(Also see Video Usage Rights, p. 64, Documenting Source Video in DaletPlus, p. 80 & News Agency IDs and the Dot, p. 81\)\*](#)
- Verbal credit to the news agencies is not required for video reports, **unless the video is exclusive and is noted as such in the agency's script.**

#### **WEB**

It has long been the practice in print to credit the wire services when using their stories in whole or in part. All VOA websites and social media pages should follow this practice.

- [How the credit looks when using a single news agency's wire story in full, with the agency's name at the top.](#)
- [How the credit looks when using more than one agency's wire story, with the agencies' names at the bottom.](#)
- [Agency photos used on VOA websites and on agency-maintained social media pages must include a captioned credit to the agency.](#)

### **PLAGIARISM**

**PLAGIARISM IS ILLEGAL AND UNETHICAL AND STRIKES AT THE VERY HEART OF OUR JOURNALISTIC MISSION.**

**IT CAN COST THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE AGENCY ITS CREDIBILITY AND REPUTATION, AND WILL NOT BE TOLERATED.**

**WE DO NOT PRESENT OTHERS' WORK AS OUR OWN**

**ALLEGATIONS OF PLAGIARISM WILL BE FULLY INVESTIGATED, AND STAFFERS WILL BE NOTIFIED OF ANY SUCH ALLEGATIONS.**

**PLAGIARISM MAY RESULT IN DISCIPLINARY ACTION, UP TO AND INCLUDING REMOVAL FROM FEDERAL SERVICE**

**NOTE:** The Poynter Institute offers this excellent guidance for identifying plagiarism:  
<https://www.poynter.org/news/it-original-editors-guide-identifying-plagiarism>

### **INTERVIEWS**

Even in the era of selfies, photo-bombing and user-generated content, most people are not comfortable being interviewed and consider recording equipment to be invasive, especially when you're dealing with sensitive subjects. One way to reduce that unease or tension is to first talk to an interview subject **WITHOUT** the equipment. Put the person at ease; make him or her feel comfortable talking to you before proceeding with the actual interview.

When setting up an interview, the subject may ask what questions will be asked or how the interview will be treated when produced. It's OK to outline in advance general points of interest and the general subject areas you intend to cover.

### **YOU SHOULD NOT**

- **PROVIDE ACTUAL QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED**
- **PROMISE YOU WILL NOT ASK QUESTIONS OUTSIDE THE AREAS YOU HAVE OUTLINED**
- **PROMISE HOW SUBJECTS WILL BE TREATED ON THE AIR**

Any agreement that certain questions will or will not be asked would be an exception, to be decided on a case-by-case basis in consultation with your supervisor and/or VOA senior management as warranted. If an agreement is approved, the agreement should be mentioned in the introduction to the interview.

If an interviewee requires VOA to use a name or title we ordinarily would not use, that too should be mentioned in the introduction to the interview.

### **DO NOT PROMISE AN INTERVIEWEE THAT**

- **VOA WILL AIR THE ENTIRE INTERVIEW OR A PORTION OF IT IN A TV PROGRAM, OR AS PART OF A TV PACKAGE**
- **THAT HE OR SHE WILL BE ABLE TO FIND ALL OR PART OF THE INTERVIEW ON THE VOA WEBSITE**
- **THAT ANY PART OF THE INTERVIEW WILL BE INCLUDED IN A TV PROGRAM OR TV PACKAGE, OR WITH A WEB STORY OR BLOG**

*(Also see [Hosting a Guest on VOA Programs, p. 43](#))*

### **NEWSMAKER INTERVIEWS**

When VOA interviews a prominent newsmaker at length, the purpose is to find out what an individual, organization or group of lawmakers are thinking about a particular issue. This type of interview does not always require that the other side be presented within the interview format.

Instead, a video piece or a brief explainer can be used to set up the topic or topics being discussed, and that can be the means by which the other side's point of view is presented. Another possibility is reading copy following the interview stating the opposition's view.

Ultimately, it is advisable to seek out a corresponding interview at length with someone from the other side of the issue.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### RECORDING TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

- If you are planning to record a telephone interview, the reporter or producer **MUST** advise the interview subject that he or she is being recorded, and that their comments will be on the record. If the interview subject objects to being recorded, the reporter or producer should confirm that the interview can be used as off the record information.  
([Also see Sourcing, p. 27](#) and [Defamation/Privacy/False Light, p. 94](#))

### SHOOTING/EDITING TV INTERVIEWS

- When shooting a two-camera interview, it's acceptable for a reporter to register appropriate visual expressions, such as smiling at a joke. What is NOT acceptable is editing in a visual reaction that is out of sequence to the answer being given.
- Equally unacceptable is separating questions from answers. The 10<sup>th</sup> answer of an interview should not be edited as if it were the response to the 4<sup>th</sup> question, even if it seems to make the reporter's or producer's editorial point clearer.
- Interviews shot with one camera can present editing difficulties, so when possible, the camera should be set up to start the interview on a medium 2-shot. That will allow the cameraperson to push in on the interview subject, pan to the interviewer and pull back to the 2-shot as needed.
- If the above method isn't possible, then reverse questions (questions asked after the interview is done, with the camera reversed to tape the interviewer), while not ideal, are allowed. Reverse questions should be true to the original questions and if done, the interviewee or representative should be made aware and should be invited to be present.

In this situation, because the reverse shots are happening after the actual interview, the reporter or producer should avoid showing an expression (smile, frown, nod) that might be seen as agreement or disagreement with what the subject said during the interview.

## **PUBLIC FIGURES**

Questions and reporting about the private lives of public figures should be relevant to the story. For example, the questioning is appropriate when the reporting is intended to expose inconsistency, lying, hypocrisy and most certainly, illegal activity. In the case of candidates for public office, information about these actions often enables voters to judge the character of a candidate or elected official.

However, VOA's reporting **should not** be based on rumor, speculation or gossip. Reporting should rely on on the record statements and actions of public figures. Information from normally reliable sources not willing to be identified should be very closely examined. ([Also see Sourcing, p. 27](#) and [Rumors & Speculation, p. 28](#))

The passage of time is an important consideration in determining what is relevant, and may affect current relevance. When information is dated, evaluate it carefully. In the case of a political figure, it may be the importance of such information for the public to judge that person's qualifications and fitness to hold public office.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)



Each situation should be considered separately and there is no blanket rule prohibiting reporting private activities from many years ago.

For interviews, be very careful when using information from sources and/or sourced information from another news organization when asking a question to a guest about his/her private life.

[\(Also see Sourcing, p. 27 and Attribution, p. 29\)](#)

Open-ended questions based on little or no evidence are strongly discouraged. For example, the question “Have you ever taken a bribe,” should not be asked unless it’s based on our reporting, or if there is a compelling and journalistically justifiable reason to ask it.

**IF VOA STAFF ARE UNSURE OF THE APPROPRIATENESS OF THEIR QUESTIONING OR REPORTING REGARDING THE PRIVATE LIFE OF A PUBLIC FIGURE, THEY SHOULD CONSULT WITH THEIR SUPERVISOR AND WHEN APPROPRIATE WITH THE EDITOR FOR NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES AND THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL.**

### **ANONYMITY**

There may be reasons to agree to anonymity for an interview subject, whether for radio, TV or online. For example, we may not wish to jeopardize the subject’s safety or subject him or her or family members to harm or undue embarrassment. But there may be legal considerations as well in granting anonymity to interview subjects.

Always ask the interviewee about his or her reasons for requesting anonymity. Clarify and confirm the conditions agreed to in exchange for the information. Anonymity for interviewees can be defined by degree. In establishing the degree of anonymity, describe the process to be used (e.g. blurring of faces, digitizing the voice, videotaping in shadow) but do not guarantee a particular result.

- **THE FAILURE TO ADEQUATELY DISGUISE AN INTERVIEW SUBJECT OR A MISUNDERSTANDING OVER THE STEPS AGREED ON TO DISGUISE AN INTERVIEW SUBJECT CAN RESULT IN A LEGAL CLAIM AGAINST VOA.**
- **GENERALLY, WE WANT TO AVOID PROMISING ANONYMITY FOR PEOPLE TRYING TO EVADE LAW ENFORCEMENT.**
- **EXCEPTIONS SHOULD BE CLEARED WITH A SUPERVISOR, THE EDITOR FOR NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES AND/OR SENIOR MANAGEMENT AND THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL.**

[\(Also see Sourcing, p. 27\)](#)

### **“AMBUSH” INTERVIEWS**

So-called “ambush” interviews, where a person who has refused to be interviewed is approached without notice by a reporter or producer, are discouraged and should be avoided. An “ambush” is different than a “stakeout,” where cameras are set up in advance to get comments from individuals who are going to or leaving meetings and/or work.

**CONSULT WITH SUPERVISORS, THE EDITOR FOR NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES AND/OR SENIOR MANAGEMENT AND THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL WHEN CONSIDERING WHETHER TO DO AN AMBUSH INTERVIEW.**

### **ADVANCE SCRIPTS/SCREENING**

You should not show a script to a third party not affiliated with VOA or BBG in advance of the story’s broadcast or online publication. However, you can call an interviewee and review portions of a script in order to fact check. As part of the reporting process you may also show portions of other interviews or other footage prepared for the report to an interview subject to obtain their reaction or comment for use in the same report. You should videotape the individual watching the other interview or other footage whenever possible.

Advance screenings of VOA news stories are not permitted without the prior approval of senior management. An exception: press screenings for review purposes.

### **SUBJECT TAPING INTERVIEW**

On occasion, a subject may ask to do his or her own recording of an interview. That is permissible as long as the subject understands the taping is for personal use only, not for broadcast, publication or other distribution. As noted above, VOA will not provide an audio or video copy of the raw interview to an interview subject.

### **REQUESTS FOR UNAIED/UNPUBLISHED MATERIAL**

As a general policy, **VOA should not give third parties access to unaied or unpublished material** or discuss the existence of such materials. Refer those requests to senior management and the Office of General Counsel.

*(Also see [Usage Requests, p. 77](#))*

### **PAYMENT**

VOA does not pay people for interviews. However, it may be appropriate to pay certain travel-related expenses for an interviewee. Refer questions on this subject to VOA senior management and the Office of General Counsel.

### GUESTS

#### **NOTIFYING VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT OF HIGH-LEVEL GUESTS**

As a major international broadcaster, VOA often welcomes to the Cohen Building high-level foreign government officials and other important individuals, such as prominent dissidents and exiles. To better determine when additional protocols may be appropriate, VOA journalists who schedule these meetings or visits should immediately notify senior management through their chain of command. Division Directors will then notify the Programming Directorate using the email address [programming-directorate@voanews.com](mailto:programming-directorate@voanews.com) for coordination with the Office of the VOA Director. Decisions about any special actions that may be needed will be coordinated between the Office of the VOA Director and the CEO's Office. Notification at each stage should occur prior to the visit, with sufficient time for senior management to take any actions that may be necessary.

VOA journalists who schedule meetings at the Cohen Building with audience members, members of the diaspora, or lower-level government officials should also immediately notify their Division Director. That Division Director will then decide whether additional coordination within VOA and/or the CEO's Office is required.

#### **SECURITY PROCEDURES FOR GUESTS**

Security procedures for entry into the Cohen building are set by the Federal Protective Service (FPS), the agency that provides integrated security and law enforcement services to federally owned and leased facilities. FPS, not BBG Security, manages the contract for the building's Protective Security Officers (PSOs), thus they report to and are represented by the FPS Inspector.

As with other federal buildings, all visitors must show proper photo ID and go through security screening upon arrival.

**FOR PROGRAM GUESTS, THIS PROCESS CAN SEEM CUMBERSOME.  
CONSEQUENTLY, EMPLOYEES MUST EXPLAIN THE SECURITY PROCEDURES AND PHOTO ID  
REQUIREMENTS TO ALL PROGRAM GUESTS PRIOR TO THEIR ARRIVAL, AND ASK THAT THEY  
ANTICIPATE ABOUT 10 MINUTES FOR THE CHECK-IN PROCESS.**

Types of Accepted Identification:

1. U.S. Citizens: Valid U.S. Driver's License or U.S. Passport
2. Non-U.S. Citizens: Valid Passport/Visa

Please notify your guest/visitor that they will be required to process through security screening (walk-through magnetometer and x-ray machine for hand-carried items) prior to arrival.

If you are sponsoring an event, please provide BBG Security with a guest list that includes the date/time of their arrival, along with their full names and your contact information (Sponsor). Please remember that all visitors **MUST** be escorted while in the Cohen Building per FPS requirements. This list should be emailed to the central Security email at: [bbg-security@bbg.gov](mailto:bbg-security@bbg.gov).

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

In those rare cases when an important guest arrives without any ID, contact Security immediately so they can work with the FPS to request an exception to normal procedures and allow the guest entry into the building. Please understand that the final decision to waive normal security procedures for your guest rests with FPS, not BBG Security.

Exceptions to these procedures can be made in some cases for VIPs. VIPs are granted access without having to sign in or go through the metal detectors. Under some circumstances, they also enter the building through a different entry point than the C Street visitors' entrance.

The following are automatically considered VIPs:

1. The President and his cabinet, including sitting Ambassadors
2. Sitting and former members of Congress
3. Anyone who has a federal law enforcement detail, such as foreign dignitaries

For these and other special guests, employees can request VIP status from BBG Security managers or from the IBB Chief of Staff.

Please contact Security with any additional questions at 202-382-7777.

### **GUEST BOOKING PROCEDURES**

- ALL REQUESTS FOR THE PRESIDENT, VICE PRESIDENT, FIRST LADY AND THE VP'S SPOUSE WILL BE MADE THROUGH THE VOA DIRECTOR'S OFFICE. **THERE ARE ABSOLUTELY NO EXCEPTIONS**
- REQUESTS FOR OTHER WHITE HOUSE OFFICIALS, CABINET SECRETARIES, CONGRESSIONAL LEADERSHIP AND THE KEY BEATS SHOULD COME FROM THE NEWS CENTER CORRESPONDENTS AT THOSE BEATS.

### **THE CORRESPONDENTS ARE THE FACE OF VOA FOR THOSE BEATS AND WE CANNOT UNDERCUT THEIR POSITIONS**

EDUCATION	Kathleen Struck
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES	Katherine Gypson
IMMIGRATION	Molly McKitterick, Aline Barros, Victoria Macchi, Ramon Taylor
INTELLIGENCE/NATIONAL SECURITY	Jeff Seldin
JUSTICE	Masood Farivar
MEDICAL	Carol Pearson
PENTAGON	Carla Babb
POLITICS	Jim Malone
SENATE	Michael Bowman
STATE DEPARTMENT	Cindy Saine & Nike Ching
UNITED NATIONS	Margaret Besheer
WHITE HOUSE	Steve Herman & Patsy Widakuswara

These requests **SHOULD BE SENT FIRST** to the appropriate beat correspondent. When an interview has been confirmed, an e-mail should be sent to the Guest Booking group: [guest-booking@voanews.com](mailto:guest-booking@voanews.com)

- When we get an interview with the President, Vice President, First Lady, VP's spouse, key Cabinet secretaries or Congressional leadership, VOA Public Relations should be notified immediately: [PublicRelations@voanews.com](mailto:PublicRelations@voanews.com)

### **ADDITIONALLY: LARRY LONDON'S BEAT IS MUSIC AND PENELOPE POULOU'S BEAT IS FILM.**

If a Language Service is thinking of interviewing a major musician or musical group, or thinking of getting an interview with a film personality who is on a junket or making an appearance in a bureau city, **an advisory e-mail should go out first to Larry or Penelope accordingly, and to Guest Booking.**

By the same token, when Larry, Penelope or anyone else has a major music interview or movie-related interview scheduled, they should advise the Guest Booking e-mail group.

When there are major awards shows – usually in Los Angeles -- Mike O’Sullivan in the L.A. bureau should be brought into the conversation. As with State, Pentagon or elsewhere – it does not make VOA look good if a studio or a musician’s or filmmaker’s press person is hearing from multiple VOA individuals.

### **LANGUAGE SERVICES & NEWS CENTER GUIDELINES**

Language Services and the News Center should use the “Guest Booking” email group for notifications about the following types of information:

- Guests they intend to book, whether newsmakers or experts.
  - Should a Language Service seek an expert on a topic but has not yet identified the expert, it would still be helpful for Guest Booking to be notified of the Service’s interest in an expert on a specific topic.
  - Guests that have already been booked.
  - Unplanned interviews that were conducted in the course of newsgathering.
- Whenever possible, Language Services and the News Center should include whatever germane information is available in their guest booking notifications: details such as date and time if known, location of the interview, platform and device (Skype, smartphone, ENG camera, audio only), language, where content may be accessed, gist of interview, full log or transcript about what was said, if available.
- **The News Center will collect this information** and provide via email a several-times **daily calendar** that will track all known guest activity at-a-glance for all to see.
- This calendar will permanently reside in the shared drive for the whole how to easily access, thus serving as a back-up for the email distribution and providing an easily accessible archive of all guest activity.

When and where possible, stringers for the News Center and the Language Services should keep the field correspondents and/or Washington advised of potential interviews of interest.

**IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT ALL STAFF RESPONSIBLE FOR BOOKING GUESTS/INTERVIEWS SEND A NOTE TO GUEST BOOKING AND TO THE APPROPRIATE INDIVIDUALS BEFORE MAKING A REQUEST.**

### **HOSTING A GUEST ON VOA PROGRAMS**

- **IT IS MANDATORY** that a discussion takes place at the Language Service and/or Division level when a service is considering a live interview with a potentially controversial or hostile guest, or about particularly sensitive issues.
- The discussion should focus on determining the format for that interview, and the final decision about the format will be determined at the Division level.
- An interview with a controversial guest or about sensitive issues **SHOULD NOT BE PROMOTED** until the final decision on the interview format has been made.
- It may be decided that the best approach will be to **RECORD** the interview so that it can be edited for time and presented to the audience in the best editorial and production formats possible.
- **All potential guests must be pre-interviewed** to get a sense of what to expect during the actual interview. You can discuss general topics, but do not give the guest the actual interview questions in advance. That pre-interview should be available for review by producers, anchors and Language Service or Division management.
- When you know you're going to have a controversial or potentially hostile live guest, prepare a game plan with the show staff and the show Director about what to do if the interview goes downhill, so that everyone in the control room and on the set know in advance what to do, including implementation of a back-up plan.
- It is the responsibility of a program's host to do his/her homework about the guest and the subject matter. If a guest starts making unsubstantiated accusations or questionable statements, it is the responsibility of the anchor to challenge the guest about those accusations/statements, whether asking for clarification about the source of the accusations/statements or refuting those accusations/statements with facts.
- If a guest uses language that is unsuitable for air (cursing, insulting, racial or homosexual slurs, for example) it is the responsibility of the host to immediately cut the conversation off and apologize to the audience for the offensive language. It is the responsibility of the Executive Producer to alert the Director about what has happened so the Director can make sure the guest's microphone is silenced. At that point the EP must communicate to the Director and the Line Producer to implement a back-up plan.
- The Executive Producer is responsible for a written report of the incident. Detail the unacceptable or irresponsible language used by the guest, how the anchor handled the situation and what steps were taken to end the interview and go to alternate programming. The report is to be sent to the Service Chief, Division Director, Associate Director for Language Programming and the Associate Director for Operations.

- Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the Executive Producer to ensure that the program is clean and airs correctly. The anchor can only do so much. The EP has his/her finger on the button, so to speak, with the authority and ability to tell the Director and the Line Producer to go to something else. That's why you need to have a backup plan.

**GOING TO BLACK DURING A LIVE INTERVIEW IS A  
LAST DITCH OPTION, WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS.  
IT IS NEVER THE FIRST OPTION.**

[\*\(Also see Interviews, p. 35\)\*](#)



### **DIGITAL MEDIA**

#### **SOCIAL MEDIA**

VOA journalists are encouraged to participate in social media. By joining networks that are popular in your target regions you can forge closer relationships with your audience, discover new angles and stories and experiment with different ways of covering the news.

Reporters are encouraged to break news on social media platforms that are most popular in their region, but certain editorial priorities should be followed.

**REMEMBER THAT ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND OTHER PUBLIC SPACES,  
YOU ARE A JOURNALIST.**

**IT IS CRITICAL THAT YOU ARE FAIR, IMPARTIAL AND OBJECTIVE  
IN ALL PUBLIC SPACES.**

#### **PROTECTING YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL REPUTATION IN SOCIAL MEDIA**

Using social media can have as many pitfalls as pluses. If your account is hacked, or you find that an imposter account is impersonating you, your reputation and that of VOA can be damaged.

Your first line of defense – maintaining good online security practices.

- Monitor your digital identity by periodically conducting an online search for your name using several of the leading search engines, e.g. Google, Yahoo, Bing, etc. Examine the results on the first two or three pages to make sure there are no unfamiliar accounts.
- Use strong passwords (combining uppercase letters, lowercase letters, numbers, and special characters)
- Change passwords frequently
- Do not use the same passwords for multiple accounts
- Keep your passwords safe
- Make sure your email address is secure
- Be sure who you are actually connecting with or following; connect with Verified public profiles
- Get Verified for your own social media accounts used for VOA work

**Twitter:** Log in, then go to [verification.twitter.com](https://verification.twitter.com)

**Facebook:** Log in, then go to [this page](#) in Facebook's [Help Center](#)

The second option is to take images used for your profile picture and do a reverse image search, since impersonators will often use pictures you've posted online to create fake accounts. [This primer](#) from Google is a good place to start and will show you how to find all the places your pictures are showing up across the internet.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

If you find or suspect problems with your accounts:

- Contact the Office of VOA Digital Strategy as soon as possible [voadigital@voanews.com](mailto:voadigital@voanews.com). They will work with the social media companies to help take care of hacks or imposter accounts.

To help prevent security problems, or once your account has been fixed, please follow these best practices for securing your account:

- Change your password
- Make sure your email address is secure
- Revoke connections to third-party applications
- Update your password in your trusted third-party applications

More details on these practices, and additional steps to protect your accounts:

- Twitter: <https://support.twitter.com/articles/31796>
- Facebook: [Keeping Your Account Secure](#) (part of the Facebook Help Center)

PEN America, the global group that ensures that people have the freedom to convey information and ideas, has created an Online Harassment Field Manual which may prove useful:

<https://onlineharassmentfieldmanual.pen.org/>

## **SOCIAL MEDIA AS REPORTING TOOL**

- **REPORTERS SHOULD QUICKLY FILE FOR VOA-OWNED PLATFORMS AFTER BREAKING NEWS ON SOCIAL MEDIA, PARTICULARLY FOR HIS OR HER SERVICE'S WEBSITE, BUT ALSO FOR RADIO AND TV WHEN APPROPRIATE.**
- **IF A VOA REPORTER/PRODUCER HAS A BREAKING STORY, HE OR SHE SHOULD BE THE ONE TO FIRST REPORT THAT ON THEIR OWN SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS OR ON THE SERVICE'S OFFICIAL ACCOUNT. DON'T BIG-FOOT YOUR COLLEAGUES.**

It's also important to remember that social media is more than Facebook and Twitter. Niche audiences often have their own niche social networks, like Sina Weibo in China or Orkut in India and Brazil. Get to know which ones are popular with your audience and experiment with them. Whatever your topic or medium, there's a probably a social network around it.

Reporting has always been about amplifying certain voices from the public. But rather than a list of carefully cultivated sources that reporters have traditionally relied upon, social media can present millions of competing voices that we must select from wisely. Whether you call it citizen journalism, user-generated content or social media, our readers often report and share news stories before we are able to verify the facts. While it's good to highlight those voices, it is critical to verify rumors before reporting them as facts.

There are techniques for confirming the validity of certain social media accounts, including examination of how long the account has been in existence, looking at the account's message history, and scrutiny of photo streams or other bits of the user's digital trail. If you have doubts, reach out to your service's or

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

division's social media lead for guidance. You must do your due diligence before relying on a source as credible. In other words, report the story.

**Do not retweet or pass along unconfirmed rumors without a clear indication that the information is not yet verified.**

For example: @VOANews Lots of reports and photos of this blast. Working to confirm RT @manonstreet Bomb in front of parliament. Hundreds dead!

**ADDING COMMENTS FROM SOCIAL MEDIA TO YOUR REPORTING IS ACCEPTABLE AS LONG AS YOU CLEARLY IDENTIFY THE SOURCE OF THE COMMENT AND IT REFLECTS AUDIENCE OPINION, SIMILAR TO A VOX POP IN RADIO OR TELEVISION.**

**MAKE SURE YOU BALANCE OPINIONS TO PROVIDE A FAIR PICTURE OF PUBLIC SENTIMENT, AND CONTEXTUALIZE THOSE OPINIONS WITH THE LARGER STORY.**

*(Also see [Fairness, Objectivity and Balance](#), p. 7)*

## **OPINION**

If you take a controversial position or make a controversial comment online it can reflect poorly on you and on the agency. It could lead our readers to believe that we are untrustworthy and unable to fairly cover a controversial story. VOA has spent 75 years building its reputation, and you have spent your career building yours. To keep that trust intact we must adhere to a high standard of objectivity.

This not only includes individual posts or tweets, but also posting your political affiliation or causes in your social media profile. Privacy policies change and people can take screenshots. Assume nothing is private in social media, even if your account is visible only to your online circle of friends.

In particular, retweeting or “liking” an opinion on one side of the issue or another could be seen as an endorsement from you or from VOA. If you want to put that comment in front of your followers, make sure it is clear you aren’t endorsing the opinion, but simply showing both sides of the conversation.

For example: @VOANews The budget fight continues RT @AngryPundit Why can’t Washington get its act together?

Don’t be afraid to engage with either side of a controversial issue. It is okay to follow or friend individuals or interest groups on either side of an issue. In fact, it should be part of the reporting process; paying attention to what both sides have to say is critical to getting as much information as possible on an issue. But never endorse only one side or the other by “liking” a cause or political figure, and make sure you follow all sides of an issue.

While personal endeavors on other sites are fine, they must not involve the use of agency materials, time or facilities, including information that is available to you because of your position at VOA.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### **MANAGING YOUR PROGRAM'S OR SERVICE'S SOCIAL PRESENCE**

VOA programs and services are encouraged to maintain official accounts on the major social media platforms in your region. These presences can help you engage with your current audience and reach new audiences with your content.

Before launching a new official social media presence, you and your service chief should answer the following questions:

- Who are you trying to reach and why is this the right way to reach them?
- Who is responsible for keeping each account active and how often?
- How will success be measured and who will track it?
- Does your branding align with the branding already established on your website?

You are also responsible for moderating the comments on your Facebook page, website, or agency blog to remove comments that violate our Terms of Use. In particular, you should be on the lookout for comments that are vulgar, racist or incite others to acts of violence. If you choose to respond to those comments, your replies should be professional and courteous. If the commenter continues to respond in a rude manner, you can report the individual to that site's staff and/or you can block the user from commenting. **DO NOT** engage in a debate with anyone who is trying to stir up anger and violence. Be aware that our spam filters sometimes fail; always be vigilant about shaping a lively and responsible conversation by removing comments that distract from the free and civil exchange of ideas.

### **POSTING VOA CONTENT TO OTHER SITES, INCLUDING YOUR OWN**

Uploading proprietary VOA or wire agency material directly to personal accounts is prohibited. Not only can you be held legally liable for posting photos or video that belongs to wire and newfeed agencies, but you will hurt your service's ability to build an audience on official channels.

Instead, you should link to VOA material posted on your service's website or other official VOA accounts, like your service's official Facebook page or YouTube channel.

*Example:* Jack is a video editor in a VOA language service. He regularly combines wire service video and VOA video into packages for broadcast and web. He sometimes takes interesting video from APTN, as well as video he has shot, and uploads it directly to his personal YouTube channel and Facebook page. Is that permitted?

*Answer:* **No.** Jack should only upload VOA material to official VOA YouTube accounts. Once it's there, he can link to it from his personal YouTube account, Facebook or other channels.

*Example:* Jack embeds video from his service's VOA YouTube channel on his own YouTube page and shares VOA reporting with his friends on Facebook. Is this permitted?

*Answer:* **Yes.** Any material shared from your service's official, public-facing website, YouTube channel, or other official outlets is okay.

### **LINKING TO OTHER SITES**

You are encouraged to provide links that are relevant to story content and suitable for all audiences. Editors should exercise judgment and not use links that may be offensive, or in any way, inappropriate.

Linking does not constitute endorsement. While you should avoid pointing readers to anything that is an affront to common decency, you can link to the websites of institutions or causes if they are relevant to a story. If your link is to the site of a particular candidate or party please be even-handed: if you link to the website of one political party, you should be just as willing to link to the website of the opposition party, when relevant to the story. Failure to do so could not only call into question our objectivity; it could be a violation of the Hatch Act.

[\*\(Also see Political Activity, p. 10\)\*](#)

### **BE TRANSPARENT ABOUT YOUR MISTAKES**

Every news outlet makes mistakes. When a piece of reporting on your VOA website contains a factual error it should be corrected as quickly as possible. Talk to a senior editor in your service about what needs to be changed and place a correction at the bottom in italics that notes the original error.

Never delete a story or video from your VOA website without correcting and acknowledging the mistake. Not only will the incorrect story remain in the caches of major search engines, but your readers will believe that you are trying to cover something up instead of being honest and open. Full disclosure is always best.

While you should not delete incorrect stories or video from your site, you should use the content management system to remove it from major section fronts until it is corrected. The URL will continue to work, but will not be highlighted on the site.

[\*\(Also see Corrections, p. 88\)\*](#)

### **USER-GENERATED CONTENT**

Like all news organizations, VOA receives video, audio and photos from outside sources. The content may be sent for the purpose of showing an up-close look at a news event; to present a particular point of view; to cast a negative light on a government, an organization or individuals.

In all cases, VOA journalists must take every editorial precaution to ensure the legitimacy of the submissions before broadcasting them or publishing them:

- **CONTACT & IDENTIFICATION**

Reach out to individuals or groups who have posted material to verify that they are the owner of the work. Clearly identify yourself as a journalist when making inquiries about user-generated content.

- **NEWSWORTHINESS**

Is there a valid editorial reason to use video, audio or photos that we receive from an outside source? Does the user-generated content help to further inform our audience about an issue or incident?

- **MOTIVE**

Does the individual or group sending the material have an agenda? If VOA determines the content is agenda-driven and decides to air/publish the content, we should reveal why the material was submitted, and who submitted it.

- **REAL OR STAGED**

Can VOA confirm that the video, audio or photo is real? Or, can VOA determine whether the content is fake or staged, produced in the hope that VOA might air or publish it?

- **COPYCAT INCIDENTS**

Will the broadcasting or publication of the video/photos encourage others to create or produce similar content that in some cases could be life-threatening?

- **RIGHT TO PRIVACY**

Was the material recorded or photographed without the knowledge of the individuals involved? In other words, was the material recorded with a hidden camera or microphone?

- **HOW WILL THE CONTENT BE USED**

Should VOA receive sensitive or graphic content, follow the guidelines in the section on [Sensitive and Graphic Material, p. 17](#). In some cases it may be more appropriate for such material to be posted online only, where users can choose what they do or do not want to see or hear.

- **PERMISSION**

Once it's established the content is valid and its owner is identified, ask for permission to use the material. As always, VOA gives credit where credit is due, so the person who created the content should be identified accordingly; it is up to the individual or group whether to use real names or a website/social network username.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

- **PAYING FOR MATERIAL**

Other than our existing agreements with the news agencies and our freelancers, VOA does not pay for content. Please keep this in mind when dealing with user-generated content.

*(Also see [Payment, p. 38](#))*

- **DISCLAIMERS**

We must always tell our audiences when we are airing or publishing user-generated content. In addition, we should tell our audiences that while we have checked for the legitimacy of the material, we cannot absolutely verify the content. As with all of VOA's reporting, transparency is key.

[Follow this link to a useful at-your-desk tool for verifying user-generated content.](#)

It provides various case studies that can easily be applied to potential UGC situations at VOA.

If you are uncertain about using photos or video taken from social media, please see the guidance on copyright and fair use in the [Legal Issues](#) section of this Guide, or e-mail the Office of General Counsel at [copyrightclearances@bbg.gov](mailto:copyrightclearances@bbg.gov).

**AUDIO, VIDEO OR PHOTOS THAT ARE FREELY AVAILABLE  
ON THE INTERNET DOES NOT MEAN THEY ARE IN  
THE "PUBLIC DOMAIN."**

### YOUTUBE GUIDELINES

- **YOUTUBE VIDEOS ARE NOT A PRIMARY MEANS OF ACCESSING AND USING B-ROLL FOR A VIDEO PACKAGE. ALWAYS CHECK THE ABC NEWSONE, AFP, APTN AND REUTERS FOLDERS IN DALETPLUS AND THEIR ONLINE SITES FIRST. IF NECESSARY, CONTACT THE SENIOR ARCHIVISTS ([SENIOR-ARCHIVISTS@VOANEWS.COM](mailto:SENIOR-ARCHIVISTS@VOANEWS.COM)) FOR ASSISTANCE.**
- **THE VOA VIDEO LIBRARY ([VIDEO-LIBRARY@VOANEWS.COM](mailto:VIDEO-LIBRARY@VOANEWS.COM)) HAS EXTENSIVE FILE VIDEO AVAILABLE; ALWAYS CHECK THERE BEFORE RELYING ON YOUTUBE FOR FILE VIDEO NEEDS.**
- **USE CAUTION AND COMMON SENSE AND AVOID USING VIDEOS FROM YOUTUBE THAT MAY VIOLATE SOMEONE'S COPYRIGHT. WHEN IN DOUBT, PLEASE CONTACT THE EDITOR FOR NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES FOR GUIDANCE.**

Although YouTube is the most popular site for video, similar rules apply to other sites, such as Vimeo and VEVO.

Use of YouTube videos should be cleared through the Editor for News Standards & Best Practices. The video can be used full-screen as long as credits, chyron information and other on-screen information is not obscured or deleted.

The actual YouTube logo **MUST** be burned into the video and remain on-screen throughout the clip:



YouTube should also be credited in narration: "In this video posted on YouTube..." or something similar.

YouTube has a blurring tool that lets you blur any part of a video, including moving objects. Details on how to use the tool are here:

<https://youtube-creators.googleblog.com/2016/02/blur-moving-objects-in-your-video-with.html>  
*(Also see Sensitive & Graphic Material, p. 18)*



### AUDIO

**The audio from a YouTube video cannot be stripped from the video.** YouTube’s Terms of Service stipulate that embedded content cannot be manipulated or downloaded for use away from [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com).

**In addition, YouTube – as well as Facebook -- takes audio copyright very seriously.** If you add music to a video that doesn’t come from one of VOA’s free music accounts – Firstcom.com, Dewolfemusic.com, Apmmusic.com or Audioblocks.com -- your video will likely be taken down from the site, and **after three “copyright strikes,” your account will be terminated—and you’ll be barred from creating a new account.**

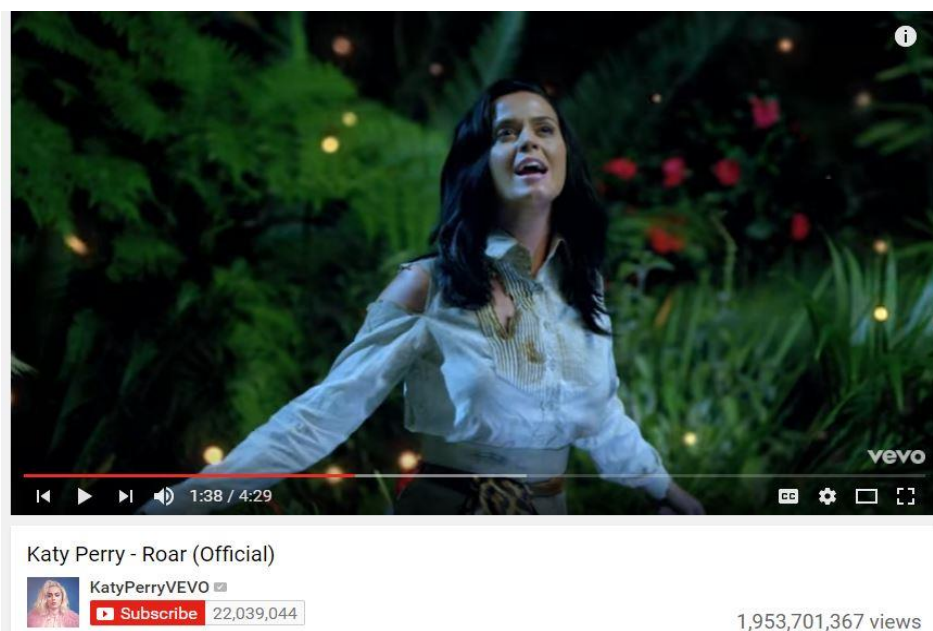
While we can always attempt to make a fair use claim for audio clips, it is highly recommended that you rely on the free music sites that are available.

[\(Also see Music, p. 61\)](#)

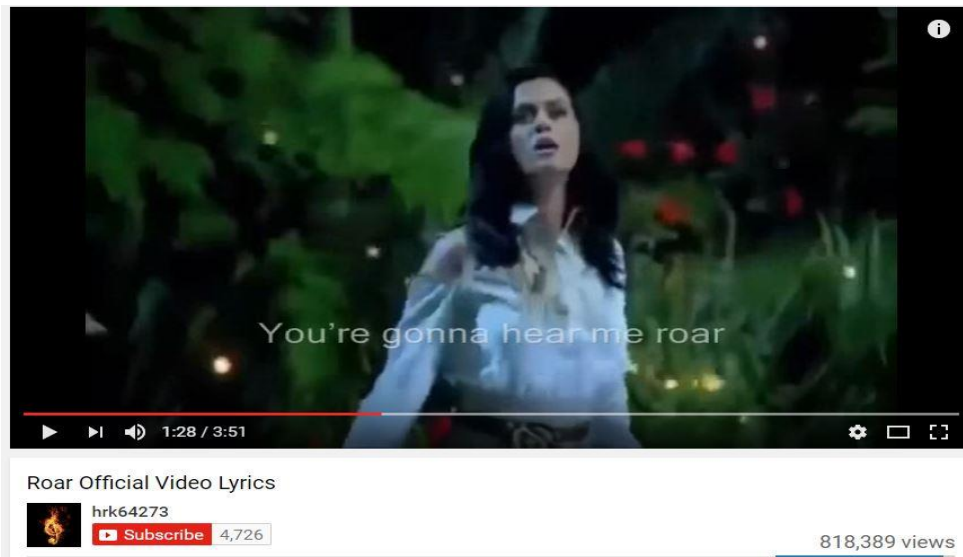
### EMBEDDING

Embedded video is effectively just a link; no copy of the video is being stored on your server. Therefore, you may use embedded video on VOA websites. However, you should still use caution and common sense and avoid posting videos that may violate someone’s copyright. In particular, do not post videos that contain music, movies or television broadcasts unless those videos are posted on the official YouTube channel of the copyright holder. Many movie studios and music companies allow you to take embed code for trailers or video clips directly from their main site. In those cases, it’s much easier to tell that you’re using an official video when it’s on the company website.

On this page is the official version of Katy Perry’s music video of “Roar” posted on YouTube by VEVO, an entertainment consortium of music producers. On the next page is the exact same song, and although it also says “official,” it is clearly a fan upload. The first is okay for use; the second is not.



[Return to Table of Contents](#)



**YOUTUBE MAKES NO REPRESENTATIONS ABOUT THE  
ACCURACY, USEFULNESS, SAFETY OR INTELLECTUAL  
PROPERTY RIGHTS OF CONTENT APPEARING ON ITS SITE**

### **GOOGLE EARTH GUIDELINES**

VOA has rights to use Google Earth for the following VOA products:

- Television programs (including promotional ads)
- DVDs and video on demand
- Any long-form video products, including documentaries
- Printed materials

Google Earth can be used to create fly-throughs, locator maps, or basic illustrations of cities or geographic features.

**We are required to credit Google Earth with an unobstructed graphic module that clearly shows that the content is provided by Google and, when applicable, a third-party data provider.** [This example](#) from CNN shows how it should be done.

Please work with your EP and Graphics person to make sure Google Earth is clearly credited for any usage.

Also, any Google Maps/Google Earth images used must reflect how they would look online. For example, you are not allowed to make any changes (delete, blur, etc.) to these products that would make them look different than in the actual product.

Because it is a standalone software package, IT will need to install Google Earth on your computer.

### **REVEALING WEBSITES AND ADDRESSES**

In most cases, websites are not considered in the public domain for purposes of publishing pictures of them. They fall under the same fair use guidelines as other copyrighted material. If you have questions about whether you can show a website, please contact the Office of General Counsel.

Generally, website addresses can be revealed, as long as they are not for sites which promote criminal behavior or contain pornography. Avoid showing website addresses if it might be construed as a commercial for the site. Exceptions would include educational or informational sites, or charitable sites raising money for victims of a natural disaster.

When reporting on political campaigns, include links to the websites of the candidates mentioned in the piece. ([Also see Political Activity, p.10](#))

### **AFFILIATE/RECIPROCAL LINKS**

Reciprocal links to affiliate websites are permitted, under the following guidelines:

- The decision to establish an online affiliation should reflect the same editorial considerations that go into establishing a broadcast affiliation – including credibility, reputation, trust and audience reach.
- VOA Language Services should consider the total number of affiliates when determining the placement of reciprocal links. A service that has a small number of large, reputable partners is justified in establishing front-page reciprocal links. A service that has dozens of broadcasting affiliates should create an Affiliates page where they may all be listed. Each situation must be considered separately. It may be appropriate to have a homepage reciprocal link with a major web portal that is a primary news source in the language, and a separate Affiliate page with reciprocal links to broadcasting affiliates.
- Affiliate logos or text links may be used to establish reciprocal links, as appropriate.
- Reciprocal links should be reviewed on a regular basis, and VOA must reserve the right to remove the link at any time, if the affiliation ends or the target site no longer reflects the editorial integrity under which the relationship was established.
- Terms of Use must include a disclaimer that “VOA is not responsible for the content of external websites.”

If you have questions about these guidelines, please contact Matthew Baise ([mbaise@voanews.com](mailto:mbaise@voanews.com)) or Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com)).

### PHOTOGRAPHS

Photographs add a great deal to VOA stories and are necessary to give the audience a fuller experience and understanding of VOA reports. While VOA has wire services and other sources for photographs, original content taken by VOA reporters and staff is always useful.

Keep in mind that some stories will have no wire photos available so it is particularly useful for the reporter to shoot a few photos while doing the story.

The photo contracts for AFP, AP and Reuters are administered by Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com), x4276). When there is a question about news agency photos, please contact Steve.

### GENERAL RULES

- The goal of images is to enhance the readers' understanding of the story – and make it look better on the web. Take photos that add to your story, and submit as many as you can so editors can decide which are best.
- Show the people, places and things that you talk about in your stories - If you emphasize a place or interview a person get a picture. If you cover a demonstration, show the protest signs or faces of the people. However, be aware that minors may be present at demonstrations, and you should use good judgment in photographing them in those situations.  
(Also see [Interviewing & Videotaping Minors, p. 22](#) and [Filming in Public vs. Private Places, p. 93](#))
- Get close up to your subject if you can. Take photos from different perspectives and distances.
- Make sure your subject is clear, focused, and lit as well as possible.
- Always send in the largest file size possible. Photo and web editors can crop as needed and warranted.
- Headshots are good. Also try to get images of the subject in their environment and in action.
- Remember the [rule of thirds](#).
- [Shoot landscape \(horizontal\) instead of portrait](#). Landscape photos look better on social media and in Pangea. That means turning your phone 90 degrees when taking the photo.

### **EDITING PHOTOGRAPHS**

VOA allows for the adjustment of photos for brightness, contrast and color.

However, VOA **does not permit** altering a photograph in any way that changes the meaning of the photo. This includes adding or subtracting elements to create a scene that is not an accurate representation of what was originally shot.

While it's OK to crop a photo, that should not change the meaning of the photo; for instance, cropping a photo that may leave out a key individual in the story.

### **CLOSELY EXAMINE DIGITAL PICTURES FROM OUTSIDE SOURCES TO ENSURE THAT THOSE IMAGES HAVE NOT BEEN ALTERED.**

### **PHOTO ILLUSTRATIONS**

When creating a photo to illustrate an idea, whether in the camera or using Photoshop or a similar program, the reader must always be informed that the image is a photo illustration and not a standard news image. This should be done either with a caption or in a tagline.

### **TECHNICAL TIPS**

- Use your flash to balance out the light - If you are outside on a sunny day and you are shooting in the shade use your flash to fill heavy shadows if needed. If you are indoors and taking an image of someone in front of a window use your flash.
- Don't shoot portraits with the sun or bright light behind your subject unless you are using a flash to fill the light.
- Be careful of using a flash in front of glass or a mirror - The flash will bounce back into the lens. If you have to do this don't shoot straight on toward the glass, try to shoot at an angle to the glass.
- Be careful of microphones - Try to get a clear shot of the person without a microphone in front of their face

### **SENDING PHOTO FILES**

Always email your service and [CentralNewsWebMedia@voanews.com](mailto:CentralNewsWebMedia@voanews.com) when submitting photos.

Always include who is paying for the photos and if they are available for use by the house. Always include caption info.

Photos can be submitted via email, any photo sharing service such as flickr or Picasa, or via ftp.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### CAPTIONS/CREDITS

Reporters and producers in the field must supply the captions for your photos. Caption info is:

- Who, what, when and where.
- Credit – who took the photo.
- Keep captions short and clear – photo and web editors will often rewrite and edit them.

VOA's caption style is the same when crediting staff and stringers: **John Doe/VOA**

VOA's photo contracts with AP and Reuters allow us to use their photos on all VOAnews.com websites. At this time, AFP's photos can be used only on the English voanews.com site.

It is **MANDATORY** that **ALL** news agency photos be given proper credit, as seen in the example below:  
[\(Also see Crediting the News Agencies, p. 32\)](#)



U.S. Vice President Mike Pence speaks during an Easter fellowship dinner at a military base in Seoul, South Korea, April 16, 2017.

Credits are also required for photos from other sources, including other news organizations, NGOs, a business or a social media post. Social media posts should include the social media site and the name of the person who took the photo. For example:

CBS News

Pew Research Center

Instagram/JohnSmith

Twitter/@JohnQSmith

Facebook/John Smith

Some public domain images also require a credit, such as the White House, State Department, Defense Department, Library of Congress and National Archives.

[\(Also see Attribution, p. 29\)](#)



### MUSIC

#### **GENERAL GUIDELINES**

The Music Library serves as the resource and research center for VOA programs containing music. Not only does the library catalog music, it also provides a historical and educational setting for producers and broadcasters to research various sources relating to music: biographies, event-driven materials, periodicals, almanacs, encyclopedias, etc.

The Music Library database currently contains a variety of musical recordings dating as far back as the 1930s. The database is catalogued by album titles, song titles, artists, and record company names/numbers. You can contact the Music Library at [Music-Library-Staff@voanews.com](mailto:Music-Library-Staff@voanews.com).

In addition, the Music Library has free accounts available to all VOA staff for four online production music sites:

Firstcom.com

Dewolfmusic.com

Apmmusic.com

Audioblocks.com

**Please contact Vincent Bonner at [vbon@voanews.com](mailto:vbon@voanews.com) to get an account opened with one or all of these sites.**

Generally, the agency's music rights apply to radio programming. However, if the music is used in a transformative way in a VOA video piece – to highlight Prince's virtuosity on guitar in a 15 second edit, for instance – that could be considered a fair use.

#### **SOCIAL MEDIA & MUSIC**

Many of you have asked if we can use popular music on our social media accounts. **WE CANNOT.**

Popular music from the VOA Music Library can only be used for radio broadcasts, and is not to be used for any posts on social media, including any simulcasts or live streaming.

#### **VOA DOES NOT HAVE THE RIGHTS TO DISTRIBUTE POPULAR MUSIC ON ANY DIGITAL PLATFORM, INCLUDING SOCIAL MEDIA.**

Popular music includes Top 40, rock, jazz, pop, soul, jazz, reggae, country, folk, rap, dance music, etc.

**You can, however, use production music on all digital platforms, including social media sites.**

The Music Library hours are 7:15am until 5:00pm (Monday-Friday), the telephone number is 202-382-7395.

*(Also see [YouTube Guidelines, p. 52](#) and [Ambient Music, p. 92](#))*

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### AUDIO USAGE RIGHTS

These guidelines **DO NOT APPLY** to the video news feeds that VOA subscribes to. Please see the next section for that information.

Some of the news organizations listed in this section have given VOA blanket permission to use audio excerpts from some of their news programs. These permissions should be respected. Requests to use audio not covered by listed blanket clearances should be sent to Steven Springer, ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com)), the Contracting Officer's Representative (COR) for VOA's contracts with the news agencies.

### AUDIO CLIPS FROM TV NETWORKS

VOA has had longstanding permission to use the voices of the persons being interviewed on network news programs.

VOA should use the following credit in the radio script for all programs: "As reported on [Network and program name]," or equivalent language giving credit to the appropriate news organization.

While we will always claim fair use for relevant audio excerpts, there are a few exceptions, listed below.

#### ABC NEWS

**DO NOT** use the voices of any ABC News anchors, correspondents, reporters, commentators and stringers.

- ***This Week*** – VOA has received permission to record the entire Sunday talk show to use content of particular interest to our audiences. However, with this permission there are some restrictions listed below:
  - We are authorized to excerpt up to two (2) minutes of the program.
  - Material may be posted on VOA's websites only if it is part of a VOA television program or video package.
  - Use of ABC talent should be kept to a minimum in the story. This is the **ONLY** exemption to the restriction on using ABC News talent in VOA programming.
  - Excerpted material cannot be used after three (3) days and the *This Week* program cannot be archived for future use.
  - This permission is **ONLY** for *This Week*.

**AUDIO-ONLY USAGE FROM ALL OTHER ABC NEWS  
OR ENTERTAINMENT PROGRAMS MUST BE CLEARED PRIOR TO USE.**

### **CBS NEWS**

**DO NOT USE** the voices of **ANY** CBS News employees, including anchors, reporters, correspondents, commentators or stringers.

**WE DO NOT HAVE PERMISSION TO USE ANY CBS NEWS AUDIO CLIPS  
ON VOANEWS.COM OR ON ANY OTHER VOA WEB PRESENCE.**

### **CNN**

VOA has no overall agreement with CNN for use of audio clips, but we will claim editorial “fair use” as necessary on a case-by-case basis.

### **FOX NEWS CHANNEL**

VOA has permission to excerpt for radio no more than 3 minutes of audio from the *Fox News Sunday* broadcast. VOA must credit *Fox News Sunday*.

**ALL OTHER FOX TV PROGRAMS MUST BE CLEARED PRIOR TO USE.  
FOX DOES NOT ALLOW ANY OF ITS MATERIAL TO BE REBROADCAST OVERSEAS.**

### **NBC NEWS, MSNBC & CNBC**

VOA has blanket permission to use audio excerpts from *The Today Show*, *Meet the Press* and *NBC Nightly News*. All news specials, documentaries and other special programming must be cleared prior to use. There is no restriction on the use of NBC correspondents’ voices, but use of NBC correspondent reports is limited to U.S datelines. VOA does **NOT** have clearance to use audio actualities from any CNBC programs.

### VIDEO USAGE RIGHTS

VOA has contracts with three different video newsfeed providers: Agence France Press (AFP), Associated Press (AP) and Reuters. We receive video from ABC NewsOne through our contract with AP. Each contract is unique and stands on its own.

Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com), x4276) is the Contracting Officer's Representative (COR) for the newsfeeds. Oscar Rodriguez at OCB is the Alternate COR ([orodriguez@bbg.gov](mailto:orodriguez@bbg.gov), 305-437-7159). The Media Asset Management Branch assists in administering and facilitating use of the video and audio newsfeeds. The MAM Branch Chief, Pam Commerford, ([pcommerford@voanews.com](mailto:pcommerford@voanews.com), x7124) also contacts the providers and clears use of specific items.

### BEFORE USING ANY VIDEO, IT IS THE PRODUCER'S RESPONSIBILITY TO REVIEW THE NEWSFEED SCRIPT SOURCE INFORMATION TO CHECK FOR RIGHTS RESTRICTIONS

### COMMON FEATURES – ALL NEWSFEEDS

Newsfeed scripts for the video stories are provided as basic information for our own script writing, and **do not** constitute a separate element. In other words, **newsfeed scripts cannot be used on the Web as a text-only story**. However, the information contained in video scripts can be used within a VOA story when they are combined with pertinent information from other news sources and follow VOA's sourcing guidelines.

### RIGHTS RESTRICTIONS

We have negotiated the rights of use with each provider to broadcast and publish our stories containing newsfeed material on TV, radio and internet. Restriction statements vary from provider to provider and cover different ground; the most common restrictions are described on the following pages.

Restrictions are usually listed near the top of the script, but also appear above specific items in the script when necessary. VOA must adhere to rights restrictions as listed in the associated scripts and we must pay attention to the source of the video. Our providers send stories in which the video may come from a variety of sources, from FIFA to ESPN to handout video to other broadcasters and awards programs. The restrictions listed reflect the rules of both the source organization and the newsfeed providers.

Since all VOA programming is available on the web, newsfeed items marked **NO ACCESS INTERNET** or **NO WEB** means the video/audio cannot be used at all, unless permission is granted by the newsfeed provider. Reuters, however, has a special requirement regarding our streaming shows, so please see the Reuters page for details. Please contact Pam or Steve if you need help with this.

You may see some variation of the following restrictions, regardless of the provider, on all the feeds:

- **TIME-LIMITED USAGE**

You will often see limited windows of usage on stories, especially for entertainment and sports programs. Footage must be pulled off the web by the date and time listed in the script info or in advisories MAM has posted in e-mail.

- **MANDATORY COURTESY**

When noted in the script the courtesy must appear on-screen in TV and web stories, and an audible courtesy must be used on radio.

- **NO LIBRARY / NO ARCHIVE**

Items with this restriction should be deleted soon after use. This material is available in the DaletPlus production system for up to thirty days and is then purged. Using video labeled **NO LIBRARY** or **NO ARCHIVE** after its initial broadcast or web posting puts our contracts in jeopardy.

### USING VIDEO FROM TV NETWORKS

- We **DO NOT** have blanket permission from ABC, CBS, CNN, FOX or NBC (including MSNBC and CNBC) to record and use clips from their newscasts or weekend talk shows. The only exception is ABC's ***This Week*** program (see next page).
- All soundbites from the other networks' weekend talk shows should be taken from our regular agency newsfeeds. However, we must follow whatever restrictions the networks place on the usage of those clips.
- There are times when we will claim "fair use" for a network news video clip that has not been fed on an agency newsfeed, but you must contact Steve to get clearance. If necessary, Steve or Pam will consult with the General Counsel's office regarding any potential legal considerations.  
[\(Also see Copyright and Fair Use, p. 92\)](#)

### **ABC NEWS**

ABC News and ABC TV Entertainment programs' on-air talent **cannot** be used. This includes shots of the back of heads, cutaways, walking shots, standups, or anything else that may show those individuals.

#### **THIS WEEK**

- VOA is authorized to excerpt up to two (2) minutes of ***This Week***.
- Material from ***This Week*** may be posted on VOA's websites only if it is part of a VOA television program.
- Material excerpted from ***This Week*** cannot be used after three (3) days and the ***This Week*** program cannot be archived for future use.
- **THIS PERMISSION IS ONLY FOR ABC'S *THIS WEEK* PROGRAM.**

#### **ABC NEWSONE**

- VOA receives material daily from the ABC News affiliate service NewsOne. As noted above, VOA cannot use on-camera talent; this applies to anchors, show hosts and reporters, whether for ABC Network or an ABC affiliate station.
- When an ABC item is listed as **PACKAGE ONLY**, it generally means that VOA must run the package as fed by NewsOne. Pam or Steve can contact NewsOne to see if that restriction can be lifted.
- **NO EXCERPTING** is similar to PACKAGE ONLY, in that we cannot lift individual sequences or shots out of a package. The wording may be "No Excerpting Package," "No Excerpting [specific video]." Please contact Pam or Steve to see whether the No Excerpting restriction can be lifted.
- **NO RETRACKING** generally means that VOA cannot translate, summarize, adapt or otherwise make the piece shorter or longer. Please contact Pam or Steve to see whether the No Retracking restriction can be lifted.
- **NNS** is a news-sharing cooperative between ABC News and other news organizations. VOA is cleared to use all video that is marked as NNS.
- Use of all ABC standard graphics must be addressed on a case-by-case basis and users must contact Pam or Steve to seek permission before using.
- 3D graphics can be used **only if the entire package is used. There are no exceptions.**
- If a story is marked **ABC AFFILIATES ONLY**, VOA is cleared to use it. However, if a story is marked **ABC AFFILIATES ONLY, NO INTERNATIONAL CLIENTS**, please contact Pam or Steve to get clearance for use.

**NO INTERNET USE OF ANY COLLEGIATE AND PROFESSIONAL  
SPORTS VIDEO FED BY ABC NewsONE!**

**NO USE ON ANY PLATFORM OF ABC NEWS OR  
ABC ENTERTAINMENT PROMOS!**

### **AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE (AFP)**

VOA has clearance to use all AFP video unless otherwise noted below.

#### **EXAMPLES OF AFP RESTRICTIONS**

- **Source: NNIS**  
**Restrictions: \*NO RESALE FOR NON-EDITORIAL PURPOSES\***  
VOA broadcast purposes are EDITORIAL, therefore we are clear to use items with this statement. In addition, VOA must version content for our audiences before broadcasting or posting it online.
- **Source: PARLIAMENTARY RECORDING UNIT (British Parliament)**  
**Restrictions: NO RESALE FOR NON-EDITORIAL PURPOSES / NOT FOR USE IN ENTERTAINMENT OR POLITICAL SATIRE PROGRAMMES**  
VOA is clear to use items with this restriction, but not in a satirical, Daily Show-type production.

#### **WEB-RELATED RESTRICTION STATEMENTS**

- **NO WEB USE or NO AFP WEB** - Stories carrying either of these restrictions cannot be used on any VOA websites.
- **NO ENGLISH OR SPANISH WEB** - VOA English and Spanish **CANNOT** post the video to their websites, but all other VOA language services CAN post the video to their websites.

#### **CBS NEWS VIDEO**

- Some AFP items may carry the multiple restrictions listed below, which normally indicates the video comes from CBS News. AFP regularly feeds CBS News video, and we are working with AFP to clarify the restrictions regarding VOA's use of CBS material. In the case of these restrictions, VOA CAN use the video.  
**NO RESALE FOR NON-EDITORIAL PURPOSES**  
**NO JAPAN**  
**NO FREE OVER-THE-AIR BROADCASTERS IN AUSTRALIA, NO U.S. CABLE OUTLETS, FREE OVER-THE-AIR NETWORKS OR STATIONS, THEIR WEBSITES AND THEIR MOBIEL PHONE SERVICES.**

#### **SOCIAL MEDIA SITES**

- VOA can post on its social media pages AFP video that is contained within VOA-produced TV packages. It is also OK to use AFP material in programs which are broadcast and streamed on VOA webpages.
- **VOA CANNOT post raw or live AFP video on any of its social media pages.**

If you have questions about using restricted video fed by AFP, please contact Pam or Steve to see if the restrictions can be lifted.



### **ASSOCIATED PRESS (APTN)**

- **APTN Clients Only** – VOA is able to use all stories with this restriction
- **Horizons clients and AP Lifestyle, Health and Technology clients Only** – VOA subscribes to these categories and can use any story that carries this restriction.
- **SNTV Clients** - VOA has unlimited use of stories with this restriction, as long as SNTV is the “Original Provider” or “Source” of the video. You will know these stories are SNTV stories, because “SNTV clients only” will be stated somewhere in the rights restrictions section of the script.

However, if the “Original Provider” is a third party, such as *FIFA, IOC, Tennis Properties Ltd., TAF Sports, Dorna*, etc., you must follow the restrictions listed within the “Rights Restrictions” section of script.

- **Check Script For Details** – VOA can use stories with this restriction, but you must follow specific restrictions within the script if there are film clips/music videos.
- **NO ACCESS IRAN AND NO ACCESS VOA PERSIAN TV**  
VOA Persian cannot use APTN stories shot in and sent from Iran. This includes ALL video of Iran, even when the restriction isn’t noted on the script and includes video previously received that we have in the Video Library and the VOA Persian video server.  
NOTE: The stories restricted to the Persian Service can be used by the News Center and the other Language Services.
- **OTHER RESTRICTIONS**  
VOA can use stories that have restrictions to other geographic regions. For example, stories marked No Access Russia or No Access Indonesia can be used by those Language Services as well as all other VOA services.

However, non-regional restrictions, such as No Access Internet, must be followed. Sometimes permission will be granted; in those cases please contact Pam or Steve to gain clearance.

- **ABC Talent on APTN-fed stories:** On occasion, APTN will feed an ABC story. ABC talent cannot be used.  
([Also see ABC News, p. 66](#))

### **REUTERS**

- Most Reuters videos are listed as **NO RIGHTS RESTRICTIONS** or the restriction listed is as **NONE**; those stories can be used across all platforms at any time.
- If a Reuters video is marked **FOR EDITORIAL USE ONLY**, we can use it.
- Reuters videos may sometimes be marked **NO MOBILE USE**. VOA has clearance to use these videos on our Internet and mobile platforms. Please contact Steve or Pam if you have questions about NO MOBILE USE restrictions.
- **NO ACCESS USA/CNN/YAHOO/AOL/WIRELESS**  
Stories with this restriction generally originate from NBC News and cannot be used by VOA

**VOA DOES NOT HAVE CONTRACTUAL RIGHTS TO USE NBC CONTENT. PLEASE BE DILIGENT ABOUT CONFIRMING THE SOURCE AND DO NOT USE NBC CONTENT. THIS INCLUDES CONTENT FROM CNBC AND MSNBC.**

**IF THERE IS A STRONG EDITORIAL REASON TO USE NBC NEWS OR NBC AFFILIATE MATERIAL – AND SIMILAR MATERIAL CANNOT BE FOUND ON THE OTHER NEWSFEEDS – PLEASE CONTACT STEVE OR PAM TO SEE WHETHER WE CAN GET CLEARANCE TO USE THE VIDEO.**

- **RESTRICTED POOL** - The five U.S. news networks -- ABC, CBS, CNN, FOX and NBC – shoot video daily that is designated Pool material. In most cases, Restricted Pool applies to domestic and overseas coverage of the president, and in election seasons, coverage of presidential candidates.  
**VOA CAN USE THIS RESTRICTED POOL VIDEO.**

**However, VOA cannot use Restricted Pool video of the vice president, First Lady, VP's spouse, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense or other Cabinet members.**

It is strongly recommended that you call Steve or Pam if there is any uncertainty about the Restricted Pool designation of a video.

- **Sports items will often be heavily restricted.** Many have **NO ARCHIVE** restrictions, very often 48 hours but also 15 days or a specific date. As a rule, golf, tennis, cricket and motorcycling are heavily restricted. Stories about U.S. hockey (NHL) can be used until the end of the current hockey season. Soccer matches are often restricted, but we can use video of soccer practice / press conferences.

- Video shot in the UK often carries this restriction:  
**ITN COPYRIGHT: TV: NO ACCESS ALL DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL CHANNELS DISTRIBUTED IN UK & EIRE ON SKY/VIRGIN/FREEVIEW; BBC/BSKYB GROUP: NO ACCESS WORLDWIDE ANY MEDIA; INTERNET: NO ACCESS.CO.UK WEB SITES AND ALL WEBSITES PRINCIPALLY TARGETED AT THE UK AND/OR EIRE; MOBILE: NO ACCESS WORLDWIDE; NO USE AFTER 30 DAYS FROM DATE FIRST USED ON ALL PLATFORMS.**

This is an extremely targeted restriction statement and it is recommended to call Steve or Pam for guidance. Typically we parse the statement to find the relevant info, and call for clearance or clarification when necessary. In this example, “MOBILE: NO ACCESS WORLDWIDE” is the relevant statement we’d need to decipher.

- **NO ACCESS IRAN AND NO ACCESS VOA PERSIAN NEWS NETWORK**  
VOA Persian **cannot** use Reuters material filmed in or sent from Iran, whether shot by Reuters or the national networks. However, stories received at VOA prior to June 9, 2010 are OK to use – for now – even if a restriction is listed.  
NOTE: The stories restricted to the Persian Service **can be used** by the News Center and the other Language Services.
- **OTHER RESTRICTIONS**  
VOA can use stories that have restrictions to other geographic regions. For example, stories with No Access Russia or No Access Indonesia can be used by those Language Services as well as all other VOA services.

However, non-regional restrictions, such as No Access Internet, must be followed. Sometimes permission will be granted; in those cases please contact Pam or Steve to gain clearance.

### **THE RESTRICTIONS OF ANY OF OUR VIDEO PROVIDERS CAN CHANGE AT ANY TIME**

**IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS,  
PLEASE CONTACT STEVE OR PAM**

### **NEWSMARKET**

Newsmarket ([www.thenewsmarket.com](http://www.thenewsmarket.com)) is an online provider of video. Although the site has a lot of available material, there are a number of guidelines that VOA must follow in order to use the video.

- You must be an employee or contractor working with VOA and use your work e-mail (@voanews.com) to access the site. Pam Commerford ([pcommerford@voanews.com](mailto:pcommerford@voanews.com)), chief of the Media Asset Management Branch has done pre-registration for many employees; if you need to establish an account, please contact Pam.
- Keep your password confidential; it is for your use only.
- Registered users are responsible for searching images and **ensuring that no costs are associated with the material. If costs are required, funding must come from your Language Service or Division.** The Office of Information Services will **NOT** pay for material acquired from Newsmarket.
- The VOA producer or Language Service is responsible for obtaining the terms and conditions of use of the material. Newsmarket makes no claims about the accuracy of the content on its website, so producers must be sure to exercise VOA journalistic standards in the choice and use of material.
- Credit must be given for content used and **logos or copyrighted images cannot be changed or obscured.**
- You must use the content for editorial purposes only.
- You **cannot** store the original content for future use. The content from Newsmarket must be deleted from your workspace when you are finished with your initial use. Should you need the content again, you can go back to the website and re-capture it.
- **The material that you use in a VOA story or program can and will be archived;** there is no restriction on this material.
- The content incorporated in your stories and shows can be distributed on all VOA platforms.
- **The Office of Cuba Broadcasting (OCB) is included in this agreement, meaning that VOA and OCB ONLY can share material that is acquired from Newsmarket.**

### RESTRICTIONS

- You cannot provide unedited content to other organizations, **including the BBG grantees RFE/RL, RFA and Alhurra.**
- You cannot use the Newsmarket logo or trademark in a way other than how it is presented in your story.
- You cannot use any technology to monitor, copy or deep link with Newsmarket.

Assets are brought into DaletPlus to the NEWSMARKET folder: INCOMING FEEDS > NEWSMARKET. Associated metadata needs to be added to the Asset Manager Form (AMF), include source information, and **a VOA DOT added to the video.**

[\(Also see Domestic Distribution of VOA Content, p. 77\)](#)

Example of Newsmarket info to add to AMF in DaletPlus:



US Distribution:	<input type="checkbox"/> All Clear	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Restricted
Footage Sources:	<input type="checkbox"/> APTN	<input type="checkbox"/> ABC NEWSONE
Feed Provider:	thenewsmarket.com	
Source Comments:		
Origin of Video:	Source: NATO TV ]	
Background Wires:		

**US Distribution:** Rights of use do not extend beyond VOA's use, so US DISTRIBUTION should be marked RESTRICTED.

**Footage Sources:** OTHER should be selected.

**Feed Provider:** thenewsmarket.com

**Origin of Video:** Indicate the owner of the source video. In the example, it's NATO TV.

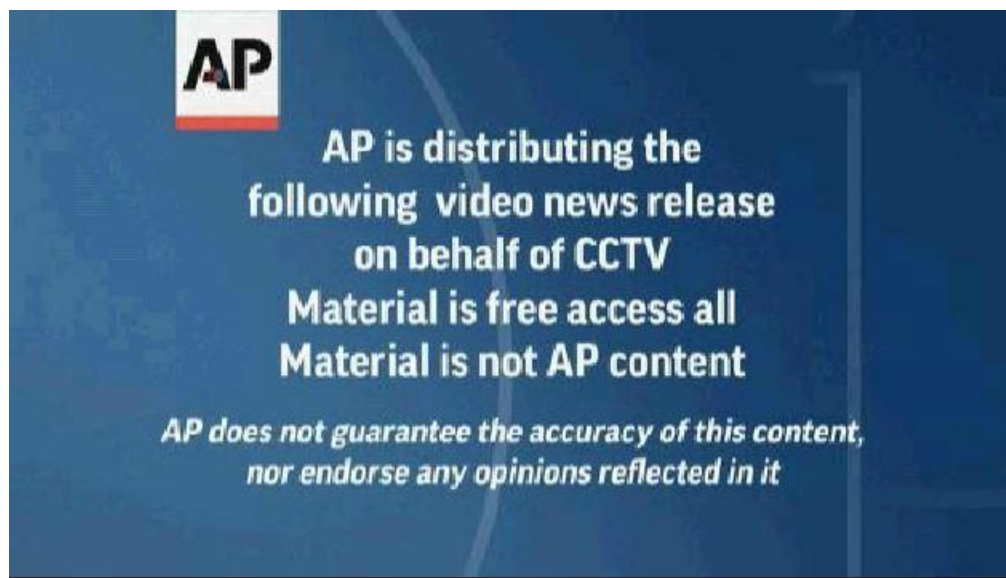
All questions regarding registration on [Newsmarket](#) and the use of its material should go to Pam Commerford ([pcommerford@voanews.com](mailto:pcommerford@voanews.com), 202-382-7124)

### USING CONTENT FROM STATE-RUN MEDIA

Any country's official news agency is a valid single source **when referring to government policy or news events in that country**. In these cases VOA must identify the news agency in its copy.

Note the distinction, **in that country**. For example, a report by China's official news agency about North Korea may not be a valid single source.

In addition, VOA's newsfeed providers AP and Reuters have agreements in place to distribute material provided by CCTV, Chinese State Television. AP includes a disclaimer for all CCTV material, as seen in this screen grab:



Reuters does not provide a video disclaimer for CCTV material, but this notice appears at the bottom of every script Reuters provides from CCTV:

**© Copyright CCTV. The content in this story, including video and script is provided by China Central Television (CCTV) and is copyright CCTV. Thomson Reuters does not guarantee the accuracy of, or endorse the views or opinions given in, this package. THIS STATEMENT SUPERSEDES ALL OTHER STATEMENTS RELATING TO COPYRIGHT ATTACHED TO THIS CONTENT.**

While the video that CCTV and other state-controlled media outlets like RT or Press TV produces often comes from areas where coverage is otherwise unavailable, VOA policy for using content provided by state-controlled media is that it should be reviewed by senior editors in a service, by the News Center or by the agency's Editor for News Standards & Best Practices before any decision is made about airing or publishing the video.

State-run media material that is cleared for broadcast or for use on the web **MUST** include proper credit to that news organization and the disclaimer that VOA cannot confirm the accuracy of the material. For video usage, the on-screen credit should be either: "From CCTV" or "CCTV Video." This guidance is the same for material received from RT or Press TV or similar state-run media outlets.

It is understood that there may be times when we would want to use the video, such as when it's the only known video of a major news event or if we're comparing how VOA and other news organizations cover stories.

**HOWEVER, ANY USE OF STATE-RUN MEDIA VIDEO SHOULD BE DONE WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF A LARGER PACKAGE THAT IS BEING PRODUCED BY THE NEWS CENTER OR A LANGUAGE SERVICE.**

**WE SHOULD NOT RUN A FULL PACKAGE FROM CCTV, RT, PRESS TV  
OR ANOTHER STATE-RUN OUTLET SIMPLY BECAUSE WE HAVE IT AVAILABLE.**

*[\(Also see Video Usage Rights, p. 64\)](#)*

### VIDEO NEWS RELEASES (VNRs)

A video news release (VNR) is a video segment made to look like a news report, but is instead created by a public relations firm, advertising agency, marketing firm, corporation, or even by a government agency. VNRs are produced with the aim of shaping public opinion, promoting commercial products and services, publicizing individuals or supporting other interests.

VNRs may include interviews with experts (who may be paid by the company or ad agency for their appearance in the VNR); man on the street interviews that may be done with professional actors; and pictures of corporate logos to support the product or brand being promoted.

Although we occasionally receive VNRs from APTN and Reuters that does not make them any more legitimate for use by VOA.

There may be times when material from a VNR is appropriate for **excerpting** in a video package.

#### **Example #1**

If the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York discovers a new treatment for prostate cancer and the Center provides a video of its research work, VOA can, and should, use some of that video to illustrate the story.

- The script must say the video was provided by the Center, and there must be a visual credit to the Center as well.

#### **Example #2**

Apple unveils the latest version of the iPhone and sends out a VNR showing the latest changes in the phone and how it operates. VOA can use some of the video to illustrate its story.

- The script must say the video was provided by Apple, and there must be a visual credit to Apple as well.

Please keep in mind, however, that as with fair use of video, all instances of whether to use material from a VNR will not be the same, so always check first with Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com)) or Pam Commerford ([pcommerford@voanews.com](mailto:pcommerford@voanews.com)).

### **VOA SHOULD NEVER AIR A VIDEO NEWS RELEASE IN ITS ENTIRETY**

More detailed information about feeds and rights can be found in Rights Usage Guidelines Presentation and the Video Newsfeed Guide found on the [Media Asset Management Branch \(MAM\) page on Sharepoint](#).



### DOMESTIC DISTRIBUTION OF VOA CONTENT

- **THE SMITH-MUNDT RESTRICTIONS APPLY TO DISTRIBUTION OF VOA CONTENT & PROGRAMMING WITHIN THE UNITED STATES.**
- **THEY DO NOT IN ANY WAY IMPACT VOA'S COVERAGE OF NEWS STORIES. VOA IS FULLY AUTHORIZED AND EXPECTED TO COVER STORIES IN THE U.S. FOR DISTRIBUTION TO FOREIGN AUDIENCES OVERSEAS.**

### USAGE REQUESTS

The law authorizes individuals and organizations to request VOA content. From time to time, VOA staff may receive requests for **one-time** use of VOA content, or the request may be for **ongoing use** of VOA programming. These requests could come from U.S.-based media organizations, diaspora media outlets, overseas media outlets, or from educational institutions.

### VOA STAFF SHOULD NOT RESPOND DIRECTLY TO REQUESTS

Instead, they should do as follows:

- Requests for **one-time use** of VOA original content should be directed to this online form: [https://www.bbg.gov/networks/content-requests/voa/?4mailto\\_id=1](https://www.bbg.gov/networks/content-requests/voa/?4mailto_id=1)
- Requests for **ongoing use of VOA programming** should be sent to [affiliates@bbg.gov](mailto:affiliates@bbg.gov). The BBG Marketing Office reviews those requests.
- **UNAIED OR UNPUBLISHED ORIGINAL VOA MATERIAL SHOULD NOT BE SHARED.**  
Please forward those requests to VOA senior management, the News Standards & Best Practices Editor and the Office of General Counsel.  
[\(Also see Requests for Unaired/Unpublished Material, p. 37 and VOA Firewall, p 89\)](#)

If you have questions about usage requests, please email [Usage-Requests@vopanews.com](mailto:Usage-Requests@vopanews.com).

### **TALKING ABOUT VOA CONTENT & PROGRAMMING**

The Smith-Mundt Act forbids VOA personnel to attempt to develop audiences within the United States. The funds which BBG and thus VOA receive are only authorized to create and distribute news and information to “foreign audiences abroad,” and the law requires VOA to ensure that VOA does not distribute content & programming with the intent of influencing “public opinion in the United States.”

If you attend a journalism or media conference such as NAB, EIJ, ONA, NABJ, NAHJ, SAJA, or attend an event at the National Press Club, and someone from a domestic U.S. news organization asks you about VOA’s work, you can freely talk about the content we produce every day. Nothing in Smith-Mundt prevents that.

### **VOA STAFF SHOULD NOT ATTEMPT TO MAKE A DIRECT OFFER OF VOA CONTENT TO ANY DOMESTIC NEWS OUTLET.**

### **IN ADDITION, VOA STAFF CANNOT SPEND ANY ADVERTISING OR OTHER FUNDS TO SPECIFICALLY TARGET OR DEVELOP AUDIENCES IN THE U.S.**

### **VIOLATION OF THIS RULE AND/OR OTHER PROVISIONS OF THE SMITH MUNDT ACT WILL RESULT IN THE TERMINATION OF YOUR AD BUDGET AND THE LOSS OF ADMINISTRATIVE ACCESS TO YOUR SERVICE’S SOCIAL ACCOUNTS.**

### **THIS IS IN ADDITION TO ANY OTHER ACTIONS THAT MAY BE AUTHORIZED TO BE TAKEN AGAINST INDIVIDUALS VIOLATING THE RULE.**

### **TOWN HALLS, FORUMS, AND OTHER SUCH EVENTS; PARTNERSHIPS; AND ACTIVITIES TO SUPPORT THE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF HIGH QUALITY JOURNALISTS**

VOA journalists or other staff may host or play a role in Town Halls or related events if the purpose of the event is to engage overseas audiences.

In line with efforts to adhere to the highest standards of broadcast journalism, there may be times, subject to any required approvals, that VOA journalists appear as subject matters experts in other news outlets. This may be allowed if the purpose is to benefit VOA and thus the agency by either facilitating development of new sources of information, enhancing VOA's credibility, and/or contributing to the recruitment or retention of high-caliber journalists. In other cases, the purpose may be to disseminate VOA content overseas as part of an arrangement with another news organization.

Agency leadership may be able to engage in certain partnership arrangements if the purpose is to enhance the quality or distribution of BBG content to foreign audiences overseas. Such partnerships must be reviewed and approved on a case-by-case basis

Please clear such events in advance with VOA leadership, who should consult with the Office of General Counsel.

### **SUMMARY**

Smith-Mundt allows us to:

- Provide materials upon request
- Engage in certain partnerships
- Provide opportunities for exposure for our journalists to enhance retention and recruitment; etc.

It **does not** prevent us from using the internet and social media to distribute our products to audiences overseas just because people in the U.S. might also see the material.

These exceptions do not allow VOA to attempt to target audiences in the United States. Ultimately, **if** it looks like the intent is to subvert the rules – i.e. **if the BBG goal is to influence U.S. opinion, or otherwise develop audiences within the United States** -- then the activity is prohibited.

### DOCUMENTING SOURCE VIDEO IN DALETPLUS

To be able to share our broadcast programs with U.S. requestors, we must be able to identify non-VOA content, including that provided by our newsfeed suppliers, ABC NewsOne, AFP, APTN and Reuters, in the stories and programs we air.

Everyone who creates a story or program using DaletPlus must take time to enter source info in the Asset Manager Form (AMF). The **Source Info** module is the third section on the AMF form. The example below is an example of source info in an AMF of a story, showing the kind of information expected when available. (Plus signs at the end of each field allow additional space for more info.)



**U.S. Distribution:** A quick reference field to indicate whether the story is cleared for fulfilling a request from a U.S. requestor. If your story or program master is entirely VOA original, **All Clear** should be check-marked. If it has non-VOA content (ABC NewsOne, AFP, APTN or Reuters) **Restricted** will be checked. **This means that some clips will have to be cleared for US distribution.** The default is **DO NOT Distribute**.

**Footage Sources:** A quick way to note the feeds that are included in the story or program master. For **program masters**, the archive liaison may use “select all” for news programs, if in assembling the program the service uses all of our content providers. For **VOA stories**, the producer will need to be specific, so the searcher knows how involved tracking down the sources may be.

**Feed Provider:** A free text field to note specifically the story slug /date and source of vendor-provided clips used in a story. When a U.S. request is being filled, this information will allow the requestor to contact the appropriate newsfeed source to obtain clearance to use the video in the United States.

**Source Comments:** Can be used to further clarify use if necessary / possible.

**Origin of video:** To be used when video is different from the newsfeed source itself; for example, video from YouTube. This field should be used for story AMFs, rather than for use for program master AMFs.

Please e-mail questions or concerns to [senior-archivists@voanews.com](mailto:senior-archivists@voanews.com). You may also call the Video Library’s point person on this project, Bojan Klima at 382-5510.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### **NEWS AGENCY IDs & THE DOT**

Incoming video from AFP, AP and Reuters are stamped with the ID of each news agency.

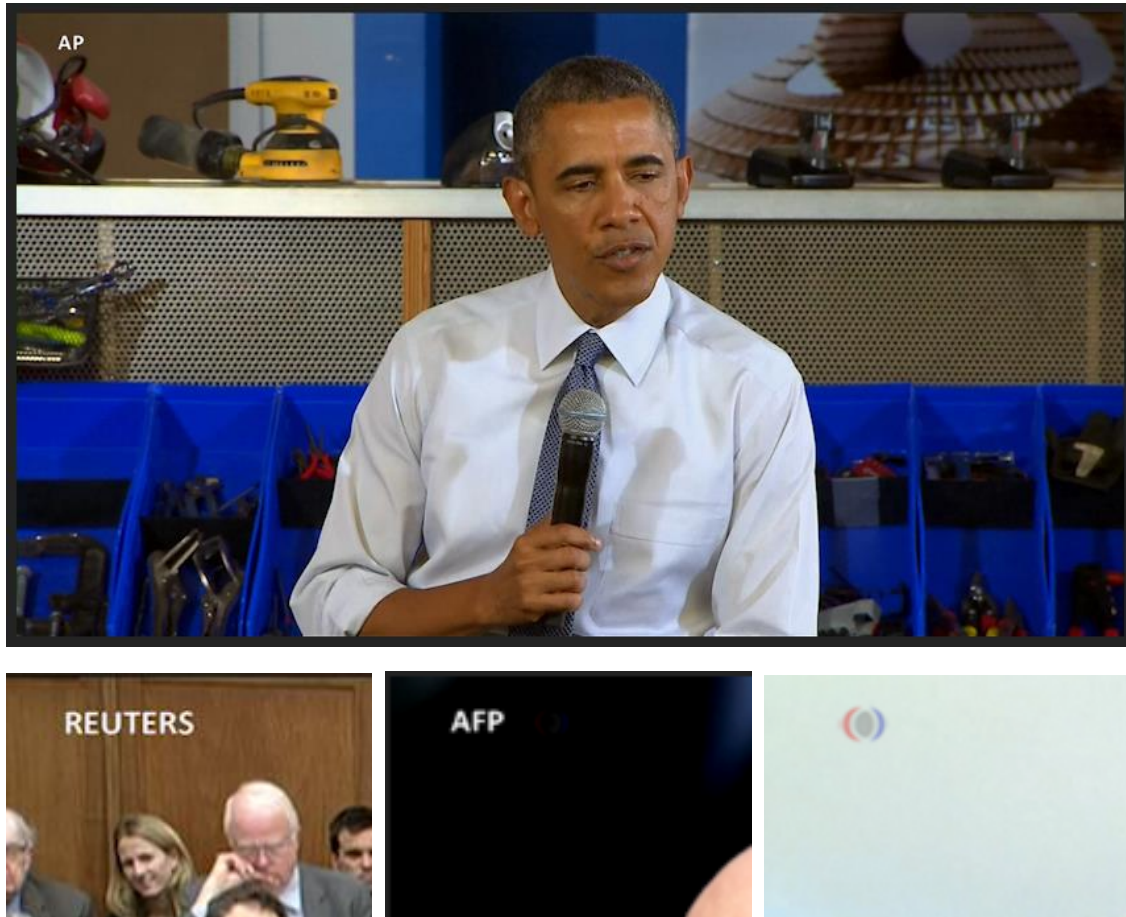
ABC NewsOne will continue to be stamped with the Dot.

### **THE IDs AND THE DOT INDICATE THAT THE STAMPED MATERIAL CANNOT BE SHARED WITH OR USED BY ANY VOA DOMESTIC CLIENTS OR REQUESTORS.**

The IDs and the Dot appear in the **UPPER LEFT** of the frame **AND CANNOT BE OBSCURED.**

- **IF A SERVICE INCLUDES NEWS AGENCY VIDEO IN ITS PACKAGES, PROGRAMS OR SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS, PLEASE MAKE SURE THE AGENCY ID OR THE DOT IS ALWAYS VISIBLE.**
- **THIS IS THE ONLY WAY WE CAN GUARANTEE THAT NON-VOA VIDEO WILL BE PROPERLY NOTED AND AVAILABLE FOR EASY REFERENCE DURING A VIDEO ASSESSMENT.**
- **ALL VIDEO DOWNLOADED FROM THE ABC NEWSONE, AFPFORUM, AP VIDEO HUB AND REUTERS CONNECT WEBSITES MUST HAVE THE PROPER ID ADDED TO THE VIDEO.**
- **IF YOU INSERT THE WRONG AGENCY ID YOU CANNOT RE-INSERT ANOTHER ID. YOU WILL HAVE TO START THE PROCESS OVER.**

This is how the agency IDs and the dot appear on incoming feeds:



- **ABC, AFP, AP AND REUTERS VIDEO IN THE VOA LIBRARY PRIOR TO JULY 3, 2013 DOES NOT HAVE THE AGENCY IDs OR THE DOT EMBEDDED IN THE VIDEO. THEREFORE, ALL ABC, AFP, AP OR REUTERS LIBRARY VIDEO PRIOR TO 7/3/13 MUST HAVE THE PROPER AGENCY ID OR DOT ADDED TO THE VIDEO.**
- **IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE REPORTER, PRODUCER AND/OR VIDEO EDITOR TO ENSURE THAT THE PROPER AGENCY ID OR DOT IS ADDED TO THE EDITED MATERIAL.**
- **EXISTING FILE FOOTAGE THAT ALREADY HAS THE DOT DOES NOT NEED TO BE RE-STAMPED WITH AN AGENCY ID.**

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### **THE DOT MUST BE ADDED TO CLIPS PRIOR TO 7/3/13 FROM THESE SOURCES**

- IRINN
- Journal of American Medicine (JAMA)
- NewsMarket
- UNIFEEDS (United Nations video)
- Other Acquired Material:
  - From VOA Acquisitions Branch
  - Obtained by VOA Reporters
  - Obtained from a Third Party

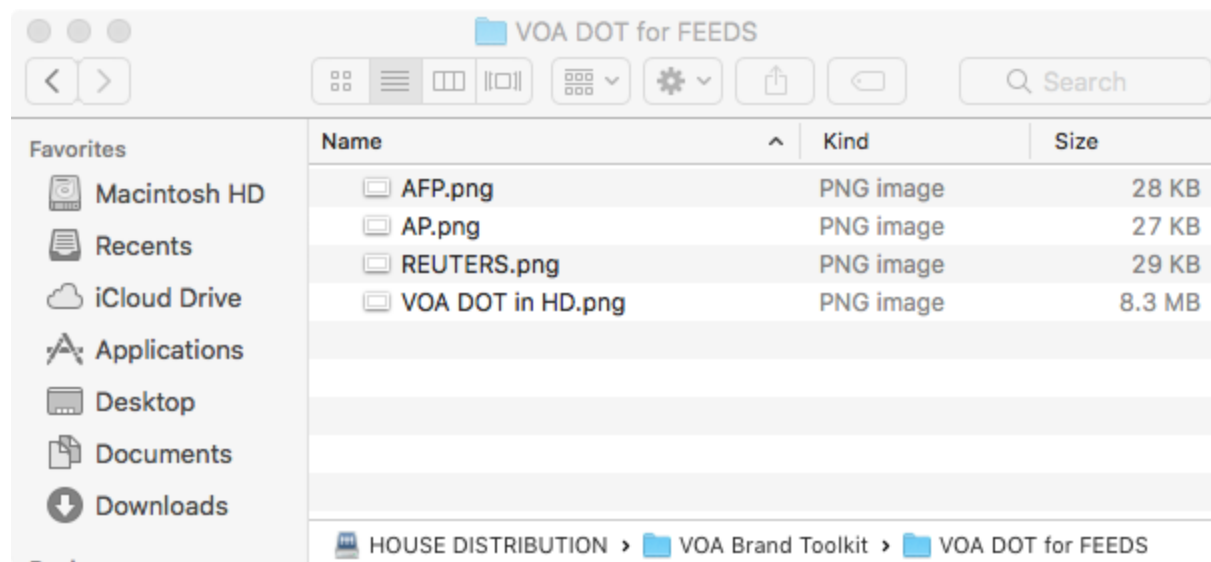
### **THESE SOURCES PRIOR TO 7/3/13 DO NOT REQUIRE THE DOT OR OTHER ID**

- VOA Original Footage
- House Recording Studio (Including hearings and news conferences)
- NASA
- Pentagon
- Senate Recording Studio (Including hearings and news conferences)
- State Department
- White House

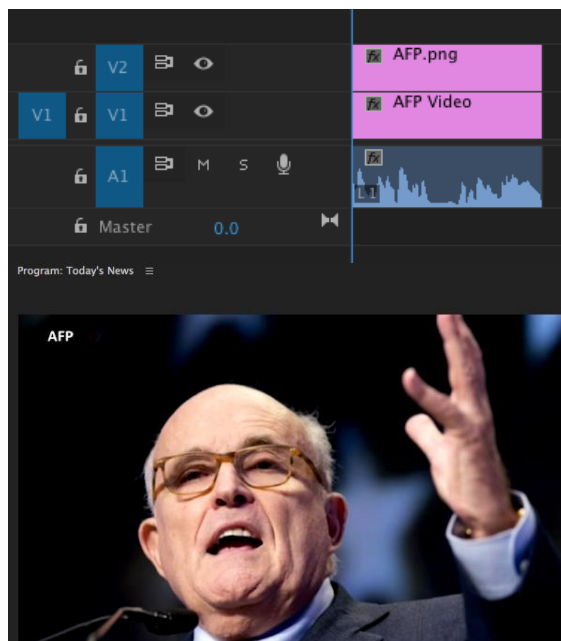
### **ADDING AN AGENCY ID/DOT IN PREMIERE PRO**

In order to add the news agency IDs or the Dot to your video in Premiere, you will first need to import the graphic files.

They are located at: [\\voa\\_creative\HOUSE DISTRIBUTION\VOA Brand Toolkit\VOA DOT for FEEDS](\\voa_creative\HOUSE DISTRIBUTION\VOA Brand Toolkit\VOA DOT for FEEDS)

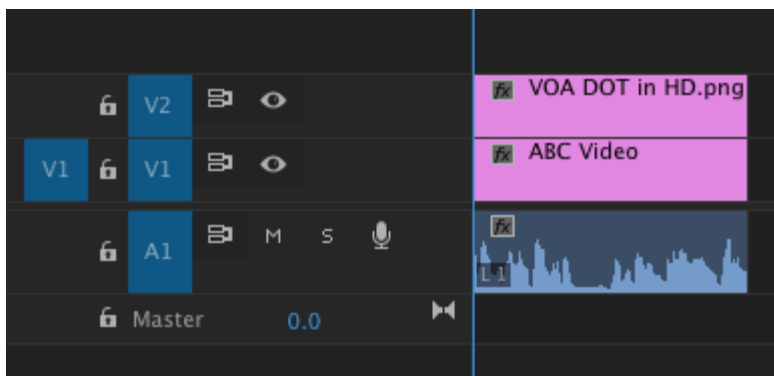


Import the needed files into Premiere and drag them to a video track above your footage. The graphic files will automatically key themselves over the video with their built in alpha channels.





Use the **VOA DOT in HD.png** file for ABC News video:



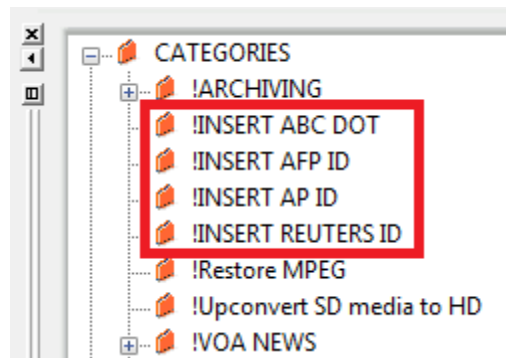
### ADDING AN AGENCY ID/DOT IN DALETPLUS

**THE DROP FOLDER PROCESS WILL REPLACE THE ORIGINAL VIDEO.**

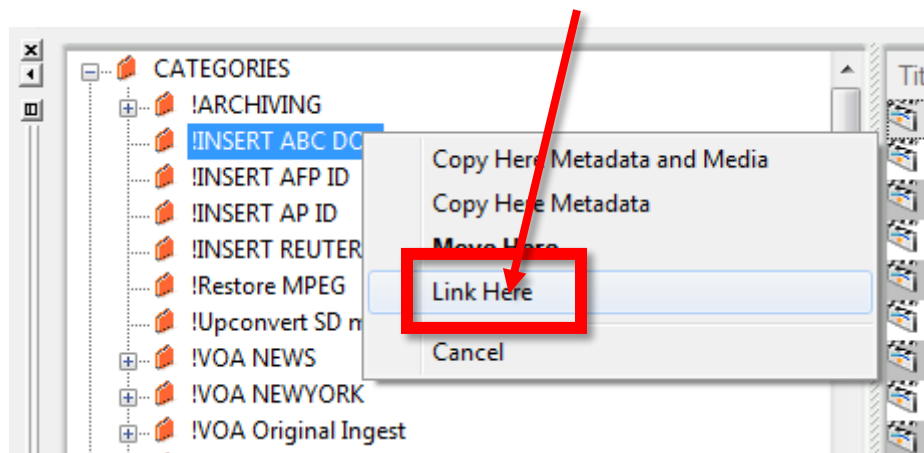
**IT CANNOT BE UNDONE.**

**BE SURE THE VIDEO IS LINKED TO THE CORRECT FOLDER!**

Dalet users will find drop folders towards the top of the CATEGORIES folder. There is a folder for each of the newsfeeds.



Locate the footage in Dalet that needs the bug. Right mouse click, hold and drag the video to the appropriate folder, and release the mouse button. Choose **Link Here**.



## BEST PRACTICES GUIDE

The video will begin rendering and the original video will be replaced with the video and the bug. While the video is processing, the status will change to OFC (Out for Conversion). This process usually takes a few minutes. The Clapboard Icon will first show a 'Red X' followed by a 'Red Circle'.

When the status changes back to 'NEW' and the Clapboard Icon is clear, the process is complete and you can view your video with the selected bug burned into the upper left corner.



**DO NOT VIEW OR USE THE VIDEO UNTIL THE CONVERSION PROCESS IS COMPLETE  
AND THE VIDEO IS BACK ONLINE!**

Once finished, the original video will have the appropriate agency ID or dot burned into it.

This link takes you to the video tutorial version of these instructions: [Agency ID & Dot Video Tutorial](#)

**THE VOA DOT MUST BE ADDED TO CERTAIN PROPRIETARY VIDEO!**  
**SEE LIST ON PAGE 82**

**IF THERE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT WHETHER TO ADD  
THE DOT TO OLDER LIBRARY VIDEO, PLEASE CONTACT  
STEVEN SPRINGER ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com))  
OR PAM COMMERFORD ([pcommerford@voanews.com](mailto:pcommerford@voanews.com))**

### CORRECTIONS

VOA's reputation and credibility are the hallmarks of the organization. The News Center and the Language Services produce news content, programming and services across many platforms and under daily deadline pressures. While our goal is always to be accurate and fair, occasionally we will present incorrect or inaccurate information. A meaningful policy for correcting significant errors will strengthen our trust with viewers, listeners and readers. As such, these errors will be corrected in a clear and timely manner, with appropriate prominence.

### TV & RADIO BROADCASTS

If we make a mistake that needs correcting, we should do so as quickly as possible while the same show is on the air. If the error is not detected immediately, then preferably the correction should be aired on the same program in which the original error occurred, whether it's the following day or week. Make a point to say "On \_\_\_\_\_ day (state the day and date and time), we erred in our reporting..." then go on to explain what we said that was wrong, make the correction and close by saying, "Voice of America regrets the error."

### VOA WEBSITES

If the error is a simple typo that does not change facts or understanding of the story, we consider it a minor change and simply correct it without further mention. If the error is substantive or one of fact, we change it, add an asterisk (\*), then a note at the bottom saying when it was corrected and what was wrong originally.

### SOCIAL MEDIA PAGES

**Facebook:** Correcting an error on Facebook should follow the same procedure as on voanews.com websites. Update/edit the Facebook post and explain why the information was corrected.

**Twitter:** A good method for correcting an error on Twitter is to **subtweet** the correction. On the next page you'll see how *Slate* handled posting the wrong photo (actor Javier Bardem) when tweeting about Vladimir Putin.

The correction begins "@Slate CORRECTION:" so that *Slate* is replying to its own original tweet. The result is that anyone viewing the original tweet can see the correction in the stream of replies. Equally important, it refers to the photo without showing it again.

People viewing the correction tweet on its own can also see it is part of a conversation linked to the original, offending tweet.

**NOTE:** If you reply to yourself, then anyone who follows you will see the reply. So in terms of who can see the correction, it's just as good as sending it as a normal tweet.

**Slate** @Slate ⚙️ Follow

Could Crimea become Putin's Waterloo? [slate.me/1jJIRFd](http://slate.me/1jJIRFd)  
[pic.twitter.com/OdvDLVLPRS](https://pic.twitter.com/OdvDLVLPRS)

↩️ Reply ↻ Retweet ★ Favorite 📶 Buffer ⋮

8:59 PM · 1 Mar 2014 · ⚙️ Flag media



RETWEETS 299 FAVORITES 151

Reply to @Slate

**Blake Hounshell** @blakehounshell · Mar 1  
 @Slate Leave Javier Bardem out of this. ★ 43 ↻ 10 ⋮

**Slate** @Slate · Mar 1  
 @Slate CORRECTION: This photo is of Javier Bardem, and not Vladimir Putin. ★ 807 ↻ 787 ⋮

### **LEGAL ISSUES**

This section provides brief introductions to various areas of the law that may apply to VOA journalists. These guidelines provide an overview to certain areas of the law and are not a substitute for a legal opinion from the Office of General Counsel (OGC). Please contact OGC when you have a specific legal question.

#### **VOA FIREWALL**

The “firewall” exists to maintain the credibility of reporting by U.S. international broadcasters. The firewall is violated whenever another U.S. government agency or a U.S. government official tries to influence our work by putting undue pressure on a VOA journalist or on the agency itself or takes any other action that may undermine the journalistic credibility or independence of VOA journalists. This protection arises from numerous provisions of the International Broadcasting Act (IBA), the Agency’s governing statute.

#### **WHAT COULD RESULT IN A FIREWALL VIOLATION**

- A firewall violation would likely be a U.S. ambassador or other State Department personnel demanding that you not air a particular interview or that you give a specific slant to a VOA news story.
- If a federal official from outside of VOA or from another federal agency asks you to use your access/position as a journalist to gather or provide information on their behalf, that would appear be a firewall violation.
- Firewall violations could also occur when someone outside of VOA takes actions that directly intrude on VOA’s professional independence and interferes with news coverage. If a directive from outside the newsroom, including from the BBG, is imposed which you think impermissibly restricts your ability to objectively report the news, or otherwise act in a manner consistent with the best practices of professional journalism, please notify your Service Chief and Division Director immediately.
- A direct request from non-VOA personnel to the News Center or a Language Service for your notes or unpublished recordings of video or audio may be a firewall violation. Those requests must immediately be directed to the VOA Director and the General Counsel’s Office.

**UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES SHOULD A VOA EMPLOYEE OR  
CONTRACTOR TURN OVER UNAired OR UNPUBLISHED NEWS  
COVERAGE TO ANY THIRD PARTY WITHOUT FIRST CONSULTING  
WITH VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT.**

### **WHAT IS NOT A FIREWALL VIOLATION**

The firewall should not discourage VOA journalists from interviewing government officials or USG officials from appearing on VOA programs. It is critical to ensuring that VOA journalists and editors make the final decisions on what stories to cover and how they are covered.

Should a third party, such as a court, law enforcement agency, or other person or organization request that VOA turn over reporters' notes or unpublished content through appropriate legal authority -- such as a court order or Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request -- that is not a firewall violation. However, **immediately** turn the request over to your Service Chief, Division Director, or to the VOA Director's Office. (For FOIA requests, please coordinate through VOA's designated FOIA point of contact.)

A supervisor or editor who asks for relevant editorial script or video changes in a story is not committing a firewall violation. That is part of the everyday nature of journalism.

Finally, the firewall does not start or stop at one specific point in the agency. It exists across the entire BBG and VOA. It is important that staff not only reports up the chain of command when other government officials or agencies approach VOA, **but that leadership communicates challenges to VOA's reporting down the chain** so that it's clear to editors that coverage has been called into question and the journalistic reasoning behind any corrective actions.

**IF YOU BELIEVE THAT A FIREWALL VIOLATION HAS OCCURRED,  
NOTIFY YOUR SERVICE CHIEF AND DIVISION DIRECTOR  
IMMEDIATELY.**

**IF YOU BELIEVE YOUR IMMEDIATE SUPERVISOR HAS ENGAGED IN A  
FIREWALL VIOLATION PLEASE DISCUSS THE ISSUE WITH THE EDITOR  
OF NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES.**

### **COPYRIGHT & FAIR USE**

Copyright is a form of protection provided by U.S. law to the authors of original artistic works. Artistic works include photographs, video, audio, music, motion pictures, commercials, written products, as well as footage from other news broadcasters. You should not use a copyrighted work unless (1) you have permission to use, whether via VOA's contracts (such as VOA's video feed or photo contracts) or another negotiated license agreement, or (2) your use of the work falls under the "fair use" doctrine.

#### **FAIR USE**

Determining whether use of copyrighted material is a **fair use** requires a balancing of four factors: (1) the purpose and character of your use; (2) the nature of the copyrighted work; (3) the amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole; and (4) the effect of the use upon the potential market for the copyrighted work. Application of these factors and the fair use doctrine is highly fact-specific and requires a case-by-case analysis.

A use of a copyrighted work is more likely to be a fair use if the material is directly relevant to a news story and the excerpt used is no longer than necessary to achieve the intended purpose. On the other hand, the use of copyrighted material such as a music clip simply to enhance the production value of a television package, for example, is not likely to be a fair use. Keep in mind that just because a video or audio clip is newsworthy does not automatically make VOA's use of it fair. [A Fair Use Self-Help Guide](#) with Frequently Asked Questions is available on the agency's Sharepoint site.

*(Also see [YouTube Guidelines, p. 52](#), [Music, p. 61](#), [Audio Usage Rights, p. 62](#) and [Video Usage Rights, p. 64](#))*

#### **AMBIENT MUSIC**

Generally, there is no copyright issue where music is naturally appearing in the background during an interview or taped event. There may be, however, a copyright issue if the music is incorporated into a news or feature report in other than its incidental form.

*(Also see [YouTube Guidelines, p. 52](#) and [Music, p. 61](#))*

#### **PUBLIC DOMAIN**

Copyright restrictions do not apply to works in the public domain, which include most U.S. federal government works, such as photos, maps, or video found on [whitehouse.gov](#), [state.gov](#), [nasa.gov](#), [cia.gov](#), and other government websites. Be sure to check the Copyright or Terms of Use/Terms of Service pages of these and other websites before using any content.

A work is also in the public domain if it is no longer under copyright protection. This depends on when and where the work was first published, but generally speaking, works published in the U.S. before 1923 are in the public domain. Contact OGC for specific questions about older works or copyright terms in foreign jurisdictions.



### LICENSED MATERIAL

VOA has several license agreements with third parties to use their copyrighted material. The terms of these agreements govern use of the material provided by the licenses, notwithstanding the applicability of the fair use doctrine. When using material from one of VOA's feed providers, such as ABC NewsOne, AFP, APTN and Reuters, for example, you must check all restrictions that may limit the story's use. Questions about the video feeds should be directed to the COR, Steven Springer, and to VOA Media Asset Management Branch at [Senior-Archivists@voanews.com](mailto:Senior-Archivists@voanews.com).

*(Also see [Video Usage Rights, p. 64](#))*

### REQUESTING PERMISSION

Because fair use can sometimes be difficult to determine with certainty, VOA producers are strongly encouraged to seek permission to use copyrighted material from the rightful copyright owner. You should start the process of identifying and contacting the owner of copyrighted content as early in your production process as possible, since it may take several days or weeks to identify the copyright owner and negotiate a license. Please note that obtaining permission in writing, using the standard BBG/VOA release form, is highly preferable to getting permission orally or via email. A template release form -- to be edited and modified, as needed -- is available on the [Best Practices Sharepoint page](#).

On occasion, a third party may either request to amend the VOA form or insist on using its own licensing agreement. Such outside agreements may contain terms to which BBG/VOA cannot agree. Please consult OGC when presented with a third party release form or licensing agreement.

### TRADEMARK

A trademark is an intellectual property right in a particular "mark" used to identify a good or service, such as a name, slogan, symbol or logo. For example, "Voice of America" is a registered trademark. It is unlawful to use a trademark in a manner that confuses consumers about the source or sponsorship of goods or services. This is rarely an issue in news broadcasting, since the law allows you to use a mark without permission in a news story if the mark is used in an informational sense. For example, if you are reporting on the BP oil spill, it is appropriate to show the BP logo to identify the company. However, if you are launching a new VOA program, avoid using slogans or titles that are trademarked.

### TRADEMARK & SPORTING EVENTS

When covering major sporting events such as the Olympics, VOA journalists must be careful with using official trademarks, such as the interlocking Olympic rings. For example, it could be argued that a VOA graphic incorporating the VOA background/colors/image with the official Olympic logo creates an unauthorized association between VOA, a non-Olympics marketing partner, and the Olympic brand.

**ALTHOUGH THE PHRASE "VOICE OF AMERICA" IS TRADEMARKED BY THE AGENCY,  
"VOA" AND THE VOA LOGO ARE NOT TRADEMARKED.**

[More information on the above topics can be found at the Best Practices site on Sharepoint.](#)

### **FILMING IN PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE PLACES**

Generally, news media have the right to be in public places and on public property to gather information, photographically or otherwise. VOA journalists should be mindful, however, about rules, permits, or prohibitions on filming or taking of photographs at certain meetings, sporting events, or in private spaces such as businesses and shops. Similarly, journalists should seek permission from an owner or occupant (even if the occupant is not the owner) before entering private property or a residence.

[\*\(Also see Covering Criminal Activity, p. 21\)\*](#)

### **REQUEST FOR PROOF OF INSURANCE**

From time to time, VOA staff may be asked to provide a certificate of liability insurance when filming in locations where event organizers or property owners want to protect themselves against third party bodily injury and property damage. While most private sector media organizations have liability insurance, the U.S. Government self-insures against liabilities. Therefore, the agency does not purchase liability insurance, and there is no such certificate that we can provide.

Instead, the Office of General Counsel provides a letter explaining this that staff can send to the appropriate parties. Two versions of the letter – one on VOA letterhead and one on BBG letterhead -- are now available in Word documents on the VOA Best Practices Sharepoint page:

[VOA Insurance Letter](#)   [BBG Insurance Letter](#)

Each letter has blanks so that you can fill in the names of VOA staff that will be on location and the name of the property/location you will be working at. Use the VOA letterhead if you choose to have your service chief or division director sign it. Use the BBG letterhead if you prefer to have an attorney in the General Counsel's Office sign it.

If you have any questions about this, please contact the General Counsel's Office or Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com)), the Editor for News Standards & Best Practices.

### **DEFAMATION/PRIVACY/FALSE LIGHT**

Under U.S. law, the central question in an action for defamation or invasion of privacy is whether the statements in question are true or false. Truthful publication or broadcast of matters pertaining to legitimate public interest should generally not expose VOA to liability in the United States, especially if VOA's reporting concerns a public figure.

However, VOA may be liable for invasion of privacy in certain situations for the publicizing of private facts or falsehoods. Not only that, other countries' defamation and "insult" laws are not as protective of the press, so broadcasts that are legal in the U.S. may still expose VOA to liability overseas.

VOA journalists should not intercept or record any private conversations without the permission of the participants, as this may be a crime in certain jurisdictions. The Office of General Counsel should be consulted when a VOA journalist receives intercepted conversations from a third party or in any other special circumstances.

[\*\(Also see Recording Telephone Interviews, p. 36\)\*](#)

**The following guidance is provided by the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press (rcfp.org):**

- Check sources thoroughly. Get independent corroboration whenever possible. A source could have a vendetta against the subject and willfully or unintentionally misrepresent the facts for his or her own purposes. Confidential sources may disappear or recant in the face of a lawsuit. Don't rely on someone else to be accurate.
- Do not let your opinion about whether someone is a public figure or official color your decision to verify the accuracy of a story. Juries do not respond favorably to reporters who fail to confront their subjects with defamatory information and provide them with an opportunity to comment.
- If you cover the police or courthouse beat, make certain you understand criminal and civil procedure and terminology. Be especially careful to restate accurately any information obtained about arrests, investigations and judicial proceedings.
- Be cautious when editing. Make sure the story does not convey the wrong information because of a hasty rewrite.
- Watch for headlines and cutlines that might be defamatory even though the text explains the story.
- **Make sure news promos or teasers used to stir audience interest are not misleading or defamatory.**
- **Do not use generic video footage or file photos when reporting on an activity that might be considered questionable.**
- **Just because someone else said it does not mean that a news organization cannot be sued for republishing it.** This includes letters to the editor. Check out any factual allegations contained in them as carefully as you would statements in a news story.
- Be sensitive about using words that connote dishonest behavior, immorality or other undesirable traits, whether in your published story or in comments in your notes. Remember that a judge may order a news organization to produce reporters' notes, drafts and internal memoranda at a libel trial.
- If contacted by someone threatening a libel suit, be polite, but do not admit error or fault. Talk the case over with your editor, supervisor or attorney immediately, and follow procedures established by your news organization.

### **DO NOT BE RECKLESS WITH THE TRUTH**

### **REPORTER'S PRIVILEGE & CONFIDENTIAL SOURCES**

The reporter's privilege originates in the First Amendment's guarantee of a free press, under the rationale that forcing journalists to disclose confidential sources will discourage sources from communicating with reporters, thereby disrupting the free flow of information protected by the First Amendment. In some circumstances, journalists are compelled to disclose confidential sources. Because of BBG's special status as a federal government agency, some internal VOA documents may also be subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

[\*\(Also see Sourcing, p. 26\)\*](#)

**VOA JOURNALISTS SHOULD CONTACT OGC IF APPROACHED  
BY ANY LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS.**

**IN SOME SITUATIONS, THIS COULD BE A FIREWALL VIOLATION.**

[\*\(Also see VOA Firewall, p. 90\)\*](#)

### **REPORTING ON CLASSIFIED DOCUMENTS**

A number of laws and regulations, including several criminal statutes, regulate access to, and transmission of, classified information. VOA has a specific protocol in place regarding its reporting on classified documents in the public domain, such as the documents released by WikiLeaks in 2010.

**ONLY CERTAIN VOA JOURNALISTS ARE ASSIGNED TO REPORT ON THESE TOPICS.**

**THE SUPERVISORY INVESTIGATIVE EDITOR SHOULD BE CONSULTED BEFORE  
YOU BEGIN ANY ASSIGNMENT RELATING IN ANY WAY TO CLASSIFIED MATERIAL,  
EVEN IF THE CLASSIFIED DOCUMENTS ARE PUBLICLY AVAILABLE ON A WEBSITE  
LIKE WIKILEAKS.**

**THE SUPERVISORY INVESTIGATIVE EDITOR WILL CONSULT WITH SENIOR  
MANAGEMENT AND THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL REGARDING ALL  
APPLICABLE LAWS.**

### **SUBPOENAS OR REQUESTS FOR TESTIMONY OR DOCUMENTS**

- **IF YOU RECEIVE A REQUEST OR DEMAND TO TESTIFY IN A LEGAL PROCEEDING ON MATTERS RELATING TO OFFICIAL AGENCY INFORMATION OR YOUR OFFICIAL DUTIES, OR IF YOU RECEIVE A REQUEST TO PRODUCE AGENCY RECORDS OR INFORMATION, CONTACT THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL IMMEDIATELY.**

There is a special regulatory procedure for handling requests for testimony by current and former employees and handling the production of documents in legal proceedings in which the BBG is not a named party.

*(Also see [What Is Not a Firewall Violation, p. 91](#))*

### **INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL BY VOA STAFF**

While U.S. government employees must usually obtain a country clearance from the State Department before official government travel abroad, VOA reporters traveling to cover and report on the news may travel to countries in which U.S. Missions are located with minimal formality, which will typically only include a notification of intent to travel to the State Department. Please be mindful that travel to some sanctioned countries may require additional licensing or documentation. Reporters should contact their supervisors and the Travel Office before planning travel to these countries.

### **OUTSIDE ACTIVITIES**

#### **ALL FULL-TIME VOA STAFF ARE REQUIRED TO FOLLOW THESE PROCEDURES BEFORE RESPONDING TO A REQUEST OR MAKING ANY COMMITMENTS**

Anyone looking to engage in activities outside of VOA should first check with their supervisor to ensure that doing so won't conflict with official duty schedules or requirements.

Then, you should forward your proposed activity to [OutsideRequests@voanews.com](mailto:OutsideRequests@voanews.com). This will reach VOA Public Relations Director Bridget Serchak ([bserchak@voanews.com](mailto:bserchak@voanews.com)), Editor for News Standards & Best Practices Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com)) and the Ethics Group in the General Counsel's Office. We will review your proposal to ensure that it will not violate government ethics regulations or journalistic ethics and best practices.

Federal regulations prohibit employees from receiving compensation for outside teaching, speaking, or writing activities that directly relate to their official duties.

Some activities may not be appropriate if they:

- Constitute a conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest.
- Involve use of agency materials, time, or facilities.
- Involve a particular matter you've worked on in your official capacity.
- Are likely to adversely affect the agency's ability to fulfill its mission
- Would involve working for outlets that broadcast to or publish in the same target area as the employee's VOA language service.

Additionally, if you will be identified as an agency employee in connection with your outside activities, in order to avoid appearances of impropriety, you must include a disclaimer that the views expressed are your own and not that of VOA (or the U.S. Government, as appropriate).

Because the highest standards of journalism require a reputation for impartiality, VOA journalists should not perform public relations or similar work, either paid or unpaid. Journalists should also not counsel individuals or organizations, either in the United States or abroad, on how to deal successfully with the news media. Lastly, you should not provide advice to government officials other than to those in VOA, the BBG or any other government broadcasting entity, or to candidates for public office, again regardless of whether in the United States or abroad.

Outside speaking and writing opportunities can be highly beneficial, both personally and professionally, but if not done properly they can have serious consequences. Please don't hesitate to contact Andrew or Steve if you have any questions or need advice.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Aside from the types of activities outlined here, there is also the issue of whether VOA staff can, or should, express themselves outside of the office.

Needless to say, this is a very delicate issue, given our unique status as government employees as well as journalists.

With that in mind, this is the recommended guidance for VOA staff:

- VOA's mission is to provide accurate and objective news and information. To facilitate that mission, as journalists, you are expected to remain neutral and objective. That means that you should be careful and try to avoid conduct or activity that would question your neutrality and objectivity as well as the neutrality and objectivity of VOA.
- For example: If as a VOA journalist you are reporting on or otherwise working on a story regarding "X" situation, it is recommended that you avoid publicly voicing your personal opinion about that situation because such activity may call into question your credibility as a journalist and could compromise VOA's reputation as a reliable and credible news organization.

### **PLEASE EXERCISE GOOD JUDGMENT WHEN CONSIDERING YOUR OPTIONS AND MAKING YOUR DECISIONS.**

[\*\(Also see Opinion, p. 47\)\*](#)

## **CONTRACTORS**

VOA contractors generally have wider latitude to engage in activities outside the scope of their contracts with the Agency, but they should keep in mind that certain activities and actions could jeopardize continued performance on their current contract, or their ability to obtain a follow-on contract.

When doing work outside of VOA, it is important for VOA contractors to refrain from stating or creating the impression that they are employees, agents or representatives of the agency. They should not say that they "work for" VOA or are "correspondents at" VOA. Rather, they should indicate that they are "freelance journalists," "regular contributors to VOA," or use a similar description.

Also, VOA contractors must exercise caution to ensure that their journalistic integrity or impartiality is not compromised by their activities outside the scope of their contract.

VOA contractors employed by the employee management firms should advise the respective on-site managers from each company when they receive offers of work outside VOA. Contractors must also send their requests to the respective VOA Program Manager responsible for their language service, as well as to Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com)) and Bridget Serchak ([bserchak@voanews.com](mailto:bserchak@voanews.com)).

VOA contractors with any questions as to whether or not an outside activity poses a potential journalistic conflict are encouraged to contact Steve and Bridget for advice.

[\*Return to Table of Contents\*](#)

### **COMPETITIONS & CASH AWARDS**

Any employee who wants to enter a particular journalism competition using his/her VOA-produced work **must** first advise his/her supervisor. If the supervisor determines the entry to be of merit, please advise Pat Bodnar ([pbodnar@voanews.com](mailto:pbodnar@voanews.com)) in the Language Programming Directorate. All entries should be sent to Percy Rogers, the Agency's Incentive Coordinator ([ptrogers@bbg.gov](mailto:ptrogers@bbg.gov)). Percy will compile all entries.

**ENTRIES FOR JOURNALISM COMPETITIONS ARE TO BE  
SUBMITTED BY THE AGENCY'S SENIOR MANAGEMENT ONLY**

**INDIVIDUAL STAFF MEMBERS SHOULD NOT ENTER COMPETITIONS  
ON THEIR OWN USING WORK PRODUCED FOR VOA**

While the majority of journalism competitions that VOA enters award trophies, plaques or certificates to the winners, a few of them may include cash awards. Should a winning entry result in a cash award, that award will be designated to the agency, **not to the individual**. It will be the responsibility of VOA senior management to determine whether it will accept the cash award under its gift acceptance authority, and how that cash award will be administered.



### **APPENDIX – CONTROL ROOM EMERGENCY PROCEDURES**

#### **EMERGENCY EVACUATION TV CONTROL ROOM ACTIONS**

1. The Director will direct the Producer to tell the anchor to make the statement, **“We must interrupt this program, please stand by. We will return as soon as possible.”**
2. Director or TD fades to black on anchor and fades up on generic VOA full screen graphic.
3. Director or TD notifies TVMC that an ID graphic is up and that the control room and studio staff are vacating the building.
4. Using the same graphic, TVMC takes control of the path seamlessly when ready. TVMC evacuates the building.

#### **EMERGENCY EVACUATION RADIO CONTROL ROOM ACTIONS**

1. Producer tells anchor to make the statement, **“We must interrupt this program, please stand by. We will return as soon as possible.”**
2. Technician plays VOA1 “The Hits” so that VOA branded content continues standard frequencies.
- 2a. **Alternate:** Producer tells anchor to introduce “linked” show. This means all remaining show elements could continue to playout without live inserts until done.
3. Technician links remaining program elements and executes.
4. Technician notifies RMC of programming status.
5. Radio MC takes necessary steps to ensure program continuity.
6. Master Control, Control- room, and studio staff evacuate the building.

#### **EMERGENCY NCC ACTIONS**

NCC receives the broadcast product from Master Control and transmits it to the respective distribution points. NCC does not alter the product content sent to them for distribution.

#### **TO IMPLEMENT THE TV CONTROL ROOM PLAN, OPERATIONS MUST**

1. Load the TVMC full screen VOA graphic in each TV control room switcher. This may be updated in the future pending further guidance.
2. The Broadcast Operations management is responsible for making sure the graphic is installed in all control rooms and Master Control, and that the emergency plan is communicated to their respective staffs.
3. Broadcast Operations is responsible for maintaining the emergency full screen VOA graphic in their daily operation control room set up, and show programming.

#### **TO IMPLEMENT THE EMERGENCY EVACUATION ACTION PLAN, LANGUAGE SERVICE MANAGEMENT MUST**

1. Communicate the emergency action plan to service leadership and staff.
2. Each service must provide to Division management the service action plan for contacting affiliates about disruptions.

### **ALL LANGUAGE SERVICES AND BROADCAST OPERATIONS STAFF ARE REQUIRED TO EVACUATE THE BUILDING DURING AN EMERGENCY**

**NOTE:** This Emergency evacuation guide for Broadcast Operations and Language Services is for real emergencies, and when there is any doubt please respond as though it is a real emergency.

**However, a fire drill is not an emergency.** If a fire alarm drill will be conducted, employees and managers will be notified in advance of the testing.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The contents of this Guide represent the contributions of many VOA staffers. Thanks to all for your input. Other entries in the Guide come from previous House-wide guidance.

In addition, certain elements in the Guide were produced with the cooperation of the following non-Federal entities:

CNN

Freedom Forum

Hootsuite.com

Los Angeles Times

New York Times

NPR

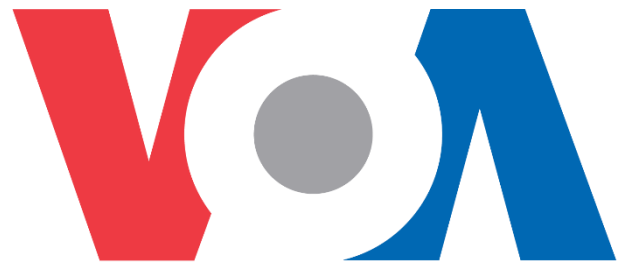
Project for Excellence in Journalism

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press

Radio Television Digital News Association

Society of Professional Journalists



Voice of America®

---

# ***BEST PRACTICES GUIDE***

---

***FEBRUARY 2019***

**[SharePoint: Best Practices Guide](#)**

**DALETPLUS: MEDIA-->CATEGORIES-->MANUALS**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>THE VOA CHARTER</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>NEWS GATHERING</b>	
-FAIRNESS, OBJECTIVITY & BALANCE	7
-BIAS & DIVERSITY	9
-POLITICAL ACTIVITY	10
-DRONES	12
-SENSITIVE & GRAPHIC MATERIAL	18
-COVERING WAR	19
-COVERING TERRORISM	18
-VIDEO & AUDIO OF TERRORISTS, HOSTAGES OR PRISONERS	20
-COVERING CRIMINAL ACTIVITY	21
-HOSTAGE/BARRICADE SITUATIONS	21
-NAMING PEOPLE INVOLVED IN CRIMES	22
-INTERVIEWING & VIDEOTAPING MINORS	23
-COVERING & REPORTING SUICIDES	24
-BREAKING NEWS	24
-REPORTING CROWD ESTIMATES	25
-STAGING & RE-CREATIONS	25
-USING VOA EMPLOYEES OR RELATIVES FOR STORIES	25
-WRITING	26
-SOURCING	27
-RUMORS & SPECULATION	28
-ATTRIBUTION	29
-CREDITING THE NEWS AGENCIES	33
-PLAGIARISM	34
-INTERVIEWS	35
-PUBLIC FIGURES	36
-ANONYMITY	37
-“AMBUSH” INTERVIEWS	38
-ADVANCE SCRIPTS/SCREENING	38
-REQUESTS FOR UNAIED/UNPUBLISHED MATERIAL	38
-SUBJECT TAPING INTERVIEW	38
-PAYMENT	38

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### GUESTS

-NOTIFYING VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT OF HIGH-LEVEL GUESTS	39
-SECURITY PROCEDURES FOR GUESTS	39
-GUEST BOOKING PROCEDURES	41
-HOSTING A GUEST ON VOA PROGRAMS	43

### DIGITAL MEDIA

-SOCIAL MEDIA-GENERAL	45
-SOCIAL MEDIA AS REPORTING TOOL	46
-OPINION	47
-MANAGING YOUR PROGRAM'S OR SERVICE'S SOCIAL PRESENCE	48
-POSTING VOA CONTENT TO OTHER SITES, INCLUDING YOUR OWN	48
-LINKING TO OTHER SITES	49
-BE TRANSPARENT ABOUT YOUR MISTAKES	49
-USER-GENERATED CONTENT	50
-YOUTUBE GUIDELINES	52
-GOOGLE EARTH GUIDELINES	55
-REVEALING WEBSITES & ADDRESSES	56
-AFFILIATE/RECIPROCAL LINKS	56

### PHOTOGRAPHS

-GENERAL RULES	57
-EDITING PHOTOGRAPHS	57
-PHOTO ILLUSTRATIONS	58
-TECHNICAL TIPS	58
-SENDING IN PHOTO FILES	59
-CAPTIONS/CREDITS	59

### MUSIC

-GENERAL GUIDELINES	61
-SOCIAL MEDIA & MUSIC	61

### AUDIO USAGE RIGHTS

-AUDIO CLIPS FROM TV NETWORKS	62
-------------------------------	----

### VIDEO USAGE RIGHTS

-COMMON FEATURES	64
-USING VIDEO FROM TV NETWORKS	65
-ABC NEWS	66
-AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE (AFP)	68

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

-ASSOCIATED PRESS (APTN)	69
-REUTERS	70
-NEWSMARKET	72
-USING CONTENT FROM STATE-RUN MEDIA	74
<b>VIDEO NEWS RELEASES (VNRs)</b>	<b>76</b>
<b><u>DOMESTIC DISTRIBUTION OF VOA CONTENT</u></b>	
-SMITH-MUNDT REGULATIONS	77
-USAGE REQUESTS	77
-TALKING ABOUT VOA CONTENT & PROGRAMMING	78
-TOWN HALLS, FORUMS, OTHER EVENTS, PARTNERSHIPS	79
-SUMMARY	79
-DOCUMENTING SOURCE VIDEO IN DALETPLUS	80
-NEWS AGENCY IDs & THE DOT	81
-ADDING AN AGENCY ID/DOT IN PREMIERE PRO	84
-ADDING AN AGENCY ID/DOT IN DALETPLUS	86
<b>CORRECTIONS</b>	<b>88</b>
<b><u>LEGAL ISSUES</u></b>	
-VOA FIREWALL	90
-COPYRIGHT & FAIR USE	92
-TRADEMARK	93
-FILMING IN PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE PLACES	94
-PROOF OF INSURANCE	94
-DEFAMATION/PRIVACY/FALSE LIGHT	94
-REPORTER'S PRIVILEGE & CONFIDENTIAL SOURCES	96
-REPORTING ON CLASSIFIED DOCUMENTS	96
-SUBPOENAS OR REQUESTS FOR TESTIMONY OR DOCUMENTS	97
-INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL BY VOA REPORTERS	97
<b><u>OUTSIDE ACTIVITIES</u></b>	
-VOA STAFF	98
-CONTRACTORS	99
-COMPETITIONS AND CASH AWARDS	100
<b>APPENDIX – CONTROL ROOM EMERGENCY PROCEDURES</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</b>	<b>103</b>



## ***BEST PRACTICES GUIDE***

### **THE VOA CHARTER**

President Gerald Ford signed the VOA Charter ([Public Law 94-350](#)) into law on July 12, 1976. It protects the independence and integrity of VOA programming.

The long-range interests of the United States are served by communicating directly with the peoples of the world by radio. To be effective, the Voice of America must win the attention and respect of listeners. These principles will therefore govern Voice of America (VOA) broadcasts:

1. VOA will serve as a consistently reliable and authoritative source of news. VOA news will be accurate, objective, and comprehensive.
2. VOA will represent America, not any single segment of American society, and will therefore present a balanced and comprehensive projection of significant American thought and institutions.
3. VOA will present the policies of the United States clearly and effectively, and will also present responsible discussions and opinions on these policies.



# ***BEST PRACTICES GUIDE***

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **THIS GUIDE APPLIES TO ALL EMPLOYEES, CONTRACTORS AND STRINGERS WHO GATHER, PRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE CONTENT FOR VOA**

The purpose of this Guide is to define in more detail the journalistic standards and best practices that VOA employees should follow every day. And it is a **guide** rather than a rulebook for one very good reason: although the increasingly changing news and information environment requires each of us to have a basic understanding of best practices, it goes without saying that every news event, every radio, TV and web piece, every social media post, every program, every interview – that is, **everything we cover, produce and disseminate – is unique and must be considered in context and on its own merits.**

VOA employees are encouraged to bring issues not covered in this guide to the attention of their supervisors, Service Chiefs, Division Directors, the Editor for News Standards & Best Practices, VOA Senior Management or the Office of General Counsel as appropriate.

- There may be times when the News Center or a Language Service will be working on stories that allege wrongdoing. In those cases, the Office of General Counsel **must** be consulted.  
[\(Also see Legal Issues, p. 90\)](#)

It is the responsibility of all staff members to understand these best practices as well as to consider one's own sense of right and wrong. Credibility is the most precious commodity of any news organization. The only way to achieve and maintain that credibility is for everyone within VOA to accept responsibility for it.

### **WHEN IN DOUBT, ASK - DO NOT ASSUME**

This guide will help, but should not replace, discussions of difficult issues with co-workers and supervisors. We grow as a news organization -- and policies are formed -- by asking questions and discussing the journalistic issues we face daily.

In addition to these journalistic guidelines, as federal employees, [we are also required to follow the policies laid out by the Office of Government Ethics and the BBG's Ethics Counsel.](#)

The [Best Practices Guide](#) is a living document and is updated regularly on Sharepoint.

### NEWS GATHERING

#### FAIRNESS, OBJECTIVITY & BALANCE

WHEN PERFORMING OFFICIAL DUTIES, VOA STAFF LEAVE THEIR PERSONAL POLITICAL VIEWS BEHIND

- All correspondents, producers, writers, editors and hosts should be aware of their own cultural values and personal beliefs and put them aside when preparing a report, conducting an interview, hosting a newscast, an interview program or posting on social media.
- The accuracy, quality and credibility of the Voice of America are its most important assets, and they rest on the audiences' perception of VOA as an objective and reliable source of U.S., regional and world news and information.
- VOA journalists -- including writers, correspondents, stringers, program hosts, and social media administrators -- should always avoid the use of unattributed negative terms or labels to describe persons or organizations. The exception is when the individuals and groups use those labels to describe themselves or their activities.
- Be fair to all of the people involved in a story. People who are presented in a negative light must be given a reasonable chance to present their side of the issue. If they refuse to comment, that should be noted. This demonstrates to our audience that we made the effort to be fair to all sides.
- A correspondent, producer or host should be well prepared with facts to balance the statement of one side or the other. Don't simply nod in acknowledgment when listening to someone's answer, as this could imply that you agree with that position.
- VOA journalists and all those preparing broadcast, website and social media programming must avoid any action or statement that might give the appearance of partisanship.
  - **THIS INCLUDES THE WEARING OF LAPEL PINS, RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS, CLOTHING DESIGNS OR COLOR SCHEMES THAT APPEAR TO SUPPORT ONE PARTY OR INDIVIDUAL OVER ANOTHER.**
- **THERE IS NO PLACE AT VOA FOR ADVOCACY JOURNALISM - THE PRESENTATION OF NEWS FROM ONE PARTICULAR VIEWPOINT OR ONE SPECIFIC AGENDA.**
- **VOA JOURNALISTS CANNOT ACCEPT MONETARY PAYMENT OR GIFTS FROM ANY INDIVIDUAL, SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP, OR POLITICAL ORGANIZATION IN EXCHANGE FOR NEWS COVERAGE. IT IS A VIOLATION OF JOURNALISTIC ETHICS.**

- Other conflicts of interest, real or apparent, may come up, such as the relationship of staff members with VOA and USAGM management.
  - For instance, VOA journalists should avoid, where possible, covering an event where a speaker or panelist is from VOA – simply because VOA is represented at the event. If the event is one of journalistic value, the report should disclose and explain that VOA is represented at the event and cite the editorial reason for covering the event.
- VOA employees should carry out their work with the utmost professionalism. This applies equally to your work in the Cohen Building and in the field. Professionalism and respect for your colleagues is absolutely vital to maintaining best practices. Whether in a newsroom, studio, control room or in the field, pursuit of a story is not an excuse for arrogance.

### **BIAS & DIVERSITY**

One of the key areas for ensuring fairness, objectivity and balance in our reporting is to stay clear of bias or preconceived notions. Some examples:

- Avoid stereotyping by race, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, geography, sexual orientation, disability, social status or physical appearance.
- The words we use in our scripts should be precise. For example, avoid the casual use of words and phrases like “illegal immigrant,” “Third World” and “terrorist,” or the assumption that “fundamentalism” equals violence. [This is the latest guidance from the AP](#) on writing about the “alt-right” and related terms. All VOA staff should read the guidance and follow it in our own reporting.
- Don’t include a description of an individual unless it is essential to the story. If a description doesn’t serve an editorial purpose, it may perpetuate negative stereotypes, possibly anger some members of a community and in all likelihood doesn’t effectively advance the story.
- Coverage of events in a gay community should not be automatically linked to coverage of HIV/AIDS, because HIV/AIDS is not exclusive to gay communities.
- Correspondents, producers, video, photo and web editors must understand the possibility of racial or ethnic stereotyping when selecting images to include in stories. For example, in a story about unwed mothers in the U.S., should every mother shown be African American? If using file video about drug arrests in the U.S., should every person shown be African American or Hispanic? The clear answer is no.

### **POLITICAL ACTIVITY**

#### **VOA STAFF CANNOT CAMPAIGN FOR OR ORGANIZE EVENTS FOR POLITICAL CANDIDATES**

#### **THAT IS A VIOLATION OF THE JOURNALISTIC ETHICS OF OBJECTIVITY, FAIRNESS AND BALANCE AND SHOULD BE AVOIDED AT ALL TIMES**

#### **THE HATCH ACT**

The Hatch Act is a federal law; its main provision is to prohibit government employees in the Executive Branch from engaging in partisan political activity. The Office of General Counsel has provided some basic guidelines regarding political activity by VOA employees.

Employees **MAY NOT** engage in political activity while:

- On duty
- In any government office
- Using a government vehicle
- Wearing an official uniform or insignia

In addition, the following political activities are prohibited while **on duty**:

- Wearing campaign buttons and/or t-shirts
- Displaying campaign posters in the workplace
- Using **AGENCY** e-mail accounts, social media accounts or blogs to support or criticize a candidate or political position
- Using agency computers to make online campaign donations
- Using screensavers supporting or criticizing a candidate or political position
- Using agency-supplied smartphones to support or criticize a candidate or political position

**NOTE: You are on duty when you are teleworking.**

**IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT THESE GUIDELINES,  
PLEASE CONTACT THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL AT 202-203-4550**

#### **POLITICAL REPORTING ON VOA WEBSITES**

Reporting on U.S. politics can be a delicate balancing act for VOA. This is especially true because of the provisions of the Hatch Act.

In the case of VOA, the Office of Special Counsel took note of our reporting on U.S. political campaigns. The OSC's concern was that as a federal agency VOA's reporting should abide by the letter and spirit of the Hatch Act. In addition, the OSC noted that a federal agency's website "...must not create the appearance that the agency, and in turn the federal government, is politically biased."

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

## ***BEST PRACTICES GUIDE***

In response, the BBG's Office of General Counsel noted that the VOA Charter lawfully empowers the agency to "...present the policies of the United States clearly and effectively, and will also present responsible discussions and opinions on these policies."

The OSC ultimately determined that the requirements of the Hatch Act could be effectively balanced with the realities of news reporting, and declared that it is permissible for VOA to report on political campaigns and to include links to a candidate or party's website in a web story if the website is source material for the article, and can be presented in a way that avoids appearances of agency endorsement or support for the candidate or party.

To avoid appearances of inappropriate endorsement or bias, if any VOANews.com website reports on a GOP or Democratic presidential debate and the story includes a link to the campaign website of one candidate, we must include the campaign websites of all the candidates who are taking part in the debate. The same holds true if we are reporting on candidates for the Senate, House and for governors.

We follow the same guidelines during the final presidential campaign period with regard to a sitting president and the opposing candidate/s. But in that case, the link for the sitting president **MUST BE TO THE CAMPAIGN'S WEBSITE, AND NOT TO WWW.WHITEHOUSE.GOV.**

In other words, when reporting on U.S. political campaigns, all VOANews.com websites should follow the same journalistic balance and fairness that we strive for in all of our daily reporting.

For more complete guidance on the Hatch Act, [please follow this link to the Office of General Counsel's Ethics page.](#)

### **DRONES**

Drones are special-purpose aerial camera platforms. Their use is heavily regulated, and VOA journalists must follow both governmental restrictions and VOA policies.

It is illegal to operate an unmanned aerial system/drone (UAS) for business purposes in the United States without advance approval from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Therefore, prospective VOA drone users must obtain a Remote Pilot Certificate (the official title for a drone pilot license) prior to any field usage of a drone<sup>1</sup>.

### **DRONE USAGE BY VOA-AFFILIATED PERSONNEL IS RESTRICTED TO PROPERLY LICENSED DRONE PILOTS.**

VOA drone pilots will follow the FAA'S rules and respect all restrictions, including those imposed locally by police or emergency service agencies. VOA journalists contracting for drone services must also be aware of laws and safety regulations governing their use.

When the use of a drone is requested to cover a VOA story, advance approval is required from the VOA Deputy Director for Programming ([jlippman@voanews.com](mailto:jlippman@voanews.com); 202-203-4325) or his designee. Requests for flight authorization must be in writing and include story information (including personnel and justification of the need for a drone), flight plans, site maps, and other specifics detailed in this section.

VOA will use guidelines from the Professional Society of Drone Journalists ([www.dronejournalism.org](http://www.dronejournalism.org)) as determinates of its drone usage:

- **NEWSPWORTHINESS:** The story must be of sufficient importance to risk using a potentially harmful drone. Do not use a drone if the information or aerial perspective can be gathered by other, safer means.
- **SAFETY:** A drone pilot must be properly trained in the operation of the equipment. The equipment must be in a condition suitable to safe and controlled flight. A drone must not fly in weather conditions that exceed the limits of the drone's ability to operate safely. A drone must be flown in a manner that ensures the safety of the public and is least disruptive to the general population in a public setting. A Pilot's first drone flight should **not** be when shooting a story.
- **REGULATIONS AND PUBLIC SPACES:** A drone pilot must follow the regulations that apply to the airspace where the drone is used.
- **PRIVACY:** Use of a drone must never compromise the privacy of non-public figures. VOA journalists should not use images of private citizens in private spaces that are encountered beyond the scope of their stories.

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.faa.gov/uas/getting\\_started/fly\\_for\\_work\\_business/becoming\\_a\\_pilot/](https://www.faa.gov/uas/getting_started/fly_for_work_business/becoming_a_pilot/)  
[https://www.faa.gov/uas/media/Part\\_107\\_Summary.pdf](https://www.faa.gov/uas/media/Part_107_Summary.pdf)

VOA will own and operate drones for use in the United States subject to government regulations and VOA procedures ([See Flight Operations, p. 13](#)).

Drones will be standardized as specified by VOA Broadcast Operations, which will inventory and house them in Washington, D.C. or selected domestic bureaus. Drones will be registered with the Federal Aviation Administration (<https://registermyuas.faa.gov/>) in the name of VOA. Like other VOA technical equipment, purchases of drones will be approved in advance by the VOA Chief Digital Officer ([jtunnessen@voanews.com](mailto:jtunnessen@voanews.com); 202-382-5420) or his designee.

Although VOA will operate drones within the United States, VOA will **not** own and operate drones outside of the United States.

Unlike the Federal Aviation Administration in the U.S., neither the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) nor the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) have established general usage or legal guidelines for drone operations. Regulations vary from country to country, frequently change, and may not yet be codified (for instance, there is no listing of drone regulations for Iran). The Global Drone Regulations Database ([www.droneregulations.info](http://www.droneregulations.info)), however, is an international directory containing summaries of countries' drone laws, if known.

VOA journalists requiring a drone outside the U.S. will need to rent drone services from a pilot/operator licensed for the particular country in which the shoot is planned. They will also be expected to search the database to make sure VOA will not inadvertently violate regulations for the country in which the shoot is planned.

Contracting for drone services outside the country, like contracting for other external services, should be requested in advance from VOA Broadcast Operations, which will work with the IBB Office of Contracts to arrange services. Once drone services are secured, language services should advise the Deputy Director of Programming ([jlippman@voanews.com](mailto:jlippman@voanews.com)) or his designee of the name of the drone pilot and the drone's registration information.

**NOTE: Nothing in this section prevents VOA journalists from obtaining drone footage taken by non-VOA personnel who have acted independently of VOA.** User-generated drone video will be governed by the same standards and verifications as other independently gathered video used by VOA, prior to its use. ([Also see User-Generated Content, p. 50](#))

### **THE DRONE CREW**

VOA uses the Operations Manual of The Drone Journalism Lab as the basis for its drone operations procedures. VOA-registered drone pilots must follow procedures as outlined in the Operations Manual<sup>2</sup>.

The Manual defines three operations roles in drone flight: Pilot, Observer, and Journalist. Although a single individual can fill all three roles, VOA will normally have at least two people involved in any drone flight: a Pilot and a combination Observer/Journalist. The three roles are defined on the next page.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/32pi2e2gv6huyzg/AAAwGq7b1mO5ekikCn-7JFiMa?dl=0&preview=opsmanual.pdf>



- **PILOT:** Responsible for all flight operations and the ultimate authority on any flight. The Pilot determines if the aircraft is airworthy and capable of conducting the proposed operations in the available airspace, and is responsible for conducting operations within all FAA regulations (and any restrictions set forth by a “grant of exemption” from the FAA). The Pilot must brief the other members of the crew about the specifics of the mission, their roles and responsibilities, and what is expected of them before, during and after flight operations. The Pilot – the person holding the FAA-issued Part 107 certificate – is by regulation the final authority on whether the drone flies or not. The Pilot’s decision on flight safety is final.
- **OBSERVER:** Responsible for monitoring the operational area to ensure that there are no hazards that may endanger the flight or people. The Observer is the only member of the team who should speak to the Pilot during flight operations. The Observer is to alert the Pilot if any aircraft come into the area, or if any person or vehicle comes near the operation. The Observer should remain within speaking distance of the Pilot.
- **JOURNALIST:** Responsible for communicating flight goals before the flight and verifying results after the drone lands. Defines the aerial elements needed for the story, but is subordinate to the Pilot, who has responsibility for determining if the Journalist’s goals are possible under the conditions presented.

### **FLIGHT OPERATIONS**

Pre-trip and pre-flight inspections help ensure airworthiness and will serve as an early warning for both maintenance issues and for mechanical issues that could substantially affect or cancel flight operations or safety.

**PRE-TRIP:** Pre-trip and prior to embarking on any drone operation, the Pilot must gather information about the proposed flight area to ensure safe operations that comply with Federal Aviation Agency regulations. The Pilot should view publicly available aerial images of the area or personally conduct a site survey that will enable him/her to answer questions about the proposed flight location and be confident of success in the mission, including:

- What is there?
- Are there hazards to aviation?
- What airspace is it in?
- Do we need permission from air traffic control (ATC)?
- Are we flying on or over private property? Do we have permission of the landowner to operate there?
- How many people can we expect around the area? What is our plan to prevent flight over people?
- How high above sea level is the location? How will the altitude affect the performance of your drone during flight?

Prior to the day of the shoot, the Pilot and Journalist should meet to define the goals of the drone shoot and specific mission goals, including:

- What shots do you need (specific expected shots, angles, or subjects)?
- What purpose is the drone serving in your story?
- What context is the drone adding to your story?

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

- How much drone video or photography do you need to tell the story?
- What privacy issues can you anticipate and what steps have you taken to mitigate them?
- What the operations area looks like.
- What the expected weather will be.
- Any known hazards.

Prior to the shoot itself, the Pilot should also practice with the drone assigned for use.

**PRE-FLIGHT:** Pre-flight operations are done immediately before any flight work is to occur. The pre-flight checklist repeats some of the pre-trip checklist, such as inspecting the aircraft and some of the control surfaces. On the day of the shoot, before leaving for the operations area, the Pilot should conduct a pre-trip inspection of the drone, including:

- Charging batteries.
- That there are sufficient fully charged batteries to compensate for the possible effects of temperature on the drone's batteries.
- Checking various mounting hardware.
- Checking the camera and storage media to ensure it is sufficient for the task.
- Verifying that weather parameters are within FAA Part 107 minimums, as determined by consulting an aviation weather forecast or weather report (METAR) or from obtaining a flight briefing from Flight Services.
- Verifying that the Journalist has informed local police or fire agencies that we will be using news-gathering drones.

Once on site, the Pilot will conduct the pre-flight inspection, connect the batteries, etc., and delineate a takeoff and landing area of at least 10 feet x 10 feet and ensure it is free of debris. S/he may also assign the Journalist or other VOA personnel on site to ensure that bystanders don't inadvertently walk into either the takeoff/landing zone or under the drone's flight path.

**IN FLIGHT:** The "In Flight" checklist isn't really a checklist. It's a "Do Constantly" list, noted as a reminder here for all journalists using drones. While in flight, personnel involved in the shoot must:

- Be constantly scanning for airborne traffic or obstacles. The Observer (in most cases, the Journalist) must report them immediately to the Pilot.
- Be constantly scanning for people on the ground in the flight area. The Observer must report them immediately to the Pilot.
- Be constantly checking battery levels, ensuring that the drone is returned to the landing area before reaching 25% of capacity remaining.
- Be constantly checking flight parameters such as altitude to ensure they remain within restrictions and operational goals.

Any changes to the operational plan should be discussed only at the time of battery changes.

**POST-FLIGHT:** The post-flight checklist is broken into three parts: shutting down the drone, inspecting the aircraft, and filling out logs. Logging is an essential part of drone safety. It forms the basis of the permanent record documenting maintenance of the drone VOA needs. Among other things, Pilots should document in logs (part of each VOA drone kit)<sup>3</sup> any issue that should be checked or fixed between flights, drone usage (times of takeoffs and landings), problems during flight, and battery usage.

### **DRONE RESTRICTIONS**

The FAA's website<sup>4</sup> provides complete information on approved flights and operations. VOA personnel involved in drone use should familiarize themselves with the contents of the site. For news coverage by drone within the United States, these restrictions are most relevant:

- Cannot fly anywhere in the District of Columbia.
- Cannot fly within five miles of an airport (that limit extends to 30 miles from Reagan National Airport).
- Cannot be operated within a U.S. National Park.
- Cannot fly at night.
- Cannot fly over people (not over protests, not over celebrations, not over sidewalks when pedestrians are present, etc.).
- Cannot fly higher than 400 feet (unless you're within 400 feet of a building; skyscraper climbing is OK).
- Cannot fly further away than the drone pilot can see with the naked eye.
- Cannot fly at speeds of more than 100 miles per hour
- Cannot be operated from a moving vehicle or inside a covered stationary vehicle.

Waivers to restrictions must be obtained in writing from the FAA. They generally are time-consuming to apply for and slow in being granted. Absent a written waiver, VOA will operate its drones in compliance with laws and regulations.

### **ACCIDENTS**

By using licensed drone pilots and having a rigorous system of approvals of drone usage, VOA will minimize the instances of mishaps or accidents involving drones. Should VOA personnel be involved in accidents or injuries involving drones, both the pilot of the drone and the VOA reporter/producer of the story must separately notify their service chief and division director, plus the VOA Deputy Director of Programming ([jlippman@voanews.com](mailto:jlippman@voanews.com)) or his designee. The drone pilot is required by law to notify both the Federal Aviation Agency and the National Transportation Safety Board of accidents that either cause injuries or at least \$500 in damage to property.

Applicable website contacts for the FAA and NTSB are below:

[https://www.faa.gov/uas/report\\_accident/](https://www.faa.gov/uas/report_accident/)

<https://www.nts.gov/investigations/process/Documents/NTSB-Advisory-Drones.pdf>

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/32pi2e2gv6huyzg/AAAwGq7b1mO5ekikCn-7JFiMa?dl=0&preview=logs.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.faa.gov/uas/where\\_to\\_fly/](https://www.faa.gov/uas/where_to_fly/)

### **ARCHIVING DRONE FOOTAGE**

All high quality drone footage must go in the archives within 3 weeks of the original shoot.

If the drone operator will be editing the video, he/she should copy the footage, edit down to the best footage, and work with the Media Asset Management team to supply the metadata and get the video into Dalet. If the operator does not edit, the producer must take on the responsibility.

No one will be granted continued access to a drone unless the footage from their previous shoot has been processed in the archive system. The Media Asset Management team has been alerted to tag the content as DRONE footage in the metadata, so users can easily search the database for the video.

This is a critical part of the return on the investment of training, purchasing and maintaining the drones.

### **SENSITIVE & GRAPHIC MATERIAL**

Newsworthiness should be the primary factor in deciding whether to air or publish audio or video that may be offensive to our audiences. Some examples include murder scenes, acts of war, acts of nature, or faces of victims.

In most cases, VOA should not broadcast or publish the moment of death in a suicide, execution, or any similar event. Exceptions might include circumstances where an event is being covered live and the action is unexpected or spontaneous, or where the event is so highly newsworthy as to warrant broadcast or posting. If it happens during live coverage, explain to the audience what has happened as quickly as possible, and move on.

The broadcasting or posting of graphic, profane, racist or other objectionable language should be determined if it is essential to the newsworthiness of the story.

Material of a sexual nature is also a cause for concern, as people of all ages listen to, watch and read VOA news stories. Questions to be asked: Is the material essential to the story? Should video be digitized in some way so as not to be offensive? Would you want your children to see such images?

If it's determined the material will be broadcast or posted online, a mandatory warning needs to be provided far enough ahead of the story to make sure children do not see or hear the material. If the material is posted online, it should not be on the homepage. Rather, a link to the story should appear on the homepage, with a warning that sexual/graphic images are included with the story.

YouTube has a [blurring tool](#) that lets you blur any part of a video, including moving objects.  
(Also see [YouTube Guidelines, p. 52](#))

**IN THESE CASES, THE EDITOR FOR NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES  
AND/OR VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT WILL DETERMINE WHETHER TO POST  
SUCH IMAGES OR AUDIO, AND WILL ISSUE A HOUSE-WIDE NOTE DETAILING  
MANDATORY LANGUAGE TO ADVISE OUR AUDIENCE OF THE CONTENT.**

The following sections explain these guidelines in greater detail.

### **COVERING WAR**

Given the many nationalities and ethnicities that VOA reaches via radio, TV and online, it's important to follow some basic guidelines in covering and reporting conflicts.

#### **LOADED WORDS**

VOA should never use "we," "us," "our" or "they," "them" and "their" in reporting about any side in a conflict. VOA practice is to name the country, as in "U.S. troops" or "Pakistani troops."

No side in a conflict should be referred to as "the enemy," or any territory as "enemy territory" in copy or in graphics. The only exception is if you are directly quoting someone making those references.

Referring to attacks as "punishing," "brutal" or "successful" can imply that VOA is taking sides. Again, the only exception would be if you're directly quoting someone making those claims.

#### **REPORTING COMBAT ACTIVITY**

As a rule, VOA should not report that warplanes or missiles are approaching a target. When an attack is underway, VOA will report it:

- If we're able to independently confirm that bombs/missiles have hit the ground; or
- If the country being attacked confirms it's being attacked; or
- If an official of an attacking country directly tells VOA that an attack is happening; or
- If VOA observes the attack first-hand

In all of the above cases, attribution **MUST** be as clear and as specific as possible.

[\*\(Also see Attribution, p. 29\)\*](#)

When information originates only from state-owned media, we should make that clear to audiences the entire time the information is used.

[\*\(Also see Using Content From State-Run Media, p. 74\)\*](#)

If VOA's reporting is being censored or shut down and/or VOA's movements are being restricted, that should also be reported.

### **COVERING TERRORISM**

Generally, terrorism is defined as "the use of violence and threats to intimidate or coerce, especially for political purposes." Terrorists use violence against (often innocent) individuals to advance their political or ideological agenda. "Terrorism" and "terrorist" carry a lot of weight, and they should be used with extreme care. It is up to editors to determine if they are most appropriate terms to use.

VOA will report the actions of terrorists (bombings, shootings, hostage takings) fully, accurately and without taking sides, as we would cover any other news story. Wherever possible, we should also provide appropriate coverage of the victims, their injuries and their families.

We will provide our audiences with informative analyses of terrorist organizations, their ideology and history, but at the same time VOA must never suggest that reporting the context in which terrorism takes place justifies terrorism in any way.

### **VIDEO & AUDIO OF TERRORISTS, HOSTAGES OR PRISONERS**

Statements from, interviews with, or video of terrorists, hostages or prisoners of war should be judged on their journalistic merits before making a decision on usage.

Some guidelines for making those decisions:

➤ **TERRORISTS**

- Although we will report on the actions of terrorists, **VOA SHOULD NOT BE USED AS A PLATFORM TO SPREAD THEIR MESSAGES.**
- This means that in almost all cases, VOA will not air a terrorist message in its entirety. Senior VOA managers will decide what portions, if any, of the message will be cleared for broadcast and websites based upon its news value.

➤ **HOSTAGES/PRISONERS**

- Pay close attention to whether a hostage or prisoner appears to have been mistreated, is bound in handcuffs or shackles, or has a hood on his/her head.
- In the case of a prisoner's statement, VOA will take special measures to ensure that the individual POW identities are not revealed (i.e. facial blurring, voice alteration, use of pseudonym or nom du guerre).
- Senior VOA managers will decide whether to show video of this nature.

➤ **FULL DISCLOSURE**

- When applicable, all TV and radio scripts and web copy **MUST** state that VOA has not been able to independently verify the source of the video or audio. Should VOA receive the material directly from a group, army or government, that should be noted in the script and web copy as well.

➤ **LEGAL ISSUES**

- From the Office of General Counsel: The Geneva Convention relative to Treatment of Prisoners of War requires POWs to "at all times be protected, particularly against acts of violence or intimidation and against insults and public curiosity." Although the Convention does not define what "public curiosity" means, the U.S. is a party to the Convention and it generally applies it at all times to the maximum extent practicable.

**PLEASE REMEMBER THAT THESE ARE BASIC GUIDELINES.  
EACH INSTANCE IS UNIQUE, AND A DECISION IN ONE SITUATION WILL NOT  
NECESSARILY BE THE PROPER ACTION FOR THE NEXT SITUATION.  
ALWAYS CONSULT WITH VOA SENIOR MANAGERS BEFORE MAKING ANY  
DECISIONS TO AIR OR PUBLISH MATERIAL OF THIS NATURE.**

### **COVERING CRIMINAL ACTIVITY**

VOA staff **must not** interfere in any way with ongoing law enforcement activities. If some orders seem designed to manage or deny news coverage, VOA reporters, producers and photographers at the scene should protest and notify senior management and the Office of General Counsel as quickly as possible. If necessary, the agency will take appropriate legal action to protect access to the news.

There may be occasions where VOA staff has the opportunity to accompany law enforcement on arrests or investigations. These situations can present sensitive legal questions, including trespass and invasion of privacy.

**THESE ACTIVITIES SHOULD ONLY BE UNDERTAKEN WITH APPROVAL IN ADVANCE FROM YOUR SUPERVISOR, VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT AND THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL.**

It's important to understand that even though law enforcement may go onto private property, it **DOES NOT** mean that journalists are exempt from trespassing.

[\*\(Also see Filming In Public vs. Private Places, p. 94\)\*](#)

Keep in mind that cameras, microphones and lights can cause relatively passive bystanders to act and/or react for the cameras. All VOA staff should use their own best judgment and discretion in these situations; where possible, you should avoid any action that could possibly influence the event.

At the same time, VOA staff covering conflicts, protests or demonstrations should not take one side or another.

[\*\(Also see Fairness, Objectivity and Balance, p. 7\)\*](#)

Neither the police nor demonstration leaders should be a reporter's only sources for accurate reporting of causes, issues or casualties.

### **HOSTAGE/BARRICADE SITUATIONS**

Coverage of these situations, whether in the U.S. or overseas, presents difficult challenges and usually requires special care. No single statement or guideline can begin to cover every situation that we may report on. The following are intended to guide you in exercising your best judgment.

- The event should be characterized as accurately as possible. Before labeling an event a "riot" or "terrorism," or referring to someone as a "terrorist," you should discuss it with your senior editors and managers, and if necessary, with News Center managers or the Editor for News Standards and Best Practices.
- Keep in mind the possibility that a hostage taker may be able to see, hear, or try to manipulate VOA's coverage. Consider whether describing or showing the actions or movements of law enforcement officers could tip off the hostage taker or barricaded person.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)



- **DO NOT** put yourself in a position where you could be playing a role in the incident. VOA staff should **NEVER** attempt to contact a hostage or hostage taker. This could endanger a hostage and interfere with rescue efforts. It could also possibly subject you to criminal liability. You should not attempt to make or receive telephone calls from a hostage or barricade situation or from nearby homes or businesses.
- When reporting on these situations, avoid speculation about the hostage taker, his or her motives, demands, or state of mind. If a guest speculates about these issues, the host should point out that VOA has not verified what the guest has just said, and move the conversation away from such speculation.

### **NAMING PEOPLE INVOLVED IN CRIMES**

Be precise with the language used in reporting about crime or demonstrations.

#### **VICTIMS**

VOA should not name rape victims or other victims of sexual assaults or molestations. These crimes carry a stigma for the victims, and victims should be allowed to decide whether they want to be identified. Be cautious in providing descriptive details so that the person is not inadvertently identified.

There are special difficulties in identifying minors (under 18 years of age) who have been kidnapped or are alleged victims of sexual crimes. In the case of a kidnapping, news outlets may identify minors to help them be found. However, if we learn that a kidnapped minor has been sexually assaulted, the responsible action is to stop both naming the individual and showing his/her picture.

#### **EXCEPTIONS TO THE ABOVE MUST BE APPROVED IN ADVANCE BY A SUPERVISOR AND THE EDITOR FOR NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES**

#### **SUSPECTS**

VOA does not identify suspects of criminal investigations who have not been charged or arrested. This has become more difficult in the U.S. in recent years, when law enforcement officials refer to someone as “a person of interest.” This is not a legal term, and VOA should not use it because it can place a person under increasing suspicion and may result in unintended consequences for the individual.

The essential source for identifying the status of a person or group charged or arrested is law enforcement or the court system, **NOT** an unidentified “informed individual.” When someone has been charged with a crime, use caution in choosing language so as not to imply guilt or innocence. Similarly, if someone originally identified as a suspect is not charged with a crime, we must make that known as soon as possible in a follow-up story.

### **NAMING OR IDENTIFYING MINORS INVOLVED IN CRIMINAL ACTIVITY**

In addition to the guidance above regarding minors who are victims, VOA should not name, show video or play audio of a minor who is a suspect in a crime, or is arrested and charged with a crime. Exceptions may be made if a minor is charged as an adult, but in those cases we should wait until the accused has been formally charged, not just arrested.

There may be other exceptions, such as if a minor is charged with murder or another heinous crime. In some cases, local media may have already widely reported the minor's identity.

### **BEFORE DECIDING TO IDENTIFY A MINOR, PLEASE CONSULT A SUPERVISOR AND THE EDITOR FOR NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES**

## **INTERVIEWING & VIDEOTAPING MINORS**

Interviewing minors, whether for audio or video, can present special issues, particularly where wrongdoing, criminal activity, private, potentially embarrassing or other sensitive situations are involved. In these situations you **MUST** obtain permission from a parent or adult guardian. Permission should be in writing, where possible. [You can find the release form on Sharepoint.](#)

If that isn't possible, recording audio or video of the parent/guardian giving consent is acceptable.

Generally, minors can be interviewed and recorded, without permission, on non-controversial subjects such as reaction to a movie, talking about a favorite food, going back to school on the first day of the school year.

When recording audio or shooting video at a school in the U.S., ask whether a school has sent out what are known as "negative releases" to parents. These are notifications that a media crew will be visiting a school, asking parents to return the notice only if they **DO NOT** want their child to participate in interviews or tapings. In this situation you may not need additional permission.

In a breaking news situation, if the minor is out of harm's way, it may be permissible – without parental approval -- to interview the minor if he/she is a witness or has information about the event. However, keep in mind that the minor must be freely willing to talk, and should not be asked private, personal or other potentially embarrassing questions and should not be asked to name suspects.

In all cases, ABC NewsOne, AFP, APTN and Reuters video should be carefully screened to follow the same guidelines.

### **COVERING & REPORTING SUICIDES**

Deciding whether to report the name of a suicide victim is a delicate and difficult matter. Did the victim commit suicide publicly in order to achieve notoriety? Will reporting the person's name encourage others who might be contemplating suicide and looking for recognition? Will reporting the victim's name bring unwanted attention to family or friends? Keep in mind that by most accounts, people who commit suicide are in a disturbed or distressed mental state. Consequently, there are no clear or easy answers to these questions.

If the person is **NOT** a public figure, there should be no overwhelming editorial reason to report the name. Ask the question: Is the suicide tangential to the story, or does it have a larger impact on the story or participants in the story?

#### **BEFORE REPORTING THE NAME OF A SUICIDE VICTIM, PLEASE CONSULT A SUPERVISOR OR THE EDITOR FOR NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES**

There may be a situation when a VOA staffer in the field is in a position to intervene in a situation where injury or the loss of life is a very real outcome. When a person decides to take his or her own life as a protest, there is no expectation that a journalist will intervene, nor is there a VOA policy on whether you should or should not intervene. It is up to the individual on the scene to use his or her own best judgment.

[\*\(Also see Sensitive & Graphic Material, p. 18\)\*](#)

### **BREAKING NEWS**

Although breaking news situations don't often present themselves in VOA's daily coverage, there are certain key points to follow when putting that type of information on the air or online.

Producers should use caution before airing live and/or unedited material which may be excessively graphic in visuals or language. Ask the question: Does the news value of the material warrant airing it without reviewing it first?

#### **CONSULT WITH YOUR SUPERVISOR AND THE EDITOR FOR NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES IF POTENTIALLY GRAPHIC MATERIAL IS GOING TO BE AIRED OR POSTED ONLINE BEFORE BEING VIEWED OR WITHOUT A DETAILED DESCRIPTION.**

When airing or posting such material, alert your listeners, viewers and readers as to the nature of the material.

[\*\(Also see Sensitive & Graphic Material, p. 18\)\*](#)

### **REPORTING CROWD ESTIMATES**

When covering rallies or demonstrations, it's important to attribute estimates of size. Organizing groups or official agencies which provide them may have reasons to inflate or downplay the numbers. Where non-official estimates such as "hundreds of thousands" appear to be guesses or inflated, a correspondent, producer or photographer on the scene may be able to provide a better perspective on crowd size. As an example, they can say the crowd is standing shoulder to shoulder for four blocks. If a correspondent, producer or photographer is not covering the event, we should look to the wire services for their reporting on the size of the crowd.

[\*\(Also see Attribution, p. 29\)\*](#)

### **STAGING & RE-CREATIONS**

➤ **VOA DOES NOT DO "AS LIVE," "LOOK LIVE" OR "LIVE TO TAPE" VIDEO REPORTS.**

"As Live" pieces are video playbacks of a correspondent reporting from a location, but are manipulated in the control room to give the illusion that this is a true live shot by placing the video in a double box and having the anchor appear to interact with the correspondent. Presenting a correspondent in this manner goes against the VOA Charter's principle of being a reliable and credible source of news, and should be discouraged at all times.

➤ **VOA REPORTS THE NEWS**

➤ **WE DO NOT CREATE OR MANIPULATE NEWS STORIES**

➤ **STAGING A NEWS EVENT OR CONTROLLING HOW IT TURNS OUT -- WHETHER BY ENCOURAGEMENT, PROPS OR PAYMENT -- IS UNACCEPTABLE**

When shooting video with the subject of a story to explain something that happened, don't ask the person to do things they normally don't do. For instance: It's acceptable to shoot video of a family that goes to the cemetery once a week to place flowers on the grave of a family member, but you should explain in the track that this is something the family normally does. However, if you ask someone to go to the cemetery and lay flowers on the grave of a family member, you should explain that as well.

Keep in mind, though, that the more you direct people – having them do things specifically for the camera – the more time you'll have to spend explaining that to the audience.

### **USING VOA EMPLOYEES OR RELATIVES FOR STORIES**

Generally speaking, VOA employees should not be used in radio, TV or web pieces outside of their official capacity. In most cases it is also preferable not to use the relatives or friends of VOA employees. While they may be perfect subjects to help illustrate stories, there is always the possibility of the appearance of a conflict.

However exceptions can be granted; for instance, if a relative or friend is prominent or expert in his or her own right. When in doubt, consult with your supervisor or the Editor for News Standards & Best Practices.

[\*Return to Table of Contents\*](#)

### **WRITING**

Anyone writing for VOA on any platform – radio, TV or online – should be familiar with the VOA Stylebook. The Stylebook covers grammar, spelling, definitions and explanations of commonly used terms, as well as the proper use of American English.

**Some of the key points of the Stylebook as they relate to best practices are included in this Guide, but every VOA employee should read and become familiar with the Stylebook.**

[The Stylebook is maintained by the News Center and can be found on Sharepoint.](#)

VOA copy should be simple and straightforward. We are not writing treaties or scholarly reports. For example, use “stop the fighting” rather than “achieve the cessation of hostilities.” Most of our writing is for people whose first language is not English, so avoid excessively difficult words, and explain them when you must use them.

Avoid colloquialisms and jargon, which may be difficult to translate and are not easily understood by foreign audiences. When used, as in a direct quotation, provide an alternative in parentheses to assist language services.

- The convicted hacker said writing the virus was “a piece of cake” (very easy).
- He spoke “off the cuff” (without notes).
- The House Minority Whip (the number two Republican/Democrat in the House).
- He made a killing (made a lot of money) in the stock market.

Words such as “biggest,” “highest,” “first” and others like them should be used judiciously because they often turn out to be incorrect. Ask yourself whether the fact that something is first is truly significant. Avoid superlatives such as “most famous” or “greatest,” which often represent value judgments. Descriptive and colorful words are encouraged, but use caution. Something that is “unique” is the only one of its kind. A thing or event cannot be “somewhat unique.” Other words describing extreme situations should also raise flags for writers and editors, and should be scrutinized to ensure they are justified. “Trouble” in a city does not necessarily mean it is in “chaos.” “Asking urgently” is not necessarily “pleading” or “begging.” If a situation is “desperate” today, what will it be tomorrow when things get worse?

It is acceptable, however, to use words like these when you’re quoting someone directly.

### **SOURCING**

Whenever possible, a source should be “on the record” – someone who is willing to be named and quoted. However, journalists routinely rely on sources who won’t go on the record. If a source refuses to be named, the information he or she provides should be characterized in other ways, as clearly as possible.

Sourcing is often a matter of negotiation, but **a request for confidentiality should come from the source and not suggested by the correspondent or producer.** However, your editor has a right to know the name of the source if he or she asks for it.

### **AN UNNAMED SOURCE MUST HAVE VERIFIABLE AND FIRST-HAND KNOWLEDGE OF THE STORY**

Before using an unnamed source, you must be certain that there is no other way to get the information on the record. You must be convinced the source knows what he/she is talking about, and you should consider asking for actual evidence to bolster the source’s claim or comment. When discussing third-party information with a source, be sure that the source is actually confirming the information from his or her knowledge of a particular situation, and is not simply hearing it from you and agreeing that it is plausible.

Avoid other extremely vague terms such as “unnamed sources” or “unidentified sources,” “informed sources,” “authoritative sources,” “well-placed sources,” “reliable sources.”

You should be willing to tell our audience why the source cannot be named. For example, you can say, “The source’s name is being withheld to protect against possible reprisals.”

A story that relies on the use of confidential/unnamed sources should be of public concern. We are not interested in “gotcha” stories just for the sake of the “gotcha,” nor are we interested in scoring scoops just for the sake of being first (and possibly being wrong).

There will be times when multiple news outlets report information from unnamed sources during a breaking story, as with the Boston Marathon bombing in April 2013.

As happened with Boston – when multiple news organizations said there was an arrest and VOA reported that information – we will later find out that that information is incorrect. In those cases VOA will issue a correction as quickly as possible across all platforms.

[\(Also see Corrections, p. 88\)](#)

The following characterizations may be helpful in establishing with a source what level of confidentiality you have agreed to. In all cases it is always best to clarify with the source how the information may be used:

- **ON THE RECORD**  
All information is suitable for publication and attributable to the source by name and title.
  - **OFF THE RECORD**  
Material that is “off the record” is not directly usable, but the information can be used to focus the direction of a story. Off-the-record material may also be a valid second source to confirm information obtained elsewhere.
  - **ON BACKGROUND**  
“On background” is generally understood to mean the information given can be used, provided it is attributed to a generic source. “A senior administration official called the election flawed.”
  - **DEEP BACKGROUND**  
Information obtained on “deep background” is normally provided with the understanding that it will not be sourced directly in any way. Acceptable wording might be, “It was learned that the delegates agreed to a second meeting on Tuesday.”
- 
- **PUBLICATION OF A SIGNIFICANT STORY BASED UPON A SINGLE SOURCE WHO WILL NOT ALLOW HIS OR HER NAME TO BE USED MUST ALWAYS BE APPROVED IN ADVANCE BY VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT.**
  - **UPON REQUEST, DISCLOSURE OF A SOURCE’S IDENTITY TO VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT AND TO THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL MAY BE REQUIRED TO CLEAR THE SOURCED INFORMATION FOR AIR.**
  - **WHEN DISCUSSING CONFIDENTIALITY WITH A SOURCE, IT MAY BE ADVISABLE TO EXPLAIN THE POSSIBILITY OF THIS LIMITED DISCLOSURE WITHIN VOA. REFUSAL TO DISCLOSE THE SOURCE MAY RESULT IN THE SOURCE’S INFORMATION NOT BEING USED BY VOA.**

[\*\(Also see Reporter’s Privilege & Confidential Sources, p. 96\)\*](#)

## **RUMORS & SPECULATION**

VOA avoids the use of rumors and speculation in news items. However, this should be carefully evaluated on a case-by-case basis in instances where a rumor or speculation takes on a life of its own. In general, reporters, producers and editors should seek out responsible officials to respond to the rumors or speculation and use those comments as our entry to the story. Without an official comment, VOA should avoid being first to publicize a rumor or speculation.

[\*Return to Table of Contents\*](#)



### ATTRIBUTION

#### WE GIVE CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE

Proper attribution is a fundamental element of good journalism.

Aside from the material provided by our own correspondents and stringers, VOA receives news from a number of different outlets: ABC News, Agence France Presse, the Associated Press and Reuters, as well as from newspapers, television news networks and official news agencies of other nations.

Story information can also come from press releases put out by corporations or private groups such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs). When using press releases, they must be identified as such, and if applicable, they should be counter-balanced.

When VOA quotes exclusive information from news stories or uses quotes from editorials, opinion pieces or social media posts, it is mandatory to credit the media organization, NGO or other outlet. Not including that information can open VOA to possible claims of plagiarism and/or copyright infringement.

*(Also see [Crediting the News Agencies, p. 33](#) and [Plagiarism, p. 34](#))*

One method of providing attribution is in the use of block quotes. In the example below, *VOX.com* provided a hyperlink to a *Washington Post* story about “Pizzagate,” but also included part of the Post’s story in a “block,” shown by the solid bar on the left. This is acceptable for use on voanews.com websites, but it should not be used repeatedly.

The conspiracy theory, known as “Pizzagate,” apparently connected Hillary Clinton’s presidential campaign to a nonexistent child sex ring at the Comet Ping Pong pizzeria, **Faiz Siddiqui and Susan Svrluga reported for the Washington Post:**

The restaurant’s owner and employees were threatened on social media in the days before the election after fake news stories circulated claiming that then-Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton and her campaign chief were running a child sex ring from the restaurant’s backrooms. Even Michael Flynn, a retired general whom President-elect Trump has tapped to advise him on national security, shared stories about another anti-Clinton conspiracy theory involving pedophilia. None of them were true. But the fake stories and threats persisted, some even aimed at children of Comet Ping Pong employees and patrons. The restaurant’s owner was forced to contact the FBI, local police, Facebook and other social-media platforms in an effort to remove the articles.



## ***BEST PRACTICES GUIDE***

Information that comes directly from the U.S. government – the White House, State Department, Pentagon or Congress – is considered valid on its own, **but must still be attributed**.

On a breaking news story, AP or Reuters may quote a single source such as a police official or a government spokesperson. In those cases our copy will attribute the information to the wire service and say that VOA is working to confirm the information.

Information in News Center stories does not require additional sourcing.

There are times when the attribution can be left unstated because the source of a particular statement is both obvious and authoritative.

**An example of over-attribution:**

*The U.S. space agency NASA says astronauts aboard the space shuttle “Discovery” performed a second spacewalk today.*

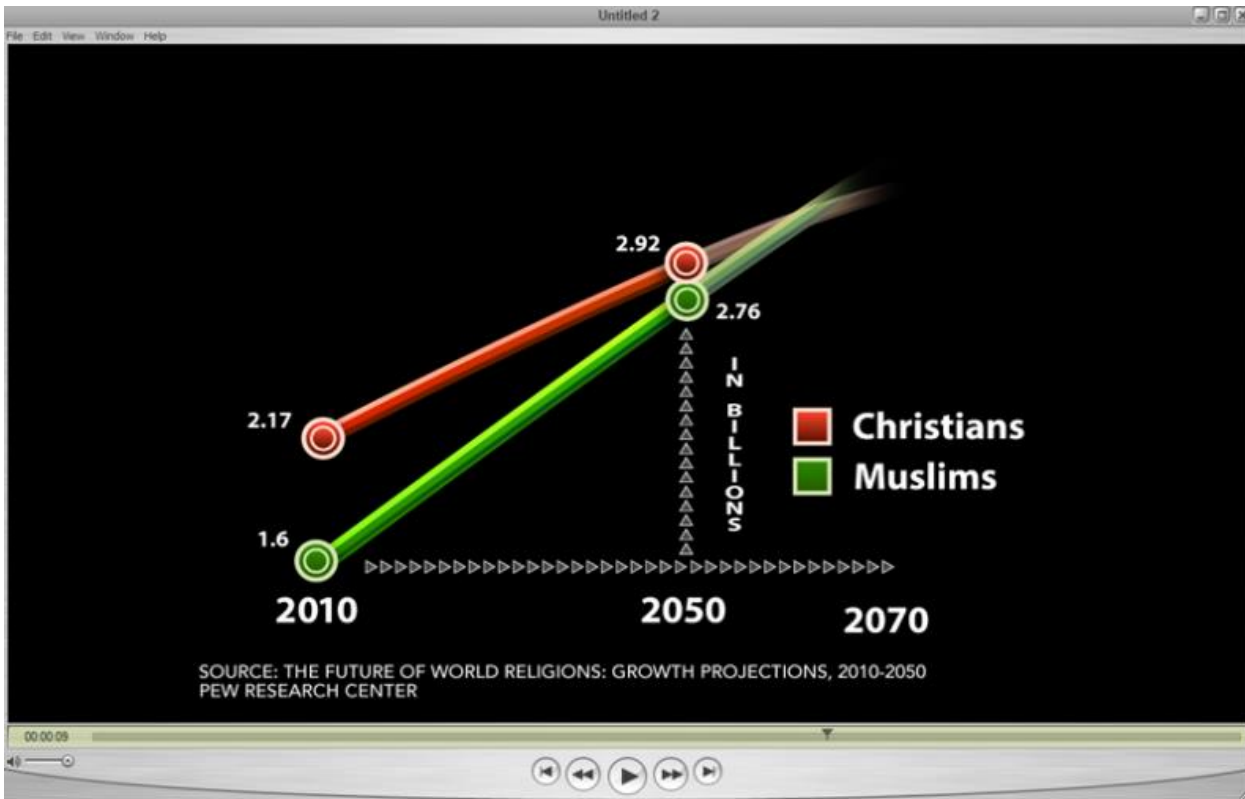
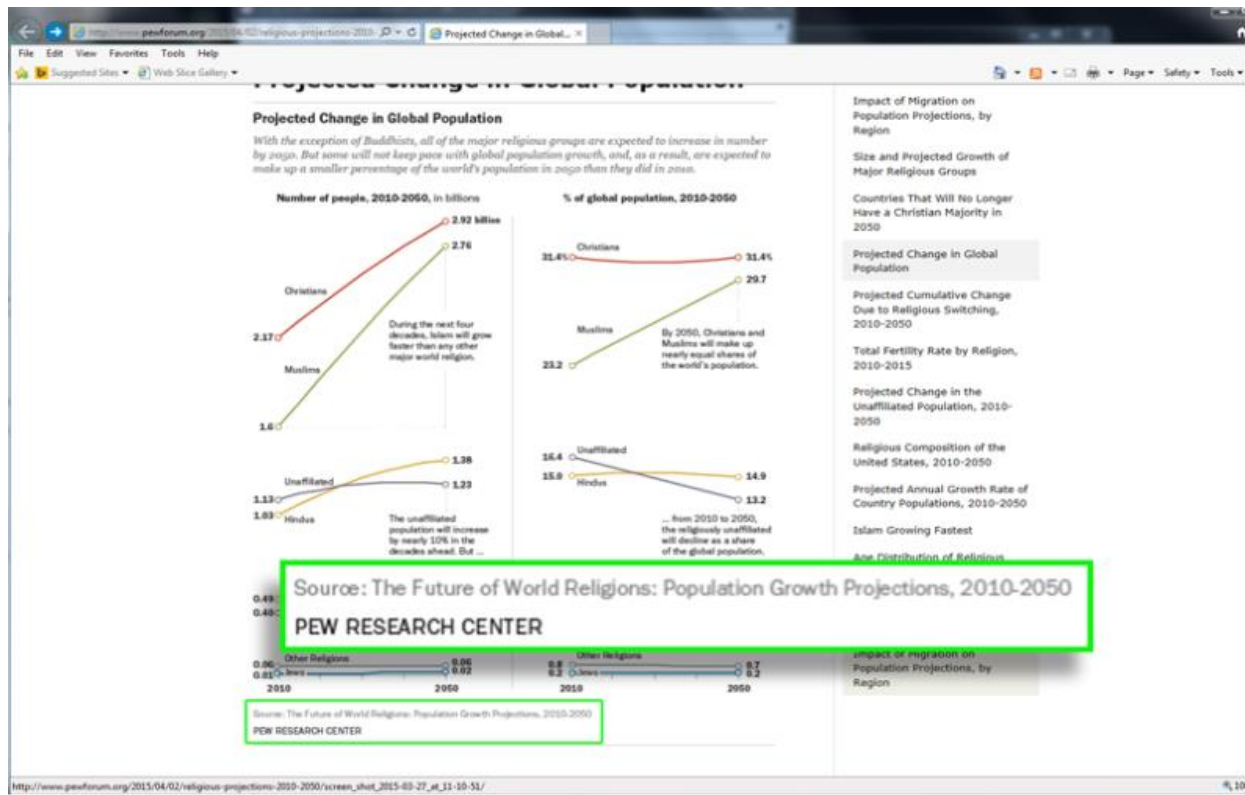
**It’s better, and easier, to write:**

*Astronauts aboard the U.S space shuttle “Discovery” performed a second spacewalk today.*

In the course of our reporting, we often will cite information or statistics that come from think tanks, NGOs, or another government agency. Aside from crediting those groups in scripts, they must also be credited in full-screen graphics, whether as a stand-alone page or within a video package.

### **FULL SCREEN GRAPHICS**

- While styles and looks may differ for various Language Services, the basic procedure should be the same.
- Any time a graphic is based on information or statistics that are not originally generated by VOA, a small info source attribution needs to be included on the graphic. See the photos on the next page, identifying the correct attribution.



[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### **WIKIPEDIA**

There have been a number of incidents where material posted on Wikipedia has not been verified or has proven to be incorrect. Any information found on Wikipedia should be confirmed with other, more reliable sources, or with the News Center.

### **WIKIPEDIA SHOULD NOT BE CONSIDERED OR USED AS A PRIMARY SOURCE OF INFORMATION**

### **OPENSOURCE**

The U.S. government-funded news portal [OpenSource](#) is an important tool for finding source information. VOA uses the text material in OpenSource as a second source of news and information.

OpenSource can be found in DaletPlus/Webspace at **WIRES→OPENSOURCE→ALL WIRES**

However, **VOA DOES NOT HAVE ACCESS** to the audio and video which OpenSource posts from news organizations -- BBC, Sky News and Al Jazeera English, for example -- with whom VOA **does not have contractual agreements.**

### **CREDITING THE NEWS AGENCIES**

To make sure that our best practices are in sync with our news agency contracts, below is guidance on how VOA should credit the agencies across all platforms. Note that each platform has different guidelines, and everyone should be aware of the differences, especially if you're producing a story that will appear on all platforms.

#### **RADIO**

- AFP, AP and Reuters have all confirmed that VOA radio broadcasts can use their news wire copy verbatim without verbal attribution or credit. All three agencies consider this to be “standard use” of their material.
- However, if one wire service has an exclusive interview or information that other news organizations do not have, we should give that wire service verbal credit in the broadcast.  
[\*\(Also see Audio Usage Rights, p. 62\)\*](#)

#### **TELEVISION**

- Although the individual news agency IDs and the Dot are burned into agency video as they are being recorded in DaletPlus, it is preferable that all video pieces -- whether produced by the News Center or by a Language Service -- should note in the DaletPlus Asset Management Form the time segments where ABC NewsOne, AFP, AP and Reuters video are used. That is our way of tracking/crediting them for the usage, and for the Senior Archivists to know whether the material is worth keeping.  
[\*\(Also see Video Usage Rights, p. 64, Documenting Source Video in DaletPlus, p. 80 & News Agency IDs and the Dot, p. 81\)\*](#)
- Verbal credit to the news agencies is not required for video reports, **unless the video is exclusive and is noted as such in the agency's script.**

#### **WEB**

It has long been the practice in print to credit the wire services when using their stories in whole or in part. All VOA websites and social media pages should follow this practice.

- [How the credit looks when using a single news agency's wire story in full, with the agency's name at the top.](#)
- [How the credit looks when using more than one agency's wire story, with the agencies' names at the bottom.](#)
- [Agency photos used on VOA websites and on agency-maintained social media pages must include a captioned credit to the agency.](#)

### **PLAGIARISM**

**PLAGIARISM IS ILLEGAL AND UNETHICAL AND STRIKES AT THE VERY HEART OF OUR JOURNALISTIC MISSION.**

**IT CAN COST THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE AGENCY ITS CREDIBILITY AND REPUTATION, AND WILL NOT BE TOLERATED.**

**WE DO NOT PRESENT OTHERS' WORK AS OUR OWN**

**ALLEGATIONS OF PLAGIARISM WILL BE FULLY INVESTIGATED, AND STAFFERS WILL BE NOTIFIED OF ANY SUCH ALLEGATIONS.**

**PLAGIARISM MAY RESULT IN DISCIPLINARY ACTION, UP TO AND INCLUDING REMOVAL FROM FEDERAL SERVICE**

**NOTE:** The Poynter Institute offers this excellent guidance for identifying plagiarism:  
<https://www.poynter.org/news/it-original-editors-guide-identifying-plagiarism>

### **INTERVIEWS**

Even in the era of selfies, photo-bombing and user-generated content, most people are not comfortable being interviewed and consider recording equipment to be invasive, especially when you're dealing with sensitive subjects. One way to reduce that unease or tension is to first talk to an interview subject **WITHOUT** the equipment. Put the person at ease; make him or her feel comfortable talking to you before proceeding with the actual interview.

When setting up an interview, the subject may ask what questions will be asked or how the interview will be treated when produced. It's OK to outline in advance general points of interest and the general subject areas you intend to cover.

### **YOU SHOULD NOT**

- **PROVIDE ACTUAL QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED**
- **PROMISE YOU WILL NOT ASK QUESTIONS OUTSIDE THE AREAS YOU HAVE OUTLINED**
- **PROMISE HOW SUBJECTS WILL BE TREATED ON THE AIR**

Any agreement that certain questions will or will not be asked would be an exception, to be decided on a case-by-case basis in consultation with your supervisor and/or VOA senior management as warranted. If an agreement is approved, the agreement should be mentioned in the introduction to the interview.

If an interviewee requires VOA to use a name or title we ordinarily would not use, that too should be mentioned in the introduction to the interview.

### **DO NOT PROMISE AN INTERVIEWEE THAT**

- **VOA WILL AIR THE ENTIRE INTERVIEW OR A PORTION OF IT IN A TV PROGRAM, OR AS PART OF A TV PACKAGE**
- **THAT HE OR SHE WILL BE ABLE TO FIND ALL OR PART OF THE INTERVIEW ON THE VOA WEBSITE**
- **THAT ANY PART OF THE INTERVIEW WILL BE INCLUDED IN A TV PROGRAM OR TV PACKAGE, OR WITH A WEB STORY OR BLOG**

*(Also see [Hosting a Guest on VOA Programs, p. 43](#))*

### **NEWSMAKER INTERVIEWS**

When VOA interviews a prominent newsmaker at length, the purpose is to find out what an individual, organization or group of lawmakers are thinking about a particular issue. This type of interview does not always require that the other side be presented within the interview format.

Instead, a video piece or a brief explainer can be used to set up the topic or topics being discussed, and that can be the means by which the other side's point of view is presented. Another possibility is reading copy following the interview stating the opposition's view.

Ultimately, it is advisable to seek out a corresponding interview at length with someone from the other side of the issue.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### RECORDING TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

- If you are planning to record a telephone interview, the reporter or producer **MUST** advise the interview subject that he or she is being recorded, and that their comments will be on the record. If the interview subject objects to being recorded, the reporter or producer should confirm that the interview can be used as off the record information.  
([Also see Sourcing, p. 27](#) and [Defamation/Privacy/False Light, p. 94](#))

### SHOOTING/EDITING TV INTERVIEWS

- When shooting a two-camera interview, it's acceptable for a reporter to register appropriate visual expressions, such as smiling at a joke. What is NOT acceptable is editing in a visual reaction that is out of sequence to the answer being given.
- Equally unacceptable is separating questions from answers. The 10<sup>th</sup> answer of an interview should not be edited as if it were the response to the 4<sup>th</sup> question, even if it seems to make the reporter's or producer's editorial point clearer.
- Interviews shot with one camera can present editing difficulties, so when possible, the camera should be set up to start the interview on a medium 2-shot. That will allow the cameraperson to push in on the interview subject, pan to the interviewer and pull back to the 2-shot as needed.
- If the above method isn't possible, then reverse questions (questions asked after the interview is done, with the camera reversed to tape the interviewer), while not ideal, are allowed. Reverse questions should be true to the original questions and if done, the interviewee or representative should be made aware and should be invited to be present.

In this situation, because the reverse shots are happening after the actual interview, the reporter or producer should avoid showing an expression (smile, frown, nod) that might be seen as agreement or disagreement with what the subject said during the interview.

## **PUBLIC FIGURES**

Questions and reporting about the private lives of public figures should be relevant to the story. For example, the questioning is appropriate when the reporting is intended to expose inconsistency, lying, hypocrisy and most certainly, illegal activity. In the case of candidates for public office, information about these actions often enables voters to judge the character of a candidate or elected official.

However, VOA's reporting **should not** be based on rumor, speculation or gossip. Reporting should rely on on the record statements and actions of public figures. Information from normally reliable sources not willing to be identified should be very closely examined. ([Also see Sourcing, p. 27](#) and [Rumors & Speculation, p. 28](#))

The passage of time is an important consideration in determining what is relevant, and may affect current relevance. When information is dated, evaluate it carefully. In the case of a political figure, it may be the importance of such information for the public to judge that person's qualifications and fitness to hold public office.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Each situation should be considered separately and there is no blanket rule prohibiting reporting private activities from many years ago.

For interviews, be very careful when using information from sources and/or sourced information from another news organization when asking a question to a guest about his/her private life.

[\(Also see Sourcing, p. 27 and Attribution, p. 29\)](#)

Open-ended questions based on little or no evidence are strongly discouraged. For example, the question “Have you ever taken a bribe,” should not be asked unless it’s based on our reporting, or if there is a compelling and journalistically justifiable reason to ask it.

**IF VOA STAFF ARE UNSURE OF THE APPROPRIATENESS OF THEIR QUESTIONING OR REPORTING REGARDING THE PRIVATE LIFE OF A PUBLIC FIGURE, THEY SHOULD CONSULT WITH THEIR SUPERVISOR AND WHEN APPROPRIATE WITH THE EDITOR FOR NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES AND THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL.**

### **ANONYMITY**

There may be reasons to agree to anonymity for an interview subject, whether for radio, TV or online. For example, we may not wish to jeopardize the subject’s safety or subject him or her or family members to harm or undue embarrassment. But there may be legal considerations as well in granting anonymity to interview subjects.

Always ask the interviewee about his or her reasons for requesting anonymity. Clarify and confirm the conditions agreed to in exchange for the information. Anonymity for interviewees can be defined by degree. In establishing the degree of anonymity, describe the process to be used (e.g. blurring of faces, digitizing the voice, videotaping in shadow) but do not guarantee a particular result.

- **THE FAILURE TO ADEQUATELY DISGUISE AN INTERVIEW SUBJECT OR A MISUNDERSTANDING OVER THE STEPS AGREED ON TO DISGUISE AN INTERVIEW SUBJECT CAN RESULT IN A LEGAL CLAIM AGAINST VOA.**
- **GENERALLY, WE WANT TO AVOID PROMISING ANONYMITY FOR PEOPLE TRYING TO EVADE LAW ENFORCEMENT.**
- **EXCEPTIONS SHOULD BE CLEARED WITH A SUPERVISOR, THE EDITOR FOR NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES AND/OR SENIOR MANAGEMENT AND THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL.**

[\(Also see Sourcing, p. 27\)](#)



### **“AMBUSH” INTERVIEWS**

So-called “ambush” interviews, where a person who has refused to be interviewed is approached without notice by a reporter or producer, are discouraged and should be avoided. An “ambush” is different than a “stakeout,” where cameras are set up in advance to get comments from individuals who are going to or leaving meetings and/or work.

**CONSULT WITH SUPERVISORS, THE EDITOR FOR NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES AND/OR SENIOR MANAGEMENT AND THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL WHEN CONSIDERING WHETHER TO DO AN AMBUSH INTERVIEW.**

### **ADVANCE SCRIPTS/SCREENING**

You should not show a script to a third party not affiliated with VOA or BBG in advance of the story’s broadcast or online publication. However, you can call an interviewee and review portions of a script in order to fact check. As part of the reporting process you may also show portions of other interviews or other footage prepared for the report to an interview subject to obtain their reaction or comment for use in the same report. You should videotape the individual watching the other interview or other footage whenever possible.

Advance screenings of VOA news stories are not permitted without the prior approval of senior management. An exception: press screenings for review purposes.

### **SUBJECT TAPING INTERVIEW**

On occasion, a subject may ask to do his or her own recording of an interview. That is permissible as long as the subject understands the taping is for personal use only, not for broadcast, publication or other distribution. As noted above, VOA will not provide an audio or video copy of the raw interview to an interview subject.

### **REQUESTS FOR UNAIED/UNPUBLISHED MATERIAL**

As a general policy, **VOA should not give third parties access to unaied or unpublished material** or discuss the existence of such materials. Refer those requests to senior management and the Office of General Counsel.

*(Also see [Usage Requests, p. 77](#))*

### **PAYMENT**

VOA does not pay people for interviews. However, it may be appropriate to pay certain travel-related expenses for an interviewee. Refer questions on this subject to VOA senior management and the Office of General Counsel.

### GUESTS

#### **NOTIFYING VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT OF HIGH-LEVEL GUESTS**

As a major international broadcaster, VOA often welcomes to the Cohen Building high-level foreign government officials and other important individuals, such as prominent dissidents and exiles. To better determine when additional protocols may be appropriate, VOA journalists who schedule these meetings or visits should immediately notify senior management through their chain of command. Division Directors will then notify the Programming Directorate using the email address [programming-directorate@voanews.com](mailto:programming-directorate@voanews.com) for coordination with the Office of the VOA Director. Decisions about any special actions that may be needed will be coordinated between the Office of the VOA Director and the CEO's Office. Notification at each stage should occur prior to the visit, with sufficient time for senior management to take any actions that may be necessary.

VOA journalists who schedule meetings at the Cohen Building with audience members, members of the diaspora, or lower-level government officials should also immediately notify their Division Director. That Division Director will then decide whether additional coordination within VOA and/or the CEO's Office is required.

#### **SECURITY PROCEDURES FOR GUESTS**

Security procedures for entry into the Cohen building are set by the Federal Protective Service (FPS), the agency that provides integrated security and law enforcement services to federally owned and leased facilities. FPS, not BBG Security, manages the contract for the building's Protective Security Officers (PSOs), thus they report to and are represented by the FPS Inspector.

As with other federal buildings, all visitors must show proper photo ID and go through security screening upon arrival.

**FOR PROGRAM GUESTS, THIS PROCESS CAN SEEM CUMBERSOME.  
CONSEQUENTLY, EMPLOYEES MUST EXPLAIN THE SECURITY PROCEDURES AND PHOTO ID  
REQUIREMENTS TO ALL PROGRAM GUESTS PRIOR TO THEIR ARRIVAL, AND ASK THAT THEY  
ANTICIPATE ABOUT 10 MINUTES FOR THE CHECK-IN PROCESS.**

Types of Accepted Identification:

1. U.S. Citizens: Valid U.S. Driver's License or U.S. Passport
2. Non-U.S. Citizens: Valid Passport/Visa

Please notify your guest/visitor that they will be required to process through security screening (walk-through magnetometer and x-ray machine for hand-carried items) prior to arrival.

If you are sponsoring an event, please provide BBG Security with a guest list that includes the date/time of their arrival, along with their full names and your contact information (Sponsor). Please remember that all visitors **MUST** be escorted while in the Cohen Building per FPS requirements. This list should be emailed to the central Security email at: [bbg-security@bbg.gov](mailto:bbg-security@bbg.gov).

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

In those rare cases when an important guest arrives without any ID, contact Security immediately so they can work with the FPS to request an exception to normal procedures and allow the guest entry into the building. Please understand that the final decision to waive normal security procedures for your guest rests with FPS, not BBG Security.

Exceptions to these procedures can be made in some cases for VIPs. VIPs are granted access without having to sign in or go through the metal detectors. Under some circumstances, they also enter the building through a different entry point than the C Street visitors' entrance.

The following are automatically considered VIPs:

1. The President and his cabinet, including sitting Ambassadors
2. Sitting and former members of Congress
3. Anyone who has a federal law enforcement detail, such as foreign dignitaries

For these and other special guests, employees can request VIP status from BBG Security managers or from the IBB Chief of Staff.

Please contact Security with any additional questions at 202-382-7777.

### **GUEST BOOKING PROCEDURES**

- ALL REQUESTS FOR THE PRESIDENT, VICE PRESIDENT, FIRST LADY AND THE VP'S SPOUSE WILL BE MADE THROUGH THE VOA DIRECTOR'S OFFICE. **THERE ARE ABSOLUTELY NO EXCEPTIONS**
- REQUESTS FOR OTHER WHITE HOUSE OFFICIALS, CABINET SECRETARIES, CONGRESSIONAL LEADERSHIP AND THE KEY BEATS SHOULD COME FROM THE NEWS CENTER CORRESPONDENTS AT THOSE BEATS.

### **THE CORRESPONDENTS ARE THE FACE OF VOA FOR THOSE BEATS AND WE CANNOT UNDERCUT THEIR POSITIONS**

EDUCATION	Kathleen Struck
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES	Katherine Gypson
IMMIGRATION	Molly McKitterick, Aline Barros, Victoria Macchi, Ramon Taylor
INTELLIGENCE/NATIONAL SECURITY	Jeff Seldin
JUSTICE	Masood Farivar
MEDICAL	Carol Pearson
PENTAGON	Carla Babb
POLITICS	Jim Malone
SENATE	Michael Bowman
STATE DEPARTMENT	Cindy Saine & Nike Ching
UNITED NATIONS	Margaret Besheer
WHITE HOUSE	Steve Herman & Patsy Widakuswara

These requests **SHOULD BE SENT FIRST** to the appropriate beat correspondent. When an interview has been confirmed, an e-mail should be sent to the Guest Booking group: [guest-booking@voanews.com](mailto:guest-booking@voanews.com)

- When we get an interview with the President, Vice President, First Lady, VP's spouse, key Cabinet secretaries or Congressional leadership, VOA Public Relations should be notified immediately: [PublicRelations@voanews.com](mailto:PublicRelations@voanews.com)

### **ADDITIONALLY: LARRY LONDON'S BEAT IS MUSIC AND PENELOPE POULOU'S BEAT IS FILM.**

If a Language Service is thinking of interviewing a major musician or musical group, or thinking of getting an interview with a film personality who is on a junket or making an appearance in a bureau city, **an advisory e-mail should go out first to Larry or Penelope accordingly, and to Guest Booking.**

By the same token, when Larry, Penelope or anyone else has a major music interview or movie-related interview scheduled, they should advise the Guest Booking e-mail group.

When there are major awards shows – usually in Los Angeles -- Mike O’Sullivan in the L.A. bureau should be brought into the conversation. As with State, Pentagon or elsewhere – it does not make VOA look good if a studio or a musician’s or filmmaker’s press person is hearing from multiple VOA individuals.

### **LANGUAGE SERVICES & NEWS CENTER GUIDELINES**

Language Services and the News Center should use the “Guest Booking” email group for notifications about the following types of information:

- Guests they intend to book, whether newsmakers or experts.
  - Should a Language Service seek an expert on a topic but has not yet identified the expert, it would still be helpful for Guest Booking to be notified of the Service’s interest in an expert on a specific topic.
  - Guests that have already been booked.
  - Unplanned interviews that were conducted in the course of newsgathering.
- Whenever possible, Language Services and the News Center should include whatever germane information is available in their guest booking notifications: details such as date and time if known, location of the interview, platform and device (Skype, smartphone, ENG camera, audio only), language, where content may be accessed, gist of interview, full log or transcript about what was said, if available.
- **The News Center will collect this information** and provide via email a several-times **daily calendar** that will track all known guest activity at-a-glance for all to see.
- This calendar will permanently reside in the shared drive for the whole how to easily access, thus serving as a back-up for the email distribution and providing an easily accessible archive of all guest activity.

When and where possible, stringers for the News Center and the Language Services should keep the field correspondents and/or Washington advised of potential interviews of interest.

**IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT ALL STAFF RESPONSIBLE FOR BOOKING GUESTS/INTERVIEWS SEND A NOTE TO GUEST BOOKING AND TO THE APPROPRIATE INDIVIDUALS BEFORE MAKING A REQUEST.**

### **HOSTING A GUEST ON VOA PROGRAMS**

- **IT IS MANDATORY** that a discussion takes place at the Language Service and/or Division level when a service is considering a live interview with a potentially controversial or hostile guest, or about particularly sensitive issues.
- The discussion should focus on determining the format for that interview, and the final decision about the format will be determined at the Division level.
- An interview with a controversial guest or about sensitive issues **SHOULD NOT BE PROMOTED** until the final decision on the interview format has been made.
- It may be decided that the best approach will be to **RECORD** the interview so that it can be edited for time and presented to the audience in the best editorial and production formats possible.
- **All potential guests must be pre-interviewed** to get a sense of what to expect during the actual interview. You can discuss general topics, but do not give the guest the actual interview questions in advance. That pre-interview should be available for review by producers, anchors and Language Service or Division management.
- When you know you're going to have a controversial or potentially hostile live guest, prepare a game plan with the show staff and the show Director about what to do if the interview goes downhill, so that everyone in the control room and on the set know in advance what to do, including implementation of a back-up plan.
- It is the responsibility of a program's host to do his/her homework about the guest and the subject matter. If a guest starts making unsubstantiated accusations or questionable statements, it is the responsibility of the anchor to challenge the guest about those accusations/statements, whether asking for clarification about the source of the accusations/statements or refuting those accusations/statements with facts.
- If a guest uses language that is unsuitable for air (cursing, insulting, racial or homosexual slurs, for example) it is the responsibility of the host to immediately cut the conversation off and apologize to the audience for the offensive language. It is the responsibility of the Executive Producer to alert the Director about what has happened so the Director can make sure the guest's microphone is silenced. At that point the EP must communicate to the Director and the Line Producer to implement a back-up plan.
- The Executive Producer is responsible for a written report of the incident. Detail the unacceptable or irresponsible language used by the guest, how the anchor handled the situation and what steps were taken to end the interview and go to alternate programming. The report is to be sent to the Service Chief, Division Director, Associate Director for Language Programming and the Associate Director for Operations.

- Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the Executive Producer to ensure that the program is clean and airs correctly. The anchor can only do so much. The EP has his/her finger on the button, so to speak, with the authority and ability to tell the Director and the Line Producer to go to something else. That's why you need to have a backup plan.

**GOING TO BLACK DURING A LIVE INTERVIEW IS A  
LAST DITCH OPTION, WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS.  
IT IS NEVER THE FIRST OPTION.**

[\*\(Also see Interviews, p. 35\)\*](#)

### **DIGITAL MEDIA**

#### **SOCIAL MEDIA**

VOA journalists are encouraged to participate in social media. By joining networks that are popular in your target regions you can forge closer relationships with your audience, discover new angles and stories and experiment with different ways of covering the news.

Reporters are encouraged to break news on social media platforms that are most popular in their region, but certain editorial priorities should be followed.

**REMEMBER THAT ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND OTHER PUBLIC SPACES,  
YOU ARE A JOURNALIST.**

**IT IS CRITICAL THAT YOU ARE FAIR, IMPARTIAL AND OBJECTIVE  
IN ALL PUBLIC SPACES.**

#### **PROTECTING YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL REPUTATION IN SOCIAL MEDIA**

Using social media can have as many pitfalls as pluses. If your account is hacked, or you find that an imposter account is impersonating you, your reputation and that of VOA can be damaged.

Your first line of defense – maintaining good online security practices.

- Monitor your digital identity by periodically conducting an online search for your name using several of the leading search engines, e.g. Google, Yahoo, Bing, etc. Examine the results on the first two or three pages to make sure there are no unfamiliar accounts.
- Use strong passwords (combining uppercase letters, lowercase letters, numbers, and special characters)
- Change passwords frequently
- Do not use the same passwords for multiple accounts
- Keep your passwords safe
- Make sure your email address is secure
- Be sure who you are actually connecting with or following; connect with Verified public profiles
- Get Verified for your own social media accounts used for VOA work

**Twitter:** Log in, then go to [verification.twitter.com](https://verification.twitter.com)

**Facebook:** Log in, then go to [this page](#) in Facebook's [Help Center](#)

The second option is to take images used for your profile picture and do a reverse image search, since impersonators will often use pictures you've posted online to create fake accounts. [This primer](#) from Google is a good place to start and will show you how to find all the places your pictures are showing up across the internet.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)



If you find or suspect problems with your accounts:

- Contact the Office of VOA Digital Strategy as soon as possible [voadigital@voanews.com](mailto:voadigital@voanews.com). They will work with the social media companies to help take care of hacks or imposter accounts.

To help prevent security problems, or once your account has been fixed, please follow these best practices for securing your account:

- Change your password
- Make sure your email address is secure
- Revoke connections to third-party applications
- Update your password in your trusted third-party applications

More details on these practices, and additional steps to protect your accounts:

- Twitter: <https://support.twitter.com/articles/31796>
- Facebook: [Keeping Your Account Secure](#) (part of the Facebook Help Center)

PEN America, the global group that ensures that people have the freedom to convey information and ideas, has created an Online Harassment Field Manual which may prove useful:

<https://onlineharassmentfieldmanual.pen.org/>

### **SOCIAL MEDIA AS REPORTING TOOL**

- **REPORTERS SHOULD QUICKLY FILE FOR VOA-OWNED PLATFORMS AFTER BREAKING NEWS ON SOCIAL MEDIA, PARTICULARLY FOR HIS OR HER SERVICE'S WEBSITE, BUT ALSO FOR RADIO AND TV WHEN APPROPRIATE.**
- **IF A VOA REPORTER/PRODUCER HAS A BREAKING STORY, HE OR SHE SHOULD BE THE ONE TO FIRST REPORT THAT ON THEIR OWN SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS OR ON THE SERVICE'S OFFICIAL ACCOUNT. DON'T BIG-FOOT YOUR COLLEAGUES.**

It's also important to remember that social media is more than Facebook and Twitter. Niche audiences often have their own niche social networks, like Sina Weibo in China or Orkut in India and Brazil. Get to know which ones are popular with your audience and experiment with them. Whatever your topic or medium, there's a probably a social network around it.

Reporting has always been about amplifying certain voices from the public. But rather than a list of carefully cultivated sources that reporters have traditionally relied upon, social media can present millions of competing voices that we must select from wisely. Whether you call it citizen journalism, user-generated content or social media, our readers often report and share news stories before we are able to verify the facts. While it's good to highlight those voices, it is critical to verify rumors before reporting them as facts.

There are techniques for confirming the validity of certain social media accounts, including examination of how long the account has been in existence, looking at the account's message history, and scrutiny of photo streams or other bits of the user's digital trail. If you have doubts, reach out to your service's or

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

division's social media lead for guidance. You must do your due diligence before relying on a source as credible. In other words, report the story.

**Do not retweet or pass along unconfirmed rumors without a clear indication that the information is not yet verified.**

For example: @VOANews Lots of reports and photos of this blast. Working to confirm RT @manonstreet Bomb in front of parliament. Hundreds dead!

**ADDING COMMENTS FROM SOCIAL MEDIA TO YOUR REPORTING IS ACCEPTABLE AS LONG AS YOU CLEARLY IDENTIFY THE SOURCE OF THE COMMENT AND IT REFLECTS AUDIENCE OPINION, SIMILAR TO A VOX POP IN RADIO OR TELEVISION.**

**MAKE SURE YOU BALANCE OPINIONS TO PROVIDE A FAIR PICTURE OF PUBLIC SENTIMENT, AND CONTEXTUALIZE THOSE OPINIONS WITH THE LARGER STORY.**

*(Also see [Fairness, Objectivity and Balance](#), p. 7)*

## **OPINION**

If you take a controversial position or make a controversial comment online it can reflect poorly on you and on the agency. It could lead our readers to believe that we are untrustworthy and unable to fairly cover a controversial story. VOA has spent 75 years building its reputation, and you have spent your career building yours. To keep that trust intact we must adhere to a high standard of objectivity.

This not only includes individual posts or tweets, but also posting your political affiliation or causes in your social media profile. Privacy policies change and people can take screenshots. Assume nothing is private in social media, even if your account is visible only to your online circle of friends.

In particular, retweeting or “liking” an opinion on one side of the issue or another could be seen as an endorsement from you or from VOA. If you want to put that comment in front of your followers, make sure it is clear you aren’t endorsing the opinion, but simply showing both sides of the conversation.

For example: @VOANews The budget fight continues RT @AngryPundit Why can’t Washington get its act together?

Don’t be afraid to engage with either side of a controversial issue. It is okay to follow or friend individuals or interest groups on either side of an issue. In fact, it should be part of the reporting process; paying attention to what both sides have to say is critical to getting as much information as possible on an issue. But never endorse only one side or the other by “liking” a cause or political figure, and make sure you follow all sides of an issue.

While personal endeavors on other sites are fine, they must not involve the use of agency materials, time or facilities, including information that is available to you because of your position at VOA.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### **MANAGING YOUR PROGRAM'S OR SERVICE'S SOCIAL PRESENCE**

VOA programs and services are encouraged to maintain official accounts on the major social media platforms in your region. These presences can help you engage with your current audience and reach new audiences with your content.

Before launching a new official social media presence, you and your service chief should answer the following questions:

- Who are you trying to reach and why is this the right way to reach them?
- Who is responsible for keeping each account active and how often?
- How will success be measured and who will track it?
- Does your branding align with the branding already established on your website?

You are also responsible for moderating the comments on your Facebook page, website, or agency blog to remove comments that violate our Terms of Use. In particular, you should be on the lookout for comments that are vulgar, racist or incite others to acts of violence. If you choose to respond to those comments, your replies should be professional and courteous. If the commenter continues to respond in a rude manner, you can report the individual to that site's staff and/or you can block the user from commenting. **DO NOT** engage in a debate with anyone who is trying to stir up anger and violence. Be aware that our spam filters sometimes fail; always be vigilant about shaping a lively and responsible conversation by removing comments that distract from the free and civil exchange of ideas.

### **POSTING VOA CONTENT TO OTHER SITES, INCLUDING YOUR OWN**

Uploading proprietary VOA or wire agency material directly to personal accounts is prohibited. Not only can you be held legally liable for posting photos or video that belongs to wire and newsfeed agencies, but you will hurt your service's ability to build an audience on official channels.

Instead, you should link to VOA material posted on your service's website or other official VOA accounts, like your service's official Facebook page or YouTube channel.

*Example:* Jack is a video editor in a VOA language service. He regularly combines wire service video and VOA video into packages for broadcast and web. He sometimes takes interesting video from APTN, as well as video he has shot, and uploads it directly to his personal YouTube channel and Facebook page. Is that permitted?

*Answer:* **No.** Jack should only upload VOA material to official VOA YouTube accounts. Once it's there, he can link to it from his personal YouTube account, Facebook or other channels.

*Example:* Jack embeds video from his service's VOA YouTube channel on his own YouTube page and shares VOA reporting with his friends on Facebook. Is this permitted?

*Answer:* **Yes.** Any material shared from your service's official, public-facing website, YouTube channel, or other official outlets is okay.

### **LINKING TO OTHER SITES**

You are encouraged to provide links that are relevant to story content and suitable for all audiences. Editors should exercise judgment and not use links that may be offensive, or in any way, inappropriate.

Linking does not constitute endorsement. While you should avoid pointing readers to anything that is an affront to common decency, you can link to the websites of institutions or causes if they are relevant to a story. If your link is to the site of a particular candidate or party please be even-handed: if you link to the website of one political party, you should be just as willing to link to the website of the opposition party, when relevant to the story. Failure to do so could not only call into question our objectivity; it could be a violation of the Hatch Act.

[\*\(Also see Political Activity, p. 10\)\*](#)

### **BE TRANSPARENT ABOUT YOUR MISTAKES**

Every news outlet makes mistakes. When a piece of reporting on your VOA website contains a factual error it should be corrected as quickly as possible. Talk to a senior editor in your service about what needs to be changed and place a correction at the bottom in italics that notes the original error.

Never delete a story or video from your VOA website without correcting and acknowledging the mistake. Not only will the incorrect story remain in the caches of major search engines, but your readers will believe that you are trying to cover something up instead of being honest and open. Full disclosure is always best.

While you should not delete incorrect stories or video from your site, you should use the content management system to remove it from major section fronts until it is corrected. The URL will continue to work, but will not be highlighted on the site.

[\*\(Also see Corrections, p. 88\)\*](#)

### **USER-GENERATED CONTENT**

Like all news organizations, VOA receives video, audio and photos from outside sources. The content may be sent for the purpose of showing an up-close look at a news event; to present a particular point of view; to cast a negative light on a government, an organization or individuals.

In all cases, VOA journalists must take every editorial precaution to ensure the legitimacy of the submissions before broadcasting them or publishing them:

- **CONTACT & IDENTIFICATION**

Reach out to individuals or groups who have posted material to verify that they are the owner of the work. Clearly identify yourself as a journalist when making inquiries about user-generated content.

- **NEWSWORTHINESS**

Is there a valid editorial reason to use video, audio or photos that we receive from an outside source? Does the user-generated content help to further inform our audience about an issue or incident?

- **MOTIVE**

Does the individual or group sending the material have an agenda? If VOA determines the content is agenda-driven and decides to air/publish the content, we should reveal why the material was submitted, and who submitted it.

- **REAL OR STAGED**

Can VOA confirm that the video, audio or photo is real? Or, can VOA determine whether the content is fake or staged, produced in the hope that VOA might air or publish it?

- **COPYCAT INCIDENTS**

Will the broadcasting or publication of the video/photos encourage others to create or produce similar content that in some cases could be life-threatening?

- **RIGHT TO PRIVACY**

Was the material recorded or photographed without the knowledge of the individuals involved? In other words, was the material recorded with a hidden camera or microphone?

- **HOW WILL THE CONTENT BE USED**

Should VOA receive sensitive or graphic content, follow the guidelines in the section on [Sensitive and Graphic Material, p. 17](#). In some cases it may be more appropriate for such material to be posted online only, where users can choose what they do or do not want to see or hear.

- **PERMISSION**

Once it's established the content is valid and its owner is identified, ask for permission to use the material. As always, VOA gives credit where credit is due, so the person who created the content should be identified accordingly; it is up to the individual or group whether to use real names or a website/social network username.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

- **PAYING FOR MATERIAL**

Other than our existing agreements with the news agencies and our freelancers, VOA does not pay for content. Please keep this in mind when dealing with user-generated content.

*(Also see [Payment, p. 38](#))*

- **DISCLAIMERS**

We must always tell our audiences when we are airing or publishing user-generated content. In addition, we should tell our audiences that while we have checked for the legitimacy of the material, we cannot absolutely verify the content. As with all of VOA's reporting, transparency is key.

[Follow this link to a useful at-your-desk tool for verifying user-generated content.](#)

It provides various case studies that can easily be applied to potential UGC situations at VOA.

If you are uncertain about using photos or video taken from social media, please see the guidance on copyright and fair use in the [Legal Issues](#) section of this Guide, or e-mail the Office of General Counsel at [copyrightclearances@bbg.gov](mailto:copyrightclearances@bbg.gov).

**AUDIO, VIDEO OR PHOTOS THAT ARE FREELY AVAILABLE  
ON THE INTERNET DOES NOT MEAN THEY ARE IN  
THE "PUBLIC DOMAIN."**

### YOUTUBE GUIDELINES

- YOUTUBE VIDEOS ARE NOT A PRIMARY MEANS OF ACCESSING AND USING B-ROLL FOR A VIDEO PACKAGE. ALWAYS CHECK THE ABC NEWSONE, AFP, APTN AND REUTERS FOLDERS IN DALETPLUS AND THEIR ONLINE SITES FIRST. IF NECESSARY, CONTACT THE SENIOR ARCHIVISTS ([SENIOR-ARCHIVISTS@VOANEWS.COM](mailto:SENIOR-ARCHIVISTS@VOANEWS.COM)) FOR ASSISTANCE.
- THE VOA VIDEO LIBRARY ([VIDEO-LIBRARY@VOANEWS.COM](mailto:VIDEO-LIBRARY@VOANEWS.COM)) HAS EXTENSIVE FILE VIDEO AVAILABLE; ALWAYS CHECK THERE BEFORE RELYING ON YOUTUBE FOR FILE VIDEO NEEDS.
- USE CAUTION AND COMMON SENSE AND AVOID USING VIDEOS FROM YOUTUBE THAT MAY VIOLATE SOMEONE'S COPYRIGHT. WHEN IN DOUBT, PLEASE CONTACT THE EDITOR FOR NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES FOR GUIDANCE.

Although YouTube is the most popular site for video, similar rules apply to other sites, such as Vimeo and VEVO.

Use of YouTube videos should be cleared through the Editor for News Standards & Best Practices. The video can be used full-screen as long as credits, chyron information and other on-screen information is not obscured or deleted.

The actual YouTube logo **MUST** be burned into the video and remain on-screen throughout the clip:



YouTube should also be credited in narration: "In this video posted on YouTube..." or something similar.

YouTube has a blurring tool that lets you blur any part of a video, including moving objects. Details on how to use the tool are here:

<https://youtube-creators.googleblog.com/2016/02/blur-moving-objects-in-your-video-with.html>  
(Also see *Sensitive & Graphic Material*, p. 18)



### AUDIO

**The audio from a YouTube video cannot be stripped from the video.** YouTube’s Terms of Service stipulate that embedded content cannot be manipulated or downloaded for use away from [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com).

**In addition, YouTube – as well as Facebook -- takes audio copyright very seriously.** If you add music to a video that doesn’t come from one of VOA’s free music accounts – Firstcom.com, Dewolfemusic.com, Apmmusic.com or Audioblocks.com -- your video will likely be taken down from the site, and **after three “copyright strikes,” your account will be terminated—and you’ll be barred from creating a new account.**

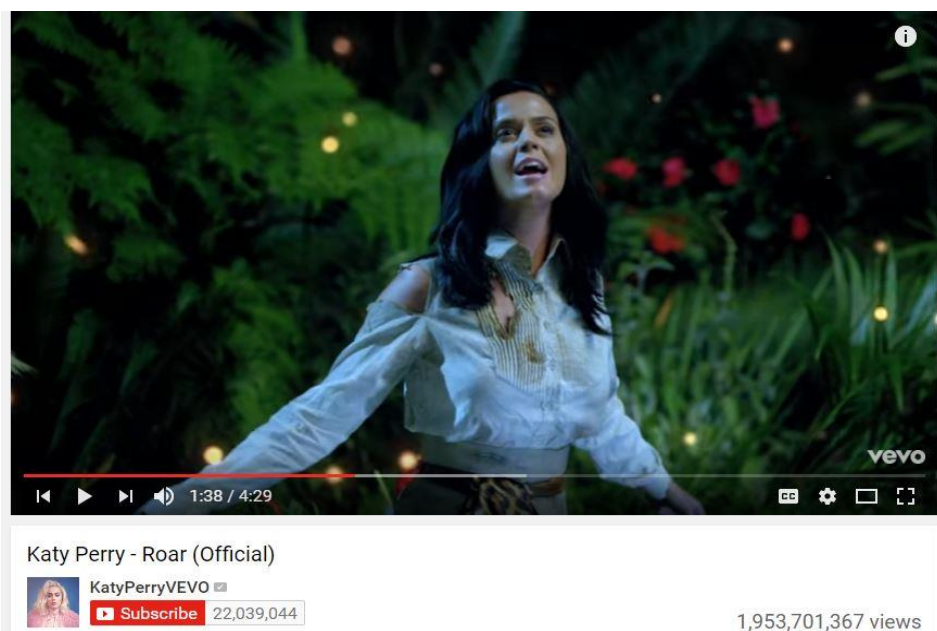
While we can always attempt to make a fair use claim for audio clips, it is highly recommended that you rely on the free music sites that are available.

[\(Also see Music, p. 61\)](#)

### EMBEDDING

Embedded video is effectively just a link; no copy of the video is being stored on your server. Therefore, you may use embedded video on VOA websites. However, you should still use caution and common sense and avoid posting videos that may violate someone’s copyright. In particular, do not post videos that contain music, movies or television broadcasts unless those videos are posted on the official YouTube channel of the copyright holder. Many movie studios and music companies allow you to take embed code for trailers or video clips directly from their main site. In those cases, it’s much easier to tell that you’re using an official video when it’s on the company website.

On this page is the official version of Katy Perry’s music video of “Roar” posted on YouTube by VEVO, an entertainment consortium of music producers. On the next page is the exact same song, and although it also says “official,” it is clearly a fan upload. The first is okay for use; the second is not.



[Return to Table of Contents](#)





**YOUTUBE MAKES NO REPRESENTATIONS ABOUT THE  
ACCURACY, USEFULNESS, SAFETY OR INTELLECTUAL  
PROPERTY RIGHTS OF CONTENT APPEARING ON ITS SITE**

### **GOOGLE EARTH GUIDELINES**

VOA has rights to use Google Earth for the following VOA products:

- Television programs (including promotional ads)
- DVDs and video on demand
- Any long-form video products, including documentaries
- Printed materials

Google Earth can be used to create fly-throughs, locator maps, or basic illustrations of cities or geographic features.

**We are required to credit Google Earth with an unobstructed graphic module that clearly shows that the content is provided by Google and, when applicable, a third-party data provider.** [This example](#) from CNN shows how it should be done.

Please work with your EP and Graphics person to make sure Google Earth is clearly credited for any usage.

Also, any Google Maps/Google Earth images used must reflect how they would look online. For example, you are not allowed to make any changes (delete, blur, etc.) to these products that would make them look different than in the actual product.

Because it is a standalone software package, IT will need to install Google Earth on your computer.

### **REVEALING WEBSITES AND ADDRESSES**

In most cases, websites are not considered in the public domain for purposes of publishing pictures of them. They fall under the same fair use guidelines as other copyrighted material. If you have questions about whether you can show a website, please contact the Office of General Counsel.

Generally, website addresses can be revealed, as long as they are not for sites which promote criminal behavior or contain pornography. Avoid showing website addresses if it might be construed as a commercial for the site. Exceptions would include educational or informational sites, or charitable sites raising money for victims of a natural disaster.

When reporting on political campaigns, include links to the websites of the candidates mentioned in the piece. ([Also see Political Activity, p.10](#))

### **AFFILIATE/RECIPROCAL LINKS**

Reciprocal links to affiliate websites are permitted, under the following guidelines:

- The decision to establish an online affiliation should reflect the same editorial considerations that go into establishing a broadcast affiliation – including credibility, reputation, trust and audience reach.
- VOA Language Services should consider the total number of affiliates when determining the placement of reciprocal links. A service that has a small number of large, reputable partners is justified in establishing front-page reciprocal links. A service that has dozens of broadcasting affiliates should create an Affiliates page where they may all be listed. Each situation must be considered separately. It may be appropriate to have a homepage reciprocal link with a major web portal that is a primary news source in the language, and a separate Affiliate page with reciprocal links to broadcasting affiliates.
- Affiliate logos or text links may be used to establish reciprocal links, as appropriate.
- Reciprocal links should be reviewed on a regular basis, and VOA must reserve the right to remove the link at any time, if the affiliation ends or the target site no longer reflects the editorial integrity under which the relationship was established.
- Terms of Use must include a disclaimer that “VOA is not responsible for the content of external websites.”

If you have questions about these guidelines, please contact Matthew Baise ([mbaise@voanews.com](mailto:mbaise@voanews.com)) or Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com)).

### PHOTOGRAPHS

Photographs add a great deal to VOA stories and are necessary to give the audience a fuller experience and understanding of VOA reports. While VOA has wire services and other sources for photographs, original content taken by VOA reporters and staff is always useful.

Keep in mind that some stories will have no wire photos available so it is particularly useful for the reporter to shoot a few photos while doing the story.

The photo contracts for AFP, AP and Reuters are administered by Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com), x4276). When there is a question about news agency photos, please contact Steve.

### GENERAL RULES

- The goal of images is to enhance the readers' understanding of the story – and make it look better on the web. Take photos that add to your story, and submit as many as you can so editors can decide which are best.
- Show the people, places and things that you talk about in your stories - If you emphasize a place or interview a person get a picture. If you cover a demonstration, show the protest signs or faces of the people. However, be aware that minors may be present at demonstrations, and you should use good judgment in photographing them in those situations.  
(Also see [Interviewing & Videotaping Minors, p. 22](#) and [Filming in Public vs. Private Places, p. 93](#))
- Get close up to your subject if you can. Take photos from different perspectives and distances.
- Make sure your subject is clear, focused, and lit as well as possible.
- Always send in the largest file size possible. Photo and web editors can crop as needed and warranted.
- Headshots are good. Also try to get images of the subject in their environment and in action.
- Remember the [rule of thirds](#).
- [Shoot landscape \(horizontal\) instead of portrait](#). Landscape photos look better on social media and in Pangea. That means turning your phone 90 degrees when taking the photo.

### **EDITING PHOTOGRAPHS**

VOA allows for the adjustment of photos for brightness, contrast and color.

However, VOA **does not permit** altering a photograph in any way that changes the meaning of the photo. This includes adding or subtracting elements to create a scene that is not an accurate representation of what was originally shot.

While it's OK to crop a photo, that should not change the meaning of the photo; for instance, cropping a photo that may leave out a key individual in the story.

### **CLOSELY EXAMINE DIGITAL PICTURES FROM OUTSIDE SOURCES TO ENSURE THAT THOSE IMAGES HAVE NOT BEEN ALTERED.**

### **PHOTO ILLUSTRATIONS**

When creating a photo to illustrate an idea, whether in the camera or using Photoshop or a similar program, the reader must always be informed that the image is a photo illustration and not a standard news image. This should be done either with a caption or in a tagline.

### **TECHNICAL TIPS**

- Use your flash to balance out the light - If you are outside on a sunny day and you are shooting in the shade use your flash to fill heavy shadows if needed. If you are indoors and taking an image of someone in front of a window use your flash.
- Don't shoot portraits with the sun or bright light behind your subject unless you are using a flash to fill the light.
- Be careful of using a flash in front of glass or a mirror - The flash will bounce back into the lens. If you have to do this don't shoot straight on toward the glass, try to shoot at an angle to the glass.
- Be careful of microphones - Try to get a clear shot of the person without a microphone in front of their face

### **SENDING PHOTO FILES**

Always email your service and [CentralNewsWebMedia@voanews.com](mailto:CentralNewsWebMedia@voanews.com) when submitting photos.

Always include who is paying for the photos and if they are available for use by the house. Always include caption info.

Photos can be submitted via email, any photo sharing service such as flickr or Picasa, or via ftp.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### **CAPTIONS/CREDITS**

Reporters and producers in the field must supply the captions for your photos. Caption info is:

- Who, what, when and where.
- Credit – who took the photo.
- Keep captions short and clear – photo and web editors will often rewrite and edit them.

VOA's caption style is the same when crediting staff and stringers: **John Doe/VOA**

VOA's photo contracts with AP and Reuters allow us to use their photos on all VOAnews.com websites. At this time, AFP's photos can be used only on the English voanews.com site.

It is **MANDATORY** that **ALL** news agency photos be given proper credit, as seen in the example below:  
[\*\(Also see Crediting the News Agencies, p. 32\)\*](#)



U.S. Vice President Mike Pence speaks during an Easter fellowship dinner at a military base in Seoul, South Korea, April 16, 2017.

Credits are also required for photos from other sources, including other news organizations, NGOs, a business or a social media post. Social media posts should include the social media site and the name of the person who took the photo. For example:

CBS News

Pew Research Center

Instagram/JohnSmith

Twitter/@JohnQSmith

Facebook/John Smith

Some public domain images also require a credit, such as the White House, State Department, Defense Department, Library of Congress and National Archives.

[\(Also see Attribution, p. 29\)](#)

### MUSIC

#### **GENERAL GUIDELINES**

The Music Library serves as the resource and research center for VOA programs containing music. Not only does the library catalog music, it also provides a historical and educational setting for producers and broadcasters to research various sources relating to music: biographies, event-driven materials, periodicals, almanacs, encyclopedias, etc.

The Music Library database currently contains a variety of musical recordings dating as far back as the 1930s. The database is catalogued by album titles, song titles, artists, and record company names/numbers. You can contact the Music Library at [Music-Library-Staff@voanews.com](mailto:Music-Library-Staff@voanews.com).

In addition, the Music Library has free accounts available to all VOA staff for four online production music sites:

Firstcom.com

Dewolfmusic.com

Apmmusic.com

Audioblocks.com

**Please contact Vincent Bonner at [vbon@voanews.com](mailto:vbon@voanews.com) to get an account opened with one or all of these sites.**

Generally, the agency's music rights apply to radio programming. However, if the music is used in a transformative way in a VOA video piece – to highlight Prince's virtuosity on guitar in a 15 second edit, for instance – that could be considered a fair use.

#### **SOCIAL MEDIA & MUSIC**

Many of you have asked if we can use popular music on our social media accounts. **WE CANNOT.**

Popular music from the VOA Music Library can only be used for radio broadcasts, and is not to be used for any posts on social media, including any simulcasts or live streaming.

#### **VOA DOES NOT HAVE THE RIGHTS TO DISTRIBUTE POPULAR MUSIC ON ANY DIGITAL PLATFORM, INCLUDING SOCIAL MEDIA.**

Popular music includes Top 40, rock, jazz, pop, soul, jazz, reggae, country, folk, rap, dance music, etc.

**You can, however, use production music on all digital platforms, including social media sites.**

The Music Library hours are 7:15am until 5:00pm (Monday-Friday), the telephone number is 202-382-7395.

*(Also see [YouTube Guidelines, p. 52](#) and [Ambient Music, p. 92](#))*

[Return to Table of Contents](#)



### AUDIO USAGE RIGHTS

These guidelines **DO NOT APPLY** to the video news feeds that VOA subscribes to. Please see the next section for that information.

Some of the news organizations listed in this section have given VOA blanket permission to use audio excerpts from some of their news programs. These permissions should be respected. Requests to use audio not covered by listed blanket clearances should be sent to Steven Springer, ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com)), the Contracting Officer's Representative (COR) for VOA's contracts with the news agencies.

### AUDIO CLIPS FROM TV NETWORKS

VOA has had longstanding permission to use the voices of the persons being interviewed on network news programs.

VOA should use the following credit in the radio script for all programs: "As reported on [Network and program name]," or equivalent language giving credit to the appropriate news organization.

While we will always claim fair use for relevant audio excerpts, there are a few exceptions, listed below.

#### **ABC NEWS**

**DO NOT** use the voices of any ABC News anchors, correspondents, reporters, commentators and stringers.

- ***This Week*** – VOA has received permission to record the entire Sunday talk show to use content of particular interest to our audiences. However, with this permission there are some restrictions listed below:
  - We are authorized to excerpt up to two (2) minutes of the program.
  - Material may be posted on VOA's websites only if it is part of a VOA television program or video package.
  - Use of ABC talent should be kept to a minimum in the story. This is the **ONLY** exemption to the restriction on using ABC News talent in VOA programming.
  - Excerpted material cannot be used after three (3) days and the *This Week* program cannot be archived for future use.
  - This permission is **ONLY** for *This Week*.

**AUDIO-ONLY USAGE FROM ALL OTHER ABC NEWS  
OR ENTERTAINMENT PROGRAMS MUST BE CLEARED PRIOR TO USE.**

### **CBS NEWS**

**DO NOT USE** the voices of **ANY** CBS News employees, including anchors, reporters, correspondents, commentators or stringers.

**WE DO NOT HAVE PERMISSION TO USE ANY CBS NEWS AUDIO CLIPS  
ON VOANEWS.COM OR ON ANY OTHER VOA WEB PRESENCE.**

### **CNN**

VOA has no overall agreement with CNN for use of audio clips, but we will claim editorial “fair use” as necessary on a case-by-case basis.

### **FOX NEWS CHANNEL**

VOA has permission to excerpt for radio no more than 3 minutes of audio from the *Fox News Sunday* broadcast. VOA must credit *Fox News Sunday*.

**ALL OTHER FOX TV PROGRAMS MUST BE CLEARED PRIOR TO USE.  
FOX DOES NOT ALLOW ANY OF ITS MATERIAL TO BE REBROADCAST OVERSEAS.**

### **NBC NEWS, MSNBC & CNBC**

VOA has blanket permission to use audio excerpts from *The Today Show*, *Meet the Press* and *NBC Nightly News*. All news specials, documentaries and other special programming must be cleared prior to use. There is no restriction on the use of NBC correspondents’ voices, but use of NBC correspondent reports is limited to U.S datelines. VOA does **NOT** have clearance to use audio actualities from any CNBC programs.

### VIDEO USAGE RIGHTS

VOA has contracts with three different video newsfeed providers: Agence France Press (AFP), Associated Press (AP) and Reuters. We receive video from ABC NewsOne through our contract with AP. Each contract is unique and stands on its own.

Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com), x4276) is the Contracting Officer's Representative (COR) for the newsfeeds. Oscar Rodriguez at OCB is the Alternate COR ([orodriguez@bbg.gov](mailto:orodriguez@bbg.gov), 305-437-7159). The Media Asset Management Branch assists in administering and facilitating use of the video and audio newsfeeds. The MAM Branch Chief, Pam Commerford, ([pcommerford@voanews.com](mailto:pcommerford@voanews.com), x7124) also contacts the providers and clears use of specific items.

### BEFORE USING ANY VIDEO, IT IS THE PRODUCER'S RESPONSIBILITY TO REVIEW THE NEWSFEED SCRIPT SOURCE INFORMATION TO CHECK FOR RIGHTS RESTRICTIONS

### COMMON FEATURES – ALL NEWSFEEDS

Newsfeed scripts for the video stories are provided as basic information for our own script writing, and **do not** constitute a separate element. In other words, **newsfeed scripts cannot be used on the Web as a text-only story**. However, the information contained in video scripts can be used within a VOA story when they are combined with pertinent information from other news sources and follow VOA's sourcing guidelines.

### RIGHTS RESTRICTIONS

We have negotiated the rights of use with each provider to broadcast and publish our stories containing newsfeed material on TV, radio and internet. Restriction statements vary from provider to provider and cover different ground; the most common restrictions are described on the following pages.

Restrictions are usually listed near the top of the script, but also appear above specific items in the script when necessary. VOA must adhere to rights restrictions as listed in the associated scripts and we must pay attention to the source of the video. Our providers send stories in which the video may come from a variety of sources, from FIFA to ESPN to handout video to other broadcasters and awards programs. The restrictions listed reflect the rules of both the source organization and the newsfeed providers.

Since all VOA programming is available on the web, newsfeed items marked **NO ACCESS INTERNET** or **NO WEB** means the video/audio cannot be used at all, unless permission is granted by the newsfeed provider. Reuters, however, has a special requirement regarding our streaming shows, so please see the Reuters page for details. Please contact Pam or Steve if you need help with this.

You may see some variation of the following restrictions, regardless of the provider, on all the feeds:

- **TIME-LIMITED USAGE**

You will often see limited windows of usage on stories, especially for entertainment and sports programs. Footage must be pulled off the web by the date and time listed in the script info or in advisories MAM has posted in e-mail.

- **MANDATORY COURTESY**

When noted in the script the courtesy must appear on-screen in TV and web stories, and an audible courtesy must be used on radio.

- **NO LIBRARY / NO ARCHIVE**

Items with this restriction should be deleted soon after use. This material is available in the DaletPlus production system for up to thirty days and is then purged. Using video labeled **NO LIBRARY** or **NO ARCHIVE** after its initial broadcast or web posting puts our contracts in jeopardy.

### USING VIDEO FROM TV NETWORKS

- We **DO NOT** have blanket permission from ABC, CBS, CNN, FOX or NBC (including MSNBC and CNBC) to record and use clips from their newscasts or weekend talk shows. The only exception is ABC's ***This Week*** program (see next page).
- All soundbites from the other networks' weekend talk shows should be taken from our regular agency newsfeeds. However, we must follow whatever restrictions the networks place on the usage of those clips.
- There are times when we will claim "fair use" for a network news video clip that has not been fed on an agency newsfeed, but you must contact Steve to get clearance. If necessary, Steve or Pam will consult with the General Counsel's office regarding any potential legal considerations.  
[\(Also see Copyright and Fair Use, p. 92\)](#)

### **ABC NEWS**

ABC News and ABC TV Entertainment programs' on-air talent **cannot** be used. This includes shots of the back of heads, cutaways, walking shots, standups, or anything else that may show those individuals.

#### **THIS WEEK**

- VOA is authorized to excerpt up to two (2) minutes of ***This Week***.
- Material from ***This Week*** may be posted on VOA's websites only if it is part of a VOA television program.
- Material excerpted from ***This Week*** cannot be used after three (3) days and the ***This Week*** program cannot be archived for future use.
- **THIS PERMISSION IS ONLY FOR ABC'S *THIS WEEK* PROGRAM.**

#### **ABC NEWSONE**

- VOA receives material daily from the ABC News affiliate service NewsOne. As noted above, VOA cannot use on-camera talent; this applies to anchors, show hosts and reporters, whether for ABC Network or an ABC affiliate station.
- When an ABC item is listed as **PACKAGE ONLY**, it generally means that VOA must run the package as fed by NewsOne. Pam or Steve can contact NewsOne to see if that restriction can be lifted.
- **NO EXCERPTING** is similar to PACKAGE ONLY, in that we cannot lift individual sequences or shots out of a package. The wording may be "No Excerpting Package," "No Excerpting [specific video]." Please contact Pam or Steve to see whether the No Excerpting restriction can be lifted.
- **NO RETRACKING** generally means that VOA cannot translate, summarize, adapt or otherwise make the piece shorter or longer. Please contact Pam or Steve to see whether the No Retracking restriction can be lifted.
- **NNS** is a news-sharing cooperative between ABC News and other news organizations. VOA is cleared to use all video that is marked as NNS.
- Use of all ABC standard graphics must be addressed on a case-by-case basis and users must contact Pam or Steve to seek permission before using.
- 3D graphics can be used **only if the entire package is used. There are no exceptions.**
- If a story is marked **ABC AFFILIATES ONLY**, VOA is cleared to use it. However, if a story is marked **ABC AFFILIATES ONLY, NO INTERNATIONAL CLIENTS**, please contact Pam or Steve to get clearance for use.

**NO INTERNET USE OF ANY COLLEGIATE AND PROFESSIONAL  
SPORTS VIDEO FED BY ABC NewsONE!**

**NO USE ON ANY PLATFORM OF ABC NEWS OR  
ABC ENTERTAINMENT PROMOS!**

### **AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE (AFP)**

VOA has clearance to use all AFP video unless otherwise noted below.

#### **EXAMPLES OF AFP RESTRICTIONS**

- **Source: NNIS**  
**Restrictions: \*NO RESALE FOR NON-EDITORIAL PURPOSES\***  
VOA broadcast purposes are EDITORIAL, therefore we are clear to use items with this statement. In addition, VOA must version content for our audiences before broadcasting or posting it online.
- **Source: PARLIAMENTARY RECORDING UNIT (British Parliament)**  
**Restrictions: NO RESALE FOR NON-EDITORIAL PURPOSES / NOT FOR USE IN ENTERTAINMENT OR POLITICAL SATIRE PROGRAMMES**  
VOA is clear to use items with this restriction, but not in a satirical, Daily Show-type production.

#### **WEB-RELATED RESTRICTION STATEMENTS**

- **NO WEB USE or NO AFP WEB** - Stories carrying either of these restrictions cannot be used on any VOA websites.
- **NO ENGLISH OR SPANISH WEB** - VOA English and Spanish **CANNOT** post the video to their websites, but all other VOA language services CAN post the video to their websites.

#### **CBS NEWS VIDEO**

- Some AFP items may carry the multiple restrictions listed below, which normally indicates the video comes from CBS News. AFP regularly feeds CBS News video, and we are working with AFP to clarify the restrictions regarding VOA's use of CBS material. In the case of these restrictions, VOA CAN use the video.  
**NO RESALE FOR NON-EDITORIAL PURPOSES**  
**NO JAPAN**  
**NO FREE OVER-THE-AIR BROADCASTERS IN AUSTRALIA, NO U.S. CABLE OUTLETS, FREE OVER-THE-AIR NETWORKS OR STATIONS, THEIR WEBSITES AND THEIR MOBIEL PHONE SERVICES.**

#### **SOCIAL MEDIA SITES**

- VOA can post on its social media pages AFP video that is contained within VOA-produced TV packages. It is also OK to use AFP material in programs which are broadcast and streamed on VOA webpages.
- **VOA CANNOT post raw or live AFP video on any of its social media pages.**

If you have questions about using restricted video fed by AFP, please contact Pam or Steve to see if the restrictions can be lifted.

### **ASSOCIATED PRESS (APTN)**

- **APTN Clients Only** – VOA is able to use all stories with this restriction
- **Horizons clients and AP Lifestyle, Health and Technology clients Only** – VOA subscribes to these categories and can use any story that carries this restriction.
- **SNTV Clients** - VOA has unlimited use of stories with this restriction, as long as SNTV is the “Original Provider” or “Source” of the video. You will know these stories are SNTV stories, because “SNTV clients only” will be stated somewhere in the rights restrictions section of the script.

However, if the “Original Provider” is a third party, such as *FIFA, IOC, Tennis Properties Ltd., TAF Sports, Dorna*, etc., you must follow the restrictions listed within the “Rights Restrictions” section of script.

- **Check Script For Details** – VOA can use stories with this restriction, but you must follow specific restrictions within the script if there are film clips/music videos.
- **NO ACCESS IRAN AND NO ACCESS VOA PERSIAN TV**  
VOA Persian cannot use APTN stories shot in and sent from Iran. This includes ALL video of Iran, even when the restriction isn’t noted on the script and includes video previously received that we have in the Video Library and the VOA Persian video server.  
NOTE: The stories restricted to the Persian Service can be used by the News Center and the other Language Services.
- **OTHER RESTRICTIONS**  
VOA can use stories that have restrictions to other geographic regions. For example, stories marked No Access Russia or No Access Indonesia can be used by those Language Services as well as all other VOA services.

However, non-regional restrictions, such as No Access Internet, must be followed. Sometimes permission will be granted; in those cases please contact Pam or Steve to gain clearance.

- **ABC Talent on APTN-fed stories:** On occasion, APTN will feed an ABC story. ABC talent cannot be used.  
([Also see ABC News, p. 66](#))



### **REUTERS**

- Most Reuters videos are listed as **NO RIGHTS RESTRICTIONS** or the restriction listed is as **NONE**; those stories can be used across all platforms at any time.
- If a Reuters video is marked **FOR EDITORIAL USE ONLY**, we can use it.
- Reuters videos may sometimes be marked **NO MOBILE USE**. VOA has clearance to use these videos on our Internet and mobile platforms. Please contact Steve or Pam if you have questions about NO MOBILE USE restrictions.
- **NO ACCESS USA/CNN/YAHOO/AOL/WIRELESS**  
Stories with this restriction generally originate from NBC News and cannot be used by VOA

**VOA DOES NOT HAVE CONTRACTUAL RIGHTS TO USE NBC CONTENT. PLEASE BE DILIGENT ABOUT CONFIRMING THE SOURCE AND DO NOT USE NBC CONTENT. THIS INCLUDES CONTENT FROM CNBC AND MSNBC.**

**IF THERE IS A STRONG EDITORIAL REASON TO USE NBC NEWS OR NBC AFFILIATE MATERIAL – AND SIMILAR MATERIAL CANNOT BE FOUND ON THE OTHER NEWSFEEDS – PLEASE CONTACT STEVE OR PAM TO SEE WHETHER WE CAN GET CLEARANCE TO USE THE VIDEO.**

- **RESTRICTED POOL** - The five U.S. news networks -- ABC, CBS, CNN, FOX and NBC – shoot video daily that is designated Pool material. In most cases, Restricted Pool applies to domestic and overseas coverage of the president, and in election seasons, coverage of presidential candidates.  
**VOA CAN USE THIS RESTRICTED POOL VIDEO.**

**However, VOA cannot use Restricted Pool video of the vice president, First Lady, VP's spouse, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense or other Cabinet members.**

It is strongly recommended that you call Steve or Pam if there is any uncertainty about the Restricted Pool designation of a video.

- **Sports items will often be heavily restricted.** Many have **NO ARCHIVE** restrictions, very often 48 hours but also 15 days or a specific date. As a rule, golf, tennis, cricket and motorcycling are heavily restricted. Stories about U.S. hockey (NHL) can be used until the end of the current hockey season. Soccer matches are often restricted, but we can use video of soccer practice / press conferences.

- Video shot in the UK often carries this restriction:  
**ITN COPYRIGHT: TV: NO ACCESS ALL DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL CHANNELS DISTRIBUTED IN UK & EIRE ON SKY/VIRGIN/FREEVIEW; BBC/BSKYB GROUP: NO ACCESS WORLDWIDE ANY MEDIA; INTERNET: NO ACCESS.CO.UK WEB SITES AND ALL WEBSITES PRINCIPALLY TARGETED AT THE UK AND/OR EIRE; MOBILE: NO ACCESS WORLDWIDE; NO USE AFTER 30 DAYS FROM DATE FIRST USED ON ALL PLATFORMS.**

This is an extremely targeted restriction statement and it is recommended to call Steve or Pam for guidance. Typically we parse the statement to find the relevant info, and call for clearance or clarification when necessary. In this example, “MOBILE: NO ACCESS WORLDWIDE” is the relevant statement we’d need to decipher.

- **NO ACCESS IRAN AND NO ACCESS VOA PERSIAN NEWS NETWORK**  
VOA Persian **cannot** use Reuters material filmed in or sent from Iran, whether shot by Reuters or the national networks. However, stories received at VOA prior to June 9, 2010 are OK to use – for now – even if a restriction is listed.  
NOTE: The stories restricted to the Persian Service **can be used** by the News Center and the other Language Services.
- **OTHER RESTRICTIONS**  
VOA **can** use stories that have restrictions to other geographic regions. For example, stories with No Access Russia or No Access Indonesia can be used by those Language Services as well as all other VOA services.

However, non-regional restrictions, such as No Access Internet, must be followed. Sometimes permission will be granted; in those cases please contact Pam or Steve to gain clearance.

### **THE RESTRICTIONS OF ANY OF OUR VIDEO PROVIDERS CAN CHANGE AT ANY TIME**

**IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS,  
PLEASE CONTACT STEVE OR PAM**

### **NEWSMARKET**

Newsmarket ([www.thenewsmarket.com](http://www.thenewsmarket.com)) is an online provider of video. Although the site has a lot of available material, there are a number of guidelines that VOA must follow in order to use the video.

- You must be an employee or contractor working with VOA and use your work e-mail (@voanews.com) to access the site. Pam Commerford ([pcommerford@voanews.com](mailto:pcommerford@voanews.com)), chief of the Media Asset Management Branch has done pre-registration for many employees; if you need to establish an account, please contact Pam.
- Keep your password confidential; it is for your use only.
- Registered users are responsible for searching images and **ensuring that no costs are associated with the material. If costs are required, funding must come from your Language Service or Division.** The Office of Information Services will **NOT** pay for material acquired from Newsmarket.
- The VOA producer or Language Service is responsible for obtaining the terms and conditions of use of the material. Newsmarket makes no claims about the accuracy of the content on its website, so producers must be sure to exercise VOA journalistic standards in the choice and use of material.
- Credit must be given for content used and **logos or copyrighted images cannot be changed or obscured.**
- You must use the content for editorial purposes only.
- You **cannot** store the original content for future use. The content from Newsmarket must be deleted from your workspace when you are finished with your initial use. Should you need the content again, you can go back to the website and re-capture it.
- **The material that you use in a VOA story or program can and will be archived;** there is no restriction on this material.
- The content incorporated in your stories and shows can be distributed on all VOA platforms.
- **The Office of Cuba Broadcasting (OCB) is included in this agreement, meaning that VOA and OCB ONLY can share material that is acquired from Newsmarket.**

### RESTRICTIONS

- You cannot provide unedited content to other organizations, **including the BBG grantees RFE/RL, RFA and Alhurra.**
- You cannot use the Newsmarket logo or trademark in a way other than how it is presented in your story.
- You cannot use any technology to monitor, copy or deep link with Newsmarket.

Assets are brought into DaletPlus to the NEWSMARKET folder: INCOMING FEEDS > NEWSMARKET. Associated metadata needs to be added to the Asset Manager Form (AMF), include source information, and **a VOA DOT added to the video.**

[\(Also see Domestic Distribution of VOA Content, p. 77\)](#)

Example of Newsmarket info to add to AMF in DaletPlus:



US Distribution:	<input type="checkbox"/> All Clear	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Restricted
Footage Sources:	<input type="checkbox"/> APTN	<input type="checkbox"/> ABC NEWSONE
Feed Provider:	thenewsmarket.com	
Source Comments:		
Origin of Video:	Source: NATO TV ]	
Background Wires:		

**US Distribution:** Rights of use do not extend beyond VOA's use, so US DISTRIBUTION should be marked RESTRICTED.

**Footage Sources:** OTHER should be selected.

**Feed Provider:** thenewsmarket.com

**Origin of Video:** Indicate the owner of the source video. In the example, it's NATO TV.

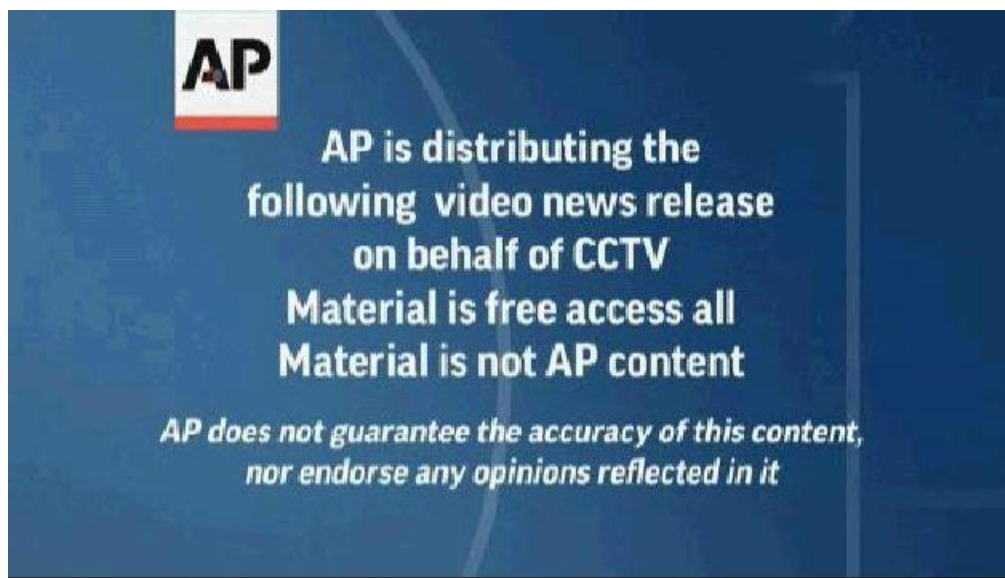
All questions regarding registration on [Newsmarket](#) and the use of its material should go to Pam Commerford ([pcommerford@voanews.com](mailto:pcommerford@voanews.com), 202-382-7124)

### **USING CONTENT FROM STATE-RUN MEDIA**

Any country's official news agency is a valid single source **when referring to government policy or news events in that country**. In these cases VOA must identify the news agency in its copy.

Note the distinction, **in that country**. For example, a report by China's official news agency about North Korea may not be a valid single source.

In addition, VOA's newsfeed providers AP and Reuters have agreements in place to distribute material provided by CCTV, Chinese State Television. AP includes a disclaimer for all CCTV material, as seen in this screen grab:



Reuters does not provide a video disclaimer for CCTV material, but this notice appears at the bottom of every script Reuters provides from CCTV:

**© Copyright CCTV. The content in this story, including video and script is provided by China Central Television (CCTV) and is copyright CCTV. Thomson Reuters does not guarantee the accuracy of, or endorse the views or opinions given in, this package. THIS STATEMENT SUPERSEDES ALL OTHER STATEMENTS RELATING TO COPYRIGHT ATTACHED TO THIS CONTENT.**

While the video that CCTV and other state-controlled media outlets like RT or Press TV produces often comes from areas where coverage is otherwise unavailable, VOA policy for using content provided by state-controlled media is that it should be reviewed by senior editors in a service, by the News Center or by the agency's Editor for News Standards & Best Practices before any decision is made about airing or publishing the video.

State-run media material that is cleared for broadcast or for use on the web **MUST** include proper credit to that news organization and the disclaimer that VOA cannot confirm the accuracy of the material. For video usage, the on-screen credit should be either: "From CCTV" or "CCTV Video." This guidance is the same for material received from RT or Press TV or similar state-run media outlets.

It is understood that there may be times when we would want to use the video, such as when it's the only known video of a major news event or if we're comparing how VOA and other news organizations cover stories.

**HOWEVER, ANY USE OF STATE-RUN MEDIA VIDEO SHOULD BE DONE WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF A LARGER PACKAGE THAT IS BEING PRODUCED BY THE NEWS CENTER OR A LANGUAGE SERVICE.**

**WE SHOULD NOT RUN A FULL PACKAGE FROM CCTV, RT, PRESS TV  
OR ANOTHER STATE-RUN OUTLET SIMPLY BECAUSE WE HAVE IT AVAILABLE.**

*(Also see [Video Usage Rights, p. 64](#))*

### VIDEO NEWS RELEASES (VNRs)

A video news release (VNR) is a video segment made to look like a news report, but is instead created by a public relations firm, advertising agency, marketing firm, corporation, or even by a government agency. VNRs are produced with the aim of shaping public opinion, promoting commercial products and services, publicizing individuals or supporting other interests.

VNRs may include interviews with experts (who may be paid by the company or ad agency for their appearance in the VNR); man on the street interviews that may be done with professional actors; and pictures of corporate logos to support the product or brand being promoted.

Although we occasionally receive VNRs from APTN and Reuters that does not make them any more legitimate for use by VOA.

There may be times when material from a VNR is appropriate for **excerpting** in a video package.

#### **Example #1**

If the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York discovers a new treatment for prostate cancer and the Center provides a video of its research work, VOA can, and should, use some of that video to illustrate the story.

- The script must say the video was provided by the Center, and there must be a visual credit to the Center as well.

#### **Example #2**

Apple unveils the latest version of the iPhone and sends out a VNR showing the latest changes in the phone and how it operates. VOA can use some of the video to illustrate its story.

- The script must say the video was provided by Apple, and there must be a visual credit to Apple as well.

Please keep in mind, however, that as with fair use of video, all instances of whether to use material from a VNR will not be the same, so always check first with Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com)) or Pam Commerford ([pcommerford@voanews.com](mailto:pcommerford@voanews.com)).

### VOA SHOULD NEVER AIR A VIDEO NEWS RELEASE IN ITS ENTIRETY

More detailed information about feeds and rights can be found in Rights Usage Guidelines Presentation and the Video Newsfeed Guide found on the [Media Asset Management Branch \(MAM\) page on Sharepoint](#).

### DOMESTIC DISTRIBUTION OF VOA CONTENT

- **THE SMITH-MUNDT RESTRICTIONS APPLY TO DISTRIBUTION OF VOA CONTENT & PROGRAMMING WITHIN THE UNITED STATES.**
- **THEY DO NOT IN ANY WAY IMPACT VOA'S COVERAGE OF NEWS STORIES. VOA IS FULLY AUTHORIZED AND EXPECTED TO COVER STORIES IN THE U.S. FOR DISTRIBUTION TO FOREIGN AUDIENCES OVERSEAS.**

### USAGE REQUESTS

The law authorizes individuals and organizations to request VOA content. From time to time, VOA staff may receive requests for **one-time** use of VOA content, or the request may be for **ongoing use** of VOA programming. These requests could come from U.S.-based media organizations, diaspora media outlets, overseas media outlets, or from educational institutions.

### VOA STAFF SHOULD NOT RESPOND DIRECTLY TO REQUESTS

Instead, they should do as follows:

- Requests for **one-time use** of VOA original content should be directed to this online form: [https://www.bbg.gov/networks/content-requests/voa/?4mailto\\_id=1](https://www.bbg.gov/networks/content-requests/voa/?4mailto_id=1)
- Requests for **ongoing use of VOA programming** should be sent to [affiliates@bbg.gov](mailto:affiliates@bbg.gov). The BBG Marketing Office reviews those requests.
- **UNAIED OR UNPUBLISHED ORIGINAL VOA MATERIAL SHOULD NOT BE SHARED.**  
Please forward those requests to VOA senior management, the News Standards & Best Practices Editor and the Office of General Counsel.  
[\(Also see Requests for Unaired/Unpublished Material, p. 37 and VOA Firewall, p 89\)](#)

If you have questions about usage requests, please email [Usage-Requests@vopanews.com](mailto:Usage-Requests@vopanews.com).



### **TALKING ABOUT VOA CONTENT & PROGRAMMING**

The Smith-Mundt Act forbids VOA personnel to attempt to develop audiences within the United States. The funds which BBG and thus VOA receive are only authorized to create and distribute news and information to “foreign audiences abroad,” and the law requires VOA to ensure that VOA does not distribute content & programming with the intent of influencing “public opinion in the United States.”

If you attend a journalism or media conference such as NAB, EIJ, ONA, NABJ, NAHJ, SAJA, or attend an event at the National Press Club, and someone from a domestic U.S. news organization asks you about VOA’s work, you can freely talk about the content we produce every day. Nothing in Smith-Mundt prevents that.

### **VOA STAFF SHOULD NOT ATTEMPT TO MAKE A DIRECT OFFER OF VOA CONTENT TO ANY DOMESTIC NEWS OUTLET.**

### **IN ADDITION, VOA STAFF CANNOT SPEND ANY ADVERTISING OR OTHER FUNDS TO SPECIFICALLY TARGET OR DEVELOP AUDIENCES IN THE U.S.**

### **VIOLATION OF THIS RULE AND/OR OTHER PROVISIONS OF THE SMITH MUNDT ACT WILL RESULT IN THE TERMINATION OF YOUR AD BUDGET AND THE LOSS OF ADMINISTRATIVE ACCESS TO YOUR SERVICE’S SOCIAL ACCOUNTS.**

### **THIS IS IN ADDITION TO ANY OTHER ACTIONS THAT MAY BE AUTHORIZED TO BE TAKEN AGAINST INDIVIDUALS VIOLATING THE RULE.**

### **TOWN HALLS, FORUMS, AND OTHER SUCH EVENTS; PARTNERSHIPS; AND ACTIVITIES TO SUPPORT THE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF HIGH QUALITY JOURNALISTS**

VOA journalists or other staff may host or play a role in Town Halls or related events if the purpose of the event is to engage overseas audiences.

In line with efforts to adhere to the highest standards of broadcast journalism, there may be times, subject to any required approvals, that VOA journalists appear as subject matters experts in other news outlets. This may be allowed if the purpose is to benefit VOA and thus the agency by either facilitating development of new sources of information, enhancing VOA's credibility, and/or contributing to the recruitment or retention of high-caliber journalists. In other cases, the purpose may be to disseminate VOA content overseas as part of an arrangement with another news organization.

Agency leadership may be able to engage in certain partnership arrangements if the purpose is to enhance the quality or distribution of BBG content to foreign audiences overseas. Such partnerships must be reviewed and approved on a case-by-case basis

Please clear such events in advance with VOA leadership, who should consult with the Office of General Counsel.

### **SUMMARY**

Smith-Mundt allows us to:

- Provide materials upon request
- Engage in certain partnerships
- Provide opportunities for exposure for our journalists to enhance retention and recruitment; etc.

It **does not** prevent us from using the internet and social media to distribute our products to audiences overseas just because people in the U.S. might also see the material.

These exceptions do not allow VOA to attempt to target audiences in the United States. Ultimately, **if** it looks like the intent is to subvert the rules – i.e. **if the BBG goal is to influence U.S. opinion, or otherwise develop audiences within the United States** -- then the activity is prohibited.

### DOCUMENTING SOURCE VIDEO IN DALETPLUS

To be able to share our broadcast programs with U.S. requestors, we must be able to identify non-VOA content, including that provided by our newsfeed suppliers, ABC NewsOne, AFP, APTN and Reuters, in the stories and programs we air.

Everyone who creates a story or program using DaletPlus must take time to enter source info in the Asset Manager Form (AMF). The **Source Info** module is the third section on the AMF form. The example below is an example of source info in an AMF of a story, showing the kind of information expected when available. (Plus signs at the end of each field allow additional space for more info.)



**U.S. Distribution:** A quick reference field to indicate whether the story is cleared for fulfilling a request from a U.S. requestor. If your story or program master is entirely VOA original, **All Clear** should be check-marked. If it has non-VOA content (ABC NewsOne, AFP, APTN or Reuters) **Restricted** will be checked. **This means that some clips will have to be cleared for US distribution.** The default is **DO NOT Distribute**.

**Footage Sources:** A quick way to note the feeds that are included in the story or program master. For **program masters**, the archive liaison may use “select all” for news programs, if in assembling the program the service uses all of our content providers. For **VOA stories**, the producer will need to be specific, so the searcher knows how involved tracking down the sources may be.

**Feed Provider:** A free text field to note specifically the story slug /date and source of vendor-provided clips used in a story. When a U.S. request is being filled, this information will allow the requestor to contact the appropriate newsfeed source to obtain clearance to use the video in the United States.

**Source Comments:** Can be used to further clarify use if necessary / possible.

**Origin of video:** To be used when video is different from the newsfeed source itself; for example, video from YouTube. This field should be used for story AMFs, rather than for use for program master AMFs.

Please e-mail questions or concerns to [senior-archivists@voanews.com](mailto:senior-archivists@voanews.com). You may also call the Video Library’s point person on this project, Bojan Klima at 382-5510.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### **NEWS AGENCY IDs & THE DOT**

Incoming video from AFP, AP and Reuters are stamped with the ID of each news agency.

ABC NewsOne will continue to be stamped with the Dot.

### **THE IDs AND THE DOT INDICATE THAT THE STAMPED MATERIAL CANNOT BE SHARED WITH OR USED BY ANY VOA DOMESTIC CLIENTS OR REQUESTORS.**

The IDs and the Dot appear in the **UPPER LEFT** of the frame **AND CANNOT BE OBSCURED.**

- **IF A SERVICE INCLUDES NEWS AGENCY VIDEO IN ITS PACKAGES, PROGRAMS OR SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS, PLEASE MAKE SURE THE AGENCY ID OR THE DOT IS ALWAYS VISIBLE.**
- **THIS IS THE ONLY WAY WE CAN GUARANTEE THAT NON-VOA VIDEO WILL BE PROPERLY NOTED AND AVAILABLE FOR EASY REFERENCE DURING A VIDEO ASSESSMENT.**
- **ALL VIDEO DOWNLOADED FROM THE ABC NEWSONE, AFPFORUM, AP VIDEO HUB AND REUTERS CONNECT WEBSITES MUST HAVE THE PROPER ID ADDED TO THE VIDEO.**
- **IF YOU INSERT THE WRONG AGENCY ID YOU CANNOT RE-INSERT ANOTHER ID. YOU WILL HAVE TO START THE PROCESS OVER.**

This is how the agency IDs and the dot appear on incoming feeds:



- **ABC, AFP, AP AND REUTERS VIDEO IN THE VOA LIBRARY PRIOR TO JULY 3, 2013 DOES NOT HAVE THE AGENCY IDs OR THE DOT EMBEDDED IN THE VIDEO. THEREFORE, ALL ABC, AFP, AP OR REUTERS LIBRARY VIDEO PRIOR TO 7/3/13 MUST HAVE THE PROPER AGENCY ID OR DOT ADDED TO THE VIDEO.**
- **IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE REPORTER, PRODUCER AND/OR VIDEO EDITOR TO ENSURE THAT THE PROPER AGENCY ID OR DOT IS ADDED TO THE EDITED MATERIAL.**
- **EXISTING FILE FOOTAGE THAT ALREADY HAS THE DOT DOES NOT NEED TO BE RE-STAMPED WITH AN AGENCY ID.**

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### **THE DOT MUST BE ADDED TO CLIPS PRIOR TO 7/3/13 FROM THESE SOURCES**

- IRINN
- Journal of American Medicine (JAMA)
- NewsMarket
- UNIFEEDS (United Nations video)
- Other Acquired Material:
  - From VOA Acquisitions Branch
  - Obtained by VOA Reporters
  - Obtained from a Third Party

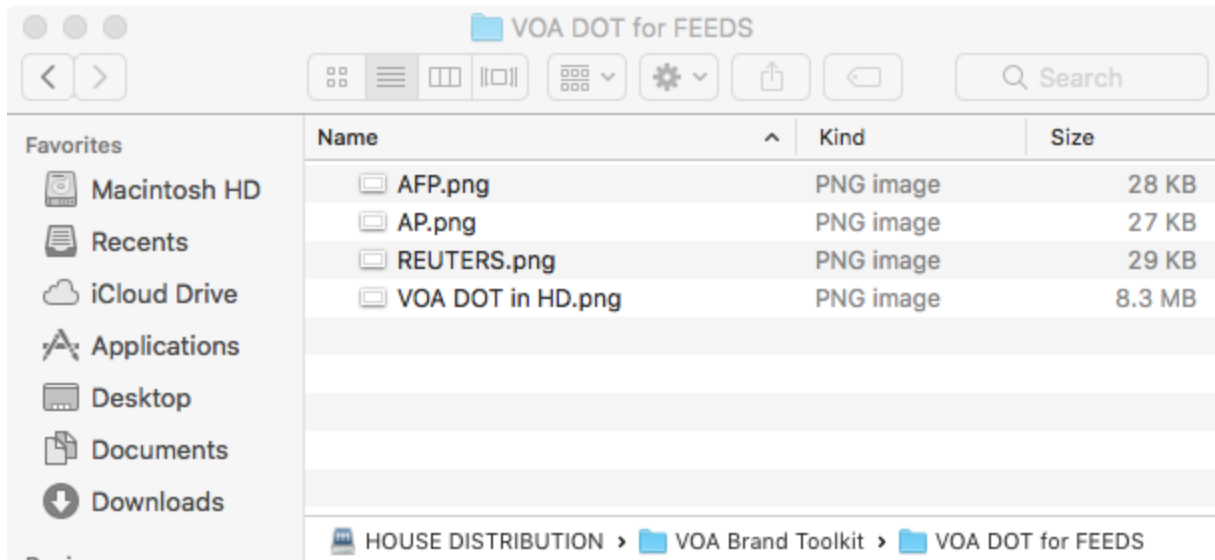
### **THESE SOURCES PRIOR TO 7/3/13 DO NOT REQUIRE THE DOT OR OTHER ID**

- VOA Original Footage
- House Recording Studio (Including hearings and news conferences)
- NASA
- Pentagon
- Senate Recording Studio (Including hearings and news conferences)
- State Department
- White House

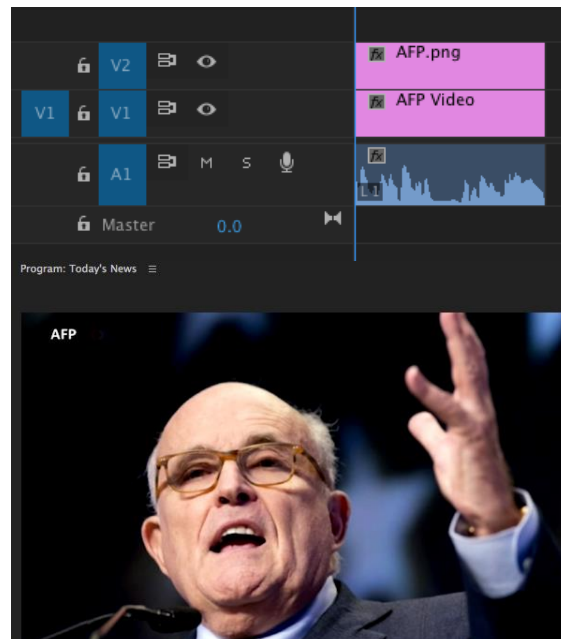
## ADDING AN AGENCY ID/DOT IN PREMIERE PRO

In order to add the news agency IDs or the Dot to your video in Premiere, you will first need to import the graphic files.

They are located at: [\\voa\\_creative\HOUSE DISTRIBUTION\VOA Brand Toolkit\VOA DOT for FEEDS](\\voa_creative\HOUSE DISTRIBUTION\VOA Brand Toolkit\VOA DOT for FEEDS)



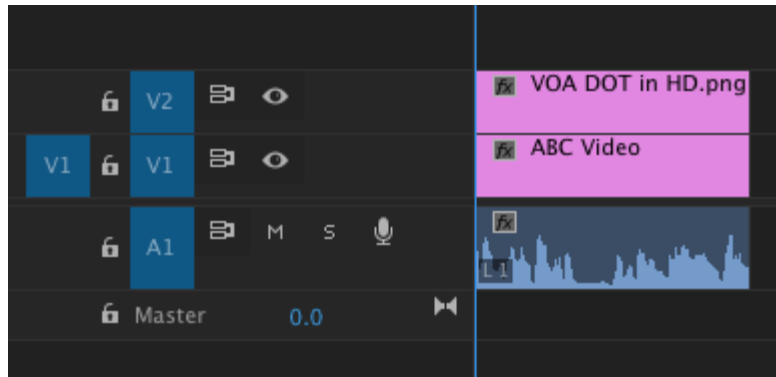
Import the needed files into Premiere and drag them to a video track above your footage. The graphic files will automatically key themselves over the video with their built in alpha channels.





## BEST PRACTICES GUIDE

Use the **VOA DOT in HD.png** file for ABC News video:





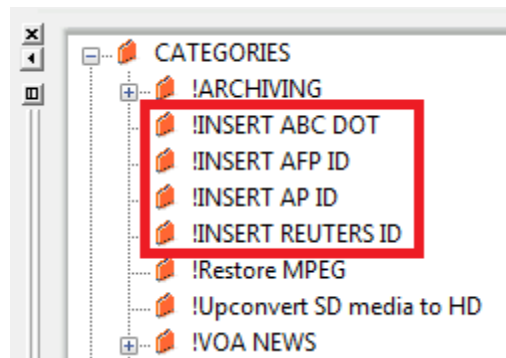
### ADDING AN AGENCY ID/DOT IN DALETPLUS

**THE DROP FOLDER PROCESS WILL REPLACE THE ORIGINAL VIDEO.**

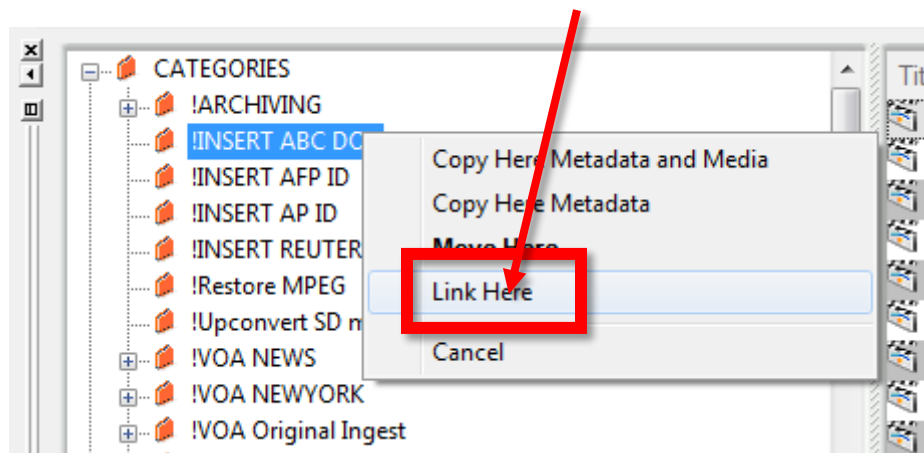
**IT CANNOT BE UNDONE.**

**BE SURE THE VIDEO IS LINKED TO THE CORRECT FOLDER!**

Dalet users will find drop folders towards the top of the CATEGORIES folder. There is a folder for each of the newsfeeds.



Locate the footage in Dalet that needs the bug. Right mouse click, hold and drag the video to the appropriate folder, and release the mouse button. Choose **Link Here**.



## BEST PRACTICES GUIDE

The video will begin rendering and the original video will be replaced with the video and the bug. While the video is processing, the status will change to OFC (Out for Conversion). This process usually takes a few minutes. The Clapboard Icon will first show a 'Red X' followed by a 'Red Circle'.

When the status changes back to 'NEW' and the Clapboard Icon is clear, the process is complete and you can view your video with the selected bug burned into the upper left corner.



**DO NOT VIEW OR USE THE VIDEO UNTIL THE CONVERSION PROCESS IS COMPLETE  
AND THE VIDEO IS BACK ONLINE!**

Once finished, the original video will have the appropriate agency ID or dot burned into it.

This link takes you to the video tutorial version of these instructions: [Agency ID & Dot Video Tutorial](#)

**THE VOA DOT MUST BE ADDED TO CERTAIN PROPRIETARY VIDEO!**  
**SEE LIST ON PAGE 82**

**IF THERE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT WHETHER TO ADD  
THE DOT TO OLDER LIBRARY VIDEO, PLEASE CONTACT  
STEVEN SPRINGER ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com))  
OR PAM COMMERFORD ([pcommerford@voanews.com](mailto:pcommerford@voanews.com))**

### CORRECTIONS

VOA's reputation and credibility are the hallmarks of the organization. The News Center and the Language Services produce news content, programming and services across many platforms and under daily deadline pressures. While our goal is always to be accurate and fair, occasionally we will present incorrect or inaccurate information. A meaningful policy for correcting significant errors will strengthen our trust with viewers, listeners and readers. As such, these errors will be corrected in a clear and timely manner, with appropriate prominence.

#### TV & RADIO BROADCASTS

If we make a mistake that needs correcting, we should do so as quickly as possible while the same show is on the air. If the error is not detected immediately, then preferably the correction should be aired on the same program in which the original error occurred, whether it's the following day or week. Make a point to say "On \_\_\_\_\_ day (state the day and date and time), we erred in our reporting..." then go on to explain what we said that was wrong, make the correction and close by saying, "Voice of America regrets the error."

#### VOA WEBSITES

If the error is a simple typo that does not change facts or understanding of the story, we consider it a minor change and simply correct it without further mention. If the error is substantive or one of fact, we change it, add an asterisk (\*), then a note at the bottom saying when it was corrected and what was wrong originally.

#### SOCIAL MEDIA PAGES

**Facebook:** Correcting an error on Facebook should follow the same procedure as on voanews.com websites. Update/edit the Facebook post and explain why the information was corrected.

**Twitter:** A good method for correcting an error on Twitter is to **subtweet** the correction. On the next page you'll see how *Slate* handled posting the wrong photo (actor Javier Bardem) when tweeting about Vladimir Putin.

The correction begins "@Slate CORRECTION:" so that *Slate* is replying to its own original tweet. The result is that anyone viewing the original tweet can see the correction in the stream of replies. Equally important, it refers to the photo without showing it again.

People viewing the correction tweet on its own can also see it is part of a conversation linked to the original, offending tweet.

**NOTE:** If you reply to yourself, then anyone who follows you will see the reply. So in terms of who can see the correction, it's just as good as sending it as a normal tweet.

**Slate** @Slate ⚙️ Follow

Could Crimea become Putin's Waterloo? [slate.me/1jJIRFd](http://slate.me/1jJIRFd)  
[pic.twitter.com/OdvDLVLPRS](https://pic.twitter.com/OdvDLVLPRS)

↩️ Reply ↻ Retweet ★ Favorite 📶 Buffer ⋮

8:59 PM · 1 Mar 2014 · ⚙️ Flag media



RETWEETS 299 FAVORITES 151

Reply to @Slate

**Blake Hounshell** @blakehounshell · Mar 1  
 @Slate Leave Javier Bardem out of this. ★ 43 ↻ 10 ⋮

**Slate** @Slate · Mar 1  
 @Slate CORRECTION: This photo is of Javier Bardem, and not Vladimir Putin. ★ 807 ↻ 787 ⋮

### **LEGAL ISSUES**

This section provides brief introductions to various areas of the law that may apply to VOA journalists. These guidelines provide an overview to certain areas of the law and are not a substitute for a legal opinion from the Office of General Counsel (OGC). Please contact OGC when you have a specific legal question.

#### **VOA FIREWALL**

The “firewall” exists to maintain the credibility of reporting by U.S. international broadcasters. The firewall is violated whenever another U.S. government agency or a U.S. government official tries to influence our work by putting undue pressure on a VOA journalist or on the agency itself or takes any other action that may undermine the journalistic credibility or independence of VOA journalists. This protection arises from numerous provisions of the International Broadcasting Act (IBA), the Agency’s governing statute.

#### **WHAT COULD RESULT IN A FIREWALL VIOLATION**

- A firewall violation would likely be a U.S. ambassador or other State Department personnel demanding that you not air a particular interview or that you give a specific slant to a VOA news story.
- If a federal official from outside of VOA or from another federal agency asks you to use your access/position as a journalist to gather or provide information on their behalf, that would appear be a firewall violation.
- Firewall violations could also occur when someone outside of VOA takes actions that directly intrude on VOA’s professional independence and interferes with news coverage. If a directive from outside the newsroom, including from the BBG, is imposed which you think impermissibly restricts your ability to objectively report the news, or otherwise act in a manner inconsistent with the best practices of professional journalism, please notify your Service Chief and Division Director immediately.
- A direct request from non-VOA personnel to the News Center or a Language Service for your notes or unpublished recordings of video or audio may be a firewall violation. Those requests must immediately be directed to the VOA Director and the General Counsel’s Office.

**UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES SHOULD A VOA EMPLOYEE OR CONTRACTOR TURN OVER UNAired OR UNPUBLISHED NEWS COVERAGE TO ANY THIRD PARTY WITHOUT FIRST CONSULTING WITH VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT.**

### **WHAT IS NOT A FIREWALL VIOLATION**

The firewall should not discourage VOA journalists from interviewing government officials or USG officials from appearing on VOA programs. It is critical to ensuring that VOA journalists and editors make the final decisions on what stories to cover and how they are covered.

Should a third party, such as a court, law enforcement agency, or other person or organization request that VOA turn over reporters' notes or unpublished content through appropriate legal authority -- such as a court order or Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request -- that is not a firewall violation. However, **immediately** turn the request over to your Service Chief, Division Director, or to the VOA Director's Office. (For FOIA requests, please coordinate through VOA's designated FOIA point of contact.)

A supervisor or editor who asks for relevant editorial script or video changes in a story is not committing a firewall violation. That is part of the everyday nature of journalism.

Finally, the firewall does not start or stop at one specific point in the agency. It exists across the entire BBG and VOA. It is important that staff not only reports up the chain of command when other government officials or agencies approach VOA, **but that leadership communicates challenges to VOA's reporting down the chain** so that it's clear to editors that coverage has been called into question and the journalistic reasoning behind any corrective actions.

**IF YOU BELIEVE THAT A FIREWALL VIOLATION HAS OCCURRED,  
NOTIFY YOUR SERVICE CHIEF AND DIVISION DIRECTOR  
IMMEDIATELY.**

**IF YOU BELIEVE YOUR IMMEDIATE SUPERVISOR HAS ENGAGED IN A  
FIREWALL VIOLATION PLEASE DISCUSS THE ISSUE WITH THE EDITOR  
OF NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES.**

### **COPYRIGHT & FAIR USE**

Copyright is a form of protection provided by U.S. law to the authors of original artistic works. Artistic works include photographs, video, audio, music, motion pictures, commercials, written products, as well as footage from other news broadcasters. You should not use a copyrighted work unless (1) you have permission to use, whether via VOA's contracts (such as VOA's video feed or photo contracts) or another negotiated license agreement, or (2) your use of the work falls under the "fair use" doctrine.

#### **FAIR USE**

Determining whether use of copyrighted material is a **fair use** requires a balancing of four factors: (1) the purpose and character of your use; (2) the nature of the copyrighted work; (3) the amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole; and (4) the effect of the use upon the potential market for the copyrighted work. Application of these factors and the fair use doctrine is highly fact-specific and requires a case-by-case analysis.

A use of a copyrighted work is more likely to be a fair use if the material is directly relevant to a news story and the excerpt used is no longer than necessary to achieve the intended purpose. On the other hand, the use of copyrighted material such as a music clip simply to enhance the production value of a television package, for example, is not likely to be a fair use. Keep in mind that just because a video or audio clip is newsworthy does not automatically make VOA's use of it fair. [A Fair Use Self-Help Guide](#) with Frequently Asked Questions is available on the agency's Sharepoint site.

*(Also see [YouTube Guidelines, p. 52](#), [Music, p. 61](#), [Audio Usage Rights, p. 62](#) and [Video Usage Rights, p. 64](#))*

#### **AMBIENT MUSIC**

Generally, there is no copyright issue where music is naturally appearing in the background during an interview or taped event. There may be, however, a copyright issue if the music is incorporated into a news or feature report in other than its incidental form.

*(Also see [YouTube Guidelines, p. 52](#) and [Music, p. 61](#))*

#### **PUBLIC DOMAIN**

Copyright restrictions do not apply to works in the public domain, which include most U.S. federal government works, such as photos, maps, or video found on [whitehouse.gov](#), [state.gov](#), [nasa.gov](#), [cia.gov](#), and other government websites. Be sure to check the Copyright or Terms of Use/Terms of Service pages of these and other websites before using any content.

A work is also in the public domain if it is no longer under copyright protection. This depends on when and where the work was first published, but generally speaking, works published in the U.S. before 1923 are in the public domain. Contact OGC for specific questions about older works or copyright terms in foreign jurisdictions.

### LICENSED MATERIAL

VOA has several license agreements with third parties to use their copyrighted material. The terms of these agreements govern use of the material provided by the licenses, notwithstanding the applicability of the fair use doctrine. When using material from one of VOA's feed providers, such as ABC NewsOne, AFP, APTN and Reuters, for example, you must check all restrictions that may limit the story's use. Questions about the video feeds should be directed to the COR, Steven Springer, and to VOA Media Asset Management Branch at [Senior-Archivists@voanews.com](mailto:Senior-Archivists@voanews.com).

[\(Also see Video Usage Rights, p. 64\)](#)

### REQUESTING PERMISSION

Because fair use can sometimes be difficult to determine with certainty, VOA producers are strongly encouraged to seek permission to use copyrighted material from the rightful copyright owner. You should start the process of identifying and contacting the owner of copyrighted content as early in your production process as possible, since it may take several days or weeks to identify the copyright owner and negotiate a license. Please note that obtaining permission in writing, using the standard BBG/VOA release form, is highly preferable to getting permission orally or via email. A template release form -- to be edited and modified, as needed -- is available on the [Best Practices Sharepoint page](#).

On occasion, a third party may either request to amend the VOA form or insist on using its own licensing agreement. Such outside agreements may contain terms to which BBG/VOA cannot agree. Please consult OGC when presented with a third party release form or licensing agreement.

### TRADEMARK

A trademark is an intellectual property right in a particular "mark" used to identify a good or service, such as a name, slogan, symbol or logo. For example, "Voice of America" is a registered trademark. It is unlawful to use a trademark in a manner that confuses consumers about the source or sponsorship of goods or services. This is rarely an issue in news broadcasting, since the law allows you to use a mark without permission in a news story if the mark is used in an informational sense. For example, if you are reporting on the BP oil spill, it is appropriate to show the BP logo to identify the company. However, if you are launching a new VOA program, avoid using slogans or titles that are trademarked.

### TRADEMARK & SPORTING EVENTS

When covering major sporting events such as the Olympics, VOA journalists must be careful with using official trademarks, such as the interlocking Olympic rings. For example, it could be argued that a VOA graphic incorporating the VOA background/colors/image with the official Olympic logo creates an unauthorized association between VOA, a non-Olympics marketing partner, and the Olympic brand.

**ALTHOUGH THE PHRASE "VOICE OF AMERICA" IS TRADEMARKED BY THE AGENCY,  
"VOA" AND THE VOA LOGO ARE NOT TRADEMARKED.**

[More information on the above topics can be found at the Best Practices site on Sharepoint.](#)



### **FILMING IN PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE PLACES**

Generally, news media have the right to be in public places and on public property to gather information, photographically or otherwise. VOA journalists should be mindful, however, about rules, permits, or prohibitions on filming or taking of photographs at certain meetings, sporting events, or in private spaces such as businesses and shops. Similarly, journalists should seek permission from an owner or occupant (even if the occupant is not the owner) before entering private property or a residence.

[\*\(Also see Covering Criminal Activity, p. 21\)\*](#)

### **REQUEST FOR PROOF OF INSURANCE**

From time to time, VOA staff may be asked to provide a certificate of liability insurance when filming in locations where event organizers or property owners want to protect themselves against third party bodily injury and property damage. While most private sector media organizations have liability insurance, the U.S. Government self-insures against liabilities. Therefore, the agency does not purchase liability insurance, and there is no such certificate that we can provide.

Instead, the Office of General Counsel provides a letter explaining this that staff can send to the appropriate parties. Two versions of the letter – one on VOA letterhead and one on BBG letterhead -- are now available in Word documents on the VOA Best Practices Sharepoint page:

[VOA Insurance Letter](#)   [BBG Insurance Letter](#)

Each letter has blanks so that you can fill in the names of VOA staff that will be on location and the name of the property/location you will be working at. Use the VOA letterhead if you choose to have your service chief or division director sign it. Use the BBG letterhead if you prefer to have an attorney in the General Counsel's Office sign it.

If you have any questions about this, please contact the General Counsel's Office or Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com)), the Editor for News Standards & Best Practices.

### **DEFAMATION/PRIVACY/FALSE LIGHT**

Under U.S. law, the central question in an action for defamation or invasion of privacy is whether the statements in question are true or false. Truthful publication or broadcast of matters pertaining to legitimate public interest should generally not expose VOA to liability in the United States, especially if VOA's reporting concerns a public figure.

However, VOA may be liable for invasion of privacy in certain situations for the publicizing of private facts or falsehoods. Not only that, other countries' defamation and "insult" laws are not as protective of the press, so broadcasts that are legal in the U.S. may still expose VOA to liability overseas.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

VOA journalists should not intercept or record any private conversations without the permission of the participants, as this may be a crime in certain jurisdictions. The Office of General Counsel should be consulted when a VOA journalist receives intercepted conversations from a third party or in any other special circumstances.

[\*\(Also see Recording Telephone Interviews, p. 36\)\*](#)

**The following guidance is provided by the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press (rcfp.org):**

- Check sources thoroughly. Get independent corroboration whenever possible. A source could have a vendetta against the subject and willfully or unintentionally misrepresent the facts for his or her own purposes. Confidential sources may disappear or recant in the face of a lawsuit. Don't rely on someone else to be accurate.
- Do not let your opinion about whether someone is a public figure or official color your decision to verify the accuracy of a story. Juries do not respond favorably to reporters who fail to confront their subjects with defamatory information and provide them with an opportunity to comment.
- If you cover the police or courthouse beat, make certain you understand criminal and civil procedure and terminology. Be especially careful to restate accurately any information obtained about arrests, investigations and judicial proceedings.
- Be cautious when editing. Make sure the story does not convey the wrong information because of a hasty rewrite.
- Watch for headlines and cutlines that might be defamatory even though the text explains the story.
- **Make sure news promos or teasers used to stir audience interest are not misleading or defamatory.**
- **Do not use generic video footage or file photos when reporting on an activity that might be considered questionable.**
- **Just because someone else said it does not mean that a news organization cannot be sued for republishing it.** This includes letters to the editor. Check out any factual allegations contained in them as carefully as you would statements in a news story.
- Be sensitive about using words that connote dishonest behavior, immorality or other undesirable traits, whether in your published story or in comments in your notes. Remember that a judge may order a news organization to produce reporters' notes, drafts and internal memoranda at a libel trial.
- If contacted by someone threatening a libel suit, be polite, but do not admit error or fault. Talk the case over with your editor, supervisor or attorney immediately, and follow procedures established by your news organization.

### **DO NOT BE RECKLESS WITH THE TRUTH**

### **REPORTER'S PRIVILEGE & CONFIDENTIAL SOURCES**

The reporter's privilege originates in the First Amendment's guarantee of a free press, under the rationale that forcing journalists to disclose confidential sources will discourage sources from communicating with reporters, thereby disrupting the free flow of information protected by the First Amendment. In some circumstances, journalists are compelled to disclose confidential sources. Because of BBG's special status as a federal government agency, some internal VOA documents may also be subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

[\*\(Also see Sourcing, p. 26\)\*](#)

**VOA JOURNALISTS SHOULD CONTACT OGC IF APPROACHED  
BY ANY LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS.**

**IN SOME SITUATIONS, THIS COULD BE A FIREWALL VIOLATION.**

[\*\(Also see VOA Firewall, p. 90\)\*](#)

### **REPORTING ON CLASSIFIED DOCUMENTS**

A number of laws and regulations, including several criminal statutes, regulate access to, and transmission of, classified information. VOA has a specific protocol in place regarding its reporting on classified documents in the public domain, such as the documents released by WikiLeaks in 2010.

**ONLY CERTAIN VOA JOURNALISTS ARE ASSIGNED TO REPORT ON THESE TOPICS.**

**THE SUPERVISORY INVESTIGATIVE EDITOR SHOULD BE CONSULTED BEFORE  
YOU BEGIN ANY ASSIGNMENT RELATING IN ANY WAY TO CLASSIFIED MATERIAL,  
EVEN IF THE CLASSIFIED DOCUMENTS ARE PUBLICLY AVAILABLE ON A WEBSITE  
LIKE WIKILEAKS.**

**THE SUPERVISORY INVESTIGATIVE EDITOR WILL CONSULT WITH SENIOR  
MANAGEMENT AND THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL REGARDING ALL  
APPLICABLE LAWS.**

[\*Return to Table of Contents\*](#)

### **SUBPOENAS OR REQUESTS FOR TESTIMONY OR DOCUMENTS**

- **IF YOU RECEIVE A REQUEST OR DEMAND TO TESTIFY IN A LEGAL PROCEEDING ON MATTERS RELATING TO OFFICIAL AGENCY INFORMATION OR YOUR OFFICIAL DUTIES, OR IF YOU RECEIVE A REQUEST TO PRODUCE AGENCY RECORDS OR INFORMATION, CONTACT THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL IMMEDIATELY.**

There is a special regulatory procedure for handling requests for testimony by current and former employees and handling the production of documents in legal proceedings in which the BBG is not a named party.

*(Also see [What Is Not a Firewall Violation, p. 91](#))*

### **INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL BY VOA STAFF**

While U.S. government employees must usually obtain a country clearance from the State Department before official government travel abroad, VOA reporters traveling to cover and report on the news may travel to countries in which U.S. Missions are located with minimal formality, which will typically only include a notification of intent to travel to the State Department. Please be mindful that travel to some sanctioned countries may require additional licensing or documentation. Reporters should contact their supervisors and the Travel Office before planning travel to these countries.

### **OUTSIDE ACTIVITIES**

#### **ALL FULL-TIME VOA STAFF ARE REQUIRED TO FOLLOW THESE PROCEDURES BEFORE RESPONDING TO A REQUEST OR MAKING ANY COMMITMENTS**

Anyone looking to engage in activities outside of VOA should first check with their supervisor to ensure that doing so won't conflict with official duty schedules or requirements.

Then, you should forward your proposed activity to [OutsideRequests@voanews.com](mailto:OutsideRequests@voanews.com). This will reach VOA Public Relations Director Bridget Serchak ([bserchak@voanews.com](mailto:bserchak@voanews.com)), Editor for News Standards & Best Practices Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com)) and the Ethics Group in the General Counsel's Office. We will review your proposal to ensure that it will not violate government ethics regulations or journalistic ethics and best practices.

Federal regulations prohibit employees from receiving compensation for outside teaching, speaking, or writing activities that directly relate to their official duties.

Some activities may not be appropriate if they:

- Constitute a conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest.
- Involve use of agency materials, time, or facilities.
- Involve a particular matter you've worked on in your official capacity.
- Are likely to adversely affect the agency's ability to fulfill its mission
- Would involve working for outlets that broadcast to or publish in the same target area as the employee's VOA language service.

Additionally, if you will be identified as an agency employee in connection with your outside activities, in order to avoid appearances of impropriety, you must include a disclaimer that the views expressed are your own and not that of VOA (or the U.S. Government, as appropriate).

Because the highest standards of journalism require a reputation for impartiality, VOA journalists should not perform public relations or similar work, either paid or unpaid. Journalists should also not counsel individuals or organizations, either in the United States or abroad, on how to deal successfully with the news media. Lastly, you should not provide advice to government officials other than to those in VOA, the BBG or any other government broadcasting entity, or to candidates for public office, again regardless of whether in the United States or abroad.

Outside speaking and writing opportunities can be highly beneficial, both personally and professionally, but if not done properly they can have serious consequences. Please don't hesitate to contact Andrew or Steve if you have any questions or need advice.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Aside from the types of activities outlined here, there is also the issue of whether VOA staff can, or should, express themselves outside of the office.

Needless to say, this is a very delicate issue, given our unique status as government employees as well as journalists.

With that in mind, this is the recommended guidance for VOA staff:

- VOA's mission is to provide accurate and objective news and information. To facilitate that mission, as journalists, you are expected to remain neutral and objective. That means that you should be careful and try to avoid conduct or activity that would question your neutrality and objectivity as well as the neutrality and objectivity of VOA.
- For example: If as a VOA journalist you are reporting on or otherwise working on a story regarding "X" situation, it is recommended that you avoid publicly voicing your personal opinion about that situation because such activity may call into question your credibility as a journalist and could compromise VOA's reputation as a reliable and credible news organization.

### **PLEASE EXERCISE GOOD JUDGMENT WHEN CONSIDERING YOUR OPTIONS AND MAKING YOUR DECISIONS.**

[\*\(Also see Opinion, p. 47\)\*](#)

## **CONTRACTORS**

VOA contractors generally have wider latitude to engage in activities outside the scope of their contracts with the Agency, but they should keep in mind that certain activities and actions could jeopardize continued performance on their current contract, or their ability to obtain a follow-on contract.

When doing work outside of VOA, it is important for VOA contractors to refrain from stating or creating the impression that they are employees, agents or representatives of the agency. They should not say that they "work for" VOA or are "correspondents at" VOA. Rather, they should indicate that they are "freelance journalists," "regular contributors to VOA," or use a similar description.

Also, VOA contractors must exercise caution to ensure that their journalistic integrity or impartiality is not compromised by their activities outside the scope of their contract.

VOA contractors employed by the employee management firms should advise the respective on-site managers from each company when they receive offers of work outside VOA. Contractors must also send their requests to the respective VOA Program Manager responsible for their language service, as well as to Outside Requests ([OutsideRequests@voanews.com](mailto:OutsideRequests@voanews.com)).

VOA contractors with any questions as to whether or not an outside activity poses a potential journalistic conflict are encouraged to contact Steve and Bridget for advice.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### **COMPETITIONS & CASH AWARDS**

Any employee who wants to enter a particular journalism competition using his/her VOA-produced work **must** first advise his/her supervisor. If the supervisor determines the entry to be of merit, please advise Pat Bodnar ([pbodnar@voanews.com](mailto:pbodnar@voanews.com)) in the Language Programming Directorate. All entries should be sent to Percy Rogers, the Agency's Incentive Coordinator ([ptrogers@bbg.gov](mailto:ptrogers@bbg.gov)). Percy will compile all entries.

**ENTRIES FOR JOURNALISM COMPETITIONS ARE TO BE  
SUBMITTED BY THE AGENCY'S SENIOR MANAGEMENT ONLY**

**INDIVIDUAL STAFF MEMBERS SHOULD NOT ENTER COMPETITIONS  
ON THEIR OWN USING WORK PRODUCED FOR VOA**

While the majority of journalism competitions that VOA enters award trophies, plaques or certificates to the winners, a few of them may include cash awards. Should a winning entry result in a cash award, that award will be designated to the agency, **not to the individual**. It will be the responsibility of VOA senior management to determine whether it will accept the cash award under its gift acceptance authority, and how that cash award will be administered.

### **APPENDIX – CONTROL ROOM EMERGENCY PROCEDURES**

#### **EMERGENCY EVACUATION TV CONTROL ROOM ACTIONS**

1. The Director will direct the Producer to tell the anchor to make the statement, **“We must interrupt this program, please stand by. We will return as soon as possible.”**
2. Director or TD fades to black on anchor and fades up on generic VOA full screen graphic.
3. Director or TD notifies TVMC that an ID graphic is up and that the control room and studio staff are vacating the building.
4. Using the same graphic, TVMC takes control of the path seamlessly when ready. TVMC evacuates the building.

#### **EMERGENCY EVACUATION RADIO CONTROL ROOM ACTIONS**

1. Producer tells anchor to make the statement, **“We must interrupt this program, please stand by. We will return as soon as possible.”**
2. Technician plays VOA1 “The Hits” so that VOA branded content continues standard frequencies.
- 2a. **Alternate:** Producer tells anchor to introduce “linked” show. This means all remaining show elements could continue to playout without live inserts until done.
3. Technician links remaining program elements and executes.
4. Technician notifies RMC of programming status.
5. Radio MC takes necessary steps to ensure program continuity.
6. Master Control, Control- room, and studio staff evacuate the building.

#### **EMERGENCY NCC ACTIONS**

NCC receives the broadcast product from Master Control and transmits it to the respective distribution points. NCC does not alter the product content sent to them for distribution.

#### **TO IMPLEMENT THE TV CONTROL ROOM PLAN, OPERATIONS MUST**

1. Load the TVMC full screen VOA graphic in each TV control room switcher. This may be updated in the future pending further guidance.
2. The Broadcast Operations management is responsible for making sure the graphic is installed in all control rooms and Master Control, and that the emergency plan is communicated to their respective staffs.
3. Broadcast Operations is responsible for maintaining the emergency full screen VOA graphic in their daily operation control room set up, and show programming.

#### **TO IMPLEMENT THE EMERGENCY EVACUATION ACTION PLAN, LANGUAGE SERVICE MANAGEMENT MUST**

1. Communicate the emergency action plan to service leadership and staff.
2. Each service must provide to Division management the service action plan for contacting affiliates about disruptions.

### **ALL LANGUAGE SERVICES AND BROADCAST OPERATIONS STAFF ARE REQUIRED TO EVACUATE THE BUILDING DURING AN EMERGENCY**



**NOTE:** This Emergency evacuation guide for Broadcast Operations and Language Services is for real emergencies, and when there is any doubt please respond as though it is a real emergency.

**However, a fire drill is not an emergency.** If a fire alarm drill will be conducted, employees and managers will be notified in advance of the testing.

### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The contents of this Guide represent the contributions of many VOA staffers. Thanks to all for your input. Other entries in the Guide come from previous House-wide guidance.

In addition, certain elements in the Guide were produced with the cooperation of the following non-Federal entities:

CNN

Freedom Forum

Hootsuite.com

Los Angeles Times

New York Times

NPR

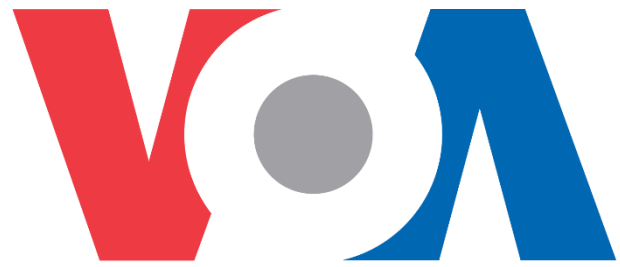
Project for Excellence in Journalism

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press

Radio Television Digital News Association

Society of Professional Journalists



Voice of America®

---

# ***BEST PRACTICES GUIDE***

---

***MARCH 2019***

**[SharePoint: Best Practices Guide](#)**

**DALETPLUS: MEDIA-->CATEGORIES-->MANUALS**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>THE VOA CHARTER</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>NEWS GATHERING</b>	
-FAIRNESS, OBJECTIVITY & BALANCE	7
-BIAS & DIVERSITY	9
-POLITICAL ACTIVITY	10
-DRONES	12
-SENSITIVE & GRAPHIC MATERIAL	18
-COVERING WAR	19
-COVERING TERRORISM	19
-VIDEO & AUDIO OF TERRORISTS, HOSTAGES OR PRISONERS	20
-COVERING MASS SHOOTINGS	21
-COVERING CRIMINAL ACTIVITY	21
-HOSTAGE/BARRICADE SITUATIONS	22
-NAMING PEOPLE INVOLVED IN CRIMES	23
-INTERVIEWING & VIDEOTAPING MINORS	24
-COVERING & REPORTING SUICIDES	24
-BREAKING NEWS	25
-REPORTING CROWD ESTIMATES	25
-STAGING & RE-CREATIONS	25
-USING VOA EMPLOYEES OR RELATIVES FOR STORIES	26
-WRITING	27
-SOURCING	28
-RUMORS & SPECULATION	29
-ATTRIBUTION	30
-CREDITING THE NEWS AGENCIES	34
-PLAGIARISM	35
-INTERVIEWS	36
-PUBLIC FIGURES	37
-ANONYMITY	38
-“AMBUSH” INTERVIEWS	39
-ADVANCE SCRIPTS/SCREENING	39
-REQUESTS FOR UNAIED/UNPUBLISHED MATERIAL	39
-SUBJECT TAPING INTERVIEW	39
-PAYMENT	39

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### GUESTS

-NOTIFYING VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT OF HIGH-LEVEL GUESTS	40
-SECURITY PROCEDURES FOR GUESTS	40
-GUEST BOOKING PROCEDURES	42
-HOSTING A GUEST ON VOA PROGRAMS	44

### DIGITAL MEDIA

-SOCIAL MEDIA-GENERAL	46
-SOCIAL MEDIA AS REPORTING TOOL	47
-OPINION	48
-MANAGING YOUR PROGRAM'S OR SERVICE'S SOCIAL PRESENCE	49
-POSTING VOA CONTENT TO OTHER SITES, INCLUDING YOUR OWN	49
-LINKING TO OTHER SITES	50
-BE TRANSPARENT ABOUT YOUR MISTAKES	50
-USER-GENERATED CONTENT	51
-YOUTUBE GUIDELINES	53
-GOOGLE EARTH GUIDELINES	56
-REVEALING WEBSITES & ADDRESSES	57
-AFFILIATE/RECIPROCAL LINKS	57

### PHOTOGRAPHS

-GENERAL RULES	58
-EDITING PHOTOGRAPHS	59
-PHOTO ILLUSTRATIONS	59
-TECHNICAL TIPS	59
-SENDING IN PHOTO FILES	59
-CAPTIONS/CREDITS	60

### MUSIC

-GENERAL GUIDELINES	62
-SOCIAL MEDIA & MUSIC	62

### AUDIO USAGE RIGHTS

-AUDIO CLIPS FROM TV NETWORKS	63
-------------------------------	----

### VIDEO USAGE RIGHTS

-COMMON FEATURES	65
-USING VIDEO FROM TV NETWORKS	66
-ABC NEWS	67
-AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE (AFP)	69

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

-ASSOCIATED PRESS (APTN)	70
-REUTERS	71
-NEWSMARKET	73
-USING CONTENT FROM STATE-RUN MEDIA	75
<b>VIDEO NEWS RELEASES (VNRs)</b>	<b>77</b>
<b><u>DOMESTIC DISTRIBUTION OF VOA CONTENT</u></b>	
-SMITH-MUNDT REGULATIONS	78
-USAGE REQUESTS	78
-TALKING ABOUT VOA CONTENT & PROGRAMMING	79
-TOWN HALLS, FORUMS, OTHER EVENTS, PARTNERSHIPS	80
-SUMMARY	80
-DOCUMENTING SOURCE VIDEO IN DALETPLUS	81
-NEWS AGENCY IDs & THE DOT	82
-ADDING AN AGENCY ID/DOT IN PREMIERE PRO	85
-ADDING AN AGENCY ID/DOT IN DALETPLUS	87
<b>CORRECTIONS</b>	<b>89</b>
<b><u>LEGAL ISSUES</u></b>	
-VOA FIREWALL	91
-COPYRIGHT & FAIR USE	93
-TRADEMARK	94
-FILMING IN PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE PLACES	95
-PROOF OF INSURANCE	95
-DEFAMATION/PRIVACY/FALSE LIGHT	95
-REPORTER'S PRIVILEGE & CONFIDENTIAL SOURCES	97
-REPORTING ON CLASSIFIED DOCUMENTS	97
-SUBPOENAS OR REQUESTS FOR TESTIMONY OR DOCUMENTS	98
-INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL BY VOA REPORTERS	98
<b><u>OUTSIDE ACTIVITIES</u></b>	
-VOA STAFF	99
-CONTRACTORS	100
-COMPETITIONS AND CASH AWARDS	101
<b>APPENDIX – CONTROL ROOM EMERGENCY PROCEDURES</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</b>	<b>104</b>



## ***BEST PRACTICES GUIDE***

### **THE VOA CHARTER**

President Gerald Ford signed the VOA Charter ([Public Law 94-350](#)) into law on July 12, 1976. It protects the independence and integrity of VOA programming.

The long-range interests of the United States are served by communicating directly with the peoples of the world by radio. To be effective, the Voice of America must win the attention and respect of listeners. These principles will therefore govern Voice of America (VOA) broadcasts:

1. VOA will serve as a consistently reliable and authoritative source of news. VOA news will be accurate, objective, and comprehensive.
2. VOA will represent America, not any single segment of American society, and will therefore present a balanced and comprehensive projection of significant American thought and institutions.
3. VOA will present the policies of the United States clearly and effectively, and will also present responsible discussions and opinions on these policies.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **THIS GUIDE APPLIES TO ALL EMPLOYEES, CONTRACTORS AND STRINGERS WHO GATHER, PRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE CONTENT FOR VOA**

The purpose of this Guide is to define in more detail the journalistic standards and best practices that VOA employees should follow every day. And it is a **guide** rather than a rulebook for one very good reason: although the increasingly changing news and information environment requires each of us to have a basic understanding of best practices, it goes without saying that every news event, every radio, TV and web piece, every social media post, every program, every interview – that is, **everything we cover, produce and disseminate – is unique and must be considered in context and on its own merits.**

VOA employees are encouraged to bring issues not covered in this guide to the attention of their supervisors, Service Chiefs, Division Directors, the Editor for News Standards & Best Practices, VOA Senior Management or the Office of General Counsel as appropriate.

- There may be times when the News Center or a Language Service will be working on stories that allege wrongdoing. In those cases, the Office of General Counsel **must** be consulted.  
[\(Also see Legal Issues, p. 91\)](#)

It is the responsibility of all staff members to understand these best practices as well as to consider one's own sense of right and wrong. Credibility is the most precious commodity of any news organization. The only way to achieve and maintain that credibility is for everyone within VOA to accept responsibility for it.

### **WHEN IN DOUBT, ASK - DO NOT ASSUME**

This guide will help, but should not replace, discussions of difficult issues with co-workers and supervisors. We grow as a news organization -- and policies are formed -- by asking questions and discussing the journalistic issues we face daily.

In addition to these journalistic guidelines, as federal employees, [we are also required to follow the policies laid out by the Office of Government Ethics and the BBG's Ethics Counsel.](#)

The [Best Practices Guide](#) is a living document and is updated regularly on Sharepoint.



### NEWS GATHERING

#### FAIRNESS, OBJECTIVITY & BALANCE

WHEN PERFORMING OFFICIAL DUTIES, VOA STAFF LEAVE THEIR PERSONAL POLITICAL VIEWS BEHIND

- All correspondents, producers, writers, editors and hosts should be aware of their own cultural values and personal beliefs and put them aside when preparing a report, conducting an interview, hosting a newscast, an interview program or posting on social media.
- The accuracy, quality and credibility of the Voice of America are its most important assets, and they rest on the audiences' perception of VOA as an objective and reliable source of U.S., regional and world news and information.
- VOA journalists -- including writers, correspondents, stringers, program hosts, and social media administrators -- should always avoid the use of unattributed negative terms or labels to describe persons or organizations. The exception is when the individuals and groups use those labels to describe themselves or their activities.
- Be fair to all of the people involved in a story. People who are presented in a negative light must be given a reasonable chance to present their side of the issue. If they refuse to comment, that should be noted. This demonstrates to our audience that we made the effort to be fair to all sides.
- A correspondent, producer or host should be well prepared with facts to balance the statement of one side or the other. Don't simply nod in acknowledgment when listening to someone's answer, as this could imply that you agree with that position.
- VOA journalists and all those preparing broadcast, website and social media programming must avoid any action or statement that might give the appearance of partisanship.
  - **THIS INCLUDES THE WEARING OF LAPEL PINS, RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS, CLOTHING DESIGNS OR COLOR SCHEMES THAT APPEAR TO SUPPORT ONE PARTY OR INDIVIDUAL OVER ANOTHER.**
- **THERE IS NO PLACE AT VOA FOR ADVOCACY JOURNALISM - THE PRESENTATION OF NEWS FROM ONE PARTICULAR VIEWPOINT OR ONE SPECIFIC AGENDA.**
- **VOA JOURNALISTS CANNOT ACCEPT MONETARY PAYMENT OR GIFTS FROM ANY INDIVIDUAL, SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP, OR POLITICAL ORGANIZATION IN EXCHANGE FOR NEWS COVERAGE. IT IS A VIOLATION OF JOURNALISTIC ETHICS.**

- Other conflicts of interest, real or apparent, may come up, such as the relationship of staff members with VOA and USAGM management.
  - For instance, VOA journalists should avoid, where possible, covering an event where a speaker or panelist is from VOA – simply because VOA is represented at the event. If the event is one of journalistic value, the report should disclose and explain that VOA is represented at the event and cite the editorial reason for covering the event.
- VOA employees should carry out their work with the utmost professionalism. This applies equally to your work in the Cohen Building and in the field. Professionalism and respect for your colleagues is absolutely vital to maintaining best practices. Whether in a newsroom, studio, control room or in the field, pursuit of a story is not an excuse for arrogance.

### **BIAS & DIVERSITY**

One of the key areas for ensuring fairness, objectivity and balance in our reporting is to stay clear of bias or preconceived notions. Some examples:

- Avoid stereotyping by race, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, geography, sexual orientation, disability, social status or physical appearance.
- The words we use in our scripts should be precise. For example, avoid the casual use of words and phrases like “illegal immigrant,” “Third World” and “terrorist,” or the assumption that “fundamentalism” equals violence. [This is the latest guidance from the AP](#) on writing about the “alt-right” and related terms. All VOA staff should read the guidance and follow it in our own reporting.
- Don’t include a description of an individual unless it is essential to the story. If a description doesn’t serve an editorial purpose, it may perpetuate negative stereotypes, possibly anger some members of a community and in all likelihood doesn’t effectively advance the story.
- Coverage of events in a gay community should not be automatically linked to coverage of HIV/AIDS, because HIV/AIDS is not exclusive to gay communities.
- Correspondents, producers, video, photo and web editors must understand the possibility of racial or ethnic stereotyping when selecting images to include in stories. For example, in a story about unwed mothers in the U.S., should every mother shown be African American? If using file video about drug arrests in the U.S., should every person shown be African American or Hispanic? The clear answer is no.

### POLITICAL ACTIVITY

#### VOA STAFF CANNOT CAMPAIGN FOR OR ORGANIZE EVENTS FOR POLITICAL CANDIDATES

#### THAT IS A VIOLATION OF THE JOURNALISTIC ETHICS OF OBJECTIVITY, FAIRNESS AND BALANCE AND SHOULD BE AVOIDED AT ALL TIMES

#### THE HATCH ACT

The Hatch Act is a federal law; its main provision is to prohibit government employees in the Executive Branch from engaging in partisan political activity. The Office of General Counsel has provided some basic guidelines regarding political activity by VOA employees.

Employees **MAY NOT** engage in political activity while:

- On duty
- In any government office
- Using a government vehicle
- Wearing an official uniform or insignia

In addition, the following political activities are prohibited while **on duty**:

- Wearing campaign buttons and/or t-shirts
- Displaying campaign posters in the workplace
- Using **AGENCY** e-mail accounts, social media accounts or blogs to support or criticize a candidate or political position
- Using agency computers to make online campaign donations
- Using screensavers supporting or criticizing a candidate or political position
- Using agency-supplied smartphones to support or criticize a candidate or political position

**NOTE: You are on duty when you are teleworking.**

**IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT THESE GUIDELINES,  
PLEASE CONTACT THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL AT 202-203-4550**

#### POLITICAL REPORTING ON VOA WEBSITES

Reporting on U.S. politics can be a delicate balancing act for VOA. This is especially true because of the provisions of the Hatch Act.

In the case of VOA, the Office of Special Counsel took note of our reporting on U.S. political campaigns. The OSC's concern was that as a federal agency VOA's reporting should abide by the letter and spirit of the Hatch Act. In addition, the OSC noted that a federal agency's website "...must not create the appearance that the agency, and in turn the federal government, is politically biased."

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

## ***BEST PRACTICES GUIDE***

In response, the BBG's Office of General Counsel noted that the VOA Charter lawfully empowers the agency to "...present the policies of the United States clearly and effectively, and will also present responsible discussions and opinions on these policies."

The OSC ultimately determined that the requirements of the Hatch Act could be effectively balanced with the realities of news reporting, and declared that it is permissible for VOA to report on political campaigns and to include links to a candidate or party's website in a web story if the website is source material for the article, and can be presented in a way that avoids appearances of agency endorsement or support for the candidate or party.

To avoid appearances of inappropriate endorsement or bias, if any VOANews.com website reports on a GOP or Democratic presidential debate and the story includes a link to the campaign website of one candidate, we must include the campaign websites of all the candidates who are taking part in the debate. The same holds true if we are reporting on candidates for the Senate, House and for governors.

We follow the same guidelines during the final presidential campaign period with regard to a sitting president and the opposing candidate/s. But in that case, the link for the sitting president **MUST BE TO THE CAMPAIGN'S WEBSITE, AND NOT TO WWW.WHITEHOUSE.GOV.**

In other words, when reporting on U.S. political campaigns, all VOANews.com websites should follow the same journalistic balance and fairness that we strive for in all of our daily reporting.

For more complete guidance on the Hatch Act, [please follow this link to the Office of General Counsel's Ethics page.](#)

### **DRONES**

Drones are special-purpose aerial camera platforms. Their use is heavily regulated, and VOA journalists must follow both governmental restrictions and VOA policies.

It is illegal to operate an unmanned aerial system/drone (UAS) for business purposes in the United States without advance approval from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Therefore, prospective VOA drone users must obtain a Remote Pilot Certificate (the official title for a drone pilot license) prior to any field usage of a drone<sup>1</sup>.

### **DRONE USAGE BY VOA-AFFILIATED PERSONNEL IS RESTRICTED TO PROPERLY LICENSED DRONE PILOTS.**

VOA drone pilots will follow the FAA'S rules and respect all restrictions, including those imposed locally by police or emergency service agencies. VOA journalists contracting for drone services must also be aware of laws and safety regulations governing their use.

When the use of a drone is requested to cover a VOA story, advance approval is required from the VOA Deputy Director for Programming ([jlippman@voanews.com](mailto:jlippman@voanews.com); 202-203-4325) or his designee. Requests for flight authorization must be in writing and include story information (including personnel and justification of the need for a drone), flight plans, site maps, and other specifics detailed in this section.

VOA will use guidelines from the Professional Society of Drone Journalists ([www.dronejournalism.org](http://www.dronejournalism.org)) as determinates of its drone usage:

- **NEWSWORTHINESS:** The story must be of sufficient importance to risk using a potentially harmful drone. Do not use a drone if the information or aerial perspective can be gathered by other, safer means.
- **SAFETY:** A drone pilot must be properly trained in the operation of the equipment. The equipment must be in a condition suitable to safe and controlled flight. A drone must not fly in weather conditions that exceed the limits of the drone's ability to operate safely. A drone must be flown in a manner that ensures the safety of the public and is least disruptive to the general population in a public setting. A Pilot's first drone flight should **not** be when shooting a story.
- **REGULATIONS AND PUBLIC SPACES:** A drone pilot must follow the regulations that apply to the airspace where the drone is used.
- **PRIVACY:** Use of a drone must never compromise the privacy of non-public figures. VOA journalists should not use images of private citizens in private spaces that are encountered beyond the scope of their stories.

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.faa.gov/uas/getting\\_started/fly\\_for\\_work\\_business/becoming\\_a\\_pilot/](https://www.faa.gov/uas/getting_started/fly_for_work_business/becoming_a_pilot/)  
[https://www.faa.gov/uas/media/Part\\_107\\_Summary.pdf](https://www.faa.gov/uas/media/Part_107_Summary.pdf)

VOA will own and operate drones for use in the United States subject to government regulations and VOA procedures ([See Flight Operations, p. 13](#)).

Drones will be standardized as specified by VOA Broadcast Operations, which will inventory and house them in Washington, D.C. or selected domestic bureaus. Drones will be registered with the Federal Aviation Administration (<https://registermyuas.faa.gov/>) in the name of VOA. Like other VOA technical equipment, purchases of drones will be approved in advance by the VOA Chief Digital Officer ([jtunnessen@voanews.com](mailto:jtunnessen@voanews.com); 202-382-5420) or his designee.

Although VOA will operate drones within the United States, VOA will **not** own and operate drones outside of the United States.

Unlike the Federal Aviation Administration in the U.S., neither the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) nor the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) have established general usage or legal guidelines for drone operations. Regulations vary from country to country, frequently change, and may not yet be codified (for instance, there is no listing of drone regulations for Iran). The Global Drone Regulations Database ([www.droneregulations.info](http://www.droneregulations.info)), however, is an international directory containing summaries of countries' drone laws, if known.

VOA journalists requiring a drone outside the U.S. will need to rent drone services from a pilot/operator licensed for the particular country in which the shoot is planned. They will also be expected to search the database to make sure VOA will not inadvertently violate regulations for the country in which the shoot is planned.

Contracting for drone services outside the country, like contracting for other external services, should be requested in advance from VOA Broadcast Operations, which will work with the IBB Office of Contracts to arrange services. Once drone services are secured, language services should advise the Deputy Director of Programming ([jlippman@voanews.com](mailto:jlippman@voanews.com)) or his designee of the name of the drone pilot and the drone's registration information.

**NOTE: Nothing in this section prevents VOA journalists from obtaining drone footage taken by non-VOA personnel who have acted independently of VOA.** User-generated drone video will be governed by the same standards and verifications as other independently gathered video used by VOA, prior to its use. ([Also see User-Generated Content, p. 51](#))

### **THE DRONE CREW**

VOA uses the Operations Manual of The Drone Journalism Lab as the basis for its drone operations procedures. VOA-registered drone pilots must follow procedures as outlined in the Operations Manual<sup>2</sup>.

The Manual defines three operations roles in drone flight: Pilot, Observer, and Journalist. Although a single individual can fill all three roles, VOA will normally have at least two people involved in any drone flight: a Pilot and a combination Observer/Journalist. The three roles are defined on the next page.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/32pi2e2gv6huyzg/AAAwGq7b1mO5ekikCn-7JFiMa?dl=0&preview=opsmanual.pdf>

- **PILOT:** Responsible for all flight operations and the ultimate authority on any flight. The Pilot determines if the aircraft is airworthy and capable of conducting the proposed operations in the available airspace, and is responsible for conducting operations within all FAA regulations (and any restrictions set forth by a “grant of exemption” from the FAA). The Pilot must brief the other members of the crew about the specifics of the mission, their roles and responsibilities, and what is expected of them before, during and after flight operations. The Pilot – the person holding the FAA-issued Part 107 certificate – is by regulation the final authority on whether the drone flies or not. The Pilot’s decision on flight safety is final.
- **OBSERVER:** Responsible for monitoring the operational area to ensure that there are no hazards that may endanger the flight or people. The Observer is the only member of the team who should speak to the Pilot during flight operations. The Observer is to alert the Pilot if any aircraft come into the area, or if any person or vehicle comes near the operation. The Observer should remain within speaking distance of the Pilot.
- **JOURNALIST:** Responsible for communicating flight goals before the flight and verifying results after the drone lands. Defines the aerial elements needed for the story, but is subordinate to the Pilot, who has responsibility for determining if the Journalist’s goals are possible under the conditions presented.

### **FLIGHT OPERATIONS**

Pre-trip and pre-flight inspections help ensure airworthiness and will serve as an early warning for both maintenance issues and for mechanical issues that could substantially affect or cancel flight operations or safety.

**PRE-TRIP:** Pre-trip and prior to embarking on any drone operation, the Pilot must gather information about the proposed flight area to ensure safe operations that comply with Federal Aviation Agency regulations. The Pilot should view publicly available aerial images of the area or personally conduct a site survey that will enable him/her to answer questions about the proposed flight location and be confident of success in the mission, including:

- What is there?
- Are there hazards to aviation?
- What airspace is it in?
- Do we need permission from air traffic control (ATC)?
- Are we flying on or over private property? Do we have permission of the landowner to operate there?
- How many people can we expect around the area? What is our plan to prevent flight over people?
- How high above sea level is the location? How will the altitude affect the performance of your drone during flight?

Prior to the day of the shoot, the Pilot and Journalist should meet to define the goals of the drone shoot and specific mission goals, including:

- What shots do you need (specific expected shots, angles, or subjects)?
- What purpose is the drone serving in your story?
- What context is the drone adding to your story?

[Return to Table of Contents](#)



- How much drone video or photography do you need to tell the story?
- What privacy issues can you anticipate and what steps have you taken to mitigate them?
- What the operations area looks like.
- What the expected weather will be.
- Any known hazards.

Prior to the shoot itself, the Pilot should also practice with the drone assigned for use.

**PRE-FLIGHT:** Pre-flight operations are done immediately before any flight work is to occur. The pre-flight checklist repeats some of the pre-trip checklist, such as inspecting the aircraft and some of the control surfaces. On the day of the shoot, before leaving for the operations area, the Pilot should conduct a pre-trip inspection of the drone, including:

- Charging batteries.
- That there are sufficient fully charged batteries to compensate for the possible effects of temperature on the drone's batteries.
- Checking various mounting hardware.
- Checking the camera and storage media to ensure it is sufficient for the task.
- Verifying that weather parameters are within FAA Part 107 minimums, as determined by consulting an aviation weather forecast or weather report (METAR) or from obtaining a flight briefing from Flight Services.
- Verifying that the Journalist has informed local police or fire agencies that we will be using news-gathering drones.

Once on site, the Pilot will conduct the pre-flight inspection, connect the batteries, etc., and delineate a takeoff and landing area of at least 10 feet x 10 feet and ensure it is free of debris. S/he may also assign the Journalist or other VOA personnel on site to ensure that bystanders don't inadvertently walk into either the takeoff/landing zone or under the drone's flight path.

**IN FLIGHT:** The "In Flight" checklist isn't really a checklist. It's a "Do Constantly" list, noted as a reminder here for all journalists using drones. While in flight, personnel involved in the shoot must:

- Be constantly scanning for airborne traffic or obstacles. The Observer (in most cases, the Journalist) must report them immediately to the Pilot.
- Be constantly scanning for people on the ground in the flight area. The Observer must report them immediately to the Pilot.
- Be constantly checking battery levels, ensuring that the drone is returned to the landing area before reaching 25% of capacity remaining.
- Be constantly checking flight parameters such as altitude to ensure they remain within restrictions and operational goals.

Any changes to the operational plan should be discussed only at the time of battery changes.

**POST-FLIGHT:** The post-flight checklist is broken into three parts: shutting down the drone, inspecting the aircraft, and filling out logs. Logging is an essential part of drone safety. It forms the basis of the permanent record documenting maintenance of the drone VOA needs. Among other things, Pilots should document in logs (part of each VOA drone kit)<sup>3</sup> any issue that should be checked or fixed between flights, drone usage (times of takeoffs and landings), problems during flight, and battery usage.

### **DRONE RESTRICTIONS**

The FAA's website<sup>4</sup> provides complete information on approved flights and operations. VOA personnel involved in drone use should familiarize themselves with the contents of the site. For news coverage by drone within the United States, these restrictions are most relevant:

- Cannot fly anywhere in the District of Columbia.
- Cannot fly within five miles of an airport (that limit extends to 30 miles from Reagan National Airport).
- Cannot be operated within a U.S. National Park.
- Cannot fly at night.
- Cannot fly over people (not over protests, not over celebrations, not over sidewalks when pedestrians are present, etc.).
- Cannot fly higher than 400 feet (unless you're within 400 feet of a building; skyscraper climbing is OK).
- Cannot fly further away than the drone pilot can see with the naked eye.
- Cannot fly at speeds of more than 100 miles per hour
- Cannot be operated from a moving vehicle or inside a covered stationary vehicle.

Waivers to restrictions must be obtained in writing from the FAA. They generally are time-consuming to apply for and slow in being granted. Absent a written waiver, VOA will operate its drones in compliance with laws and regulations.

### **ACCIDENTS**

By using licensed drone pilots and having a rigorous system of approvals of drone usage, VOA will minimize the instances of mishaps or accidents involving drones. Should VOA personnel be involved in accidents or injuries involving drones, both the pilot of the drone and the VOA reporter/producer of the story must separately notify their service chief and division director, plus the VOA Deputy Director of Programming ([jlippman@voanews.com](mailto:jlippman@voanews.com)) or his designee. The drone pilot is required by law to notify both the Federal Aviation Agency and the National Transportation Safety Board of accidents that either cause injuries or at least \$500 in damage to property.

Applicable website contacts for the FAA and NTSB are below:

[https://www.faa.gov/uas/report\\_accident/](https://www.faa.gov/uas/report_accident/)

<https://www.nts.gov/investigations/process/Documents/NTSB-Advisory-Drones.pdf>

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/32pi2e2gv6huyzg/AAAwGq7b1mO5ekikCn-7JFiMa?dl=0&preview=logs.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.faa.gov/uas/where\\_to\\_fly/](https://www.faa.gov/uas/where_to_fly/)

### **ARCHIVING DRONE FOOTAGE**

All high quality drone footage must go in the archives within 3 weeks of the original shoot.

If the drone operator will be editing the video, he/she should copy the footage, edit down to the best footage, and work with the Media Asset Management team to supply the metadata and get the video into Dalet. If the operator does not edit, the producer must take on the responsibility.

No one will be granted continued access to a drone unless the footage from their previous shoot has been processed in the archive system. The Media Asset Management team has been alerted to tag the content as DRONE footage in the metadata, so users can easily search the database for the video.

This is a critical part of the return on the investment of training, purchasing and maintaining the drones.

### **SENSITIVE & GRAPHIC MATERIAL**

Newsworthiness should be the primary factor in deciding whether to air or publish audio or video that may be offensive to our audiences. Some examples include murder scenes, acts of war, acts of nature, or faces of victims.

In most cases, VOA should not broadcast or publish the moment of death in a suicide, execution, or any similar event. Exceptions might include circumstances where an event is being covered live and the action is unexpected or spontaneous, or where the event is so highly newsworthy as to warrant broadcast or posting. If it happens during live coverage, explain to the audience what has happened as quickly as possible, and move on.

The broadcasting or posting of graphic, profane, racist or other objectionable language should be determined if it is essential to the newsworthiness of the story.

Material of a sexual nature is also a cause for concern, as people of all ages listen to, watch and read VOA news stories. Questions to be asked: Is the material essential to the story? Should video be digitized in some way so as not to be offensive? Would you want your children to see such images?

If it's determined the material will be broadcast or posted online, a mandatory warning needs to be provided far enough ahead of the story to make sure children do not see or hear the material. If the material is posted online, it should not be on the homepage. Rather, a link to the story should appear on the homepage, with a warning that sexual/graphic images are included with the story.

YouTube has a [blurring tool](#) that lets you blur any part of a video, including moving objects.  
(Also see [YouTube Guidelines, p. 53](#))

**IN THESE CASES, THE EDITOR FOR NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES  
AND/OR VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT WILL DETERMINE WHETHER TO POST  
SUCH IMAGES OR AUDIO, AND WILL ISSUE A HOUSE-WIDE NOTE DETAILING  
MANDATORY LANGUAGE TO ADVISE OUR AUDIENCE OF THE CONTENT.**

The following sections explain these guidelines in greater detail.

### **COVERING WAR**

Given the many nationalities and ethnicities that VOA reaches via radio, TV and online, it's important to follow some basic guidelines in covering and reporting conflicts.

#### **LOADED WORDS**

VOA should never use “we,” “us,” “our” or “they,” “them” and “their” in reporting about any side in a conflict. VOA practice is to name the country, as in “U.S. troops” or “Pakistani troops.”

No side in a conflict should be referred to as “the enemy,” or any territory as “enemy territory” in copy or in graphics. The only exception is if you are directly quoting someone making those references.

Referring to attacks as “punishing,” “brutal” or “successful” can imply that VOA is taking sides. Again, the only exception would be if you’re directly quoting someone making those claims.

#### **REPORTING COMBAT ACTIVITY**

As a rule, VOA should not report that warplanes or missiles are approaching a target. When an attack is underway, VOA will report it:

- If we’re able to independently confirm that bombs/missiles have hit the ground; or
- If the country being attacked confirms it’s being attacked; or
- If an official of an attacking country directly tells VOA that an attack is happening; or
- If VOA observes the attack first-hand

In all of the above cases, attribution **MUST** be as clear and as specific as possible.

[\*\(Also see Attribution, p. 30\)\*](#)

When information originates only from state-owned media, we should make that clear to audiences the entire time the information is used.

[\*\(Also see Using Content From State-Run Media, p. 75\)\*](#)

If VOA’s reporting is being censored or shut down and/or VOA’s movements are being restricted, that should also be reported.

### **COVERING TERRORISM**

Generally, terrorism is defined as “the use of violence and threats to intimidate or coerce, especially for political purposes.” Terrorists use violence against (often innocent) individuals to advance their political or ideological agenda. “Terrorism” and “terrorist” carry a lot of weight, and they should be used with extreme care. It is up to editors to determine if they are most appropriate terms to use.

VOA will report the actions of terrorists (bombings, shootings, hostage takings) fully, accurately and without taking sides, as we would cover any other news story. Wherever possible, we should also provide appropriate coverage of the victims, their injuries and their families.

We will provide our audiences with informative analyses of terrorist organizations, their ideology and history, but at the same time VOA must never suggest that reporting the context in which terrorism takes place justifies terrorism in any way.

### **VIDEO & AUDIO OF TERRORISTS, HOSTAGES OR PRISONERS**

Statements from, interviews with, or video of terrorists, hostages or prisoners of war should be judged on their journalistic merits before making a decision on usage.

Some guidelines for making those decisions:

➤ **TERRORISTS**

- Although we will report on the actions of terrorists, **VOA SHOULD NOT BE USED AS A PLATFORM TO SPREAD THEIR MESSAGES.**
- This means that in almost all cases, VOA will not air a terrorist message in its entirety. Senior VOA managers will decide what portions, if any, of the message will be cleared for broadcast and websites based upon its news value.

➤ **HOSTAGES/PRISONERS**

- Pay close attention to whether a hostage or prisoner appears to have been mistreated, is bound in handcuffs or shackles, or has a hood on his/her head.
- In the case of a prisoner's statement, VOA will take special measures to ensure that the individual POW identities are not revealed (i.e. facial blurring, voice alteration, use of pseudonym or nom du guerre).
- Senior VOA managers will decide whether to show video of this nature.

➤ **FULL DISCLOSURE**

- When applicable, all TV and radio scripts and web copy **MUST** state that VOA has not been able to independently verify the source of the video or audio. Should VOA receive the material directly from a group, army or government, that should be noted in the script and web copy as well.

➤ **LEGAL ISSUES**

- From the Office of General Counsel: The Geneva Convention relative to Treatment of Prisoners of War requires POWs to "at all times be protected, particularly against acts of violence or intimidation and against insults and public curiosity." Although the Convention does not define what "public curiosity" means, the U.S. is a party to the Convention and it generally applies it at all times to the maximum extent practicable.

**PLEASE REMEMBER THAT THESE ARE BASIC GUIDELINES.  
EACH INSTANCE IS UNIQUE, AND A DECISION IN ONE SITUATION WILL NOT  
NECESSARILY BE THE PROPER ACTION FOR THE NEXT SITUATION.  
ALWAYS CONSULT WITH VOA SENIOR MANAGERS BEFORE MAKING ANY  
DECISIONS TO AIR OR PUBLISH MATERIAL OF THIS NATURE.**

### **COVERING MASS SHOOTINGS**

[The Poynter Institute](#) provides excellent guidance on how to cover and report on mass shootings. These are their primary recommendations:

- Name the shooter infrequently and only when his or her name is critical to helping your audience understand what happened.
- Avoid images of the shooter that could be seen as glorifying him or her by others who might be inclined to other acts of violence.
- As more information becomes available, be careful to be accurate and contextual. Small details can take on inappropriate levels of importance in the early reporting stages. Those details can be harmful to the truth if they are inaccurate or out of context.
- Avoid speculating about mental illness or allowing unqualified sources to speculate about mental illness. Witnesses, law enforcement and politicians usually know very little about the topic in general, are likely to know even less about the role of mental illness in this tragedy.
- Avoid using superlatives like “the deadliest mass shooting ever,” in teasers, tweets and other formats where context is absent. Instead, use them where you can bring more context, such as interviews, the text of stories and produced packages.

[This link from SAVE.org](#) includes additional recommendations and other important guidelines for covering and reporting on mass shootings.

### **COVERING CRIMINAL ACTIVITY**

VOA staff **must not** interfere in any way with ongoing law enforcement activities. If some orders seem designed to manage or deny news coverage, VOA reporters, producers and photographers at the scene should protest and notify senior management and the Office of General Counsel as quickly as possible. If necessary, the agency will take appropriate legal action to protect access to the news.

There may be occasions where VOA staff has the opportunity to accompany law enforcement on arrests or investigations. These situations can present sensitive legal questions, including trespass and invasion of privacy.

**THESE ACTIVITIES SHOULD ONLY BE UNDERTAKEN WITH APPROVAL IN  
ADVANCE FROM YOUR SUPERVISOR, VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT AND THE  
OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL.**

It’s important to understand that even though law enforcement may go onto private property, it **DOES NOT** mean that journalists are exempt from trespassing.

[\(Also see \*Filming In Public vs. Private Places\*, p. 95\)](#)

Keep in mind that cameras, microphones and lights can cause relatively passive bystanders to act and/or react for the cameras. All VOA staff should use their own best judgment and discretion in these situations; where possible, you should avoid any action that could possibly influence the event.

At the same time, VOA staff covering conflicts, protests or demonstrations should not take one side or another.

[\*\(Also see Fairness, Objectivity and Balance, p. 7\)\*](#)

Neither the police nor demonstration leaders should be a reporter's only sources for accurate reporting of causes, issues or casualties.

### **HOSTAGE/BARRICADE SITUATIONS**

Coverage of these situations, whether in the U.S. or overseas, presents difficult challenges and usually requires special care. No single statement or guideline can begin to cover every situation that we may report on. The following are intended to guide you in exercising your best judgment.

- The event should be characterized as accurately as possible. Before labeling an event a "riot" or "terrorism," or referring to someone as a "terrorist," you should discuss it with your senior editors and managers, and if necessary, with News Center managers or the Editor for News Standards and Best Practices.
- Keep in mind the possibility that a hostage taker may be able to see, hear, or try to manipulate VOA's coverage. Consider whether describing or showing the actions or movements of law enforcement officers could tip off the hostage taker or barricaded person.
- **DO NOT** put yourself in a position where you could be playing a role in the incident. VOA staff should **NEVER** attempt to contact a hostage or hostage taker. This could endanger a hostage and interfere with rescue efforts. It could also possibly subject you to criminal liability. You should not attempt to make or receive telephone calls from a hostage or barricade situation or from nearby homes or businesses.
- When reporting on these situations, avoid speculation about the hostage taker, his or her motives, demands, or state of mind. If a guest speculates about these issues, the host should point out that VOA has not verified what the guest has just said, and move the conversation away from such speculation.



### **NAMING PEOPLE INVOLVED IN CRIMES**

Be precise with the language used in reporting about crime or demonstrations.

#### **VICTIMS**

VOA should not name rape victims or other victims of sexual assaults or molestations. These crimes carry a stigma for the victims, and victims should be allowed to decide whether they want to be identified. Be cautious in providing descriptive details so that the person is not inadvertently identified.

There are special difficulties in identifying minors (under 18 years of age) who have been kidnapped or are alleged victims of sexual crimes. In the case of a kidnapping, news outlets may identify minors to help them be found. However, if we learn that a kidnapped minor has been sexually assaulted, the responsible action is to stop both naming the individual and showing his/her picture.

#### **EXCEPTIONS TO THE ABOVE MUST BE APPROVED IN ADVANCE BY A SUPERVISOR AND THE EDITOR FOR NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES**

#### **SUSPECTS**

VOA does not identify suspects of criminal investigations who have not been charged or arrested. This has become more difficult in the U.S. in recent years, when law enforcement officials refer to someone as “a person of interest.” This is not a legal term, and VOA should not use it because it can place a person under increasing suspicion and may result in unintended consequences for the individual.

The essential source for identifying the status of a person or group charged or arrested is law enforcement or the court system, **NOT** an unidentified “informed individual.” When someone has been charged with a crime, use caution in choosing language so as not to imply guilt or innocence. Similarly, if someone originally identified as a suspect is not charged with a crime, we must make that known as soon as possible in a follow-up story.

#### **NAMING OR IDENTIFYING MINORS INVOLVED IN CRIMINAL ACTIVITY**

In addition to the guidance above regarding minors who are victims, VOA should not name, show video or play audio of a minor who is a suspect in a crime, or is arrested and charged with a crime. Exceptions may be made if a minor is charged as an adult, but in those cases we should wait until the accused has been formally charged, not just arrested.

There may be other exceptions, such as if a minor is charged with murder or another heinous crime. In some cases, local media may have already widely reported the minor’s identity.

#### **BEFORE DECIDING TO IDENTIFY A MINOR, PLEASE CONSULT A SUPERVISOR AND THE EDITOR FOR NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES**

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### **INTERVIEWING & VIDEOTAPING MINORS**

Interviewing minors, whether for audio or video, can present special issues, particularly where wrongdoing, criminal activity, private, potentially embarrassing or other sensitive situations are involved. In these situations you **MUST** obtain permission from a parent or adult guardian. Permission should be in writing, where possible. [You can find the release form on Sharepoint.](#)

If that isn't possible, recording audio or video of the parent/guardian giving consent is acceptable.

Generally, minors can be interviewed and recorded, without permission, on non-controversial subjects such as reaction to a movie, talking about a favorite food, going back to school on the first day of the school year.

When recording audio or shooting video at a school in the U.S., ask whether a school has sent out what are known as "negative releases" to parents. These are notifications that a media crew will be visiting a school, asking parents to return the notice only if they **DO NOT** want their child to participate in interviews or tapings. In this situation you may not need additional permission.

In a breaking news situation, if the minor is out of harm's way, it may be permissible – without parental approval -- to interview the minor if he/she is a witness or has information about the event. However, keep in mind that the minor must be freely willing to talk, and should not be asked private, personal or other potentially embarrassing questions and should not be asked to name suspects.

In all cases, ABC NewsOne, AFP, APTN and Reuters video should be carefully screened to follow the same guidelines.

### **COVERING & REPORTING SUICIDES**

Deciding whether to report the name of a suicide victim is a delicate and difficult matter. Did the victim commit suicide publicly in order to achieve notoriety? Will reporting the person's name encourage others who might be contemplating suicide and looking for recognition? Will reporting the victim's name bring unwanted attention to family or friends? Keep in mind that by most accounts, people who commit suicide are in a disturbed or distressed mental state. Consequently, there are no clear or easy answers to these questions.

If the person is **NOT** a public figure, there should be no overwhelming editorial reason to report the name. Ask the question: Is the suicide tangential to the story, or does it have a larger impact on the story or participants in the story?

**BEFORE REPORTING THE NAME OF A SUICIDE VICTIM, PLEASE CONSULT  
A SUPERVISOR OR THE EDITOR FOR NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES**

There may be a situation when a VOA staffer in the field is in a position to intervene in a situation where injury or the loss of life is a very real outcome. When a person decides to take his or her own life as a protest, there is no expectation that a journalist will intervene, nor is there a VOA policy on whether you should or should not intervene. It is up to the individual on the scene to use his or her own best judgment.

[\(Also see Sensitive & Graphic Material, p. 18\)](#)

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### **BREAKING NEWS**

Although breaking news situations don't often present themselves in VOA's daily coverage, there are certain key points to follow when putting that type of information on the air or online.

Producers should use caution before airing live and/or unedited material which may be excessively graphic in visuals or language. Ask the question: Does the news value of the material warrant airing it without reviewing it first?

**CONSULT WITH YOUR SUPERVISOR AND THE EDITOR FOR NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES IF POTENTIALLY GRAPHIC MATERIAL IS GOING TO BE AIRED OR POSTED ONLINE BEFORE BEING VIEWED OR WITHOUT A DETAILED DESCRIPTION.**

When airing or posting such material, alert your listeners, viewers and readers as to the nature of the material.

[\*\(Also see Sensitive & Graphic Material, p. 18\)\*](#)

### **REPORTING CROWD ESTIMATES**

When covering rallies or demonstrations, it's important to attribute estimates of size. Organizing groups or official agencies which provide them may have reasons to inflate or downplay the numbers. Where non-official estimates such as "hundreds of thousands" appear to be guesses or inflated, a correspondent, producer or photographer on the scene may be able to provide a better perspective on crowd size. As an example, they can say the crowd is standing shoulder to shoulder for four blocks. If a correspondent, producer or photographer is not covering the event, we should look to the wire services for their reporting on the size of the crowd.

[\*\(Also see Attribution, p. 30\)\*](#)

### **STAGING & RE-CREATIONS**

➤ **VOA DOES NOT DO "AS LIVE," "LOOK LIVE" OR "LIVE TO TAPE" VIDEO REPORTS.**  
"As Live" pieces are video playbacks of a correspondent reporting from a location, but are manipulated in the control room to give the illusion that this is a true live shot by placing the video in a double box and having the anchor appear to interact with the correspondent. Presenting a correspondent in this manner goes against the VOA Charter's principle of being a reliable and credible source of news, and should be discouraged at all times.

- **VOA REPORTS THE NEWS**
- **WE DO NOT CREATE OR MANIPULATE NEWS STORIES**
- **STAGING A NEWS EVENT OR CONTROLLING HOW IT TURNS OUT -- WHETHER BY ENCOURAGEMENT, PROPS OR PAYMENT -- IS UNACCEPTABLE**

[\*Return to Table of Contents\*](#)

When shooting video with the subject of a story to explain something that happened, don't ask the person to do things they normally don't do. For instance: It's acceptable to shoot video of a family that goes to the cemetery once a week to place flowers on the grave of a family member, but you should explain in the track that this is something the family normally does. However, if you ask someone to go to the cemetery and lay flowers on the grave of a family member, you should explain that as well.

Keep in mind, though, that the more you direct people – having them do things specifically for the camera – the more time you'll have to spend explaining that to the audience.

### **USING VOA EMPLOYEES OR RELATIVES FOR STORIES**

Generally speaking, VOA employees should not be used in radio, TV or web pieces outside of their official capacity. In most cases it is also preferable not to use the relatives or friends of VOA employees. While they may be perfect subjects to help illustrate stories, there is always the possibility of the appearance of a conflict.

However exceptions can be granted; for instance, if a relative or friend is prominent or expert in his or her own right. When in doubt, consult with your supervisor or the Editor for News Standards & Best Practices.

### **WRITING**

Anyone writing for VOA on any platform – radio, TV or online – should be familiar with the VOA Stylebook. The Stylebook covers grammar, spelling, definitions and explanations of commonly used terms, as well as the proper use of American English.

**Some of the key points of the Stylebook as they relate to best practices are included in this Guide, but every VOA employee should read and become familiar with the Stylebook.**

[The Stylebook is maintained by the News Center and can be found on Sharepoint.](#)

VOA copy should be simple and straightforward. We are not writing treaties or scholarly reports. For example, use “stop the fighting” rather than “achieve the cessation of hostilities.” Most of our writing is for people whose first language is not English, so avoid excessively difficult words, and explain them when you must use them.

Avoid colloquialisms and jargon, which may be difficult to translate and are not easily understood by foreign audiences. When used, as in a direct quotation, provide an alternative in parentheses to assist language services.

- The convicted hacker said writing the virus was “a piece of cake” (very easy).
- He spoke “off the cuff” (without notes).
- The House Minority Whip (the number two Republican/Democrat in the House).
- He made a killing (made a lot of money) in the stock market.

Words such as “biggest,” “highest,” “first” and others like them should be used judiciously because they often turn out to be incorrect. Ask yourself whether the fact that something is first is truly significant. Avoid superlatives such as “most famous” or “greatest,” which often represent value judgments. Descriptive and colorful words are encouraged, but use caution. Something that is “unique” is the only one of its kind. A thing or event cannot be “somewhat unique.” Other words describing extreme situations should also raise flags for writers and editors, and should be scrutinized to ensure they are justified. “Trouble” in a city does not necessarily mean it is in “chaos.” “Asking urgently” is not necessarily “pleading” or “begging.” If a situation is “desperate” today, what will it be tomorrow when things get worse?

It is acceptable, however, to use words like these when you’re quoting someone directly.

### **SOURCING**

Whenever possible, a source should be “on the record” – someone who is willing to be named and quoted. However, journalists routinely rely on sources who won’t go on the record. If a source refuses to be named, the information he or she provides should be characterized in other ways, as clearly as possible.

Sourcing is often a matter of negotiation, but **a request for confidentiality should come from the source and not suggested by the correspondent or producer.** However, your editor has a right to know the name of the source if he or she asks for it.

### **AN UNNAMED SOURCE MUST HAVE VERIFIABLE AND FIRST-HAND KNOWLEDGE OF THE STORY**

Before using an unnamed source, you must be certain that there is no other way to get the information on the record. You must be convinced the source knows what he/she is talking about, and you should consider asking for actual evidence to bolster the source’s claim or comment. When discussing third-party information with a source, be sure that the source is actually confirming the information from his or her knowledge of a particular situation, and is not simply hearing it from you and agreeing that it is plausible.

Avoid other extremely vague terms such as “unnamed sources” or “unidentified sources,” “informed sources,” “authoritative sources,” “well-placed sources,” “reliable sources.”

You should be willing to tell our audience why the source cannot be named. For example, you can say, “The source’s name is being withheld to protect against possible reprisals.”

A story that relies on the use of confidential/unnamed sources should be of public concern. We are not interested in “gotcha” stories just for the sake of the “gotcha,” nor are we interested in scoring scoops just for the sake of being first (and possibly being wrong).

There will be times when multiple news outlets report information from unnamed sources during a breaking story, as with the Boston Marathon bombing in April 2013.

As happened with Boston – when multiple news organizations said there was an arrest and VOA reported that information – we will later find out that that information is incorrect. In those cases VOA will issue a correction as quickly as possible across all platforms.

[\(Also see Corrections, p. 89\)](#)

The following characterizations may be helpful in establishing with a source what level of confidentiality you have agreed to. In all cases it is always best to clarify with the source how the information may be used:

- **ON THE RECORD**  
All information is suitable for publication and attributable to the source by name and title.
  - **OFF THE RECORD**  
Material that is “off the record” is not directly usable, but the information can be used to focus the direction of a story. Off-the-record material may also be a valid second source to confirm information obtained elsewhere.
  - **ON BACKGROUND**  
“On background” is generally understood to mean the information given can be used, provided it is attributed to a generic source. “A senior administration official called the election flawed.”
  - **DEEP BACKGROUND**  
Information obtained on “deep background” is normally provided with the understanding that it will not be sourced directly in any way. Acceptable wording might be, “It was learned that the delegates agreed to a second meeting on Tuesday.”
- 
- **PUBLICATION OF A SIGNIFICANT STORY BASED UPON A SINGLE SOURCE WHO WILL NOT ALLOW HIS OR HER NAME TO BE USED MUST ALWAYS BE APPROVED IN ADVANCE BY VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT.**
  - **UPON REQUEST, DISCLOSURE OF A SOURCE’S IDENTITY TO VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT AND TO THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL MAY BE REQUIRED TO CLEAR THE SOURCED INFORMATION FOR AIR.**
  - **WHEN DISCUSSING CONFIDENTIALITY WITH A SOURCE, IT MAY BE ADVISABLE TO EXPLAIN THE POSSIBILITY OF THIS LIMITED DISCLOSURE WITHIN VOA. REFUSAL TO DISCLOSE THE SOURCE MAY RESULT IN THE SOURCE’S INFORMATION NOT BEING USED BY VOA.**

[\*\(Also see Reporter’s Privilege & Confidential Sources, p. 97\)\*](#)

## **RUMORS & SPECULATION**

VOA avoids the use of rumors and speculation in news items. However, this should be carefully evaluated on a case-by-case basis in instances where a rumor or speculation takes on a life of its own. In general, reporters, producers and editors should seek out responsible officials to respond to the rumors or speculation and use those comments as our entry to the story. Without an official comment, VOA should avoid being first to publicize a rumor or speculation.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### ATTRIBUTION

#### WE GIVE CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE

Proper attribution is a fundamental element of good journalism.

Aside from the material provided by our own correspondents and stringers, VOA receives news from a number of different outlets: ABC News, Agence France Presse, the Associated Press and Reuters, as well as from newspapers, television news networks and official news agencies of other nations.

Story information can also come from press releases put out by corporations or private groups such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs). When using press releases, they must be identified as such, and if applicable, they should be counter-balanced.

When VOA quotes exclusive information from news stories or uses quotes from editorials, opinion pieces or social media posts, it is mandatory to credit the media organization, NGO or other outlet. Not including that information can open VOA to possible claims of plagiarism and/or copyright infringement.

*(Also see [Crediting the News Agencies, p. 34](#) and [Plagiarism, p. 35](#))*

One method of providing attribution is in the use of block quotes. In the example below, *VOX.com* provided a hyperlink to a *Washington Post* story about “Pizzagate,” but also included part of the Post’s story in a “block,” shown by the solid bar on the left. This is acceptable for use on voanews.com websites, but it should not be used repeatedly.

The conspiracy theory, known as “Pizzagate,” apparently connected Hillary Clinton’s presidential campaign to a nonexistent child sex ring at the Comet Ping Pong pizzeria, **Faiz Siddiqui and Susan Svrluga reported for the Washington Post:**

The restaurant’s owner and employees were threatened on social media in the days before the election after fake news stories circulated claiming that then-Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton and her campaign chief were running a child sex ring from the restaurant’s backrooms. Even Michael Flynn, a retired general whom President-elect Trump has tapped to advise him on national security, shared stories about another anti-Clinton conspiracy theory involving pedophilia. None of them were true. But the fake stories and threats persisted, some even aimed at children of Comet Ping Pong employees and patrons. The restaurant’s owner was forced to contact the FBI, local police, Facebook and other social-media platforms in an effort to remove the articles.



## BEST PRACTICES GUIDE

Information that comes directly from the U.S. government – the White House, State Department, Pentagon or Congress – is considered valid on its own, **but must still be attributed.**

On a breaking news story, AP or Reuters may quote a single source such as a police official or a government spokesperson. In those cases our copy will attribute the information to the wire service and say that VOA is working to confirm the information.

Information in News Center stories does not require additional sourcing.

There are times when the attribution can be left unstated because the source of a particular statement is both obvious and authoritative.

**An example of over-attribution:**

*The U.S. space agency NASA says astronauts aboard the space shuttle “Discovery” performed a second spacewalk today.*

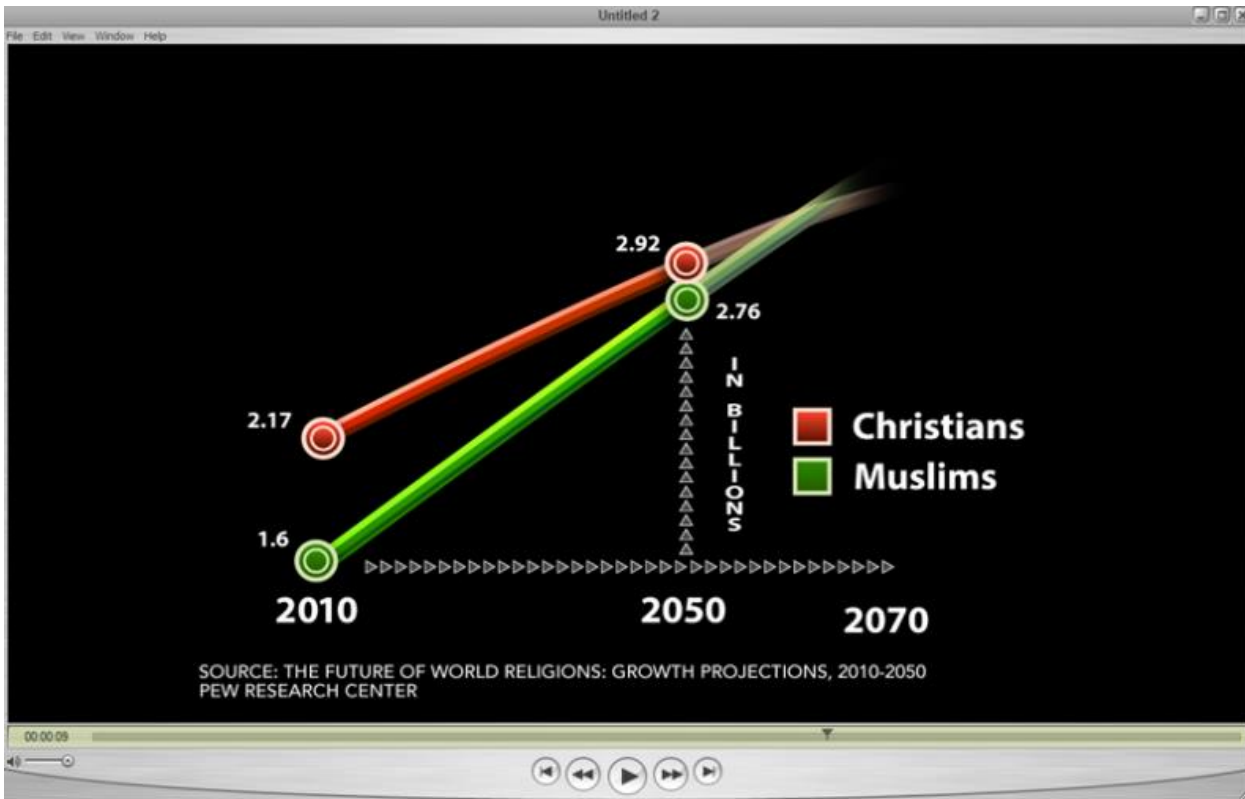
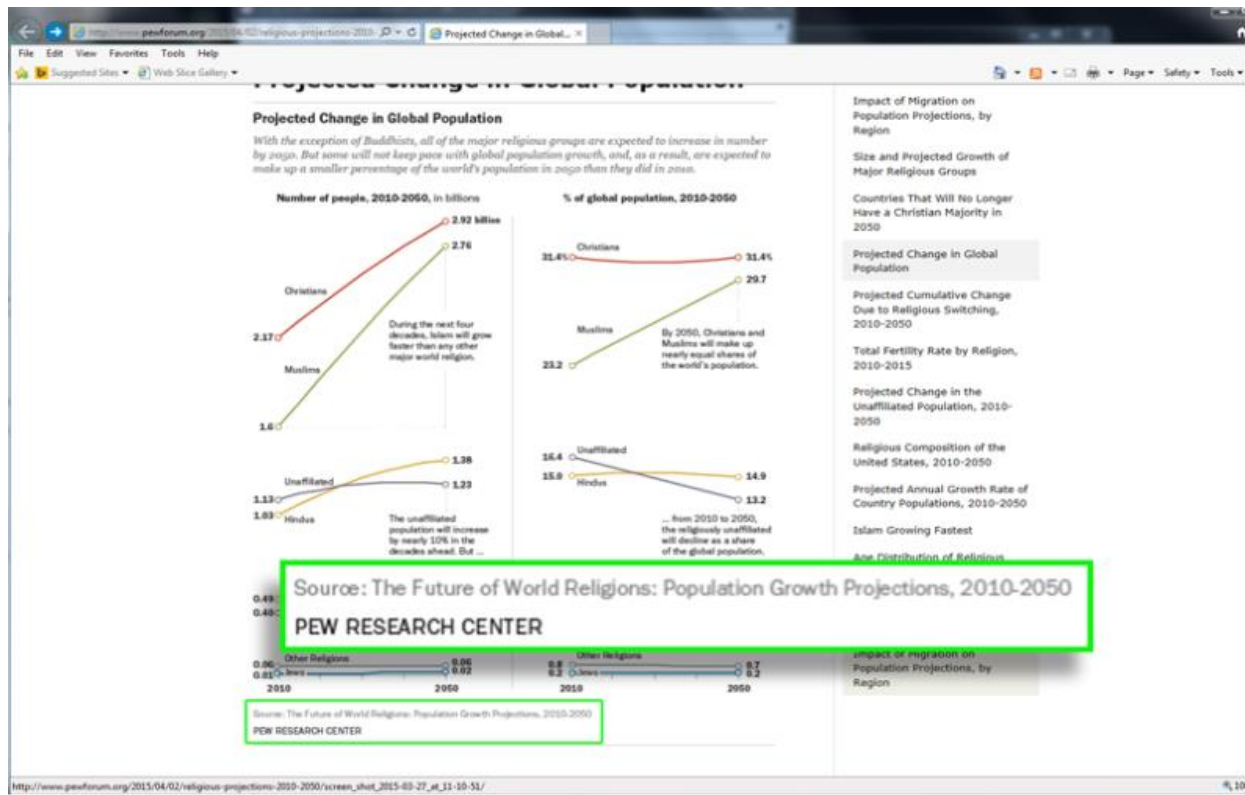
**It’s better, and easier, to write:**

*Astronauts aboard the U.S space shuttle “Discovery” performed a second spacewalk today.*

In the course of our reporting, we often will cite information or statistics that come from think tanks, NGOs, or another government agency. Aside from crediting those groups in scripts, they must also be credited in full-screen graphics, whether as a stand-alone page or within a video package.

### FULL SCREEN GRAPHICS

- While styles and looks may differ for various Language Services, the basic procedure should be the same.
- Any time a graphic is based on information or statistics that are not originally generated by VOA, a small info source attribution needs to be included on the graphic. See the photos on the next page, identifying the correct attribution.



[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### **WIKIPEDIA**

There have been a number of incidents where material posted on Wikipedia has not been verified or has proven to be incorrect. Any information found on Wikipedia should be confirmed with other, more reliable sources, or with the News Center.

### **WIKIPEDIA SHOULD NOT BE CONSIDERED OR USED AS A PRIMARY SOURCE OF INFORMATION**

### **OPENSOURCE**

The U.S. government-funded news portal [OpenSource](#) is an important tool for finding source information. VOA uses the text material in OpenSource as a second source of news and information.

OpenSource can be found in DaletPlus/Webspace at **WIRES→OPENSOURCE→ALL WIRES**

However, **VOA DOES NOT HAVE ACCESS** to the audio and video which OpenSource posts from news organizations -- BBC, Sky News and Al Jazeera English, for example -- with whom VOA **does not have contractual agreements.**

### **CREDITING THE NEWS AGENCIES**

To make sure that our best practices are in sync with our news agency contracts, below is guidance on how VOA should credit the agencies across all platforms. Note that each platform has different guidelines, and everyone should be aware of the differences, especially if you're producing a story that will appear on all platforms.

#### **RADIO**

- AFP, AP and Reuters have all confirmed that VOA radio broadcasts can use their news wire copy verbatim without verbal attribution or credit. All three agencies consider this to be “standard use” of their material.
- However, if one wire service has an exclusive interview or information that other news organizations do not have, we should give that wire service verbal credit in the broadcast.  
[\*\(Also see Audio Usage Rights, p. 63\)\*](#)

#### **TELEVISION**

- Although the individual news agency IDs and the Dot are burned into agency video as they are being recorded in DaletPlus, it is preferable that all video pieces -- whether produced by the News Center or by a Language Service -- should note in the DaletPlus Asset Management Form the time segments where ABC NewsOne, AFP, AP and Reuters video are used. That is our way of tracking/crediting them for the usage, and for the Senior Archivists to know whether the material is worth keeping.  
[\*\(Also see Video Usage Rights, p. 65, Documenting Source Video in DaletPlus, p. 81 & News Agency IDs and the Dot, p. 82\)\*](#)
- Verbal credit to the news agencies is not required for video reports, **unless the video is exclusive and is noted as such in the agency's script.**

#### **WEB**

It has long been the practice in print to credit the wire services when using their stories in whole or in part. All VOA websites and social media pages should follow this practice.

- [How the credit looks when using a single news agency's wire story in full, with the agency's name at the top.](#)
- [How the credit looks when using more than one agency's wire story, with the agencies' names at the bottom.](#)
- [Agency photos used on VOA websites and on agency-maintained social media pages must include a captioned credit to the agency.](#)

### **PLAGIARISM**

**PLAGIARISM IS ILLEGAL AND UNETHICAL AND STRIKES AT THE VERY HEART OF OUR JOURNALISTIC MISSION.**

**IT CAN COST THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE AGENCY ITS CREDIBILITY AND REPUTATION, AND WILL NOT BE TOLERATED.**

**WE DO NOT PRESENT OTHERS' WORK AS OUR OWN**

**ALLEGATIONS OF PLAGIARISM WILL BE FULLY INVESTIGATED, AND STAFFERS WILL BE NOTIFIED OF ANY SUCH ALLEGATIONS.**

**PLAGIARISM MAY RESULT IN DISCIPLINARY ACTION, UP TO AND INCLUDING REMOVAL FROM FEDERAL SERVICE**

**NOTE:** The Poynter Institute offers [this excellent guidance for identifying plagiarism](#).

### **INTERVIEWS**

Even in the era of selfies, photo-bombing and user-generated content, most people are not comfortable being interviewed and consider recording equipment to be invasive, especially when you're dealing with sensitive subjects. One way to reduce that unease or tension is to first talk to an interview subject **WITHOUT** the equipment. Put the person at ease; make him or her feel comfortable talking to you before proceeding with the actual interview.

When setting up an interview, the subject may ask what questions will be asked or how the interview will be treated when produced. It's OK to outline in advance general points of interest and the general subject areas you intend to cover.

### **YOU SHOULD NOT**

- **PROVIDE ACTUAL QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED**
- **PROMISE YOU WILL NOT ASK QUESTIONS OUTSIDE THE AREAS YOU HAVE OUTLINED**
- **PROMISE HOW SUBJECTS WILL BE TREATED ON THE AIR**

Any agreement that certain questions will or will not be asked would be an exception, to be decided on a case-by-case basis in consultation with your supervisor and/or VOA senior management as warranted. If an agreement is approved, the agreement should be mentioned in the introduction to the interview.

If an interviewee requires VOA to use a name or title we ordinarily would not use, that too should be mentioned in the introduction to the interview.

### **DO NOT PROMISE AN INTERVIEWEE THAT**

- **VOA WILL AIR THE ENTIRE INTERVIEW OR A PORTION OF IT IN A TV PROGRAM, OR AS PART OF A TV PACKAGE**
- **THAT HE OR SHE WILL BE ABLE TO FIND ALL OR PART OF THE INTERVIEW ON THE VOA WEBSITE**
- **THAT ANY PART OF THE INTERVIEW WILL BE INCLUDED IN A TV PROGRAM OR TV PACKAGE, OR WITH A WEB STORY OR BLOG**

*(Also see [Hosting a Guest on VOA Programs, p. 44](#))*

### **NEWSMAKER INTERVIEWS**

When VOA interviews a prominent newsmaker at length, the purpose is to find out what an individual, organization or group of lawmakers are thinking about a particular issue. This type of interview does not always require that the other side be presented within the interview format.

Instead, a video piece or a brief explainer can be used to set up the topic or topics being discussed, and that can be the means by which the other side's point of view is presented. Another possibility is reading copy following the interview stating the opposition's view.

Ultimately, it is advisable to seek out a corresponding interview at length with someone from the other side of the issue.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### RECORDING TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

- If you are planning to record a telephone interview, the reporter or producer **MUST** advise the interview subject that he or she is being recorded, and that their comments will be on the record. If the interview subject objects to being recorded, the reporter or producer should confirm that the interview can be used as off the record information.  
([Also see Sourcing, p. 28](#) and [Defamation/Privacy/False Light, p. 95](#))

### SHOOTING/EDITING TV INTERVIEWS

- When shooting a two-camera interview, it's acceptable for a reporter to register appropriate visual expressions, such as smiling at a joke. What is NOT acceptable is editing in a visual reaction that is out of sequence to the answer being given.
- Equally unacceptable is separating questions from answers. The 10<sup>th</sup> answer of an interview should not be edited as if it were the response to the 4<sup>th</sup> question, even if it seems to make the reporter's or producer's editorial point clearer.
- Interviews shot with one camera can present editing difficulties, so when possible, the camera should be set up to start the interview on a medium 2-shot. That will allow the cameraperson to push in on the interview subject, pan to the interviewer and pull back to the 2-shot as needed.
- If the above method isn't possible, then reverse questions (questions asked after the interview is done, with the camera reversed to tape the interviewer), while not ideal, are allowed. Reverse questions should be true to the original questions and if done, the interviewee or representative should be made aware and should be invited to be present.

In this situation, because the reverse shots are happening after the actual interview, the reporter or producer should avoid showing an expression (smile, frown, nod) that might be seen as agreement or disagreement with what the subject said during the interview.

## **PUBLIC FIGURES**

Questions and reporting about the private lives of public figures should be relevant to the story. For example, the questioning is appropriate when the reporting is intended to expose inconsistency, lying, hypocrisy and most certainly, illegal activity. In the case of candidates for public office, information about these actions often enables voters to judge the character of a candidate or elected official.

However, VOA's reporting **should not** be based on rumor, speculation or gossip. Reporting should rely on on the record statements and actions of public figures. Information from normally reliable sources not willing to be identified should be very closely examined. ([Also see Sourcing, p. 28](#) and [Rumors & Speculation, p. 29](#))

The passage of time is an important consideration in determining what is relevant, and may affect current relevance. When information is dated, evaluate it carefully. In the case of a political figure, it may be the importance of such information for the public to judge that person's qualifications and fitness to hold public office.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Each situation should be considered separately and there is no blanket rule prohibiting reporting private activities from many years ago.

For interviews, be very careful when using information from sources and/or sourced information from another news organization when asking a question to a guest about his/her private life.

[\(Also see Sourcing, p. 28 and Attribution, p. 30\)](#)

Open-ended questions based on little or no evidence are strongly discouraged. For example, the question “Have you ever taken a bribe,” should not be asked unless it’s based on our reporting, or if there is a compelling and journalistically justifiable reason to ask it.

**IF VOA STAFF ARE UNSURE OF THE APPROPRIATENESS OF THEIR QUESTIONING OR REPORTING REGARDING THE PRIVATE LIFE OF A PUBLIC FIGURE, THEY SHOULD CONSULT WITH THEIR SUPERVISOR AND WHEN APPROPRIATE WITH THE EDITOR FOR NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES AND THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL.**

### **ANONYMITY**

There may be reasons to agree to anonymity for an interview subject, whether for radio, TV or online. For example, we may not wish to jeopardize the subject’s safety or subject him or her or family members to harm or undue embarrassment. But there may be legal considerations as well in granting anonymity to interview subjects.

Always ask the interviewee about his or her reasons for requesting anonymity. Clarify and confirm the conditions agreed to in exchange for the information. Anonymity for interviewees can be defined by degree. In establishing the degree of anonymity, describe the process to be used (e.g. blurring of faces, digitizing the voice, videotaping in shadow) but do not guarantee a particular result.

- **THE FAILURE TO ADEQUATELY DISGUISE AN INTERVIEW SUBJECT OR A MISUNDERSTANDING OVER THE STEPS AGREED ON TO DISGUISE AN INTERVIEW SUBJECT CAN RESULT IN A LEGAL CLAIM AGAINST VOA.**
- **GENERALLY, WE WANT TO AVOID PROMISING ANONYMITY FOR PEOPLE TRYING TO EVADE LAW ENFORCEMENT.**
- **EXCEPTIONS SHOULD BE CLEARED WITH A SUPERVISOR, THE EDITOR FOR NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES AND/OR SENIOR MANAGEMENT AND THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL.**

[\(Also see Sourcing, p. 28\)](#)



### **“AMBUSH” INTERVIEWS**

So-called “ambush” interviews, where a person who has refused to be interviewed is approached without notice by a reporter or producer, are discouraged and should be avoided. An “ambush” is different than a “stakeout,” where cameras are set up in advance to get comments from individuals who are going to or leaving meetings and/or work.

**CONSULT WITH SUPERVISORS, THE EDITOR FOR NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES AND/OR SENIOR MANAGEMENT AND THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL WHEN CONSIDERING WHETHER TO DO AN AMBUSH INTERVIEW.**

### **ADVANCE SCRIPTS/SCREENING**

You should not show a script to a third party not affiliated with VOA or BBG in advance of the story’s broadcast or online publication. However, you can call an interviewee and review portions of a script in order to fact check. As part of the reporting process you may also show portions of other interviews or other footage prepared for the report to an interview subject to obtain their reaction or comment for use in the same report. You should videotape the individual watching the other interview or other footage whenever possible.

Advance screenings of VOA news stories are not permitted without the prior approval of senior management. An exception: press screenings for review purposes.

### **SUBJECT TAPING INTERVIEW**

On occasion, a subject may ask to do his or her own recording of an interview. That is permissible as long as the subject understands the taping is for personal use only, not for broadcast, publication or other distribution. As noted above, VOA will not provide an audio or video copy of the raw interview to an interview subject.

### **REQUESTS FOR UNAIED/UNPUBLISHED MATERIAL**

As a general policy, **VOA should not give third parties access to unaied or unpublished material** or discuss the existence of such materials. Refer those requests to senior management and the Office of General Counsel.

*(Also see [Usage Requests, p. 78](#))*

### **PAYMENT**

VOA does not pay people for interviews. However, it may be appropriate to pay certain travel-related expenses for an interviewee. Refer questions on this subject to VOA senior management and the Office of General Counsel.

### GUESTS

#### **NOTIFYING VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT OF HIGH-LEVEL GUESTS**

As a major international broadcaster, VOA often welcomes to the Cohen Building high-level foreign government officials and other important individuals, such as prominent dissidents and exiles. To better determine when additional protocols may be appropriate, VOA journalists who schedule these meetings or visits should immediately notify senior management through their chain of command. Division Directors will then notify the Programming Directorate using the email address [programming-directorate@voanews.com](mailto:programming-directorate@voanews.com) for coordination with the Office of the VOA Director. Decisions about any special actions that may be needed will be coordinated between the Office of the VOA Director and the CEO's Office. Notification at each stage should occur prior to the visit, with sufficient time for senior management to take any actions that may be necessary.

VOA journalists who schedule meetings at the Cohen Building with audience members, members of the diaspora, or lower-level government officials should also immediately notify their Division Director. That Division Director will then decide whether additional coordination within VOA and/or the CEO's Office is required.

#### **SECURITY PROCEDURES FOR GUESTS**

Security procedures for entry into the Cohen building are set by the Federal Protective Service (FPS), the agency that provides integrated security and law enforcement services to federally owned and leased facilities. FPS, not BBG Security, manages the contract for the building's Protective Security Officers (PSOs), thus they report to and are represented by the FPS Inspector.

As with other federal buildings, all visitors must show proper photo ID and go through security screening upon arrival.

**FOR PROGRAM GUESTS, THIS PROCESS CAN SEEM CUMBERSOME.  
CONSEQUENTLY, EMPLOYEES MUST EXPLAIN THE SECURITY PROCEDURES AND PHOTO ID  
REQUIREMENTS TO ALL PROGRAM GUESTS PRIOR TO THEIR ARRIVAL, AND ASK THAT THEY  
ANTICIPATE ABOUT 10 MINUTES FOR THE CHECK-IN PROCESS.**

Types of Accepted Identification:

1. U.S. Citizens: Valid U.S. Driver's License or U.S. Passport
2. Non-U.S. Citizens: Valid Passport/Visa

Please notify your guest/visitor that they will be required to process through security screening (walk-through magnetometer and x-ray machine for hand-carried items) prior to arrival.

If you are sponsoring an event, please provide BBG Security with a guest list that includes the date/time of their arrival, along with their full names and your contact information (Sponsor). Please remember that all visitors **MUST** be escorted while in the Cohen Building per FPS requirements. This list should be emailed to the central Security email at: [bbg-security@bbg.gov](mailto:bbg-security@bbg.gov).

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

In those rare cases when an important guest arrives without any ID, contact Security immediately so they can work with the FPS to request an exception to normal procedures and allow the guest entry into the building. Please understand that the final decision to waive normal security procedures for your guest rests with FPS, not BBG Security.

Exceptions to these procedures can be made in some cases for VIPs. VIPs are granted access without having to sign in or go through the metal detectors. Under some circumstances, they also enter the building through a different entry point than the C Street visitors' entrance.

The following are automatically considered VIPs:

1. The President and his cabinet, including sitting Ambassadors
2. Sitting and former members of Congress
3. Anyone who has a federal law enforcement detail, such as foreign dignitaries

For these and other special guests, employees can request VIP status from BBG Security managers or from the IBB Chief of Staff.

Please contact Security with any additional questions at 202-382-7777.

### **GUEST BOOKING PROCEDURES**

- ALL REQUESTS FOR THE PRESIDENT, VICE PRESIDENT, FIRST LADY AND THE VP'S SPOUSE WILL BE MADE THROUGH THE VOA DIRECTOR'S OFFICE. **THERE ARE ABSOLUTELY NO EXCEPTIONS**
- REQUESTS FOR OTHER WHITE HOUSE OFFICIALS, CABINET SECRETARIES, CONGRESSIONAL LEADERSHIP AND THE KEY BEATS SHOULD COME FROM THE NEWS CENTER CORRESPONDENTS AT THOSE BEATS.

### **THE CORRESPONDENTS ARE THE FACE OF VOA FOR THOSE BEATS AND WE CANNOT UNDERCUT THEIR POSITIONS**

EDUCATION	Kathleen Struck
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES	Katherine Gypson
IMMIGRATION	Molly McKitterick, Aline Barros, Victoria Macchi, Ramon Taylor
INTELLIGENCE/NATIONAL SECURITY	Jeff Seldin
JUSTICE	Masood Farivar
MEDICAL	Carol Pearson
PENTAGON	Carla Babb
POLITICS	Jim Malone
SENATE	Michael Bowman
STATE DEPARTMENT	Cindy Saine & Nike Ching
UNITED NATIONS	Margaret Besheer
WHITE HOUSE	Steve Herman & Patsy Widakuswara

These requests **SHOULD BE SENT FIRST** to the appropriate beat correspondent. When an interview has been confirmed, an e-mail should be sent to the Guest Booking group: [guest-booking@voanews.com](mailto:guest-booking@voanews.com)

- When we get an interview with the President, Vice President, First Lady, VP's spouse, key Cabinet secretaries or Congressional leadership, VOA Public Relations should be notified immediately: [PublicRelations@voanews.com](mailto:PublicRelations@voanews.com)

### **ADDITIONALLY: LARRY LONDON'S BEAT IS MUSIC AND PENELOPE POULOU'S BEAT IS FILM.**

If a Language Service is thinking of interviewing a major musician or musical group, or thinking of getting an interview with a film personality who is on a junket or making an appearance in a bureau city, **an advisory e-mail should go out first to Larry or Penelope accordingly, and to Guest Booking.**

By the same token, when Larry, Penelope or anyone else has a major music interview or movie-related interview scheduled, they should advise the Guest Booking e-mail group.

When there are major awards shows – usually in Los Angeles -- Mike O’Sullivan in the L.A. bureau should be brought into the conversation. As with State, Pentagon or elsewhere – it does not make VOA look good if a studio or a musician’s or filmmaker’s press person is hearing from multiple VOA individuals.

### **LANGUAGE SERVICES & NEWS CENTER GUIDELINES**

Language Services and the News Center should use the “Guest Booking” email group for notifications about the following types of information:

- Guests they intend to book, whether newsmakers or experts.
  - Should a Language Service seek an expert on a topic but has not yet identified the expert, it would still be helpful for Guest Booking to be notified of the Service’s interest in an expert on a specific topic.
  - Guests that have already been booked.
  - Unplanned interviews that were conducted in the course of newsgathering.
- Whenever possible, Language Services and the News Center should include whatever germane information is available in their guest booking notifications: details such as date and time if known, location of the interview, platform and device (Skype, smartphone, ENG camera, audio only), language, where content may be accessed, gist of interview, full log or transcript about what was said, if available.
- **The News Center will collect this information** and provide via email a several-times **daily calendar** that will track all known guest activity at-a-glance for all to see.
- This calendar will permanently reside in the shared drive for the whole how to easily access, thus serving as a back-up for the email distribution and providing an easily accessible archive of all guest activity.

When and where possible, stringers for the News Center and the Language Services should keep the field correspondents and/or Washington advised of potential interviews of interest.

**IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT ALL STAFF RESPONSIBLE FOR BOOKING GUESTS/INTERVIEWS SEND A NOTE TO GUEST BOOKING AND TO THE APPROPRIATE INDIVIDUALS BEFORE MAKING A REQUEST.**

### **HOSTING A GUEST ON VOA PROGRAMS**

- **IT IS MANDATORY** that a discussion takes place at the Language Service and/or Division level when a service is considering a live interview with a potentially controversial or hostile guest, or about particularly sensitive issues.
- The discussion should focus on determining the format for that interview, and the final decision about the format will be determined at the Division level.
- An interview with a controversial guest or about sensitive issues **SHOULD NOT BE PROMOTED** until the final decision on the interview format has been made.
- It may be decided that the best approach will be to **RECORD** the interview so that it can be edited for time and presented to the audience in the best editorial and production formats possible.
- **All potential guests must be pre-interviewed** to get a sense of what to expect during the actual interview. You can discuss general topics, but do not give the guest the actual interview questions in advance. That pre-interview should be available for review by producers, anchors and Language Service or Division management.
- When you know you're going to have a controversial or potentially hostile live guest, prepare a game plan with the show staff and the show Director about what to do if the interview goes downhill, so that everyone in the control room and on the set know in advance what to do, including implementation of a back-up plan.
- It is the responsibility of a program's host to do his/her homework about the guest and the subject matter. If a guest starts making unsubstantiated accusations or questionable statements, it is the responsibility of the anchor to challenge the guest about those accusations/statements, whether asking for clarification about the source of the accusations/statements or refuting those accusations/statements with facts.
- If a guest uses language that is unsuitable for air (cursing, insulting, racial or homosexual slurs, for example) it is the responsibility of the host to immediately cut the conversation off and apologize to the audience for the offensive language. It is the responsibility of the Executive Producer to alert the Director about what has happened so the Director can make sure the guest's microphone is silenced. At that point the EP must communicate to the Director and the Line Producer to implement a back-up plan.
- The Executive Producer is responsible for a written report of the incident. Detail the unacceptable or irresponsible language used by the guest, how the anchor handled the situation and what steps were taken to end the interview and go to alternate programming. The report is to be sent to the Service Chief, Division Director, Associate Director for Language Programming and the Associate Director for Operations.

- Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the Executive Producer to ensure that the program is clean and airs correctly. The anchor can only do so much. The EP has his/her finger on the button, so to speak, with the authority and ability to tell the Director and the Line Producer to go to something else. That's why you need to have a backup plan.

**GOING TO BLACK DURING A LIVE INTERVIEW IS A  
LAST DITCH OPTION, WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS.  
IT IS NEVER THE FIRST OPTION.**

[\*\(Also see Interviews, p. 36\)\*](#)

### **DIGITAL MEDIA**

#### **SOCIAL MEDIA**

VOA journalists are encouraged to participate in social media. By joining networks that are popular in your target regions you can forge closer relationships with your audience, discover new angles and stories and experiment with different ways of covering the news.

Reporters are encouraged to break news on social media platforms that are most popular in their region, but certain editorial priorities should be followed.

**REMEMBER THAT ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND OTHER PUBLIC SPACES,  
YOU ARE A JOURNALIST.**

**IT IS CRITICAL THAT YOU ARE FAIR, IMPARTIAL AND OBJECTIVE  
IN ALL PUBLIC SPACES.**

#### **PROTECTING YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL REPUTATION IN SOCIAL MEDIA**

Using social media can have as many pitfalls as pluses. If your account is hacked, or you find that an imposter account is impersonating you, your reputation and that of VOA can be damaged.

Your first line of defense – maintaining good online security practices.

- Monitor your digital identity by periodically conducting an online search for your name using several of the leading search engines, e.g. Google, Yahoo, Bing, etc. Examine the results on the first two or three pages to make sure there are no unfamiliar accounts.
- Use strong passwords (combining uppercase letters, lowercase letters, numbers, and special characters)
- Change passwords frequently
- Do not use the same passwords for multiple accounts
- Keep your passwords safe
- Make sure your email address is secure
- Be sure who you are actually connecting with or following; connect with Verified public profiles
- Get Verified for your own social media accounts used for VOA work

**Twitter:** Log in, then go to [verification.twitter.com](https://verification.twitter.com)

**Facebook:** Log in, then go to [this page](#) in Facebook's [Help Center](#)

The second option is to take images used for your profile picture and do a reverse image search, since impersonators will often use pictures you've posted online to create fake accounts. [This primer](#) from Google is a good place to start and will show you how to find all the places your pictures are showing up across the internet.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)



If you find or suspect problems with your accounts:

- Contact the Office of VOA Digital Strategy as soon as possible [voadigital@voanews.com](mailto:voadigital@voanews.com). They will work with the social media companies to help take care of hacks or imposter accounts.

To help prevent security problems, or once your account has been fixed, please follow these best practices for securing your account:

- Change your password
- Make sure your email address is secure
- Revoke connections to third-party applications
- Update your password in your trusted third-party applications

More details on these practices, and additional steps to protect your accounts:

- Twitter: <https://support.twitter.com/articles/31796>
- Facebook: [Keeping Your Account Secure](#) (part of the Facebook Help Center)

PEN America, the global group that ensures that people have the freedom to convey information and ideas, has created an [Online Harassment Field Manual](#) which may prove useful.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA AS REPORTING TOOL**

- **REPORTERS SHOULD QUICKLY FILE FOR VOA-OWNED PLATFORMS AFTER BREAKING NEWS ON SOCIAL MEDIA, PARTICULARLY FOR HIS OR HER SERVICE'S WEBSITE, BUT ALSO FOR RADIO AND TV WHEN APPROPRIATE.**
- **IF A VOA REPORTER/PRODUCER HAS A BREAKING STORY, HE OR SHE SHOULD BE THE ONE TO FIRST REPORT THAT ON THEIR OWN SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS OR ON THE SERVICE'S OFFICIAL ACCOUNT. DON'T BIG-FOOT YOUR COLLEAGUES.**

It's also important to remember that social media is more than Facebook and Twitter. Niche audiences often have their own niche social networks, like Sina Weibo in China or Orkut in India and Brazil. Get to know which ones are popular with your audience and experiment with them. Whatever your topic or medium, there's a probably a social network around it.

Reporting has always been about amplifying certain voices from the public. But rather than a list of carefully cultivated sources that reporters have traditionally relied upon, social media can present millions of competing voices that we must select from wisely. Whether you call it citizen journalism, user-generated content or social media, our readers often report and share news stories before we are able to verify the facts. While it's good to highlight those voices, it is critical to verify rumors before reporting them as facts.

There are techniques for confirming the validity of certain social media accounts, including examination of how long the account has been in existence, looking at the account's message history, and scrutiny of photo streams or other bits of the user's digital trail. If you have doubts, reach out to your service's or

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

## BEST PRACTICES GUIDE

division's social media lead for guidance. You must do your due diligence before relying on a source as credible. In other words, report the story.

**Do not retweet or pass along unconfirmed rumors without a clear indication that the information is not yet verified.**

For example: @VOANews Lots of reports and photos of this blast. Working to confirm RT @manonstreet Bomb in front of parliament. Hundreds dead!

**ADDING COMMENTS FROM SOCIAL MEDIA TO YOUR REPORTING IS ACCEPTABLE AS LONG AS YOU CLEARLY IDENTIFY THE SOURCE OF THE COMMENT AND IT REFLECTS AUDIENCE OPINION, SIMILAR TO A VOX POP IN RADIO OR TELEVISION.**

**MAKE SURE YOU BALANCE OPINIONS TO PROVIDE A FAIR PICTURE OF PUBLIC SENTIMENT, AND CONTEXTUALIZE THOSE OPINIONS WITH THE LARGER STORY.**

*(Also see [Fairness, Objectivity and Balance, p. 7](#))*

## OPINION

If you take a controversial position or make a controversial comment online it can reflect poorly on you and on the agency. It could lead our readers to believe that we are untrustworthy and unable to fairly cover a controversial story. VOA has spent 75 years building its reputation, and you have spent your career building yours. To keep that trust intact we must adhere to a high standard of objectivity.

This not only includes individual posts or tweets, but also posting your political affiliation or causes in your social media profile. Privacy policies change and people can take screenshots. Assume nothing is private in social media, even if your account is visible only to your online circle of friends.

In particular, retweeting or “liking” an opinion on one side of the issue or another could be seen as an endorsement from you or from VOA. If you want to put that comment in front of your followers, make sure it is clear you aren’t endorsing the opinion, but simply showing both sides of the conversation.

For example: @VOANews The budget fight continues RT @AngryPundit Why can’t Washington get its act together?

Don’t be afraid to engage with either side of a controversial issue. It is okay to follow or friend individuals or interest groups on either side of an issue. In fact, it should be part of the reporting process; paying attention to what both sides have to say is critical to getting as much information as possible on an issue. But never endorse only one side or the other by “liking” a cause or political figure, and make sure you follow all sides of an issue.

While personal endeavors on other sites are fine, they must not involve the use of agency materials, time or facilities, including information that is available to you because of your position at VOA.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### **MANAGING YOUR PROGRAM'S OR SERVICE'S SOCIAL PRESENCE**

VOA programs and services are encouraged to maintain official accounts on the major social media platforms in your region. These presences can help you engage with your current audience and reach new audiences with your content.

Before launching a new official social media presence, you and your service chief should answer the following questions:

- Who are you trying to reach and why is this the right way to reach them?
- Who is responsible for keeping each account active and how often?
- How will success be measured and who will track it?
- Does your branding align with the branding already established on your website?

You are also responsible for moderating the comments on your Facebook page, website, or agency blog to remove comments that violate our Terms of Use. In particular, you should be on the lookout for comments that are vulgar, racist or incite others to acts of violence. If you choose to respond to those comments, your replies should be professional and courteous. If the commenter continues to respond in a rude manner, you can report the individual to that site's staff and/or you can block the user from commenting. **DO NOT** engage in a debate with anyone who is trying to stir up anger and violence. Be aware that our spam filters sometimes fail; always be vigilant about shaping a lively and responsible conversation by removing comments that distract from the free and civil exchange of ideas.

### **POSTING VOA CONTENT TO OTHER SITES, INCLUDING YOUR OWN**

Uploading proprietary VOA or wire agency material directly to personal accounts is prohibited. Not only can you be held legally liable for posting photos or video that belongs to wire and newsfeed agencies, but you will hurt your service's ability to build an audience on official channels.

Instead, you should link to VOA material posted on your service's website or other official VOA accounts, like your service's official Facebook page or YouTube channel.

*Example:* Jack is a video editor in a VOA language service. He regularly combines wire service video and VOA video into packages for broadcast and web. He sometimes takes interesting video from APTN, as well as video he has shot, and uploads it directly to his personal YouTube channel and Facebook page. Is that permitted?

*Answer:* **No.** Jack should only upload VOA material to official VOA YouTube accounts. Once it's there, he can link to it from his personal YouTube account, Facebook or other channels.

*Example:* Jack embeds video from his service's VOA YouTube channel on his own YouTube page and shares VOA reporting with his friends on Facebook. Is this permitted?

*Answer:* **Yes.** Any material shared from your service's official, public-facing website, YouTube channel, or other official outlets is okay.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### **LINKING TO OTHER SITES**

You are encouraged to provide links that are relevant to story content and suitable for all audiences. Editors should exercise judgment and not use links that may be offensive, or in any way, inappropriate.

Linking does not constitute endorsement. While you should avoid pointing readers to anything that is an affront to common decency, you can link to the websites of institutions or causes if they are relevant to a story. If your link is to the site of a particular candidate or party please be even-handed: if you link to the website of one political party, you should be just as willing to link to the website of the opposition party, when relevant to the story. Failure to do so could not only call into question our objectivity; it could be a violation of the Hatch Act.

[\*\(Also see Political Activity, p. 10\)\*](#)

### **BE TRANSPARENT ABOUT YOUR MISTAKES**

Every news outlet makes mistakes. When a piece of reporting on your VOA website contains a factual error it should be corrected as quickly as possible. Talk to a senior editor in your service about what needs to be changed and place a correction at the bottom in italics that notes the original error.

Never delete a story or video from your VOA website without correcting and acknowledging the mistake. Not only will the incorrect story remain in the caches of major search engines, but your readers will believe that you are trying to cover something up instead of being honest and open. Full disclosure is always best.

While you should not delete incorrect stories or video from your site, you should use the content management system to remove it from major section fronts until it is corrected. The URL will continue to work, but will not be highlighted on the site.

[\*\(Also see Corrections, p. 89\)\*](#)

[\*Return to Table of Contents\*](#)

### **USER-GENERATED CONTENT**

Like all news organizations, VOA receives video, audio and photos from outside sources. The content may be sent for the purpose of showing an up-close look at a news event; to present a particular point of view; to cast a negative light on a government, an organization or individuals.

In all cases, VOA journalists must take every editorial precaution to ensure the legitimacy of the submissions before broadcasting them or publishing them:

- **CONTACT & IDENTIFICATION**

Reach out to individuals or groups who have posted material to verify that they are the owner of the work. Clearly identify yourself as a journalist when making inquiries about user-generated content.

- **NEWSWORTHINESS**

Is there a valid editorial reason to use video, audio or photos that we receive from an outside source? Does the user-generated content help to further inform our audience about an issue or incident?

- **MOTIVE**

Does the individual or group sending the material have an agenda? If VOA determines the content is agenda-driven and decides to air/publish the content, we should reveal why the material was submitted, and who submitted it.

- **REAL OR STAGED**

Can VOA confirm that the video, audio or photo is real? Or, can VOA determine whether the content is fake or staged, produced in the hope that VOA might air or publish it?

- **COPYCAT INCIDENTS**

Will the broadcasting or publication of the video/photos encourage others to create or produce similar content that in some cases could be life-threatening?

- **RIGHT TO PRIVACY**

Was the material recorded or photographed without the knowledge of the individuals involved? In other words, was the material recorded with a hidden camera or microphone?

- **HOW WILL THE CONTENT BE USED**

Should VOA receive sensitive or graphic content, follow the guidelines in the section on [Sensitive and Graphic Material, p. 18](#). In some cases it may be more appropriate for such material to be posted online only, where users can choose what they do or do not want to see or hear.

- **PERMISSION**

Once it's established the content is valid and its owner is identified, ask for permission to use the material. As always, VOA gives credit where credit is due, so the person who created the content should be identified accordingly; it is up to the individual or group whether to use real names or a website/social network username.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

- **PAYING FOR MATERIAL**

Other than our existing agreements with the news agencies and our freelancers, VOA does not pay for content. Please keep this in mind when dealing with user-generated content.

*(Also see [Payment, p. 39](#))*

- **DISCLAIMERS**

We must always tell our audiences when we are airing or publishing user-generated content. In addition, we should tell our audiences that while we have checked for the legitimacy of the material, we cannot absolutely verify the content. As with all of VOA's reporting, transparency is key.

[Follow this link to a useful at-your-desk tool for verifying user-generated content.](#)

It provides various case studies that can easily be applied to potential UGC situations at VOA.

If you are uncertain about using photos or video taken from social media, please see the guidance on copyright and fair use in the [Legal Issues](#) section of this Guide, or e-mail the Office of General Counsel at [copyrightclearances@bbg.gov](mailto:copyrightclearances@bbg.gov).

**AUDIO, VIDEO OR PHOTOS THAT ARE FREELY AVAILABLE**  
**ON THE INTERNET DOES NOT MEAN THEY ARE IN**  
**THE “PUBLIC DOMAIN.”**

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### YOUTUBE GUIDELINES

- **YOUTUBE VIDEOS ARE NOT A PRIMARY MEANS OF ACCESSING AND USING B-ROLL FOR A VIDEO PACKAGE. ALWAYS CHECK THE ABC NEWSONE, AFP, APTN AND REUTERS FOLDERS IN DALETPLUS AND THEIR ONLINE SITES FIRST. IF NECESSARY, CONTACT THE SENIOR ARCHIVISTS ([SENIOR-ARCHIVISTS@VOANEWS.COM](mailto:SENIOR-ARCHIVISTS@VOANEWS.COM)) FOR ASSISTANCE.**
- **THE VOA VIDEO LIBRARY ([VIDEO-LIBRARY@VOANEWS.COM](mailto:VIDEO-LIBRARY@VOANEWS.COM)) HAS EXTENSIVE FILE VIDEO AVAILABLE; ALWAYS CHECK THERE BEFORE RELYING ON YOUTUBE FOR FILE VIDEO NEEDS.**
- **USE CAUTION AND COMMON SENSE AND AVOID USING VIDEOS FROM YOUTUBE THAT MAY VIOLATE SOMEONE'S COPYRIGHT. WHEN IN DOUBT, PLEASE CONTACT THE EDITOR FOR NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES FOR GUIDANCE.**

Although YouTube is the most popular site for video, similar rules apply to other sites, such as Vimeo and VEVO.

Use of YouTube videos should be cleared through the Editor for News Standards & Best Practices. The video can be used full-screen as long as credits, chyron information and other on-screen information is not obscured or deleted.

The actual YouTube logo **MUST** be burned into the video and remain on-screen throughout the clip:



YouTube should also be credited in narration: "In this video posted on YouTube..." or something similar.

YouTube has a blurring tool that lets you blur any part of a video, including moving objects. Details on how to use the tool are here:

<https://youtube-creators.googleblog.com/2016/02/blur-moving-objects-in-your-video-with.html>

[\*\(Also see Sensitive & Graphic Material, p. 18\)\*](#)



### AUDIO

**The audio from a YouTube video cannot be stripped from the video.** YouTube's Terms of Service stipulate that embedded content cannot be manipulated or downloaded for use away from [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com).

**In addition, YouTube – as well as Facebook -- takes audio copyright very seriously.** If you add music to a video that doesn't come from one of VOA's free music accounts – Firstcom.com, Dewolfemusic.com, Apmmusic.com or Audioblocks.com -- your video will likely be taken down from the site, and **after three "copyright strikes," your account will be terminated—and you'll be barred from creating a new account.**

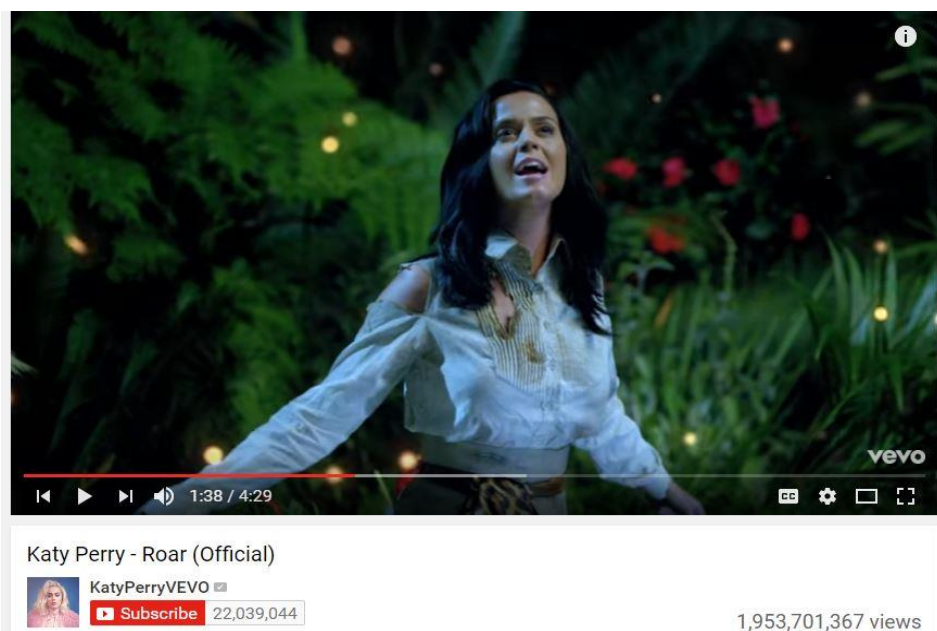
While we can always attempt to make a fair use claim for audio clips, it is highly recommended that you rely on the free music sites that are available.

[\(Also see Music, p. 62\)](#)

### EMBEDDING

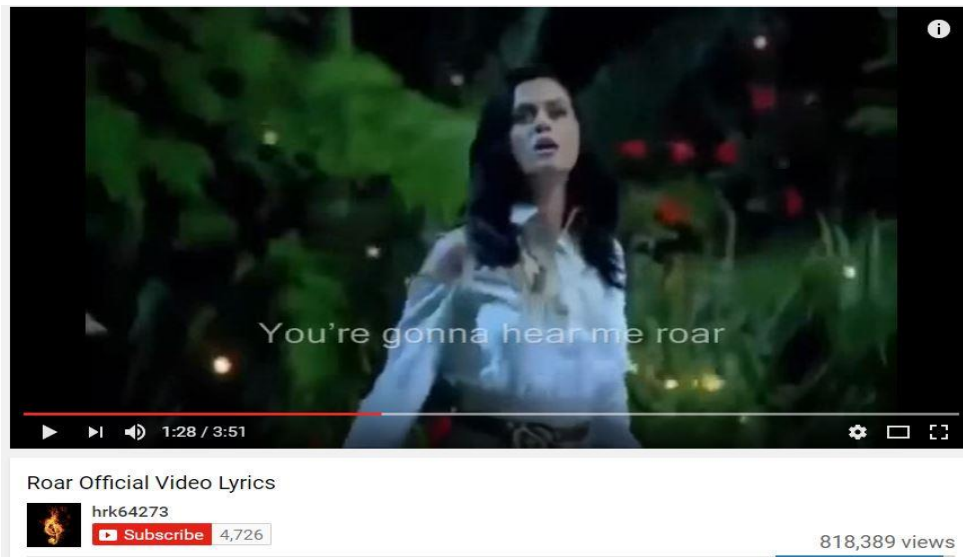
Embedded video is effectively just a link; no copy of the video is being stored on your server. Therefore, you may use embedded video on VOA websites. However, you should still use caution and common sense and avoid posting videos that may violate someone's copyright. In particular, do not post videos that contain music, movies or television broadcasts unless those videos are posted on the official YouTube channel of the copyright holder. Many movie studios and music companies allow you to take embed code for trailers or video clips directly from their main site. In those cases, it's much easier to tell that you're using an official video when it's on the company website.

On this page is the official version of Katy Perry's music video of "Roar" posted on YouTube by VEVO, an entertainment consortium of music producers. On the next page is the exact same song, and although it also says "official," it is clearly a fan upload. The first is okay for use; the second is not.



[Return to Table of Contents](#)





**YOUTUBE MAKES NO REPRESENTATIONS ABOUT THE  
ACCURACY, USEFULNESS, SAFETY OR INTELLECTUAL  
PROPERTY RIGHTS OF CONTENT APPEARING ON ITS SITE**

### **GOOGLE EARTH GUIDELINES**

VOA has rights to use Google Earth for the following VOA products:

- Television programs (including promotional ads)
- DVDs and video on demand
- Any long-form video products, including documentaries
- Printed materials

Google Earth can be used to create fly-throughs, locator maps, or basic illustrations of cities or geographic features.

**We are required to credit Google Earth with an unobstructed graphic module that clearly shows that the content is provided by Google and, when applicable, a third-party data provider.** [This example](#) from CNN shows how it should be done.

Please work with your EP and Graphics person to make sure Google Earth is clearly credited for any usage.

Also, any Google Maps/Google Earth images used must reflect how they would look online. For example, you are not allowed to make any changes (delete, blur, etc.) to these products that would make them look different than in the actual product.

Because it is a standalone software package, IT will need to install Google Earth on your computer.

### **REVEALING WEBSITES AND ADDRESSES**

In most cases, websites are not considered in the public domain for purposes of publishing pictures of them. They fall under the same fair use guidelines as other copyrighted material. If you have questions about whether you can show a website, please contact the Office of General Counsel.

Generally, website addresses can be revealed, as long as they are not for sites which promote criminal behavior or contain pornography. Avoid showing website addresses if it might be construed as a commercial for the site. Exceptions would include educational or informational sites, or charitable sites raising money for victims of a natural disaster.

When reporting on political campaigns, include links to the websites of the candidates mentioned in the piece. ([Also see Political Activity, p.10](#))

### **AFFILIATE/RECIPROCAL LINKS**

Reciprocal links to affiliate websites are permitted, under the following guidelines:

- The decision to establish an online affiliation should reflect the same editorial considerations that go into establishing a broadcast affiliation – including credibility, reputation, trust and audience reach.
- VOA Language Services should consider the total number of affiliates when determining the placement of reciprocal links. A service that has a small number of large, reputable partners is justified in establishing front-page reciprocal links. A service that has dozens of broadcasting affiliates should create an Affiliates page where they may all be listed. Each situation must be considered separately. It may be appropriate to have a homepage reciprocal link with a major web portal that is a primary news source in the language, and a separate Affiliate page with reciprocal links to broadcasting affiliates.
- Affiliate logos or text links may be used to establish reciprocal links, as appropriate.
- Reciprocal links should be reviewed on a regular basis, and VOA must reserve the right to remove the link at any time, if the affiliation ends or the target site no longer reflects the editorial integrity under which the relationship was established.
- Terms of Use must include a disclaimer that “VOA is not responsible for the content of external websites.”

If you have questions about these guidelines, please contact Matthew Baise ([mbaise@voanews.com](mailto:mbaise@voanews.com)) or Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com)).

### PHOTOGRAPHS

Photographs add a great deal to VOA stories and are necessary to give the audience a fuller experience and understanding of VOA reports. While VOA has wire services and other sources for photographs, original content taken by VOA reporters and staff is always useful.

Keep in mind that some stories will have no wire photos available so it is particularly useful for the reporter to shoot a few photos while doing the story.

The photo contracts for AFP, AP and Reuters are administered by Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com), x4276). When there is a question about news agency photos, please contact Steve.

### GENERAL RULES

- The goal of images is to enhance the readers' understanding of the story – and make it look better on the web. Take photos that add to your story, and submit as many as you can so editors can decide which are best.
- Show the people, places and things that you talk about in your stories - If you emphasize a place or interview a person get a picture. If you cover a demonstration, show the protest signs or faces of the people. However, be aware that minors may be present at demonstrations, and you should use good judgment in photographing them in those situations.  
(Also see [Interviewing & Videotaping Minors, p. 24](#) and [Filming in Public vs. Private Places, p. 95](#))
- Get close up to your subject if you can. Take photos from different perspectives and distances.
- Make sure your subject is clear, focused, and lit as well as possible.
- Always send in the largest file size possible. Photo and web editors can crop as needed and warranted.
- Headshots are good. Also try to get images of the subject in their environment and in action.
- Remember the [rule of thirds](#).
- [Shoot landscape \(horizontal\) instead of portrait](#). Landscape photos look better on social media and in Pangea. That means turning your phone 90 degrees when taking the photo.

### **EDITING PHOTOGRAPHS**

VOA allows for the adjustment of photos for brightness, contrast and color.

However, VOA **does not permit** altering a photograph in any way that changes the meaning of the photo. This includes adding or subtracting elements to create a scene that is not an accurate representation of what was originally shot.

While it's OK to crop a photo, that should not change the meaning of the photo; for instance, cropping a photo that may leave out a key individual in the story.

### **CLOSELY EXAMINE DIGITAL PICTURES FROM OUTSIDE SOURCES TO ENSURE THAT THOSE IMAGES HAVE NOT BEEN ALTERED.**

### **PHOTO ILLUSTRATIONS**

When creating a photo to illustrate an idea, whether in the camera or using Photoshop or a similar program, the reader must always be informed that the image is a photo illustration and not a standard news image. This should be done either with a caption or in a tagline.

### **TECHNICAL TIPS**

- Use your flash to balance out the light - If you are outside on a sunny day and you are shooting in the shade use your flash to fill heavy shadows if needed. If you are indoors and taking an image of someone in front of a window use your flash.
- Don't shoot portraits with the sun or bright light behind your subject unless you are using a flash to fill the light.
- Be careful of using a flash in front of glass or a mirror - The flash will bounce back into the lens. If you have to do this don't shoot straight on toward the glass, try to shoot at an angle to the glass.
- Be careful of microphones - Try to get a clear shot of the person without a microphone in front of their face

### **SENDING PHOTO FILES**

Always email your service and [CentralNewsWebMedia@voanews.com](mailto:CentralNewsWebMedia@voanews.com) when submitting photos.

Always include who is paying for the photos and if they are available for use by the house. Always include caption info.

Photos can be submitted via email, any photo sharing service such as flickr or Picasa, or via ftp.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### **CAPTIONS/CREDITS**

Reporters and producers in the field must supply the captions for your photos. Caption info is:

- Who, what, when and where.
- Credit – who took the photo.
- Keep captions short and clear – photo and web editors will often rewrite and edit them.

VOA's caption style is the same when crediting staff and stringers: **John Doe/VOA**

VOA's photo contracts with AP and Reuters allow us to use their photos on all VOAnews.com websites. At this time, AFP's photos can be used only on the English voanews.com site.

It is **MANDATORY** that **ALL** news agency photos be given proper credit, as seen in the example below:

[\*\(Also see Crediting the News Agencies, p. 34\)\*](#)



U.S. Vice President Mike Pence speaks during an Easter fellowship dinner at a military base in Seoul, South Korea, April 16, 2017.

Credits are also required for photos from other sources, including other news organizations, NGOs, a business or a social media post. Social media posts should include the social media site and the name of the person who took the photo. For example:

CBS News

Pew Research Center

Instagram/JohnSmith

Twitter/@JohnQSmith

Facebook/John Smith

Some public domain images also require a credit, such as the White House, State Department, Defense Department, Library of Congress and National Archives.

[\(Also see Attribution, p. 30\)](#)

### MUSIC

#### **GENERAL GUIDELINES**

The Music Library serves as the resource and research center for VOA programs containing music. Not only does the library catalog music, it also provides a historical and educational setting for producers and broadcasters to research various sources relating to music: biographies, event-driven materials, periodicals, almanacs, encyclopedias, etc.

The Music Library database currently contains a variety of musical recordings dating as far back as the 1930s. The database is catalogued by album titles, song titles, artists, and record company names/numbers. You can contact the Music Library at [Music-Library-Staff@voanews.com](mailto:Music-Library-Staff@voanews.com).

In addition, the Music Library has free accounts available to all VOA staff for four online production music sites:

Firstcom.com

Dewolfmusic.com

Apmmusic.com

Audioblocks.com

**Please contact Vincent Bonner at [vbon@voanews.com](mailto:vbon@voanews.com) to get an account opened with one or all of these sites.**

Generally, the agency's music rights apply to radio programming. However, if the music is used in a transformative way in a VOA video piece – to highlight Prince's virtuosity on guitar in a 15 second edit, for instance – that could be considered a fair use.

#### **SOCIAL MEDIA & MUSIC**

Many of you have asked if we can use popular music on our social media accounts. **WE CANNOT.**

Popular music from the VOA Music Library can only be used for radio broadcasts, and is not to be used for any posts on social media, including any simulcasts or live streaming.

#### **VOA DOES NOT HAVE THE RIGHTS TO DISTRIBUTE POPULAR MUSIC ON ANY DIGITAL PLATFORM, INCLUDING SOCIAL MEDIA.**

Popular music includes Top 40, rock, jazz, pop, soul, jazz, reggae, country, folk, rap, dance music, etc.

**You can, however, use production music on all digital platforms, including social media sites.**

The Music Library hours are 7:15am until 5:00pm (Monday-Friday), the telephone number is 202-382-7395.

(Also see [YouTube Guidelines, p. 53](#) and [Ambient Music, p. 93](#))

[Return to Table of Contents](#)



### AUDIO USAGE RIGHTS

These guidelines **DO NOT APPLY** to the video news feeds that VOA subscribes to. Please see the next section for that information.

Some of the news organizations listed in this section have given VOA blanket permission to use audio excerpts from some of their news programs. These permissions should be respected. Requests to use audio not covered by listed blanket clearances should be sent to Steven Springer, ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com)), the Contracting Officer's Representative (COR) for VOA's contracts with the news agencies.

### AUDIO CLIPS FROM TV NETWORKS

VOA has had longstanding permission to use the voices of the persons being interviewed on network news programs.

VOA should use the following credit in the radio script for all programs: "As reported on [Network and program name]," or equivalent language giving credit to the appropriate news organization.

While we will always claim fair use for relevant audio excerpts, there are a few exceptions, listed below.

#### ABC NEWS

**DO NOT** use the voices of any ABC News anchors, correspondents, reporters, commentators and stringers.

- ***This Week*** – VOA has received permission to record the entire Sunday talk show to use content of particular interest to our audiences. However, with this permission there are some restrictions listed below:
  - We are authorized to excerpt up to two (2) minutes of the program.
  - Material may be posted on VOA's websites only if it is part of a VOA television program or video package.
  - Use of ABC talent should be kept to a minimum in the story. This is the **ONLY** exemption to the restriction on using ABC News talent in VOA programming.
  - Excerpted material cannot be used after three (3) days and the *This Week* program cannot be archived for future use.
  - This permission is **ONLY** for *This Week*.

**AUDIO-ONLY USAGE FROM ALL OTHER ABC NEWS  
OR ENTERTAINMENT PROGRAMS MUST BE CLEARED PRIOR TO USE.**

### **CBS NEWS**

**DO NOT USE** the voices of **ANY** CBS News employees, including anchors, reporters, correspondents, commentators or stringers.

**WE DO NOT HAVE PERMISSION TO USE ANY CBS NEWS AUDIO CLIPS  
ON VOANEWS.COM OR ON ANY OTHER VOA WEB PRESENCE.**

### **CNN**

VOA has no overall agreement with CNN for use of audio clips, but we will claim editorial “fair use” as necessary on a case-by-case basis.

### **FOX NEWS CHANNEL**

VOA has permission to excerpt for radio no more than 3 minutes of audio from the *Fox News Sunday* broadcast. VOA must credit *Fox News Sunday*.

**ALL OTHER FOX TV PROGRAMS MUST BE CLEARED PRIOR TO USE.  
FOX DOES NOT ALLOW ANY OF ITS MATERIAL TO BE REBROADCAST OVERSEAS.**

### **NBC NEWS, MSNBC & CNBC**

VOA has blanket permission to use audio excerpts from *The Today Show*, *Meet the Press* and *NBC Nightly News*. All news specials, documentaries and other special programming must be cleared prior to use. There is no restriction on the use of NBC correspondents’ voices, but use of NBC correspondent reports is limited to U.S datelines. VOA does **NOT** have clearance to use audio actualities from any CNBC programs.

### **VIDEO USAGE RIGHTS**

VOA has contracts with three different video newsfeed providers: Agence France Press (AFP), Associated Press (AP) and Reuters. We receive video from ABC NewsOne through our contract with AP. Each contract is unique and stands on its own.

Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com), x4276) is the Contracting Officer's Representative (COR) for the newsfeeds. Oscar Rodriguez at OCB is the Alternate COR ([orodriguez@bbg.gov](mailto:orodriguez@bbg.gov), 305-437-7159). The Media Asset Management Branch assists in administering and facilitating use of the video and audio newsfeeds. The MAM Branch Chief, Pam Commerford, ([pcommerford@voanews.com](mailto:pcommerford@voanews.com), x7124) also contacts the providers and clears use of specific items.

### **BEFORE USING ANY VIDEO, IT IS THE PRODUCER'S RESPONSIBILITY TO REVIEW THE NEWSFEED SCRIPT SOURCE INFORMATION TO CHECK FOR RIGHTS RESTRICTIONS**

### **COMMON FEATURES – ALL NEWSFEEDS**

Newsfeed scripts for the video stories are provided as basic information for our own script writing, and **do not** constitute a separate element. In other words, **newsfeed scripts cannot be used on the Web as a text-only story**. However, the information contained in video scripts can be used within a VOA story when they are combined with pertinent information from other news sources and follow VOA's sourcing guidelines.

### **RIGHTS RESTRICTIONS**

We have negotiated the rights of use with each provider to broadcast and publish our stories containing newsfeed material on TV, radio and internet. Restriction statements vary from provider to provider and cover different ground; the most common restrictions are described on the following pages.

Restrictions are usually listed near the top of the script, but also appear above specific items in the script when necessary. VOA must adhere to rights restrictions as listed in the associated scripts and we must pay attention to the source of the video. Our providers send stories in which the video may come from a variety of sources, from FIFA to ESPN to handout video to other broadcasters and awards programs. The restrictions listed reflect the rules of both the source organization and the newsfeed providers.

Since all VOA programming is available on the web, newsfeed items marked **NO ACCESS INTERNET** or **NO WEB** means the video/audio cannot be used at all, unless permission is granted by the newsfeed provider. Reuters, however, has a special requirement regarding our streaming shows, so please see the Reuters page for details. Please contact Pam or Steve if you need help with this.

You may see some variation of the following restrictions, regardless of the provider, on all the feeds:

- **TIME-LIMITED USAGE**  
You will often see limited windows of usage on stories, especially for entertainment and sports programs. Footage must be pulled off the web by the date and time listed in the script info or in advisories MAM has posted in e-mail.
- **MANDATORY COURTESY**  
When noted in the script the courtesy must appear on-screen in TV and web stories, and an audible courtesy must be used on radio.
- **NO LIBRARY / NO ARCHIVE**  
Items with this restriction should be deleted soon after use. This material is available in the DaletPlus production system for up to thirty days and is then purged. Using video labeled **NO LIBRARY** or **NO ARCHIVE** after its initial broadcast or web posting puts our contracts in jeopardy.

### USING VIDEO FROM TV NETWORKS

- We **DO NOT** have blanket permission from ABC, CBS, CNN, FOX or NBC (including MSNBC and CNBC) to record and use clips from their newscasts or weekend talk shows. The only exception is ABC's ***This Week*** program (see next page).
- All soundbites from the other networks' weekend talk shows should be taken from our regular agency newsfeeds. However, we must follow whatever restrictions the networks place on the usage of those clips.
- There are times when we will claim "fair use" for a network news video clip that has not been fed on an agency newsfeed, but you must contact Steve to get clearance. If necessary, Steve or Pam will consult with the General Counsel's office regarding any potential legal considerations.  
[\(Also see Copyright and Fair Use, p. 93\)](#)

### **ABC NEWS**

ABC News and ABC TV Entertainment programs' on-air talent **cannot** be used. This includes shots of the back of heads, cutaways, walking shots, standups, or anything else that may show those individuals.

#### **THIS WEEK**

- VOA is authorized to excerpt up to two (2) minutes of ***This Week***.
- Material from ***This Week*** may be posted on VOA's websites only if it is part of a VOA television program.
- Material excerpted from ***This Week*** cannot be used after three (3) days and the ***This Week*** program cannot be archived for future use.
- **THIS PERMISSION IS ONLY FOR ABC'S *THIS WEEK* PROGRAM.**

#### **ABC NEWSONE**

- VOA receives material daily from the ABC News affiliate service NewsOne. As noted above, VOA cannot use on-camera talent; this applies to anchors, show hosts and reporters, whether for ABC Network or an ABC affiliate station.
- When an ABC item is listed as **PACKAGE ONLY**, it generally means that VOA must run the package as fed by NewsOne. Pam or Steve can contact NewsOne to see if that restriction can be lifted.
- **NO EXCERPTING** is similar to PACKAGE ONLY, in that we cannot lift individual sequences or shots out of a package. The wording may be "No Excerpting Package," "No Excerpting [specific video]." Please contact Pam or Steve to see whether the No Excerpting restriction can be lifted.
- **NO RETRACKING** generally means that VOA cannot translate, summarize, adapt or otherwise make the piece shorter or longer. Please contact Pam or Steve to see whether the No Retracking restriction can be lifted.
- **NNS** is a news-sharing cooperative between ABC News and other news organizations. VOA is cleared to use all video that is marked as NNS.
- Use of all ABC standard graphics must be addressed on a case-by-case basis and users must contact Pam or Steve to seek permission before using.
- 3D graphics can be used **only if the entire package is used. There are no exceptions.**
- If a story is marked **ABC AFFILIATES ONLY**, VOA is cleared to use it. However, if a story is marked **ABC AFFILIATES ONLY, NO INTERNATIONAL CLIENTS**, please contact Pam or Steve to get clearance for use.

**NO INTERNET USE OF ANY COLLEGIATE AND PROFESSIONAL  
SPORTS VIDEO FED BY ABC NewsONE!**

**NO USE ON ANY PLATFORM OF ABC NEWS OR  
ABC ENTERTAINMENT PROMOS!**

### **AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE (AFP)**

VOA has clearance to use all AFP video unless otherwise noted below.

#### **EXAMPLES OF AFP RESTRICTIONS**

- **Source: NNIS**  
**Restrictions: \*NO RESALE FOR NON-EDITORIAL PURPOSES\***  
VOA broadcast purposes are EDITORIAL, therefore we are clear to use items with this statement. In addition, VOA must version content for our audiences before broadcasting or posting it online.
- **Source: PARLIAMENTARY RECORDING UNIT (British Parliament)**  
**Restrictions: NO RESALE FOR NON-EDITORIAL PURPOSES / NOT FOR USE IN ENTERTAINMENT OR POLITICAL SATIRE PROGRAMMES**  
VOA is clear to use items with this restriction, but not in a satirical, Daily Show-type production.

#### **WEB-RELATED RESTRICTION STATEMENTS**

- **NO WEB USE or NO AFP WEB** - Stories carrying either of these restrictions cannot be used on any VOA websites.
- **NO ENGLISH OR SPANISH WEB** - VOA English and Spanish **CANNOT** post the video to their websites, but all other VOA language services CAN post the video to their websites.

#### **CBS NEWS VIDEO**

- Some AFP items may carry the multiple restrictions listed below, which normally indicates the video comes from CBS News. AFP regularly feeds CBS News video, and we are working with AFP to clarify the restrictions regarding VOA's use of CBS material. In the case of these restrictions, VOA CAN use the video.  
**NO RESALE FOR NON-EDITORIAL PURPOSES**  
**NO JAPAN**  
**NO FREE OVER-THE-AIR BROADCASTERS IN AUSTRALIA, NO U.S. CABLE OUTLETS, FREE OVER-THE-AIR NETWORKS OR STATIONS, THEIR WEBSITES AND THEIR MOBIEL PHONE SERVICES.**

#### **SOCIAL MEDIA SITES**

- VOA can post on its social media pages AFP video that is contained within VOA-produced TV packages. It is also OK to use AFP material in programs which are broadcast and streamed on VOA webpages.
- **VOA CANNOT post raw or live AFP video on any of its social media pages.**

If you have questions about using restricted video fed by AFP, please contact Pam or Steve to see if the restrictions can be lifted.

### **ASSOCIATED PRESS (APTN)**

- **APTN Clients Only** – VOA is able to use all stories with this restriction
- **Horizons clients and AP Lifestyle, Health and Technology clients Only** – VOA subscribes to these categories and can use any story that carries this restriction.
- **SNTV Clients** - VOA has unlimited use of stories with this restriction, as long as SNTV is the “Original Provider” or “Source” of the video. You will know these stories are SNTV stories, because “SNTV clients only” will be stated somewhere in the rights restrictions section of the script.

However, if the “Original Provider” is a third party, such as *FIFA, IOC, Tennis Properties Ltd., TAF Sports, Dorna*, etc., you must follow the restrictions listed within the “Rights Restrictions” section of script.

- **Check Script For Details** – VOA can use stories with this restriction, but you must follow specific restrictions within the script if there are film clips/music videos.
- **NO ACCESS IRAN AND NO ACCESS VOA PERSIAN TV**  
VOA Persian cannot use APTN stories shot in and sent from Iran. This includes ALL video of Iran, even when the restriction isn’t noted on the script and includes video previously received that we have in the Video Library and the VOA Persian video server.  
NOTE: The stories restricted to the Persian Service can be used by the News Center and the other Language Services.
- **OTHER RESTRICTIONS**  
VOA can use stories that have restrictions to other geographic regions. For example, stories marked No Access Russia or No Access Indonesia can be used by those Language Services as well as all other VOA services.

However, non-regional restrictions, such as No Access Internet, must be followed. Sometimes permission will be granted; in those cases please contact Pam or Steve to gain clearance.

- **ABC Talent on APTN-fed stories:** On occasion, APTN will feed an ABC story. ABC talent cannot be used.  
([Also see ABC News, p. 67](#))



### **REUTERS**

- Most Reuters videos are listed as **NO RIGHTS RESTRICTIONS** or the restriction listed is as **NONE**; those stories can be used across all platforms at any time.
- If a Reuters video is marked **FOR EDITORIAL USE ONLY**, we can use it.
- Reuters videos may sometimes be marked **NO MOBILE USE**. VOA has clearance to use these videos on our Internet and mobile platforms. Please contact Steve or Pam if you have questions about NO MOBILE USE restrictions.
- **NO ACCESS USA/CNN/YAHOO/AOL/WIRELESS**  
Stories with this restriction generally originate from NBC News and cannot be used by VOA

**VOA DOES NOT HAVE CONTRACTUAL RIGHTS TO USE NBC CONTENT. PLEASE BE DILIGENT ABOUT CONFIRMING THE SOURCE AND DO NOT USE NBC CONTENT. THIS INCLUDES CONTENT FROM CNBC AND MSNBC.**

**IF THERE IS A STRONG EDITORIAL REASON TO USE NBC NEWS OR NBC AFFILIATE MATERIAL – AND SIMILAR MATERIAL CANNOT BE FOUND ON THE OTHER NEWSFEEDS – PLEASE CONTACT STEVE OR PAM TO SEE WHETHER WE CAN GET CLEARANCE TO USE THE VIDEO.**

- **RESTRICTED POOL** - The five U.S. news networks -- ABC, CBS, CNN, FOX and NBC – shoot video daily that is designated Pool material. In most cases, Restricted Pool applies to domestic and overseas coverage of the president, and in election seasons, coverage of presidential candidates.  
**VOA CAN USE THIS RESTRICTED POOL VIDEO.**

**However, VOA cannot use Restricted Pool video of the vice president, First Lady, VP's spouse, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense or other Cabinet members.**

It is strongly recommended that you call Steve or Pam if there is any uncertainty about the Restricted Pool designation of a video.

- **Sports items will often be heavily restricted.** Many have **NO ARCHIVE** restrictions, very often 48 hours but also 15 days or a specific date. As a rule, golf, tennis, cricket and motorcycling are heavily restricted. Stories about U.S. hockey (NHL) can be used until the end of the current hockey season. Soccer matches are often restricted, but we can use video of soccer practice / press conferences.

- Video shot in the UK often carries this restriction:  
**ITN COPYRIGHT: TV: NO ACCESS ALL DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL CHANNELS DISTRIBUTED IN UK & EIRE ON SKY/VIRGIN/FREEVIEW; BBC/BSKYB GROUP: NO ACCESS WORLDWIDE ANY MEDIA; INTERNET: NO ACCESS.CO.UK WEB SITES AND ALL WEBSITES PRINCIPALLY TARGETED AT THE UK AND/OR EIRE; MOBILE: NO ACCESS WORLDWIDE; NO USE AFTER 30 DAYS FROM DATE FIRST USED ON ALL PLATFORMS.**

This is an extremely targeted restriction statement and it is recommended to call Steve or Pam for guidance. Typically we parse the statement to find the relevant info, and call for clearance or clarification when necessary. In this example, “MOBILE: NO ACCESS WORLDWIDE” is the relevant statement we’d need to decipher.

- **NO ACCESS IRAN AND NO ACCESS VOA PERSIAN NEWS NETWORK**  
VOA Persian **cannot** use Reuters material filmed in or sent from Iran, whether shot by Reuters or the national networks. However, stories received at VOA prior to June 9, 2010 are OK to use – for now – even if a restriction is listed.  
NOTE: The stories restricted to the Persian Service **can be used** by the News Center and the other Language Services.
- **OTHER RESTRICTIONS**  
VOA **can** use stories that have restrictions to other geographic regions. For example, stories with No Access Russia or No Access Indonesia can be used by those Language Services as well as all other VOA services.

However, non-regional restrictions, such as No Access Internet, must be followed. Sometimes permission will be granted; in those cases please contact Pam or Steve to gain clearance.

### **THE RESTRICTIONS OF ANY OF OUR VIDEO PROVIDERS CAN CHANGE AT ANY TIME**

**IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS,  
PLEASE CONTACT STEVE OR PAM**

### **NEWSMARKET**

Newsmarket ([www.thenewsmarket.com](http://www.thenewsmarket.com)) is an online provider of video. Although the site has a lot of available material, there are a number of guidelines that VOA must follow in order to use the video.

- You must be an employee or contractor working with VOA and use your work e-mail (@voanews.com) to access the site. Pam Commerford ([pcommerford@voanews.com](mailto:pcommerford@voanews.com)), chief of the Media Asset Management Branch has done pre-registration for many employees; if you need to establish an account, please contact Pam.
- Keep your password confidential; it is for your use only.
- Registered users are responsible for searching images and **ensuring that no costs are associated with the material. If costs are required, funding must come from your Language Service or Division.** The Office of Information Services will **NOT** pay for material acquired from Newsmarket.
- The VOA producer or Language Service is responsible for obtaining the terms and conditions of use of the material. Newsmarket makes no claims about the accuracy of the content on its website, so producers must be sure to exercise VOA journalistic standards in the choice and use of material.
- Credit must be given for content used and **logos or copyrighted images cannot be changed or obscured.**
- You must use the content for editorial purposes only.
- You **cannot** store the original content for future use. The content from Newsmarket must be deleted from your workspace when you are finished with your initial use. Should you need the content again, you can go back to the website and re-capture it.
- **The material that you use in a VOA story or program can and will be archived;** there is no restriction on this material.
- The content incorporated in your stories and shows can be distributed on all VOA platforms.
- **The Office of Cuba Broadcasting (OCB) is included in this agreement, meaning that VOA and OCB ONLY can share material that is acquired from Newsmarket.**

### RESTRICTIONS

- You cannot provide unedited content to other organizations, **including the BBG grantees RFE/RL, RFA and Alhurra.**
- You cannot use the Newsmarket logo or trademark in a way other than how it is presented in your story.
- You cannot use any technology to monitor, copy or deep link with Newsmarket.

Assets are brought into DaletPlus to the NEWSMARKET folder: INCOMING FEEDS > NEWSMARKET. Associated metadata needs to be added to the Asset Manager Form (AMF), include source information, and **a VOA DOT added to the video.**

[\(Also see Domestic Distribution of VOA Content, p. 78\)](#)

Example of Newsmarket info to add to AMF in DaletPlus:



US Distribution:	<input type="checkbox"/> All Clear	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Restricted
Footage Sources:	<input type="checkbox"/> APTN	<input type="checkbox"/> ABC NEWSONE
Feed Provider:	thenewsmarket.com	
Source Comments:		
Origin of Video:	Source: NATO TV ]	
Background Wires:		

**US Distribution:** Rights of use do not extend beyond VOA's use, so US DISTRIBUTION should be marked RESTRICTED.

**Footage Sources:** OTHER should be selected.

**Feed Provider:** thenewsmarket.com

**Origin of Video:** Indicate the owner of the source video. In the example, it's NATO TV.

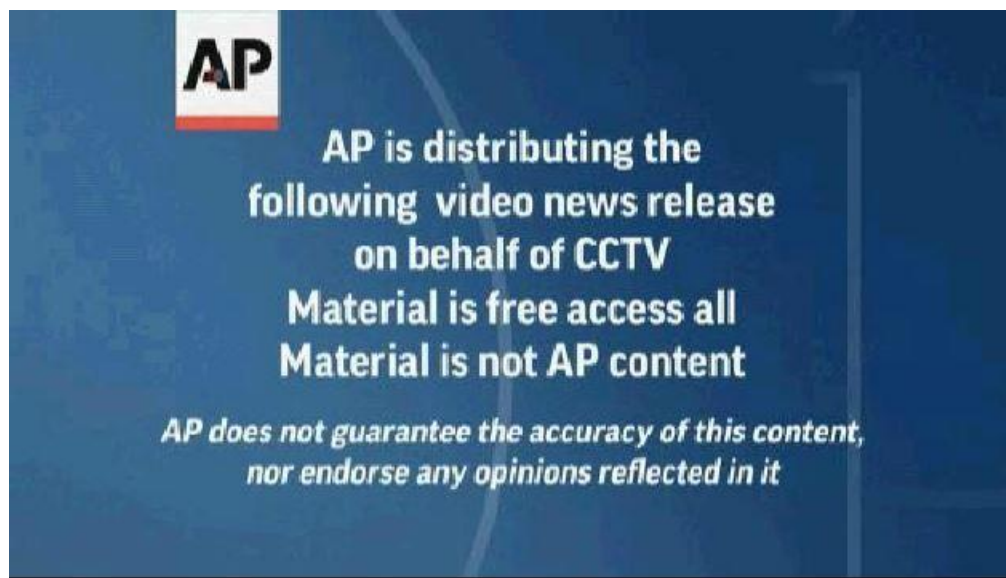
All questions regarding registration on [Newsmarket](#) and the use of its material should go to Pam Commerford ([pcommerford@voanews.com](mailto:pcommerford@voanews.com), 202-382-7124)

### **USING CONTENT FROM STATE-RUN MEDIA**

Any country's official news agency is a valid single source **when referring to government policy or news events in that country**. In these cases VOA must identify the news agency in its copy.

Note the distinction, **in that country**. For example, a report by China's official news agency about North Korea may not be a valid single source.

In addition, VOA's newsfeed providers AP and Reuters have agreements in place to distribute material provided by CCTV, Chinese State Television. AP includes a disclaimer for all CCTV material, as seen in this screen grab:



Reuters does not provide a video disclaimer for CCTV material, but this notice appears at the bottom of every script Reuters provides from CCTV:

**© Copyright CCTV. The content in this story, including video and script is provided by China Central Television (CCTV) and is copyright CCTV. Thomson Reuters does not guarantee the accuracy of, or endorse the views or opinions given in, this package. THIS STATEMENT SUPERSEDES ALL OTHER STATEMENTS RELATING TO COPYRIGHT ATTACHED TO THIS CONTENT.**

While the video that CCTV and other state-controlled media outlets like RT or Press TV produces often comes from areas where coverage is otherwise unavailable, VOA policy for using content provided by state-controlled media is that it should be reviewed by senior editors in a service, by the News Center or by the agency's Editor for News Standards & Best Practices before any decision is made about airing or publishing the video.

State-run media material that is cleared for broadcast or for use on the web **MUST** include proper credit to that news organization and the disclaimer that VOA cannot confirm the accuracy of the material. For video usage, the on-screen credit should be either: "From CCTV" or "CCTV Video." This guidance is the same for material received from RT or Press TV or similar state-run media outlets.

It is understood that there may be times when we would want to use the video, such as when it's the only known video of a major news event or if we're comparing how VOA and other news organizations cover stories.

**HOWEVER, ANY USE OF STATE-RUN MEDIA VIDEO SHOULD BE DONE WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF A LARGER PACKAGE THAT IS BEING PRODUCED BY THE NEWS CENTER OR A LANGUAGE SERVICE.**

**WE SHOULD NOT RUN A FULL PACKAGE FROM CCTV, RT, PRESS TV  
OR ANOTHER STATE-RUN OUTLET SIMPLY BECAUSE WE HAVE IT AVAILABLE.**

*(Also see [Video Usage Rights, p. 65](#))*

### VIDEO NEWS RELEASES (VNRs)

A video news release (VNR) is a video segment made to look like a news report, but is instead created by a public relations firm, advertising agency, marketing firm, corporation, or even by a government agency. VNRs are produced with the aim of shaping public opinion, promoting commercial products and services, publicizing individuals or supporting other interests.

VNRs may include interviews with experts (who may be paid by the company or ad agency for their appearance in the VNR); man on the street interviews that may be done with professional actors; and pictures of corporate logos to support the product or brand being promoted.

Although we occasionally receive VNRs from APTN and Reuters that does not make them any more legitimate for use by VOA.

There may be times when material from a VNR is appropriate for **excerpting** in a video package.

#### **Example #1**

If the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York discovers a new treatment for prostate cancer and the Center provides a video of its research work, VOA can, and should, use some of that video to illustrate the story.

- The script must say the video was provided by the Center, and there must be a visual credit to the Center as well.

#### **Example #2**

Apple unveils the latest version of the iPhone and sends out a VNR showing the latest changes in the phone and how it operates. VOA can use some of the video to illustrate its story.

- The script must say the video was provided by Apple, and there must be a visual credit to Apple as well.

Please keep in mind, however, that as with fair use of video, all instances of whether to use material from a VNR will not be the same, so always check first with Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com)) or Pam Commerford ([pcommerford@voanews.com](mailto:pcommerford@voanews.com)).

### **VOA SHOULD NEVER AIR A VIDEO NEWS RELEASE IN ITS ENTIRETY**

More detailed information about feeds and rights can be found in Rights Usage Guidelines Presentation and the Video Newsfeed Guide found on the [Media Asset Management Branch \(MAM\) page on Sharepoint](#).

### **DOMESTIC DISTRIBUTION OF VOA CONTENT**

- **THE SMITH-MUNDT RESTRICTIONS APPLY TO DISTRIBUTION OF VOA CONTENT & PROGRAMMING WITHIN THE UNITED STATES.**
- **THEY DO NOT IN ANY WAY IMPACT VOA'S COVERAGE OF NEWS STORIES. VOA IS FULLY AUTHORIZED AND EXPECTED TO COVER STORIES IN THE U.S. FOR DISTRIBUTION TO FOREIGN AUDIENCES OVERSEAS.**

### **USAGE REQUESTS**

The law authorizes individuals and organizations to request VOA content. From time to time, VOA staff may receive requests for **one-time** use of VOA content, or the request may be for **ongoing use** of VOA programming. These requests could come from U.S.-based media organizations, diaspora media outlets, overseas media outlets, or from educational institutions.

### **VOA STAFF SHOULD NOT RESPOND DIRECTLY TO REQUESTS**

Instead, they should do as follows:

- Requests for **one-time use** of VOA original content should be directed to this online form: [https://www.bbg.gov/networks/content-requests/voa/?4mailto\\_id=1](https://www.bbg.gov/networks/content-requests/voa/?4mailto_id=1)
- Requests for **ongoing use of VOA programming** should be sent to [affiliates@bbg.gov](mailto:affiliates@bbg.gov). The BBG Marketing Office reviews those requests.
- **UNAIED OR UNPUBLISHED ORIGINAL VOA MATERIAL SHOULD NOT BE SHARED.**  
Please forward those requests to VOA senior management, the News Standards & Best Practices Editor and the Office of General Counsel.  
[\(Also see Requests for Unaired/Unpublished Material, p. 39 and VOA Firewall, p. 91\)](#)

If you have questions about usage requests, please email [Usage-Requests@vopanews.com](mailto:Usage-Requests@vopanews.com).



### **TALKING ABOUT VOA CONTENT & PROGRAMMING**

The Smith-Mundt Act forbids VOA personnel to attempt to develop audiences within the United States. The funds which BBG and thus VOA receive are only authorized to create and distribute news and information to “foreign audiences abroad,” and the law requires VOA to ensure that VOA does not distribute content & programming with the intent of influencing “public opinion in the United States.”

If you attend a journalism or media conference such as NAB, EIJ, ONA, NABJ, NAHJ, SAJA, or attend an event at the National Press Club, and someone from a domestic U.S. news organization asks you about VOA’s work, you can freely talk about the content we produce every day. Nothing in Smith-Mundt prevents that.

### **VOA STAFF SHOULD NOT ATTEMPT TO MAKE A DIRECT OFFER OF VOA CONTENT TO ANY DOMESTIC NEWS OUTLET.**

### **IN ADDITION, VOA STAFF CANNOT SPEND ANY ADVERTISING OR OTHER FUNDS TO SPECIFICALLY TARGET OR DEVELOP AUDIENCES IN THE U.S.**

### **VIOLATION OF THIS RULE AND/OR OTHER PROVISIONS OF THE SMITH MUNDT ACT WILL RESULT IN THE TERMINATION OF YOUR AD BUDGET AND THE LOSS OF ADMINISTRATIVE ACCESS TO YOUR SERVICE’S SOCIAL ACCOUNTS.**

### **THIS IS IN ADDITION TO ANY OTHER ACTIONS THAT MAY BE AUTHORIZED TO BE TAKEN AGAINST INDIVIDUALS VIOLATING THE RULE.**

### **TOWN HALLS, FORUMS, AND OTHER SUCH EVENTS; PARTNERSHIPS; AND ACTIVITIES TO SUPPORT THE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF HIGH QUALITY JOURNALISTS**

VOA journalists or other staff may host or play a role in Town Halls or related events if the purpose of the event is to engage overseas audiences.

In line with efforts to adhere to the highest standards of broadcast journalism, there may be times, subject to any required approvals, that VOA journalists appear as subject matters experts in other news outlets. This may be allowed if the purpose is to benefit VOA and thus the agency by either facilitating development of new sources of information, enhancing VOA's credibility, and/or contributing to the recruitment or retention of high-caliber journalists. In other cases, the purpose may be to disseminate VOA content overseas as part of an arrangement with another news organization.

Agency leadership may be able to engage in certain partnership arrangements if the purpose is to enhance the quality or distribution of BBG content to foreign audiences overseas. Such partnerships must be reviewed and approved on a case-by-case basis

Please clear such events in advance with VOA leadership, who should consult with the Office of General Counsel.

### **SUMMARY**

Smith-Mundt allows us to:

- Provide materials upon request
- Engage in certain partnerships
- Provide opportunities for exposure for our journalists to enhance retention and recruitment; etc.

It **does not** prevent us from using the internet and social media to distribute our products to audiences overseas just because people in the U.S. might also see the material.

These exceptions do not allow VOA to attempt to target audiences in the United States. Ultimately, **if** it looks like the intent is to subvert the rules – i.e. **if the BBG goal is to influence U.S. opinion, or otherwise develop audiences within the United States** -- then the activity is prohibited.

### DOCUMENTING SOURCE VIDEO IN DALETPLUS

To be able to share our broadcast programs with U.S. requestors, we must be able to identify non-VOA content, including that provided by our newsfeed suppliers, ABC NewsOne, AFP, APTN and Reuters, in the stories and programs we air.

Everyone who creates a story or program using DaletPlus must take time to enter source info in the Asset Manager Form (AMF). The **Source Info** module is the third section on the AMF form. The example below is an example of source info in an AMF of a story, showing the kind of information expected when available. (Plus signs at the end of each field allow additional space for more info.)



**U.S. Distribution:** A quick reference field to indicate whether the story is cleared for fulfilling a request from a U.S. requestor. If your story or program master is entirely VOA original, **All Clear** should be check-marked. If it has non-VOA content (ABC NewsOne, AFP, APTN or Reuters) **Restricted** will be checked. **This means that some clips will have to be cleared for US distribution.** The default is **DO NOT Distribute**.

**Footage Sources:** A quick way to note the feeds that are included in the story or program master. For **program masters**, the archive liaison may use “select all” for news programs, if in assembling the program the service uses all of our content providers. For **VOA stories**, the producer will need to be specific, so the searcher knows how involved tracking down the sources may be.

**Feed Provider:** A free text field to note specifically the story slug /date and source of vendor-provided clips used in a story. When a U.S. request is being filled, this information will allow the requestor to contact the appropriate newsfeed source to obtain clearance to use the video in the United States.

**Source Comments:** Can be used to further clarify use if necessary / possible.

**Origin of video:** To be used when video is different from the newsfeed source itself; for example, video from YouTube. This field should be used for story AMFs, rather than for use for program master AMFs.

Please e-mail questions or concerns to [senior-archivists@voanews.com](mailto:senior-archivists@voanews.com). You may also call the Video Library’s point person on this project, Bojan Klima at 382-5510.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### **NEWS AGENCY IDs & THE DOT**

Incoming video from AFP, AP and Reuters are stamped with the ID of each news agency.

ABC NewsOne will continue to be stamped with the Dot.

### **THE IDs AND THE DOT INDICATE THAT THE STAMPED MATERIAL CANNOT BE SHARED WITH OR USED BY ANY VOA DOMESTIC CLIENTS OR REQUESTORS.**

The IDs and the Dot appear in the **UPPER LEFT** of the frame **AND CANNOT BE OBSCURED.**

- **IF A SERVICE INCLUDES NEWS AGENCY VIDEO IN ITS PACKAGES, PROGRAMS OR SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS, PLEASE MAKE SURE THE AGENCY ID OR THE DOT IS ALWAYS VISIBLE.**
- **THIS IS THE ONLY WAY WE CAN GUARANTEE THAT NON-VOA VIDEO WILL BE PROPERLY NOTED AND AVAILABLE FOR EASY REFERENCE DURING A VIDEO ASSESSMENT.**
- **ALL VIDEO DOWNLOADED FROM THE ABC NEWSONE, AFPFORUM, AP VIDEO HUB AND REUTERS CONNECT WEBSITES MUST HAVE THE PROPER ID ADDED TO THE VIDEO.**
- **IF YOU INSERT THE WRONG AGENCY ID YOU CANNOT RE-INSERT ANOTHER ID. YOU WILL HAVE TO START THE PROCESS OVER.**

This is how the agency IDs and the dot appear on incoming feeds:



- ABC, AFP, AP AND REUTERS VIDEO IN THE VOA LIBRARY PRIOR TO JULY 3, 2013 DOES NOT HAVE THE AGENCY IDs OR THE DOT EMBEDDED IN THE VIDEO. THEREFORE, ALL ABC, AFP, AP OR REUTERS LIBRARY VIDEO PRIOR TO 7/3/13 MUST HAVE THE PROPER AGENCY ID OR DOT ADDED TO THE VIDEO.
- IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE REPORTER, PRODUCER AND/OR VIDEO EDITOR TO ENSURE THAT THE PROPER AGENCY ID OR DOT IS ADDED TO THE EDITED MATERIAL.
- EXISTING FILE FOOTAGE THAT ALREADY HAS THE DOT DOES NOT NEED TO BE RE-STAMPED WITH AN AGENCY ID.

### **THE DOT MUST BE ADDED TO CLIPS PRIOR TO 7/3/13 FROM THESE SOURCES**

- IRINN
- Journal of American Medicine (JAMA)
- NewsMarket
- UNIFEEDS (United Nations video)
- Other Acquired Material:
  - From VOA Acquisitions Branch
  - Obtained by VOA Reporters
  - Obtained from a Third Party

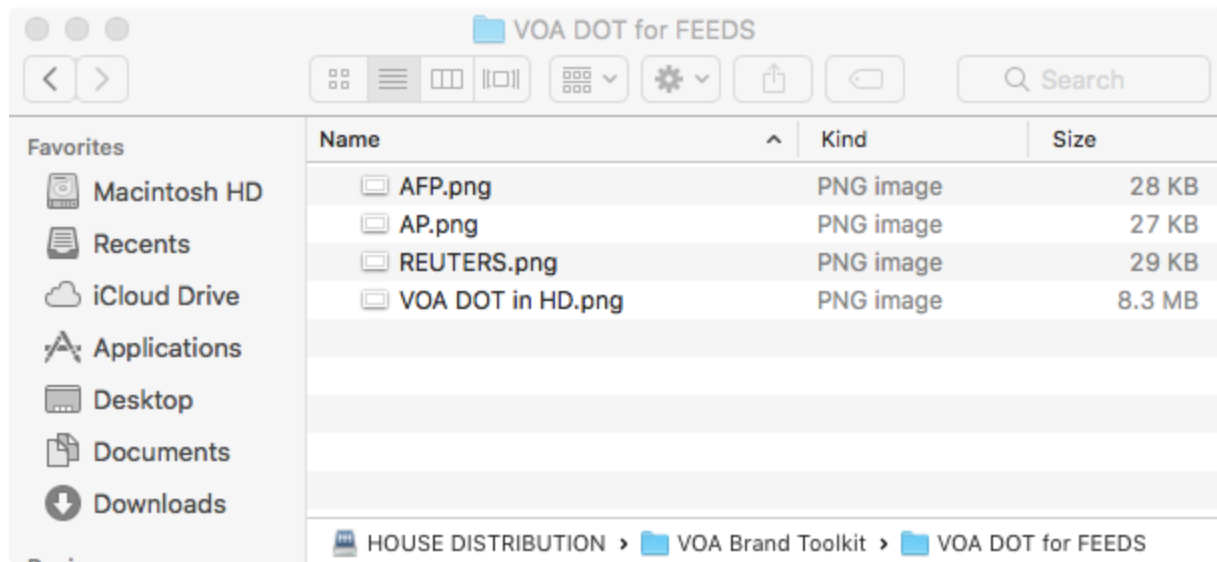
### **THESE SOURCES PRIOR TO 7/3/13 DO NOT REQUIRE THE DOT OR OTHER ID**

- VOA Original Footage
- House Recording Studio (Including hearings and news conferences)
- NASA
- Pentagon
- Senate Recording Studio (Including hearings and news conferences)
- State Department
- White House

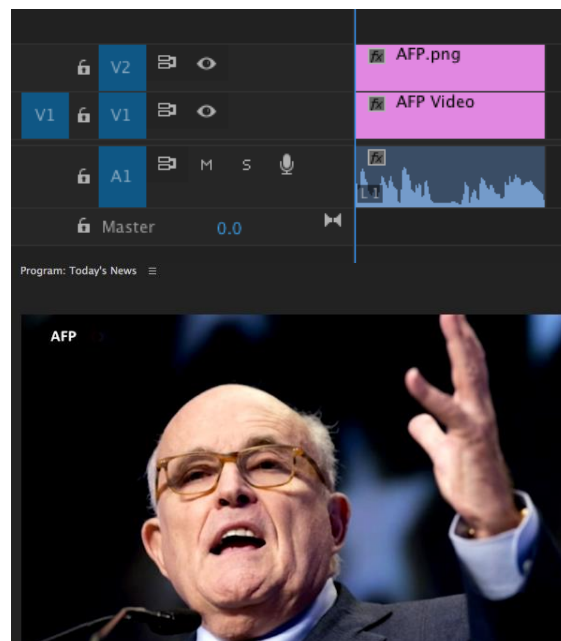
### **ADDING AN AGENCY ID/DOT IN PREMIERE PRO**

In order to add the news agency IDs or the Dot to your video in Premiere, you will first need to import the graphic files.

They are located at: [\\voa\\_creative\HOUSE DISTRIBUTION\VOA Brand Toolkit\VOA DOT for FEEDS](\\voa_creative\HOUSE DISTRIBUTION\VOA Brand Toolkit\VOA DOT for FEEDS)



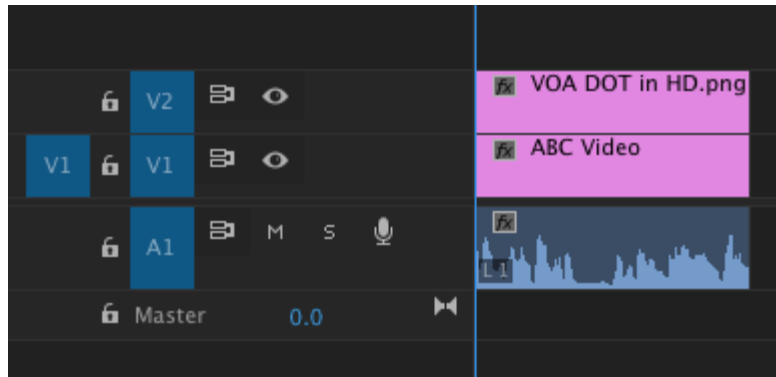
Import the needed files into Premiere and drag them to a video track above your footage. The graphic files will automatically key themselves over the video with their built in alpha channels.





## BEST PRACTICES GUIDE

Use the **VOA DOT in HD.png** file for ABC News video:





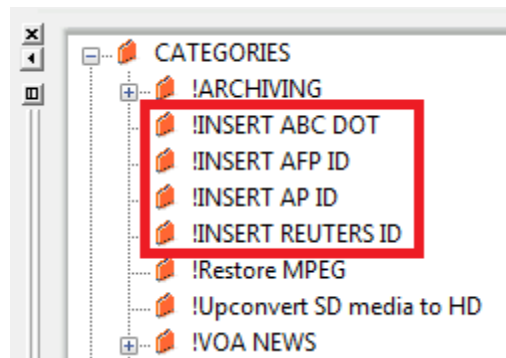
## ADDING AN AGENCY ID/DOT IN DALETPLUS

**THE DROP FOLDER PROCESS WILL REPLACE THE ORIGINAL VIDEO.**

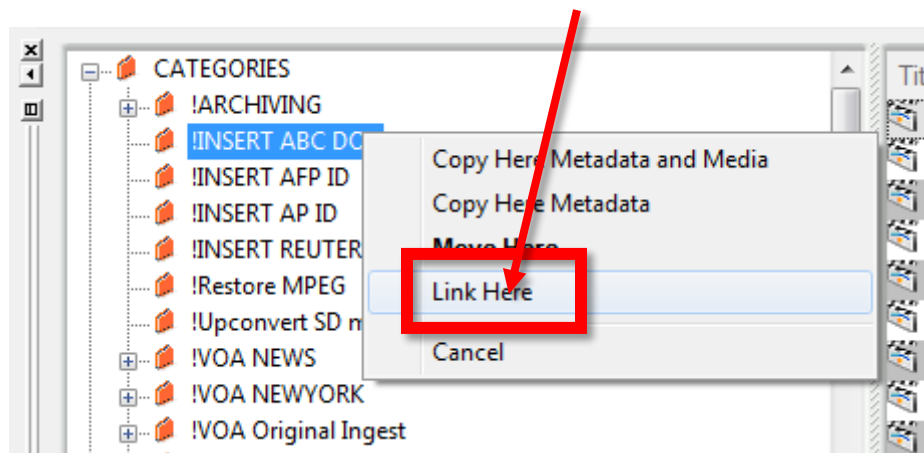
**IT CANNOT BE UNDONE.**

**BE SURE THE VIDEO IS LINKED TO THE CORRECT FOLDER!**

Dalet users will find drop folders towards the top of the CATEGORIES folder. There is a folder for each of the newsfeeds.



Locate the footage in Dalet that needs the bug. Right mouse click, hold and drag the video to the appropriate folder, and release the mouse button. Choose **Link Here**.



## BEST PRACTICES GUIDE

The video will begin rendering and the original video will be replaced with the video and the bug. While the video is processing, the status will change to OFC (Out for Conversion). This process usually takes a few minutes. The Clapboard Icon will first show a 'Red X' followed by a 'Red Circle'.

When the status changes back to 'NEW' and the Clapboard Icon is clear, the process is complete and you can view your video with the selected bug burned into the upper left corner.



**DO NOT VIEW OR USE THE VIDEO UNTIL THE CONVERSION PROCESS IS COMPLETE  
AND THE VIDEO IS BACK ONLINE!**

Once finished, the original video will have the appropriate agency ID or dot burned into it.

This link takes you to the video tutorial version of these instructions: [Agency ID & Dot Video Tutorial](#)

**THE VOA DOT MUST BE ADDED TO CERTAIN PROPRIETARY VIDEO!**  
**SEE LIST ON PAGE 84**

**IF THERE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT WHETHER TO ADD  
THE DOT TO OLDER LIBRARY VIDEO, PLEASE CONTACT  
STEVEN SPRINGER ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com))  
OR PAM COMMERFORD ([pcommerford@voanews.com](mailto:pcommerford@voanews.com))**

### CORRECTIONS

VOA's reputation and credibility are the hallmarks of the organization. The News Center and the Language Services produce news content, programming and services across many platforms and under daily deadline pressures. While our goal is always to be accurate and fair, occasionally we will present incorrect or inaccurate information. A meaningful policy for correcting significant errors will strengthen our trust with viewers, listeners and readers. As such, these errors will be corrected in a clear and timely manner, with appropriate prominence.

#### TV & RADIO BROADCASTS

If we make a mistake that needs correcting, we should do so as quickly as possible while the same show is on the air. If the error is not detected immediately, then preferably the correction should be aired on the same program in which the original error occurred, whether it's the following day or week. Make a point to say "On \_\_\_\_\_ day (state the day and date and time), we erred in our reporting..." then go on to explain what we said that was wrong, make the correction and close by saying, "Voice of America regrets the error."

#### VOA WEBSITES

If the error is a simple typo that does not change facts or understanding of the story, we consider it a minor change and simply correct it without further mention. If the error is substantive or one of fact, we change it, add an asterisk (\*), then a note at the bottom saying when it was corrected and what was wrong originally.

#### SOCIAL MEDIA PAGES

**Facebook:** Correcting an error on Facebook should follow the same procedure as on voanews.com websites. Update/edit the Facebook post and explain why the information was corrected.

**Twitter:** A good method for correcting an error on Twitter is to **subtweet** the correction. On the next page you'll see how *Slate* handled posting the wrong photo (actor Javier Bardem) when tweeting about Vladimir Putin.

The correction begins "@Slate CORRECTION:" so that *Slate* is replying to its own original tweet. The result is that anyone viewing the original tweet can see the correction in the stream of replies. Equally important, it refers to the photo without showing it again.

People viewing the correction tweet on its own can also see it is part of a conversation linked to the original, offending tweet.

**NOTE:** If you reply to yourself, then anyone who follows you will see the reply. So in terms of who can see the correction, it's just as good as sending it as a normal tweet.



### **LEGAL ISSUES**

This section provides brief introductions to various areas of the law that may apply to VOA journalists. These guidelines provide an overview to certain areas of the law and are not a substitute for a legal opinion from the Office of General Counsel (OGC). Please contact OGC when you have a specific legal question.

#### **VOA FIREWALL**

The “firewall” exists to maintain the credibility of reporting by U.S. international broadcasters. The firewall is violated whenever another U.S. government agency or a U.S. government official tries to influence our work by putting undue pressure on a VOA journalist or on the agency itself or takes any other action that may undermine the journalistic credibility or independence of VOA journalists. This protection arises from numerous provisions of the International Broadcasting Act (IBA), the Agency’s governing statute.

#### **WHAT COULD RESULT IN A FIREWALL VIOLATION**

- A firewall violation would likely be a U.S. ambassador or other State Department personnel demanding that you not air a particular interview or that you give a specific slant to a VOA news story.
- If a federal official from outside of VOA or from another federal agency asks you to use your access/position as a journalist to gather or provide information on their behalf, that would appear to be a firewall violation.
- Firewall violations could also occur when someone outside of VOA takes actions that directly intrude on VOA’s professional independence and interferes with news coverage. If a directive from outside the newsroom, including from the BBG, is imposed which you think impermissibly restricts your ability to objectively report the news, or otherwise act in a manner inconsistent with the best practices of professional journalism, please notify your Service Chief and Division Director immediately.
- A direct request from non-VOA personnel to the News Center or a Language Service for your notes or unpublished recordings of video or audio may be a firewall violation. Those requests must immediately be directed to the VOA Director and the General Counsel’s Office.

**UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES SHOULD A VOA EMPLOYEE OR CONTRACTOR TURN OVER UNAired OR UNPUBLISHED NEWS COVERAGE TO ANY THIRD PARTY WITHOUT FIRST CONSULTING WITH VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT.**

### **WHAT IS NOT A FIREWALL VIOLATION**

The firewall should not discourage VOA journalists from interviewing government officials or USG officials from appearing on VOA programs. It is critical to ensuring that VOA journalists and editors make the final decisions on what stories to cover and how they are covered.

Should a third party, such as a court, law enforcement agency, or other person or organization request that VOA turn over reporters' notes or unpublished content through appropriate legal authority -- such as a court order or Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request -- that is not a firewall violation. However, **immediately** turn the request over to your Service Chief, Division Director, or to the VOA Director's Office. (For FOIA requests, please coordinate through VOA's designated FOIA point of contact.)

A supervisor or editor who asks for relevant editorial script or video changes in a story is not committing a firewall violation. That is part of the everyday nature of journalism.

Finally, the firewall does not start or stop at one specific point in the agency. It exists across the entire BBG and VOA. It is important that staff not only reports up the chain of command when other government officials or agencies approach VOA, **but that leadership communicates challenges to VOA's reporting down the chain** so that it's clear to editors that coverage has been called into question and the journalistic reasoning behind any corrective actions.

**IF YOU BELIEVE THAT A FIREWALL VIOLATION HAS OCCURRED,  
NOTIFY YOUR SERVICE CHIEF AND DIVISION DIRECTOR  
IMMEDIATELY.**

**IF YOU BELIEVE YOUR IMMEDIATE SUPERVISOR HAS ENGAGED IN A  
FIREWALL VIOLATION PLEASE DISCUSS THE ISSUE WITH THE EDITOR  
OF NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES.**

### **COPYRIGHT & FAIR USE**

Copyright is a form of protection provided by U.S. law to the authors of original artistic works. Artistic works include photographs, video, audio, music, motion pictures, commercials, written products, as well as footage from other news broadcasters. You should not use a copyrighted work unless (1) you have permission to use, whether via VOA's contracts (such as VOA's video feed or photo contracts) or another negotiated license agreement, or (2) your use of the work falls under the "fair use" doctrine.

#### **FAIR USE**

Determining whether use of copyrighted material is a **fair use** requires a balancing of four factors: (1) the purpose and character of your use; (2) the nature of the copyrighted work; (3) the amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole; and (4) the effect of the use upon the potential market for the copyrighted work. Application of these factors and the fair use doctrine is highly fact-specific and requires a case-by-case analysis.

A use of a copyrighted work is more likely to be a fair use if the material is directly relevant to a news story and the excerpt used is no longer than necessary to achieve the intended purpose. On the other hand, the use of copyrighted material such as a music clip simply to enhance the production value of a television package, for example, is not likely to be a fair use. Keep in mind that just because a video or audio clip is newsworthy does not automatically make VOA's use of it fair. [A Fair Use Self-Help Guide](#) with Frequently Asked Questions is available on the agency's Sharepoint site.

*(Also see [YouTube Guidelines, p. 53](#), [Music, p. 62](#), [Audio Usage Rights, p. 63](#) and [Video Usage Rights, p. 65](#))*

#### **AMBIENT MUSIC**

Generally, there is no copyright issue where music is naturally appearing in the background during an interview or taped event. There may be, however, a copyright issue if the music is incorporated into a news or feature report in other than its incidental form.

*(Also see [YouTube Guidelines, p. 53](#) and [Music, p. 62](#))*

#### **PUBLIC DOMAIN**

Copyright restrictions do not apply to works in the public domain, which include most U.S. federal government works, such as photos, maps, or video found on [whitehouse.gov](http://whitehouse.gov), [state.gov](http://state.gov), [nasa.gov](http://nasa.gov), [cia.gov](http://cia.gov), and other government websites. Be sure to check the Copyright or Terms of Use/Terms of Service pages of these and other websites before using any content.

A work is also in the public domain if it is no longer under copyright protection. This depends on when and where the work was first published, but generally speaking, works published in the U.S. before 1923 are in the public domain. Contact OGC for specific questions about older works or copyright terms in foreign jurisdictions.

### LICENSED MATERIAL

VOA has several license agreements with third parties to use their copyrighted material. The terms of these agreements govern use of the material provided by the licenses, notwithstanding the applicability of the fair use doctrine. When using material from one of VOA's feed providers, such as ABC NewsOne, AFP, APTN and Reuters, for example, you must check all restrictions that may limit the story's use. Questions about the video feeds should be directed to the COR, Steven Springer, and to VOA Media Asset Management Branch at [Senior-Archivists@voanews.com](mailto:Senior-Archivists@voanews.com).

*(Also see [Video Usage Rights, p. 65](#))*

### REQUESTING PERMISSION

Because fair use can sometimes be difficult to determine with certainty, VOA producers are strongly encouraged to seek permission to use copyrighted material from the rightful copyright owner. You should start the process of identifying and contacting the owner of copyrighted content as early in your production process as possible, since it may take several days or weeks to identify the copyright owner and negotiate a license. Please note that obtaining permission in writing, using the standard BBG/VOA release form, is highly preferable to getting permission orally or via email. A template release form -- to be edited and modified, as needed -- is available on the [Best Practices Sharepoint page](#).

On occasion, a third party may either request to amend the VOA form or insist on using its own licensing agreement. Such outside agreements may contain terms to which BBG/VOA cannot agree. Please consult OGC when presented with a third party release form or licensing agreement.

### TRADEMARK

A trademark is an intellectual property right in a particular "mark" used to identify a good or service, such as a name, slogan, symbol or logo. For example, "Voice of America" is a registered trademark. It is unlawful to use a trademark in a manner that confuses consumers about the source or sponsorship of goods or services. This is rarely an issue in news broadcasting, since the law allows you to use a mark without permission in a news story if the mark is used in an informational sense. For example, if you are reporting on the BP oil spill, it is appropriate to show the BP logo to identify the company. However, if you are launching a new VOA program, avoid using slogans or titles that are trademarked.

### TRADEMARK & SPORTING EVENTS

When covering major sporting events such as the Olympics, VOA journalists must be careful with using official trademarks, such as the interlocking Olympic rings. For example, it could be argued that a VOA graphic incorporating the VOA background/colors/image with the official Olympic logo creates an unauthorized association between VOA, a non-Olympics marketing partner, and the Olympic brand.

**ALTHOUGH THE PHRASE "VOICE OF AMERICA" IS TRADEMARKED BY THE AGENCY,  
"VOA" AND THE VOA LOGO ARE NOT TRADEMARKED.**

[More information on the above topics can be found at the Best Practices site on Sharepoint.](#)



### **FILMING IN PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE PLACES**

Generally, news media have the right to be in public places and on public property to gather information, photographically or otherwise. VOA journalists should be mindful, however, about rules, permits, or prohibitions on filming or taking of photographs at certain meetings, sporting events, or in private spaces such as businesses and shops. Similarly, journalists should seek permission from an owner or occupant (even if the occupant is not the owner) before entering private property or a residence.

[\*\(Also see Covering Criminal Activity, p. 21\)\*](#)

### **REQUEST FOR PROOF OF INSURANCE**

From time to time, VOA staff may be asked to provide a certificate of liability insurance when filming in locations where event organizers or property owners want to protect themselves against third party bodily injury and property damage. While most private sector media organizations have liability insurance, the U.S. Government self-insures against liabilities. Therefore, the agency does not purchase liability insurance, and there is no such certificate that we can provide.

Instead, the Office of General Counsel provides a letter explaining this that staff can send to the appropriate parties. Two versions of the letter – one on VOA letterhead and one on BBG letterhead -- are now available in Word documents on the VOA Best Practices Sharepoint page:

[VOA Insurance Letter](#)   [BBG Insurance Letter](#)

Each letter has blanks so that you can fill in the names of VOA staff that will be on location and the name of the property/location you will be working at. Use the VOA letterhead if you choose to have your service chief or division director sign it. Use the BBG letterhead if you prefer to have an attorney in the General Counsel's Office sign it.

If you have any questions about this, please contact the General Counsel's Office or Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com)), the Editor for News Standards & Best Practices.

### **DEFAMATION/PRIVACY/FALSE LIGHT**

Under U.S. law, the central question in an action for defamation or invasion of privacy is whether the statements in question are true or false. Truthful publication or broadcast of matters pertaining to legitimate public interest should generally not expose VOA to liability in the United States, especially if VOA's reporting concerns a public figure.

However, VOA may be liable for invasion of privacy in certain situations for the publicizing of private facts or falsehoods. Not only that, other countries' defamation and "insult" laws are not as protective of the press, so broadcasts that are legal in the U.S. may still expose VOA to liability overseas.

VOA journalists should not intercept or record any private conversations without the permission of the participants, as this may be a crime in certain jurisdictions. The Office of General Counsel should be consulted when a VOA journalist receives intercepted conversations from a third party or in any other special circumstances.

[\*\(Also see Recording Telephone Interviews, p. 37\)\*](#)

**The following guidance is provided by the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press (rcfp.org):**

- Check sources thoroughly. Get independent corroboration whenever possible. A source could have a vendetta against the subject and willfully or unintentionally misrepresent the facts for his or her own purposes. Confidential sources may disappear or recant in the face of a lawsuit. Don't rely on someone else to be accurate.
- Do not let your opinion about whether someone is a public figure or official color your decision to verify the accuracy of a story. Juries do not respond favorably to reporters who fail to confront their subjects with defamatory information and provide them with an opportunity to comment.
- If you cover the police or courthouse beat, make certain you understand criminal and civil procedure and terminology. Be especially careful to restate accurately any information obtained about arrests, investigations and judicial proceedings.
- Be cautious when editing. Make sure the story does not convey the wrong information because of a hasty rewrite.
- Watch for headlines and cutlines that might be defamatory even though the text explains the story.
- **Make sure news promos or teasers used to stir audience interest are not misleading or defamatory.**
- **Do not use generic video footage or file photos when reporting on an activity that might be considered questionable.**
- **Just because someone else said it does not mean that a news organization cannot be sued for republishing it.** This includes letters to the editor. Check out any factual allegations contained in them as carefully as you would statements in a news story.
- Be sensitive about using words that connote dishonest behavior, immorality or other undesirable traits, whether in your published story or in comments in your notes. Remember that a judge may order a news organization to produce reporters' notes, drafts and internal memoranda at a libel trial.
- If contacted by someone threatening a libel suit, be polite, but do not admit error or fault. Talk the case over with your editor, supervisor or attorney immediately, and follow procedures established by your news organization.

### **DO NOT BE RECKLESS WITH THE TRUTH**

### **REPORTER'S PRIVILEGE & CONFIDENTIAL SOURCES**

The reporter's privilege originates in the First Amendment's guarantee of a free press, under the rationale that forcing journalists to disclose confidential sources will discourage sources from communicating with reporters, thereby disrupting the free flow of information protected by the First Amendment. In some circumstances, journalists are compelled to disclose confidential sources. Because of BBG's special status as a federal government agency, some internal VOA documents may also be subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

[\*\(Also see Sourcing, p. 28\)\*](#)

**VOA JOURNALISTS SHOULD CONTACT OGC IF APPROACHED  
BY ANY LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS.**

**IN SOME SITUATIONS, THIS COULD BE A FIREWALL VIOLATION.**

[\*\(Also see VOA Firewall, p. 91\)\*](#)

### **REPORTING ON CLASSIFIED DOCUMENTS**

A number of laws and regulations, including several criminal statutes, regulate access to, and transmission of, classified information. VOA has a specific protocol in place regarding its reporting on classified documents in the public domain, such as the documents released by WikiLeaks in 2010.

**ONLY CERTAIN VOA JOURNALISTS ARE ASSIGNED TO REPORT ON THESE TOPICS.**

**THE SUPERVISORY INVESTIGATIVE EDITOR SHOULD BE CONSULTED BEFORE  
YOU BEGIN ANY ASSIGNMENT RELATING IN ANY WAY TO CLASSIFIED MATERIAL,  
EVEN IF THE CLASSIFIED DOCUMENTS ARE PUBLICLY AVAILABLE ON A WEBSITE  
LIKE WIKILEAKS.**

**THE SUPERVISORY INVESTIGATIVE EDITOR WILL CONSULT WITH SENIOR  
MANAGEMENT AND THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL REGARDING ALL  
APPLICABLE LAWS.**

### **SUBPOENAS OR REQUESTS FOR TESTIMONY OR DOCUMENTS**

- **IF YOU RECEIVE A REQUEST OR DEMAND TO TESTIFY IN A LEGAL PROCEEDING ON MATTERS RELATING TO OFFICIAL AGENCY INFORMATION OR YOUR OFFICIAL DUTIES, OR IF YOU RECEIVE A REQUEST TO PRODUCE AGENCY RECORDS OR INFORMATION, CONTACT THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL IMMEDIATELY.**

There is a special regulatory procedure for handling requests for testimony by current and former employees and handling the production of documents in legal proceedings in which the BBG is not a named party.

[\*\(Also see What Is Not a Firewall Violation, p. 92\)\*](#)

### **INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL BY VOA STAFF**

While U.S. government employees must usually obtain a country clearance from the State Department before official government travel abroad, VOA reporters traveling to cover and report on the news may travel to countries in which U.S. Missions are located with minimal formality, which will typically only include a notification of intent to travel to the State Department. Please be mindful that travel to some sanctioned countries may require additional licensing or documentation. Reporters should contact their supervisors and the Travel Office before planning travel to these countries.

### **OUTSIDE ACTIVITIES**

#### **ALL FULL-TIME VOA STAFF ARE REQUIRED TO FOLLOW THESE PROCEDURES BEFORE RESPONDING TO A REQUEST OR MAKING ANY COMMITMENTS**

Anyone looking to engage in activities outside of VOA should first check with their supervisor to ensure that doing so won't conflict with official duty schedules or requirements.

Then, you should forward your proposed activity to [OutsideRequests@voanews.com](mailto:OutsideRequests@voanews.com). This will reach VOA Public Relations Director Bridget Serchak ([bserchak@voanews.com](mailto:bserchak@voanews.com)), Editor for News Standards & Best Practices Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com)) and the Ethics Group in the General Counsel's Office. We will review your proposal to ensure that it will not violate government ethics regulations or journalistic ethics and best practices.

Federal regulations prohibit employees from receiving compensation for outside teaching, speaking, or writing activities that directly relate to their official duties.

Some activities may not be appropriate if they:

- Constitute a conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest.
- Involve use of agency materials, time, or facilities.
- Involve a particular matter you've worked on in your official capacity.
- Are likely to adversely affect the agency's ability to fulfill its mission
- Would involve working for outlets that broadcast to or publish in the same target area as the employee's VOA language service.

Additionally, if you will be identified as an agency employee in connection with your outside activities, in order to avoid appearances of impropriety, you must include a disclaimer that the views expressed are your own and not that of VOA (or the U.S. Government, as appropriate).

Because the highest standards of journalism require a reputation for impartiality, VOA journalists should not perform public relations or similar work, either paid or unpaid. Journalists should also not counsel individuals or organizations, either in the United States or abroad, on how to deal successfully with the news media. Lastly, you should not provide advice to government officials other than to those in VOA, the BBG or any other government broadcasting entity, or to candidates for public office, again regardless of whether in the United States or abroad.

Outside speaking and writing opportunities can be highly beneficial, both personally and professionally, but if not done properly they can have serious consequences. Please don't hesitate to contact Andrew or Steve if you have any questions or need advice.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Aside from the types of activities outlined here, there is also the issue of whether VOA staff can, or should, express themselves outside of the office.

Needless to say, this is a very delicate issue, given our unique status as government employees as well as journalists.

With that in mind, this is the recommended guidance for VOA staff:

- VOA's mission is to provide accurate and objective news and information. To facilitate that mission, as journalists, you are expected to remain neutral and objective. That means that you should be careful and try to avoid conduct or activity that would question your neutrality and objectivity as well as the neutrality and objectivity of VOA.
- For example: If as a VOA journalist you are reporting on or otherwise working on a story regarding "X" situation, it is recommended that you avoid publicly voicing your personal opinion about that situation because such activity may call into question your credibility as a journalist and could compromise VOA's reputation as a reliable and credible news organization.

### **PLEASE EXERCISE GOOD JUDGMENT WHEN CONSIDERING YOUR OPTIONS AND MAKING YOUR DECISIONS.**

[\*\(Also see Opinion, p. 48\)\*](#)

## **CONTRACTORS**

VOA contractors generally have wider latitude to engage in activities outside the scope of their contracts with the Agency, but they should keep in mind that certain activities and actions could jeopardize continued performance on their current contract, or their ability to obtain a follow-on contract.

When doing work outside of VOA, it is important for VOA contractors to refrain from stating or creating the impression that they are employees, agents or representatives of the agency. They should not say that they "work for" VOA or are "correspondents at" VOA. Rather, they should indicate that they are "freelance journalists," "regular contributors to VOA," or use a similar description.

Also, VOA contractors must exercise caution to ensure that their journalistic integrity or impartiality is not compromised by their activities outside the scope of their contract.

VOA contractors employed by the employee management firms should advise the respective on-site managers from each company when they receive offers of work outside VOA. Contractors must also send their requests to the respective VOA Program Manager responsible for their language service, as well as to Outside Requests ([OutsideRequests@voanews.com](mailto:OutsideRequests@voanews.com)).

VOA contractors with any questions as to whether or not an outside activity poses a potential journalistic conflict are encouraged to contact Steve and Bridget for advice.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### **COMPETITIONS & CASH AWARDS**

Any employee who wants to enter a particular journalism competition using his/her VOA-produced work **must** first advise his/her supervisor. If the supervisor determines the entry to be of merit, please advise Pat Bodnar ([pbodnar@voanews.com](mailto:pbodnar@voanews.com)) in the Language Programming Directorate. All entries should be sent to Percy Rogers, the Agency's Incentive Coordinator ([ptrogers@bbg.gov](mailto:ptrogers@bbg.gov)). Percy will compile all entries.

**ENTRIES FOR JOURNALISM COMPETITIONS ARE TO BE  
SUBMITTED BY THE AGENCY'S SENIOR MANAGEMENT ONLY**

**INDIVIDUAL STAFF MEMBERS SHOULD NOT ENTER COMPETITIONS  
ON THEIR OWN USING WORK PRODUCED FOR VOA**

While the majority of journalism competitions that VOA enters award trophies, plaques or certificates to the winners, a few of them may include cash awards. Should a winning entry result in a cash award, that award will be designated to the agency, **not to the individual**. It will be the responsibility of VOA senior management to determine whether it will accept the cash award under its gift acceptance authority, and how that cash award will be administered.

### **APPENDIX – CONTROL ROOM EMERGENCY PROCEDURES**

#### **EMERGENCY EVACUATION TV CONTROL ROOM ACTIONS**

1. The Director will direct the Producer to tell the anchor to make the statement, **“We must interrupt this program, please stand by. We will return as soon as possible.”**
2. Director or TD fades to black on anchor and fades up on generic VOA full screen graphic.
3. Director or TD notifies TVMC that an ID graphic is up and that the control room and studio staff are vacating the building.
4. Using the same graphic, TVMC takes control of the path seamlessly when ready. TVMC evacuates the building.

#### **EMERGENCY EVACUATION RADIO CONTROL ROOM ACTIONS**

1. Producer tells anchor to make the statement, **“We must interrupt this program, please stand by. We will return as soon as possible.”**
2. Technician plays VOA1 “The Hits” so that VOA branded content continues standard frequencies.
- 2a. **Alternate:** Producer tells anchor to introduce “linked” show. This means all remaining show elements could continue to playout without live inserts until done.
3. Technician links remaining program elements and executes.
4. Technician notifies RMC of programming status.
5. Radio MC takes necessary steps to ensure program continuity.
6. Master Control, Control- room, and studio staff evacuate the building.

#### **EMERGENCY NCC ACTIONS**

NCC receives the broadcast product from Master Control and transmits it to the respective distribution points. NCC does not alter the product content sent to them for distribution.

#### **TO IMPLEMENT THE TV CONTROL ROOM PLAN, OPERATIONS MUST**

1. Load the TVMC full screen VOA graphic in each TV control room switcher. This may be updated in the future pending further guidance.
2. The Broadcast Operations management is responsible for making sure the graphic is installed in all control rooms and Master Control, and that the emergency plan is communicated to their respective staffs.
3. Broadcast Operations is responsible for maintaining the emergency full screen VOA graphic in their daily operation control room set up, and show programming.

#### **TO IMPLEMENT THE EMERGENCY EVACUATION ACTION PLAN, LANGUAGE SERVICE MANAGEMENT MUST**

1. Communicate the emergency action plan to service leadership and staff.
2. Each service must provide to Division management the service action plan for contacting affiliates about disruptions.

### **ALL LANGUAGE SERVICES AND BROADCAST OPERATIONS STAFF ARE REQUIRED TO EVACUATE THE BUILDING DURING AN EMERGENCY**



**NOTE:** This Emergency evacuation guide for Broadcast Operations and Language Services is for real emergencies, and when there is any doubt please respond as though it is a real emergency.

**However, a fire drill is not an emergency.** If a fire alarm drill will be conducted, employees and managers will be notified in advance of the testing.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The contents of this Guide represent the contributions of many VOA staffers. Thanks to all for your input. Other entries in the Guide come from previous House-wide guidance.

In addition, certain elements in the Guide were produced with the cooperation of the following non-Federal entities:

CNN

Freedom Forum

Hootsuite.com

Los Angeles Times

New York Times

NPR

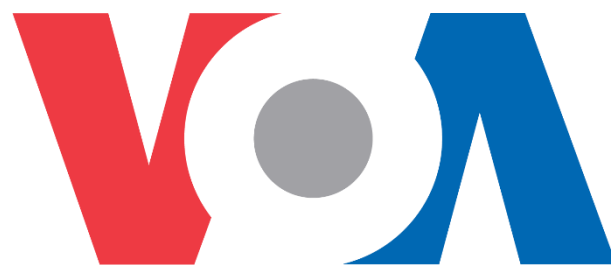
Project for Excellence in Journalism

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press

Radio Television Digital News Association

Society of Professional Journalists



Voice of America®

---

# ***BEST PRACTICES GUIDE***

---

***APRIL 2019***

**[SharePoint: Best Practices Guide](#)**

**DALETPLUS: MEDIA-->CATEGORIES-->MANUALS**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>THE VOA CHARTER</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>NEWS GATHERING</b>	
-FAIRNESS, OBJECTIVITY & BALANCE	7
-BIAS & DIVERSITY	9
-POLITICAL ACTIVITY	10
-DRONES	12
-SENSITIVE & GRAPHIC MATERIAL	18
-COVERING WAR	19
-COVERING TERRORISM	19
-VIDEO & AUDIO OF TERRORISTS, HOSTAGES OR PRISONERS	20
-COVERING MASS SHOOTINGS	21
-COVERING CRIMINAL ACTIVITY	21
-HOSTAGE/BARRICADE SITUATIONS	22
-NAMING PEOPLE INVOLVED IN CRIMES	23
-INTERVIEWING & VIDEOTAPING MINORS	24
-COVERING & REPORTING SUICIDES	24
-BREAKING NEWS	25
-REPORTING CROWD ESTIMATES	25
-STAGING & RE-CREATIONS	25
-USING VOA EMPLOYEES OR RELATIVES FOR STORIES	26
-WRITING	27
-SOURCING	28
-RUMORS & SPECULATION	29
-ATTRIBUTION	30
-CREDITING THE NEWS AGENCIES	34
-PLAGIARISM	35
-INTERVIEWS	36
-PUBLIC FIGURES	37
-ANONYMITY	38
-“AMBUSH” INTERVIEWS	39
-ADVANCE SCRIPTS/SCREENING	39
-REQUESTS FOR UNAIED/UNPUBLISHED MATERIAL	39
-SUBJECT TAPING INTERVIEW	39
-PAYMENT	39

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### GUESTS

-NOTIFYING VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT OF HIGH-LEVEL GUESTS	40
-SECURITY PROCEDURES FOR GUESTS	40
-GUEST BOOKING PROCEDURES	42
-HOSTING A GUEST ON VOA PROGRAMS	44

### DIGITAL MEDIA

-SOCIAL MEDIA-GENERAL	46
-SOCIAL MEDIA AS REPORTING TOOL	47
-OPINION	48
-MANAGING YOUR PROGRAM'S OR SERVICE'S SOCIAL PRESENCE	49
-POSTING VOA CONTENT TO OTHER SITES, INCLUDING YOUR OWN	49
-LINKING TO OTHER SITES	50
-BE TRANSPARENT ABOUT YOUR MISTAKES	50
-USER-GENERATED CONTENT	51
-YOUTUBE GUIDELINES	53
-GOOGLE EARTH GUIDELINES	56
-REVEALING WEBSITES & ADDRESSES	57
-AFFILIATE/RECIPROCAL LINKS	57

### PHOTOGRAPHS

-GENERAL RULES	58
-EDITING PHOTOGRAPHS	59
-PHOTO ILLUSTRATIONS	59
-TECHNICAL TIPS	59
-SENDING IN PHOTO FILES	59
-CAPTIONS/CREDITS	60

### MUSIC

-GENERAL GUIDELINES	62
-COPYRIGHT GUIDELINES	62

### AUDIO USAGE RIGHTS

-AUDIO CLIPS FROM TV NETWORKS	63
-------------------------------	----

### VIDEO USAGE RIGHTS

-COMMON FEATURES	65
-USING VIDEO FROM TV NETWORKS	66
-ABC NEWS	67
-AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE (AFP)	69

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

-ASSOCIATED PRESS (APTN)	70
-REUTERS	71
-NEWSMARKET	73
-USING CONTENT FROM STATE-RUN MEDIA	75
<b>VIDEO NEWS RELEASES (VNRs)</b>	<b>77</b>
<b><u>DOMESTIC DISTRIBUTION OF VOA CONTENT</u></b>	
-SMITH-MUNDT REGULATIONS	78
-USAGE REQUESTS	78
-TALKING ABOUT VOA CONTENT & PROGRAMMING	79
-TOWN HALLS, FORUMS, OTHER EVENTS, PARTNERSHIPS	80
-SUMMARY	80
-DOCUMENTING SOURCE VIDEO IN DALETPLUS	81
-NEWS AGENCY IDs & THE DOT	82
-ADDING AN AGENCY ID/DOT IN PREMIERE PRO	85
-ADDING AN AGENCY ID/DOT IN DALETPLUS	87
<b>CORRECTIONS</b>	<b>89</b>
<b><u>LEGAL ISSUES</u></b>	
-VOA FIREWALL	91
-COPYRIGHT & FAIR USE	93
-TRADEMARK	94
-FILMING IN PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE PLACES	95
-PROOF OF INSURANCE	95
-DEFAMATION/PRIVACY/FALSE LIGHT	95
-REPORTER'S PRIVILEGE & CONFIDENTIAL SOURCES	97
-REPORTING ON CLASSIFIED DOCUMENTS	97
-SUBPOENAS OR REQUESTS FOR TESTIMONY OR DOCUMENTS	98
-INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL BY VOA REPORTERS	98
<b><u>OUTSIDE ACTIVITIES</u></b>	
-VOA STAFF	99
-CONTRACTORS	100
-COMPETITIONS AND CASH AWARDS	101
<b>APPENDIX – CONTROL ROOM EMERGENCY PROCEDURES</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</b>	<b>104</b>



## ***BEST PRACTICES GUIDE***

### **THE VOA CHARTER**

President Gerald Ford signed the VOA Charter ([Public Law 94-350](#)) into law on July 12, 1976. It protects the independence and integrity of VOA programming.

The long-range interests of the United States are served by communicating directly with the peoples of the world by radio. To be effective, the Voice of America must win the attention and respect of listeners. These principles will therefore govern Voice of America (VOA) broadcasts:

1. VOA will serve as a consistently reliable and authoritative source of news. VOA news will be accurate, objective, and comprehensive.
2. VOA will represent America, not any single segment of American society, and will therefore present a balanced and comprehensive projection of significant American thought and institutions.
3. VOA will present the policies of the United States clearly and effectively, and will also present responsible discussions and opinions on these policies.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **THIS GUIDE APPLIES TO ALL EMPLOYEES, CONTRACTORS AND STRINGERS WHO GATHER, PRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE CONTENT FOR VOA**

The purpose of this Guide is to define in more detail the journalistic standards and best practices that VOA employees should follow every day. And it is a **guide** rather than a rulebook for one very good reason: although the increasingly changing news and information environment requires each of us to have a basic understanding of best practices, it goes without saying that every news event, every radio, TV and web piece, every social media post, every program, every interview – that is, **everything we cover, produce and disseminate – is unique and must be considered in context and on its own merits.**

VOA employees are encouraged to bring issues not covered in this guide to the attention of their supervisors, Service Chiefs, Division Directors, the Editor for News Standards & Best Practices, VOA Senior Management or the Office of General Counsel as appropriate.

- There may be times when the News Center or a Language Service will be working on stories that allege wrongdoing. In those cases, the Office of General Counsel **must** be consulted.  
[\(Also see Legal Issues, p. 91\)](#)

It is the responsibility of all staff members to understand these best practices as well as to consider one's own sense of right and wrong. Credibility is the most precious commodity of any news organization. The only way to achieve and maintain that credibility is for everyone within VOA to accept responsibility for it.

### **WHEN IN DOUBT, ASK - DO NOT ASSUME**

This guide will help, but should not replace, discussions of difficult issues with co-workers and supervisors. We grow as a news organization -- and policies are formed -- by asking questions and discussing the journalistic issues we face daily.

In addition to these journalistic guidelines, as federal employees, [we are also required to follow the policies laid out by the Office of Government Ethics and USAGM's Ethics Counsel.](#)

The [Best Practices Guide](#) is a living document and is updated regularly on Sharepoint.



### NEWS GATHERING

#### FAIRNESS, OBJECTIVITY & BALANCE

WHEN PERFORMING OFFICIAL DUTIES, VOA STAFF LEAVE THEIR PERSONAL POLITICAL VIEWS BEHIND

- All correspondents, producers, writers, editors and hosts should be aware of their own cultural values and personal beliefs and put them aside when preparing a report, conducting an interview, hosting a newscast, an interview program or posting on social media.
- The accuracy, quality and credibility of the Voice of America are its most important assets, and they rest on the audiences' perception of VOA as an objective and reliable source of U.S., regional and world news and information.
- VOA journalists -- including writers, correspondents, stringers, program hosts, and social media administrators -- should always avoid the use of unattributed negative terms or labels to describe persons or organizations. The exception is when the individuals and groups use those labels to describe themselves or their activities.
- Be fair to all of the people involved in a story. People who are presented in a negative light must be given a reasonable chance to present their side of the issue. If they refuse to comment, that should be noted. This demonstrates to our audience that we made the effort to be fair to all sides.
- A correspondent, producer or host should be well prepared with facts to balance the statement of one side or the other. Don't simply nod in acknowledgment when listening to someone's answer, as this could imply that you agree with that position.
- VOA journalists and all those preparing broadcast, website and social media programming must avoid any action or statement that might give the appearance of partisanship.
  - **THIS INCLUDES THE WEARING OF LAPEL PINS, RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS, CLOTHING DESIGNS OR COLOR SCHEMES THAT APPEAR TO SUPPORT ONE PARTY OR INDIVIDUAL OVER ANOTHER.**
- **THERE IS NO PLACE AT VOA FOR ADVOCACY JOURNALISM - THE PRESENTATION OF NEWS FROM ONE PARTICULAR VIEWPOINT OR ONE SPECIFIC AGENDA.**
- **VOA JOURNALISTS CANNOT ACCEPT MONETARY PAYMENT OR GIFTS FROM ANY INDIVIDUAL, SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP, OR POLITICAL ORGANIZATION IN EXCHANGE FOR NEWS COVERAGE. IT IS A VIOLATION OF JOURNALISTIC ETHICS.**

- Other conflicts of interest, real or apparent, may come up, such as the relationship of staff members with VOA and USAGM management.
  - For instance, VOA journalists should avoid, where possible, covering an event where a speaker or panelist is from VOA – simply because VOA is represented at the event. If the event is one of journalistic value, the report should disclose and explain that VOA is represented at the event and cite the editorial reason for covering the event.
- VOA employees should carry out their work with the utmost professionalism. This applies equally to your work in the Cohen Building and in the field. Professionalism and respect for your colleagues is absolutely vital to maintaining best practices. Whether in a newsroom, studio, control room or in the field, pursuit of a story is not an excuse for arrogance.

### **BIAS & DIVERSITY**

One of the key areas for ensuring fairness, objectivity and balance in our reporting is to stay clear of bias or preconceived notions. Some examples:

- Avoid stereotyping by race, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, geography, sexual orientation, disability, social status or physical appearance.
- The words we use in our scripts should be precise. For example, avoid the casual use of words and phrases like “illegal immigrant,” “Third World” and “terrorist,” or the assumption that “fundamentalism” equals violence. [This is the latest guidance from the AP](#) on writing about the “alt-right” and related terms. All VOA staff should read the guidance and follow it in our own reporting.
- Don’t include a description of an individual unless it is essential to the story. If a description doesn’t serve an editorial purpose, it may perpetuate negative stereotypes, possibly anger some members of a community and in all likelihood doesn’t effectively advance the story.
- Coverage of events in a gay community should not be automatically linked to coverage of HIV/AIDS, because HIV/AIDS is not exclusive to gay communities.
- Correspondents, producers, video, photo and web editors must understand the possibility of racial or ethnic stereotyping when selecting images to include in stories. For example, in a story about unwed mothers in the U.S., should every mother shown be African American? If using file video about drug arrests in the U.S., should every person shown be African American or Hispanic? The clear answer is no.

### **POLITICAL ACTIVITY**

#### **VOA STAFF CANNOT CAMPAIGN FOR OR ORGANIZE EVENTS FOR POLITICAL CANDIDATES**

#### **THAT IS A VIOLATION OF THE JOURNALISTIC ETHICS OF OBJECTIVITY, FAIRNESS AND BALANCE AND SHOULD BE AVOIDED AT ALL TIMES**

#### **THE HATCH ACT**

The Hatch Act is a federal law; its main provision is to prohibit government employees in the Executive Branch from engaging in partisan political activity. The Office of General Counsel has provided some basic guidelines regarding political activity by VOA employees.

Employees **MAY NOT** engage in political activity while:

- On duty
- In any government office
- Using a government vehicle
- Wearing an official uniform or insignia

In addition, the following political activities are prohibited while **on duty**:

- Wearing campaign buttons and/or t-shirts
- Displaying campaign posters in the workplace
- Using **AGENCY** e-mail accounts, social media accounts or blogs to support or criticize a candidate or political position
- Using agency computers to make online campaign donations
- Using screensavers supporting or criticizing a candidate or political position
- Using agency-supplied smartphones to support or criticize a candidate or political position

**NOTE: You are on duty when you are teleworking.**

**IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT THESE GUIDELINES,  
PLEASE CONTACT THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL AT 202-203-4550**

#### **POLITICAL REPORTING ON VOA WEBSITES**

Reporting on U.S. politics can be a delicate balancing act for VOA. This is especially true because of the provisions of the Hatch Act.

In the case of VOA, the Office of Special Counsel took note of our reporting on U.S. political campaigns. The OSC's concern was that as a federal agency VOA's reporting should abide by the letter and spirit of the Hatch Act. In addition, the OSC noted that a federal agency's website "...must not create the appearance that the agency, and in turn the federal government, is politically biased."

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

## ***BEST PRACTICES GUIDE***

In response, USAGM's Office of General Counsel noted that the VOA Charter lawfully empowers the agency to "...present the policies of the United States clearly and effectively, and will also present responsible discussions and opinions on these policies."

The OSC ultimately determined that the requirements of the Hatch Act could be effectively balanced with the realities of news reporting, and declared that it is permissible for VOA to report on political campaigns and to include links to a candidate or party's website in a web story if the website is source material for the article, and can be presented in a way that avoids appearances of agency endorsement or support for the candidate or party.

To avoid appearances of inappropriate endorsement or bias, if any VOANews.com website reports on a GOP or Democratic presidential debate and the story includes a link to the campaign website of one candidate, we must include the campaign websites of all the candidates who are taking part in the debate. The same holds true if we are reporting on candidates for the Senate, House and for governors.

We follow the same guidelines during the final presidential campaign period with regard to a sitting president and the opposing candidate/s. But in that case, the link for the sitting president **MUST BE TO THE CAMPAIGN'S WEBSITE, AND NOT TO WWW.WHITEHOUSE.GOV.**

In other words, when reporting on U.S. political campaigns, all VOANews.com websites should follow the same journalistic balance and fairness that we strive for in all of our daily reporting.

For more complete guidance on the Hatch Act, [please follow this link to the Office of General Counsel's Ethics page.](#)

### **DRONES**

Drones are special-purpose aerial camera platforms. Their use is heavily regulated, and VOA journalists must follow both governmental restrictions and VOA policies.

It is illegal to operate an unmanned aerial system/drone (UAS) for business purposes in the United States without advance approval from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Therefore, prospective VOA drone users must obtain a Remote Pilot Certificate (the official title for a drone pilot license) prior to any field usage of a drone<sup>1</sup>.

### **DRONE USAGE BY VOA-AFFILIATED PERSONNEL IS RESTRICTED TO PROPERLY LICENSED DRONE PILOTS.**

VOA drone pilots will follow the FAA'S rules and respect all restrictions, including those imposed locally by police or emergency service agencies. VOA journalists contracting for drone services must also be aware of laws and safety regulations governing their use.

When the use of a drone is requested to cover a VOA story, advance approval is required from the VOA Deputy Director for Programming ([jlippman@voanews.com](mailto:jlippman@voanews.com); 202-203-4325) or his designee. Requests for flight authorization must be in writing and include story information (including personnel and justification of the need for a drone), flight plans, site maps, and other specifics detailed in this section.

VOA will use guidelines from the Professional Society of Drone Journalists ([www.dronejournalism.org](http://www.dronejournalism.org)) as determinates of its drone usage:

- **NEWSWORTHINESS:** The story must be of sufficient importance to risk using a potentially harmful drone. Do not use a drone if the information or aerial perspective can be gathered by other, safer means.
- **SAFETY:** A drone pilot must be properly trained in the operation of the equipment. The equipment must be in a condition suitable to safe and controlled flight. A drone must not fly in weather conditions that exceed the limits of the drone's ability to operate safely. A drone must be flown in a manner that ensures the safety of the public and is least disruptive to the general population in a public setting. A Pilot's first drone flight should **not** be when shooting a story.
- **REGULATIONS AND PUBLIC SPACES:** A drone pilot must follow the regulations that apply to the airspace where the drone is used.
- **PRIVACY:** Use of a drone must never compromise the privacy of non-public figures. VOA journalists should not use images of private citizens in private spaces that are encountered beyond the scope of their stories.

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.faa.gov/uas/getting\\_started/fly\\_for\\_work\\_business/becoming\\_a\\_pilot/](https://www.faa.gov/uas/getting_started/fly_for_work_business/becoming_a_pilot/)  
[https://www.faa.gov/uas/media/Part\\_107\\_Summary.pdf](https://www.faa.gov/uas/media/Part_107_Summary.pdf)

VOA will own and operate drones for use in the United States subject to government regulations and VOA procedures ([See Flight Operations, p. 13](#)).

Drones will be standardized as specified by VOA Broadcast Operations, which will inventory and house them in Washington, D.C. or selected domestic bureaus. Drones will be registered with the Federal Aviation Administration (<https://registermyuas.faa.gov/>) in the name of VOA. Like other VOA technical equipment, purchases of drones will be approved in advance by the VOA Chief Digital Officer ([jtunnessen@voanews.com](mailto:jtunnessen@voanews.com); 202-382-5420) or his designee.

Although VOA will operate drones within the United States, VOA will **not** own and operate drones outside of the United States.

Unlike the Federal Aviation Administration in the U.S., neither the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) nor the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) have established general usage or legal guidelines for drone operations. Regulations vary from country to country, frequently change, and may not yet be codified (for instance, there is no listing of drone regulations for Iran). The Global Drone Regulations Database ([www.droneregulations.info](http://www.droneregulations.info)), however, is an international directory containing summaries of countries' drone laws, if known.

VOA journalists requiring a drone outside the U.S. will need to rent drone services from a pilot/operator licensed for the particular country in which the shoot is planned. They will also be expected to search the database to make sure VOA will not inadvertently violate regulations for the country in which the shoot is planned.

Contracting for drone services outside the country, like contracting for other external services, should be requested in advance from VOA Broadcast Operations, which will work with the IBB Office of Contracts to arrange services. Once drone services are secured, language services should advise the Deputy Director of Programming ([jlippman@voanews.com](mailto:jlippman@voanews.com)) or his designee of the name of the drone pilot and the drone's registration information.

**NOTE: Nothing in this section prevents VOA journalists from obtaining drone footage taken by non-VOA personnel who have acted independently of VOA.** User-generated drone video will be governed by the same standards and verifications as other independently gathered video used by VOA, prior to its use. ([Also see User-Generated Content, p. 51](#))

### **THE DRONE CREW**

VOA uses the Operations Manual of The Drone Journalism Lab as the basis for its drone operations procedures. VOA-registered drone pilots must follow procedures as outlined in the Operations Manual<sup>2</sup>.

The Manual defines three operations roles in drone flight: Pilot, Observer, and Journalist. Although a single individual can fill all three roles, VOA will normally have at least two people involved in any drone flight: a Pilot and a combination Observer/Journalist. The three roles are defined on the next page.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/32pi2e2gv6huyzg/AAAwGq7b1mO5ekikCn-7JFiMa?dl=0&preview=opsmanual.pdf>

- **PILOT:** Responsible for all flight operations and the ultimate authority on any flight. The Pilot determines if the aircraft is airworthy and capable of conducting the proposed operations in the available airspace, and is responsible for conducting operations within all FAA regulations (and any restrictions set forth by a “grant of exemption” from the FAA). The Pilot must brief the other members of the crew about the specifics of the mission, their roles and responsibilities, and what is expected of them before, during and after flight operations. The Pilot – the person holding the FAA-issued Part 107 certificate – is by regulation the final authority on whether the drone flies or not. The Pilot’s decision on flight safety is final.
- **OBSERVER:** Responsible for monitoring the operational area to ensure that there are no hazards that may endanger the flight or people. The Observer is the only member of the team who should speak to the Pilot during flight operations. The Observer is to alert the Pilot if any aircraft come into the area, or if any person or vehicle comes near the operation. The Observer should remain within speaking distance of the Pilot.
- **JOURNALIST:** Responsible for communicating flight goals before the flight and verifying results after the drone lands. Defines the aerial elements needed for the story, but is subordinate to the Pilot, who has responsibility for determining if the Journalist’s goals are possible under the conditions presented.

### **FLIGHT OPERATIONS**

Pre-trip and pre-flight inspections help ensure airworthiness and will serve as an early warning for both maintenance issues and for mechanical issues that could substantially affect or cancel flight operations or safety.

**PRE-TRIP:** Pre-trip and prior to embarking on any drone operation, the Pilot must gather information about the proposed flight area to ensure safe operations that comply with Federal Aviation Agency regulations. The Pilot should view publicly available aerial images of the area or personally conduct a site survey that will enable him/her to answer questions about the proposed flight location and be confident of success in the mission, including:

- What is there?
- Are there hazards to aviation?
- What airspace is it in?
- Do we need permission from air traffic control (ATC)?
- Are we flying on or over private property? Do we have permission of the landowner to operate there?
- How many people can we expect around the area? What is our plan to prevent flight over people?
- How high above sea level is the location? How will the altitude affect the performance of your drone during flight?

Prior to the day of the shoot, the Pilot and Journalist should meet to define the goals of the drone shoot and specific mission goals, including:

- What shots do you need (specific expected shots, angles, or subjects)?
- What purpose is the drone serving in your story?
- What context is the drone adding to your story?

[Return to Table of Contents](#)



- How much drone video or photography do you need to tell the story?
- What privacy issues can you anticipate and what steps have you taken to mitigate them?
- What the operations area looks like.
- What the expected weather will be.
- Any known hazards.

Prior to the shoot itself, the Pilot should also practice with the drone assigned for use.

**PRE-FLIGHT:** Pre-flight operations are done immediately before any flight work is to occur. The pre-flight checklist repeats some of the pre-trip checklist, such as inspecting the aircraft and some of the control surfaces. On the day of the shoot, before leaving for the operations area, the Pilot should conduct a pre-trip inspection of the drone, including:

- Charging batteries.
- That there are sufficient fully charged batteries to compensate for the possible effects of temperature on the drone's batteries.
- Checking various mounting hardware.
- Checking the camera and storage media to ensure it is sufficient for the task.
- Verifying that weather parameters are within FAA Part 107 minimums, as determined by consulting an aviation weather forecast or weather report (METAR) or from obtaining a flight briefing from Flight Services.
- Verifying that the Journalist has informed local police or fire agencies that we will be using news-gathering drones.

Once on site, the Pilot will conduct the pre-flight inspection, connect the batteries, etc., and delineate a takeoff and landing area of at least 10 feet x 10 feet and ensure it is free of debris. S/he may also assign the Journalist or other VOA personnel on site to ensure that bystanders don't inadvertently walk into either the takeoff/landing zone or under the drone's flight path.

**IN FLIGHT:** The "In Flight" checklist isn't really a checklist. It's a "Do Constantly" list, noted as a reminder here for all journalists using drones. While in flight, personnel involved in the shoot must:

- Be constantly scanning for airborne traffic or obstacles. The Observer (in most cases, the Journalist) must report them immediately to the Pilot.
- Be constantly scanning for people on the ground in the flight area. The Observer must report them immediately to the Pilot.
- Be constantly checking battery levels, ensuring that the drone is returned to the landing area before reaching 25% of capacity remaining.
- Be constantly checking flight parameters such as altitude to ensure they remain within restrictions and operational goals.

Any changes to the operational plan should be discussed only at the time of battery changes.

**POST-FLIGHT:** The post-flight checklist is broken into three parts: shutting down the drone, inspecting the aircraft, and filling out logs. Logging is an essential part of drone safety. It forms the basis of the permanent record documenting maintenance of the drone VOA needs. Among other things, Pilots should document in logs (part of each VOA drone kit)<sup>3</sup> any issue that should be checked or fixed between flights, drone usage (times of takeoffs and landings), problems during flight, and battery usage.

### **DRONE RESTRICTIONS**

The FAA's website<sup>4</sup> provides complete information on approved flights and operations. VOA personnel involved in drone use should familiarize themselves with the contents of the site. For news coverage by drone within the United States, these restrictions are most relevant:

- Cannot fly anywhere in the District of Columbia.
- Cannot fly within five miles of an airport (that limit extends to 30 miles from Reagan National Airport).
- Cannot be operated within a U.S. National Park.
- Cannot fly at night.
- Cannot fly over people (not over protests, not over celebrations, not over sidewalks when pedestrians are present, etc.).
- Cannot fly higher than 400 feet (unless you're within 400 feet of a building; skyscraper climbing is OK).
- Cannot fly further away than the drone pilot can see with the naked eye.
- Cannot fly at speeds of more than 100 miles per hour
- Cannot be operated from a moving vehicle or inside a covered stationary vehicle.

Waivers to restrictions must be obtained in writing from the FAA. They generally are time-consuming to apply for and slow in being granted. Absent a written waiver, VOA will operate its drones in compliance with laws and regulations.

### **ACCIDENTS**

By using licensed drone pilots and having a rigorous system of approvals of drone usage, VOA will minimize the instances of mishaps or accidents involving drones. Should VOA personnel be involved in accidents or injuries involving drones, both the pilot of the drone and the VOA reporter/producer of the story must separately notify their service chief and division director, plus the VOA Deputy Director of Programming ([jlippman@voanews.com](mailto:jlippman@voanews.com)) or his designee. The drone pilot is required by law to notify both the Federal Aviation Agency and the National Transportation Safety Board of accidents that either cause injuries or at least \$500 in damage to property.

Applicable website contacts for the FAA and NTSB are below:

[https://www.faa.gov/uas/report\\_accident/](https://www.faa.gov/uas/report_accident/)

<https://www.nts.gov/investigations/process/Documents/NTSB-Advisory-Drones.pdf>

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/32pi2e2gv6huyzg/AAAwGq7b1mO5ekikCn-7JFiMa?dl=0&preview=logs.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.faa.gov/uas/where\\_to\\_fly/](https://www.faa.gov/uas/where_to_fly/)

### **ARCHIVING DRONE FOOTAGE**

All high quality drone footage must go in the archives within 3 weeks of the original shoot.

If the drone operator will be editing the video, he/she should copy the footage, edit down to the best footage, and work with the Media Asset Management team to supply the metadata and get the video into Dalet. If the operator does not edit, the producer must take on the responsibility.

No one will be granted continued access to a drone unless the footage from their previous shoot has been processed in the archive system. The Media Asset Management team has been alerted to tag the content as DRONE footage in the metadata, so users can easily search the database for the video.

This is a critical part of the return on the investment of training, purchasing and maintaining the drones.

### **SENSITIVE & GRAPHIC MATERIAL**

Newsworthiness should be the primary factor in deciding whether to air or publish audio or video that may be offensive to our audiences. Some examples include murder scenes, acts of war, acts of nature, or faces of victims.

In most cases, VOA should not broadcast or publish the moment of death in a suicide, execution, or any similar event. Exceptions might include circumstances where an event is being covered live and the action is unexpected or spontaneous, or where the event is so highly newsworthy as to warrant broadcast or posting. If it happens during live coverage, explain to the audience what has happened as quickly as possible, and move on.

The broadcasting or posting of graphic, profane, racist or other objectionable language should be determined if it is essential to the newsworthiness of the story.

Material of a sexual nature is also a cause for concern, as people of all ages listen to, watch and read VOA news stories. Questions to be asked: Is the material essential to the story? Should video be digitized in some way so as not to be offensive? Would you want your children to see such images?

If it's determined the material will be broadcast or posted online, a mandatory warning needs to be provided far enough ahead of the story to make sure children do not see or hear the material. If the material is posted online, it should not be on the homepage. Rather, a link to the story should appear on the homepage, with a warning that sexual/graphic images are included with the story.

YouTube has a [blurring tool](#) that lets you blur any part of a video, including moving objects.  
(Also see [YouTube Guidelines, p. 53](#))

**IN THESE CASES, THE EDITOR FOR NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES  
AND/OR VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT WILL DETERMINE WHETHER TO POST  
SUCH IMAGES OR AUDIO, AND WILL ISSUE A HOUSE-WIDE NOTE DETAILING  
MANDATORY LANGUAGE TO ADVISE OUR AUDIENCE OF THE CONTENT.**

The following sections explain these guidelines in greater detail.

### **COVERING WAR**

Given the many nationalities and ethnicities that VOA reaches via radio, TV and online, it's important to follow some basic guidelines in covering and reporting conflicts.

#### **LOADED WORDS**

VOA should never use “we,” “us,” “our” or “they,” “them” and “their” in reporting about any side in a conflict. VOA practice is to name the country, as in “U.S. troops” or “Pakistani troops.”

No side in a conflict should be referred to as “the enemy,” or any territory as “enemy territory” in copy or in graphics. The only exception is if you are directly quoting someone making those references.

Referring to attacks as “punishing,” “brutal” or “successful” can imply that VOA is taking sides. Again, the only exception would be if you’re directly quoting someone making those claims.

#### **REPORTING COMBAT ACTIVITY**

As a rule, VOA should not report that warplanes or missiles are approaching a target. When an attack is underway, VOA will report it:

- If we’re able to independently confirm that bombs/missiles have hit the ground; or
- If the country being attacked confirms it’s being attacked; or
- If an official of an attacking country directly tells VOA that an attack is happening; or
- If VOA observes the attack first-hand

In all of the above cases, attribution **MUST** be as clear and as specific as possible.

[\*\(Also see Attribution, p. 30\)\*](#)

When information originates only from state-owned media, we should make that clear to audiences the entire time the information is used.

[\*\(Also see Using Content From State-Run Media, p. 75\)\*](#)

If VOA’s reporting is being censored or shut down and/or VOA’s movements are being restricted, that should also be reported.

### **COVERING TERRORISM**

Generally, terrorism is defined as “the use of violence and threats to intimidate or coerce, especially for political purposes.” Terrorists use violence against (often innocent) individuals to advance their political or ideological agenda. “Terrorism” and “terrorist” carry a lot of weight, and they should be used with extreme care. It is up to editors to determine if they are most appropriate terms to use.

VOA will report the actions of terrorists (bombings, shootings, hostage takings) fully, accurately and without taking sides, as we would cover any other news story. Wherever possible, we should also provide appropriate coverage of the victims, their injuries and their families.

We will provide our audiences with informative analyses of terrorist organizations, their ideology and history, but at the same time VOA must never suggest that reporting the context in which terrorism takes place justifies terrorism in any way.

### **VIDEO & AUDIO OF TERRORISTS, HOSTAGES OR PRISONERS**

Statements from, interviews with, or video of terrorists, hostages or prisoners of war should be judged on their journalistic merits before making a decision on usage.

Some guidelines for making those decisions:

➤ **TERRORISTS**

- Although we will report on the actions of terrorists, **VOA SHOULD NOT BE USED AS A PLATFORM TO SPREAD THEIR MESSAGES.**
- This means that in almost all cases, VOA will not air a terrorist message in its entirety. Senior VOA managers will decide what portions, if any, of the message will be cleared for broadcast and websites based upon its news value.

➤ **HOSTAGES/PRISONERS**

- Pay close attention to whether a hostage or prisoner appears to have been mistreated, is bound in handcuffs or shackles, or has a hood on his/her head.
- In the case of a prisoner's statement, VOA will take special measures to ensure that the individual POW identities are not revealed (i.e. facial blurring, voice alteration, use of pseudonym or nom du guerre).
- Senior VOA managers will decide whether to show video of this nature.

➤ **FULL DISCLOSURE**

- When applicable, all TV and radio scripts and web copy **MUST** state that VOA has not been able to independently verify the source of the video or audio. Should VOA receive the material directly from a group, army or government, that should be noted in the script and web copy as well.

➤ **LEGAL ISSUES**

- From the Office of General Counsel: The Geneva Convention relative to Treatment of Prisoners of War requires POWs to "at all times be protected, particularly against acts of violence or intimidation and against insults and public curiosity." Although the Convention does not define what "public curiosity" means, the U.S. is a party to the Convention and it generally applies it at all times to the maximum extent practicable.

**PLEASE REMEMBER THAT THESE ARE BASIC GUIDELINES.  
EACH INSTANCE IS UNIQUE, AND A DECISION IN ONE SITUATION WILL NOT  
NECESSARILY BE THE PROPER ACTION FOR THE NEXT SITUATION.  
ALWAYS CONSULT WITH VOA SENIOR MANAGERS BEFORE MAKING ANY  
DECISIONS TO AIR OR PUBLISH MATERIAL OF THIS NATURE.**

### **COVERING MASS SHOOTINGS**

[The Poynter Institute](#) provides excellent guidance on how to cover and report on mass shootings. These are their primary recommendations:

- Name the shooter infrequently and only when his or her name is critical to helping your audience understand what happened.
- Avoid images of the shooter that could be seen as glorifying him or her by others who might be inclined to other acts of violence.
- As more information becomes available, be careful to be accurate and contextual. Small details can take on inappropriate levels of importance in the early reporting stages. Those details can be harmful to the truth if they are inaccurate or out of context.
- Avoid speculating about mental illness or allowing unqualified sources to speculate about mental illness. Witnesses, law enforcement and politicians usually know very little about the topic in general, are likely to know even less about the role of mental illness in this tragedy.
- Avoid using superlatives like “the deadliest mass shooting ever,” in teasers, tweets and other formats where context is absent. Instead, use them where you can bring more context, such as interviews, the text of stories and produced packages.

[This link from SAVE.org](#) includes additional recommendations and other important guidelines for covering and reporting on mass shootings.

### **COVERING CRIMINAL ACTIVITY**

VOA staff **must not** interfere in any way with ongoing law enforcement activities. If some orders seem designed to manage or deny news coverage, VOA reporters, producers and photographers at the scene should protest and notify senior management and the Office of General Counsel as quickly as possible. If necessary, the agency will take appropriate legal action to protect access to the news.

There may be occasions where VOA staff has the opportunity to accompany law enforcement on arrests or investigations. These situations can present sensitive legal questions, including trespass and invasion of privacy.

**THESE ACTIVITIES SHOULD ONLY BE UNDERTAKEN WITH APPROVAL IN  
ADVANCE FROM YOUR SUPERVISOR, VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT AND THE  
OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL.**

It’s important to understand that even though law enforcement may go onto private property, it **DOES NOT** mean that journalists are exempt from trespassing.

[\(Also see \*Filming In Public vs. Private Places\*, p. 95\)](#)

Keep in mind that cameras, microphones and lights can cause relatively passive bystanders to act and/or react for the cameras. All VOA staff should use their own best judgment and discretion in these situations; where possible, you should avoid any action that could possibly influence the event.

At the same time, VOA staff covering conflicts, protests or demonstrations should not take one side or another.

[\*\(Also see Fairness, Objectivity and Balance, p. 7\)\*](#)

Neither the police nor demonstration leaders should be a reporter's only sources for accurate reporting of causes, issues or casualties.

### **HOSTAGE/BARRICADE SITUATIONS**

Coverage of these situations, whether in the U.S. or overseas, presents difficult challenges and usually requires special care. No single statement or guideline can begin to cover every situation that we may report on. The following are intended to guide you in exercising your best judgment.

- The event should be characterized as accurately as possible. Before labeling an event a "riot" or "terrorism," or referring to someone as a "terrorist," you should discuss it with your senior editors and managers, and if necessary, with News Center managers or the Editor for News Standards and Best Practices.
- Keep in mind the possibility that a hostage taker may be able to see, hear, or try to manipulate VOA's coverage. Consider whether describing or showing the actions or movements of law enforcement officers could tip off the hostage taker or barricaded person.
- **DO NOT** put yourself in a position where you could be playing a role in the incident. VOA staff should **NEVER** attempt to contact a hostage or hostage taker. This could endanger a hostage and interfere with rescue efforts. It could also possibly subject you to criminal liability. You should not attempt to make or receive telephone calls from a hostage or barricade situation or from nearby homes or businesses.
- When reporting on these situations, avoid speculation about the hostage taker, his or her motives, demands, or state of mind. If a guest speculates about these issues, the host should point out that VOA has not verified what the guest has just said, and move the conversation away from such speculation.



### **NAMING PEOPLE INVOLVED IN CRIMES**

Be precise with the language used in reporting about crime or demonstrations.

#### **VICTIMS**

VOA should not name rape victims or other victims of sexual assaults or molestations. These crimes carry a stigma for the victims, and victims should be allowed to decide whether they want to be identified. Be cautious in providing descriptive details so that the person is not inadvertently identified.

There are special difficulties in identifying minors (under 18 years of age) who have been kidnapped or are alleged victims of sexual crimes. In the case of a kidnapping, news outlets may identify minors to help them be found. However, if we learn that a kidnapped minor has been sexually assaulted, the responsible action is to stop both naming the individual and showing his/her picture.

#### **EXCEPTIONS TO THE ABOVE MUST BE APPROVED IN ADVANCE BY A SUPERVISOR AND THE EDITOR FOR NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES**

#### **SUSPECTS**

VOA does not identify suspects of criminal investigations who have not been charged or arrested. This has become more difficult in the U.S. in recent years, when law enforcement officials refer to someone as “a person of interest.” This is not a legal term, and VOA should not use it because it can place a person under increasing suspicion and may result in unintended consequences for the individual.

The essential source for identifying the status of a person or group charged or arrested is law enforcement or the court system, **NOT** an unidentified “informed individual.” When someone has been charged with a crime, use caution in choosing language so as not to imply guilt or innocence. Similarly, if someone originally identified as a suspect is not charged with a crime, we must make that known as soon as possible in a follow-up story.

#### **NAMING OR IDENTIFYING MINORS INVOLVED IN CRIMINAL ACTIVITY**

In addition to the guidance above regarding minors who are victims, VOA should not name, show video or play audio of a minor who is a suspect in a crime, or is arrested and charged with a crime. Exceptions may be made if a minor is charged as an adult, but in those cases we should wait until the accused has been formally charged, not just arrested.

There may be other exceptions, such as if a minor is charged with murder or another heinous crime. In some cases, local media may have already widely reported the minor’s identity.

#### **BEFORE DECIDING TO IDENTIFY A MINOR, PLEASE CONSULT A SUPERVISOR AND THE EDITOR FOR NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES**

[\*Return to Table of Contents\*](#)

### **INTERVIEWING & VIDEOTAPING MINORS**

Interviewing minors, whether for audio or video, can present special issues, particularly where wrongdoing, criminal activity, private, potentially embarrassing or other sensitive situations are involved. In these situations you **MUST** obtain permission from a parent or adult guardian. Permission should be in writing, where possible. [You can find the release form on Sharepoint.](#)

If that isn't possible, recording audio or video of the parent/guardian giving consent is acceptable.

Generally, minors can be interviewed and recorded, without permission, on non-controversial subjects such as reaction to a movie, talking about a favorite food, going back to school on the first day of the school year.

When recording audio or shooting video at a school in the U.S., ask whether a school has sent out what are known as "negative releases" to parents. These are notifications that a media crew will be visiting a school, asking parents to return the notice only if they **DO NOT** want their child to participate in interviews or tapings. In this situation you may not need additional permission.

In a breaking news situation, if the minor is out of harm's way, it may be permissible – without parental approval -- to interview the minor if he/she is a witness or has information about the event. However, keep in mind that the minor must be freely willing to talk, and should not be asked private, personal or other potentially embarrassing questions and should not be asked to name suspects.

In all cases, ABC NewsOne, AFP, APTN and Reuters video should be carefully screened to follow the same guidelines.

### **COVERING & REPORTING SUICIDES**

Deciding whether to report the name of a suicide victim is a delicate and difficult matter. Did the victim commit suicide publicly in order to achieve notoriety? Will reporting the person's name encourage others who might be contemplating suicide and looking for recognition? Will reporting the victim's name bring unwanted attention to family or friends? Keep in mind that by most accounts, people who commit suicide are in a disturbed or distressed mental state. Consequently, there are no clear or easy answers to these questions.

If the person is **NOT** a public figure, there should be no overwhelming editorial reason to report the name. Ask the question: Is the suicide tangential to the story, or does it have a larger impact on the story or participants in the story?

**BEFORE REPORTING THE NAME OF A SUICIDE VICTIM, PLEASE CONSULT  
A SUPERVISOR OR THE EDITOR FOR NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES**

There may be a situation when a VOA staffer in the field is in a position to intervene in a situation where injury or the loss of life is a very real outcome. When a person decides to take his or her own life as a protest, there is no expectation that a journalist will intervene, nor is there a VOA policy on whether you should or should not intervene. It is up to the individual on the scene to use his or her own best judgment.

[\(Also see Sensitive & Graphic Material, p. 18\)](#)

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### **BREAKING NEWS**

Although breaking news situations don't often present themselves in VOA's daily coverage, there are certain key points to follow when putting that type of information on the air or online.

Producers should use caution before airing live and/or unedited material which may be excessively graphic in visuals or language. Ask the question: Does the news value of the material warrant airing it without reviewing it first?

**CONSULT WITH YOUR SUPERVISOR AND THE EDITOR FOR NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES IF POTENTIALLY GRAPHIC MATERIAL IS GOING TO BE AIRED OR POSTED ONLINE BEFORE BEING VIEWED OR WITHOUT A DETAILED DESCRIPTION.**

When airing or posting such material, alert your listeners, viewers and readers as to the nature of the material.

[\*\(Also see Sensitive & Graphic Material, p. 18\)\*](#)

### **REPORTING CROWD ESTIMATES**

When covering rallies or demonstrations, it's important to attribute estimates of size. Organizing groups or official agencies which provide them may have reasons to inflate or downplay the numbers. Where non-official estimates such as "hundreds of thousands" appear to be guesses or inflated, a correspondent, producer or photographer on the scene may be able to provide a better perspective on crowd size. As an example, they can say the crowd is standing shoulder to shoulder for four blocks. If a correspondent, producer or photographer is not covering the event, we should look to the wire services for their reporting on the size of the crowd.

[\*\(Also see Attribution, p. 30\)\*](#)

### **STAGING & RE-CREATIONS**

➤ **VOA DOES NOT DO "AS LIVE," "LOOK LIVE" OR "LIVE TO TAPE" VIDEO REPORTS.**  
"As Live" pieces are video playbacks of a correspondent reporting from a location, but are manipulated in the control room to give the illusion that this is a true live shot by placing the video in a double box and having the anchor appear to interact with the correspondent. Presenting a correspondent in this manner goes against the VOA Charter's principle of being a reliable and credible source of news, and should be discouraged at all times.

- **VOA REPORTS THE NEWS**
- **WE DO NOT CREATE OR MANIPULATE NEWS STORIES**
- **STAGING A NEWS EVENT OR CONTROLLING HOW IT TURNS OUT -- WHETHER BY ENCOURAGEMENT, PROPS OR PAYMENT -- IS UNACCEPTABLE**

[\*Return to Table of Contents\*](#)

When shooting video with the subject of a story to explain something that happened, don't ask the person to do things they normally don't do. For instance: It's acceptable to shoot video of a family that goes to the cemetery once a week to place flowers on the grave of a family member, but you should explain in the track that this is something the family normally does. However, if you ask someone to go to the cemetery and lay flowers on the grave of a family member, you should explain that as well.

Keep in mind, though, that the more you direct people – having them do things specifically for the camera – the more time you'll have to spend explaining that to the audience.

### **USING VOA EMPLOYEES OR RELATIVES FOR STORIES**

Generally speaking, VOA employees should not be used in radio, TV or web pieces outside of their official capacity. In most cases it is also preferable not to use the relatives or friends of VOA employees. While they may be perfect subjects to help illustrate stories, there is always the possibility of the appearance of a conflict.

However exceptions can be granted; for instance, if a relative or friend is prominent or expert in his or her own right. When in doubt, consult with your supervisor or the Editor for News Standards & Best Practices.

### **WRITING**

Anyone writing for VOA on any platform – radio, TV or online – should be familiar with the VOA Stylebook. The Stylebook covers grammar, spelling, definitions and explanations of commonly used terms, as well as the proper use of American English.

**Some of the key points of the Stylebook as they relate to best practices are included in this Guide, but every VOA employee should read and become familiar with the Stylebook.**

[The Stylebook is maintained by the News Center and can be found on Sharepoint.](#)

VOA copy should be simple and straightforward. We are not writing treaties or scholarly reports. For example, use “stop the fighting” rather than “achieve the cessation of hostilities.” Most of our writing is for people whose first language is not English, so avoid excessively difficult words, and explain them when you must use them.

Avoid colloquialisms and jargon, which may be difficult to translate and are not easily understood by foreign audiences. When used, as in a direct quotation, provide an alternative in parentheses to assist language services.

- The convicted hacker said writing the virus was “a piece of cake” (very easy).
- He spoke “off the cuff” (without notes).
- The House Minority Whip (the number two Republican/Democrat in the House).
- He made a killing (made a lot of money) in the stock market.

Words such as “biggest,” “highest,” “first” and others like them should be used judiciously because they often turn out to be incorrect. Ask yourself whether the fact that something is first is truly significant. Avoid superlatives such as “most famous” or “greatest,” which often represent value judgments. Descriptive and colorful words are encouraged, but use caution. Something that is “unique” is the only one of its kind. A thing or event cannot be “somewhat unique.” Other words describing extreme situations should also raise flags for writers and editors, and should be scrutinized to ensure they are justified. “Trouble” in a city does not necessarily mean it is in “chaos.” “Asking urgently” is not necessarily “pleading” or “begging.” If a situation is “desperate” today, what will it be tomorrow when things get worse?

It is acceptable, however, to use words like these when you’re quoting someone directly.

### **SOURCING**

Whenever possible, a source should be “on the record” – someone who is willing to be named and quoted. However, journalists routinely rely on sources who won’t go on the record. If a source refuses to be named, the information he or she provides should be characterized in other ways, as clearly as possible.

Sourcing is often a matter of negotiation, but **a request for confidentiality should come from the source and not suggested by the correspondent or producer.** However, your editor has a right to know the name of the source if he or she asks for it.

### **AN UNNAMED SOURCE MUST HAVE VERIFIABLE AND FIRST-HAND KNOWLEDGE OF THE STORY**

Before using an unnamed source, you must be certain that there is no other way to get the information on the record. You must be convinced the source knows what he/she is talking about, and you should consider asking for actual evidence to bolster the source’s claim or comment. When discussing third-party information with a source, be sure that the source is actually confirming the information from his or her knowledge of a particular situation, and is not simply hearing it from you and agreeing that it is plausible.

Avoid other extremely vague terms such as “unnamed sources” or “unidentified sources,” “informed sources,” “authoritative sources,” “well-placed sources,” “reliable sources.”

You should be willing to tell our audience why the source cannot be named. For example, you can say, “The source’s name is being withheld to protect against possible reprisals.”

A story that relies on the use of confidential/unnamed sources should be of public concern. We are not interested in “gotcha” stories just for the sake of the “gotcha,” nor are we interested in scoring scoops just for the sake of being first (and possibly being wrong).

There will be times when multiple news outlets report information from unnamed sources during a breaking story, as with the Boston Marathon bombing in April 2013.

As happened with Boston – when multiple news organizations said there was an arrest and VOA reported that information – we will later find out that that information is incorrect. In those cases VOA will issue a correction as quickly as possible across all platforms.

[\(Also see Corrections, p. 89\)](#)

The following characterizations may be helpful in establishing with a source what level of confidentiality you have agreed to. In all cases it is always best to clarify with the source how the information may be used:

- **ON THE RECORD**  
All information is suitable for publication and attributable to the source by name and title.
  - **OFF THE RECORD**  
Material that is “off the record” is not directly usable, but the information can be used to focus the direction of a story. Off-the-record material may also be a valid second source to confirm information obtained elsewhere.
  - **ON BACKGROUND**  
“On background” is generally understood to mean the information given can be used, provided it is attributed to a generic source. “A senior administration official called the election flawed.”
  - **DEEP BACKGROUND**  
Information obtained on “deep background” is normally provided with the understanding that it will not be sourced directly in any way. Acceptable wording might be, “It was learned that the delegates agreed to a second meeting on Tuesday.”
- **PUBLICATION OF A SIGNIFICANT STORY BASED UPON A SINGLE SOURCE WHO WILL NOT ALLOW HIS OR HER NAME TO BE USED MUST ALWAYS BE APPROVED IN ADVANCE BY VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT.**
  - **UPON REQUEST, DISCLOSURE OF A SOURCE’S IDENTITY TO VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT AND TO THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL MAY BE REQUIRED TO CLEAR THE SOURCED INFORMATION FOR AIR.**
  - **WHEN DISCUSSING CONFIDENTIALITY WITH A SOURCE, IT MAY BE ADVISABLE TO EXPLAIN THE POSSIBILITY OF THIS LIMITED DISCLOSURE WITHIN VOA. REFUSAL TO DISCLOSE THE SOURCE MAY RESULT IN THE SOURCE’S INFORMATION NOT BEING USED BY VOA.**

[\*\(Also see Reporter’s Privilege & Confidential Sources, p. 97\)\*](#)

## **RUMORS & SPECULATION**

VOA avoids the use of rumors and speculation in news items. However, this should be carefully evaluated on a case-by-case basis in instances where a rumor or speculation takes on a life of its own. In general, reporters, producers and editors should seek out responsible officials to respond to the rumors or speculation and use those comments as our entry to the story. Without an official comment, VOA should avoid being first to publicize a rumor or speculation.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### ATTRIBUTION

#### WE GIVE CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE

Proper attribution is a fundamental element of good journalism.

Aside from the material provided by our own correspondents and stringers, VOA receives news from a number of different outlets: ABC News, Agence France Presse, the Associated Press and Reuters, as well as from newspapers, television news networks and official news agencies of other nations.

Story information can also come from press releases put out by corporations or private groups such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs). When using press releases, they must be identified as such, and if applicable, they should be counter-balanced.

When VOA quotes exclusive information from news stories or uses quotes from editorials, opinion pieces or social media posts, it is mandatory to credit the media organization, NGO or other outlet. Not including that information can open VOA to possible claims of plagiarism and/or copyright infringement.

*(Also see [Crediting the News Agencies, p. 34](#) and [Plagiarism, p. 35](#))*

One method of providing attribution is in the use of block quotes. In the example below, *VOX.com* provided a hyperlink to a *Washington Post* story about “Pizzagate,” but also included part of the Post’s story in a “block,” shown by the solid bar on the left. This is acceptable for use on voanews.com websites, but it should not be used repeatedly.

The conspiracy theory, known as “Pizzagate,” apparently connected Hillary Clinton’s presidential campaign to a nonexistent child sex ring at the Comet Ping Pong pizzeria, **Faiz Siddiqui and Susan Svrluga reported for the Washington Post:**

The restaurant’s owner and employees were threatened on social media in the days before the election after fake news stories circulated claiming that then-Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton and her campaign chief were running a child sex ring from the restaurant’s backrooms. Even Michael Flynn, a retired general whom President-elect Trump has tapped to advise him on national security, shared stories about another anti-Clinton conspiracy theory involving pedophilia. None of them were true. But the fake stories and threats persisted, some even aimed at children of Comet Ping Pong employees and patrons. The restaurant’s owner was forced to contact the FBI, local police, Facebook and other social-media platforms in an effort to remove the articles.



## BEST PRACTICES GUIDE

Information that comes directly from the U.S. government – the White House, State Department, Pentagon or Congress – is considered valid on its own, **but must still be attributed.**

On a breaking news story, AP or Reuters may quote a single source such as a police official or a government spokesperson. In those cases our copy will attribute the information to the wire service and say that VOA is working to confirm the information.

Information in News Center stories does not require additional sourcing.

There are times when the attribution can be left unstated because the source of a particular statement is both obvious and authoritative.

**An example of over-attribution:**

*The U.S. space agency NASA says astronauts aboard the space shuttle “Discovery” performed a second spacewalk today.*

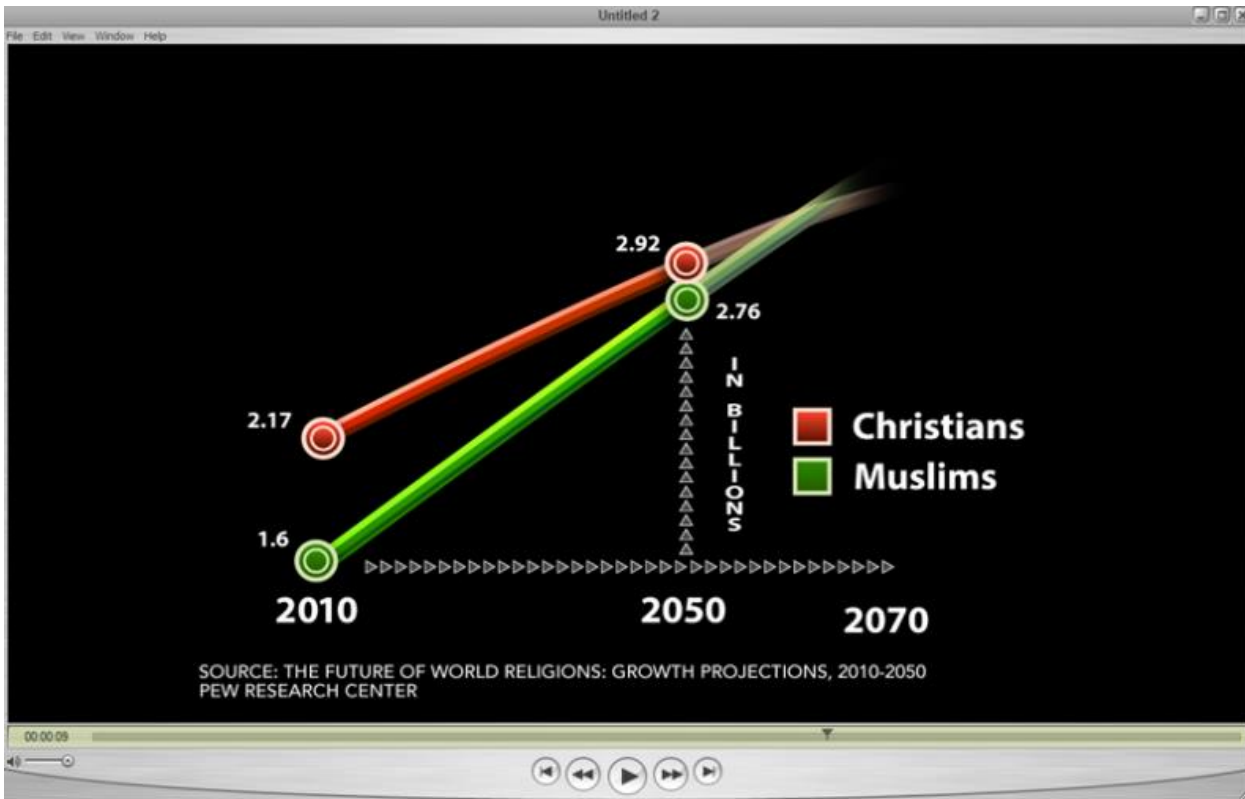
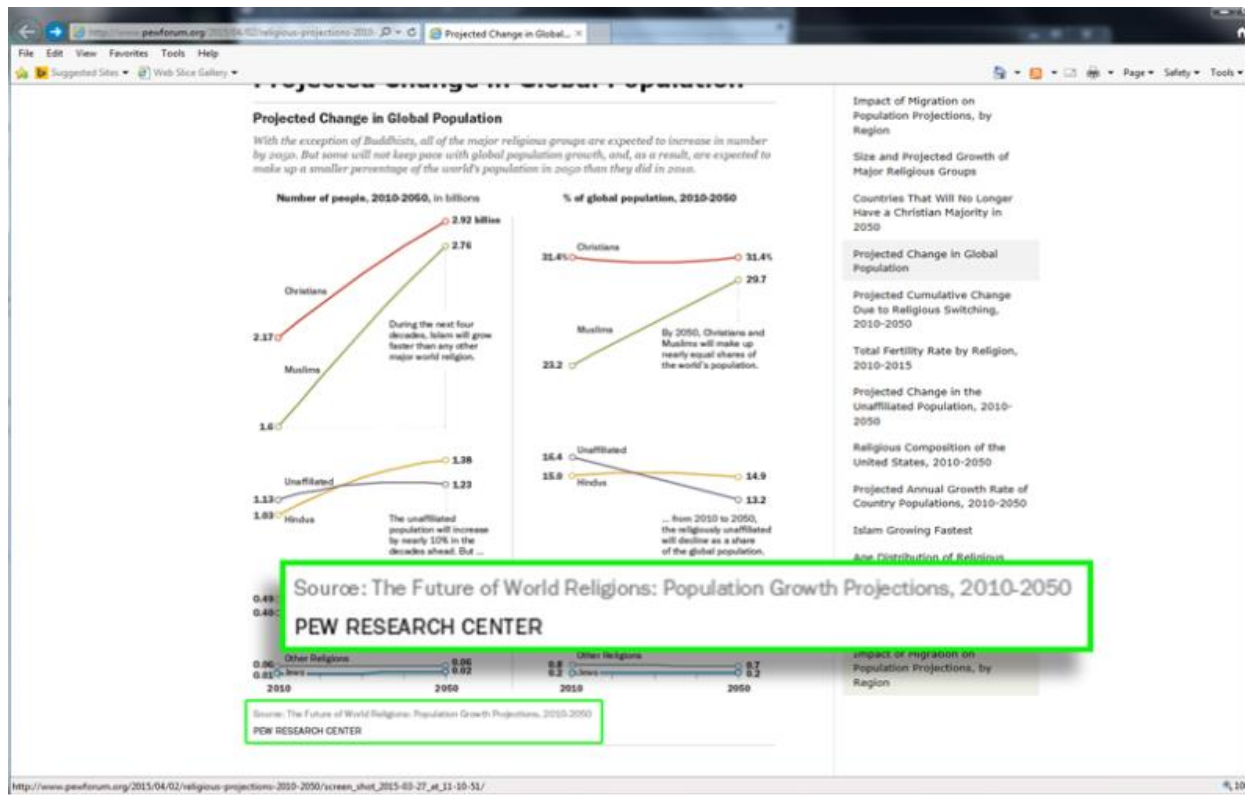
**It’s better, and easier, to write:**

*Astronauts aboard the U.S space shuttle “Discovery” performed a second spacewalk today.*

In the course of our reporting, we often will cite information or statistics that come from think tanks, NGOs, or another government agency. Aside from crediting those groups in scripts, they must also be credited in full-screen graphics, whether as a stand-alone page or within a video package.

### FULL SCREEN GRAPHICS

- While styles and looks may differ for various Language Services, the basic procedure should be the same.
- Any time a graphic is based on information or statistics that are not originally generated by VOA, a small info source attribution needs to be included on the graphic. See the photos on the next page, identifying the correct attribution.



[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### **WIKIPEDIA**

There have been a number of incidents where material posted on Wikipedia has not been verified or has proven to be incorrect. Any information found on Wikipedia should be confirmed with other, more reliable sources, or with the News Center.

### **WIKIPEDIA SHOULD NOT BE CONSIDERED OR USED AS A PRIMARY SOURCE OF INFORMATION**

### **OPENSOURCE**

The U.S. government-funded news portal [OpenSource](#) is an important tool for finding source information. VOA uses the text material in OpenSource as a second source of news and information.

OpenSource can be found in DaletPlus/Webspace at **WIRES→OPENSOURCE→ALL WIRES**

However, **VOA DOES NOT HAVE ACCESS** to the audio and video which OpenSource posts from news organizations -- BBC, Sky News and Al Jazeera English, for example -- with whom VOA **does not have contractual agreements.**

### **CREDITING THE NEWS AGENCIES**

To make sure that our best practices are in sync with our news agency contracts, below is guidance on how VOA should credit the agencies across all platforms. Note that each platform has different guidelines, and everyone should be aware of the differences, especially if you're producing a story that will appear on all platforms.

#### **RADIO**

- AFP, AP and Reuters have all confirmed that VOA radio broadcasts can use their news wire copy verbatim without verbal attribution or credit. All three agencies consider this to be “standard use” of their material.
- However, if one wire service has an exclusive interview or information that other news organizations do not have, we should give that wire service verbal credit in the broadcast.  
[\*\(Also see Audio Usage Rights, p. 63\)\*](#)

#### **TELEVISION**

- Although the individual news agency IDs and the Dot are burned into agency video as they are being recorded in DaletPlus, it is preferable that all video pieces -- whether produced by the News Center or by a Language Service -- should note in the DaletPlus Asset Management Form the time segments where ABC NewsOne, AFP, AP and Reuters video are used. That is our way of tracking/crediting them for the usage, and for the Senior Archivists to know whether the material is worth keeping.  
[\*\(Also see Video Usage Rights, p. 65, Documenting Source Video in DaletPlus, p. 81 & News Agency IDs and the Dot, p. 82\)\*](#)
- Verbal credit to the news agencies is not required for video reports, **unless the video is exclusive and is noted as such in the agency's script.**

#### **WEB**

It has long been the practice in print to credit the wire services when using their stories in whole or in part. All VOA websites and social media pages should follow this practice.

- [How the credit looks when using a single news agency's wire story in full, with the agency's name at the top.](#)
- [How the credit looks when using more than one agency's wire story, with the agencies' names at the bottom.](#)
- [Agency photos used on VOA websites and on agency-maintained social media pages must include a captioned credit to the agency.](#)

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### **PLAGIARISM**

**PLAGIARISM IS ILLEGAL AND UNETHICAL AND STRIKES AT THE VERY HEART OF OUR JOURNALISTIC MISSION.**

**IT CAN COST THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE AGENCY ITS CREDIBILITY AND REPUTATION, AND WILL NOT BE TOLERATED.**

**WE DO NOT PRESENT OTHERS' WORK AS OUR OWN**

**ALLEGATIONS OF PLAGIARISM WILL BE FULLY INVESTIGATED, AND STAFFERS WILL BE NOTIFIED OF ANY SUCH ALLEGATIONS.**

**PLAGIARISM MAY RESULT IN DISCIPLINARY ACTION, UP TO AND INCLUDING REMOVAL FROM FEDERAL SERVICE**

**NOTE:** The Poynter Institute offers [this excellent guidance for identifying plagiarism](#).

### **INTERVIEWS**

Even in the era of selfies, photo-bombing and user-generated content, most people are not comfortable being interviewed and consider recording equipment to be invasive, especially when you're dealing with sensitive subjects. One way to reduce that unease or tension is to first talk to an interview subject **WITHOUT** the equipment. Put the person at ease; make him or her feel comfortable talking to you before proceeding with the actual interview.

When setting up an interview, the subject may ask what questions will be asked or how the interview will be treated when produced. It's OK to outline in advance general points of interest and the general subject areas you intend to cover.

### **YOU SHOULD NOT**

- **PROVIDE ACTUAL QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED**
- **PROMISE YOU WILL NOT ASK QUESTIONS OUTSIDE THE AREAS YOU HAVE OUTLINED**
- **PROMISE HOW SUBJECTS WILL BE TREATED ON THE AIR**

Any agreement that certain questions will or will not be asked would be an exception, to be decided on a case-by-case basis in consultation with your supervisor and/or VOA senior management as warranted. If an agreement is approved, the agreement should be mentioned in the introduction to the interview.

If an interviewee requires VOA to use a name or title we ordinarily would not use, that too should be mentioned in the introduction to the interview.

### **DO NOT PROMISE AN INTERVIEWEE THAT**

- **VOA WILL AIR THE ENTIRE INTERVIEW OR A PORTION OF IT IN A TV PROGRAM, OR AS PART OF A TV PACKAGE**
- **THAT HE OR SHE WILL BE ABLE TO FIND ALL OR PART OF THE INTERVIEW ON THE VOA WEBSITE**
- **THAT ANY PART OF THE INTERVIEW WILL BE INCLUDED IN A TV PROGRAM OR TV PACKAGE, OR WITH A WEB STORY OR BLOG**

*(Also see [Hosting a Guest on VOA Programs, p. 44](#))*

### **NEWSMAKER INTERVIEWS**

When VOA interviews a prominent newsmaker at length, the purpose is to find out what an individual, organization or group of lawmakers are thinking about a particular issue. This type of interview does not always require that the other side be presented within the interview format.

Instead, a video piece or a brief explainer can be used to set up the topic or topics being discussed, and that can be the means by which the other side's point of view is presented. Another possibility is reading copy following the interview stating the opposition's view.

Ultimately, it is advisable to seek out a corresponding interview at length with someone from the other side of the issue.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### RECORDING TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

- If you are planning to record a telephone interview, the reporter or producer **MUST** advise the interview subject that he or she is being recorded, and that their comments will be on the record. If the interview subject objects to being recorded, the reporter or producer should confirm that the interview can be used as off the record information.  
([Also see Sourcing, p. 28](#) and [Defamation/Privacy/False Light, p. 95](#))

### SHOOTING/EDITING TV INTERVIEWS

- When shooting a two-camera interview, it's acceptable for a reporter to register appropriate visual expressions, such as smiling at a joke. What is NOT acceptable is editing in a visual reaction that is out of sequence to the answer being given.
- Equally unacceptable is separating questions from answers. The 10<sup>th</sup> answer of an interview should not be edited as if it were the response to the 4<sup>th</sup> question, even if it seems to make the reporter's or producer's editorial point clearer.
- Interviews shot with one camera can present editing difficulties, so when possible, the camera should be set up to start the interview on a medium 2-shot. That will allow the cameraperson to push in on the interview subject, pan to the interviewer and pull back to the 2-shot as needed.
- If the above method isn't possible, then reverse questions (questions asked after the interview is done, with the camera reversed to tape the interviewer), while not ideal, are allowed. Reverse questions should be true to the original questions and if done, the interviewee or representative should be made aware and should be invited to be present.

In this situation, because the reverse shots are happening after the actual interview, the reporter or producer should avoid showing an expression (smile, frown, nod) that might be seen as agreement or disagreement with what the subject said during the interview.

## **PUBLIC FIGURES**

Questions and reporting about the private lives of public figures should be relevant to the story. For example, the questioning is appropriate when the reporting is intended to expose inconsistency, lying, hypocrisy and most certainly, illegal activity. In the case of candidates for public office, information about these actions often enables voters to judge the character of a candidate or elected official.

However, VOA's reporting **should not** be based on rumor, speculation or gossip. Reporting should rely on on the record statements and actions of public figures. Information from normally reliable sources not willing to be identified should be very closely examined. ([Also see Sourcing, p. 28](#) and [Rumors & Speculation, p. 29](#))

The passage of time is an important consideration in determining what is relevant, and may affect current relevance. When information is dated, evaluate it carefully. In the case of a political figure, it may be the importance of such information for the public to judge that person's qualifications and fitness to hold public office.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Each situation should be considered separately and there is no blanket rule prohibiting reporting private activities from many years ago.

For interviews, be very careful when using information from sources and/or sourced information from another news organization when asking a question to a guest about his/her private life.

[\(Also see Sourcing, p. 28 and Attribution, p. 30\)](#)

Open-ended questions based on little or no evidence are strongly discouraged. For example, the question “Have you ever taken a bribe,” should not be asked unless it’s based on our reporting, or if there is a compelling and journalistically justifiable reason to ask it.

**IF VOA STAFF ARE UNSURE OF THE APPROPRIATENESS OF THEIR QUESTIONING OR REPORTING REGARDING THE PRIVATE LIFE OF A PUBLIC FIGURE, THEY SHOULD CONSULT WITH THEIR SUPERVISOR AND WHEN APPROPRIATE WITH THE EDITOR FOR NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES AND THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL.**

### **ANONYMITY**

There may be reasons to agree to anonymity for an interview subject, whether for radio, TV or online. For example, we may not wish to jeopardize the subject’s safety or subject him or her or family members to harm or undue embarrassment. But there may be legal considerations as well in granting anonymity to interview subjects.

Always ask the interviewee about his or her reasons for requesting anonymity. Clarify and confirm the conditions agreed to in exchange for the information. Anonymity for interviewees can be defined by degree. In establishing the degree of anonymity, describe the process to be used (e.g. blurring of faces, digitizing the voice, videotaping in shadow) but do not guarantee a particular result.

- **THE FAILURE TO ADEQUATELY DISGUISE AN INTERVIEW SUBJECT OR A MISUNDERSTANDING OVER THE STEPS AGREED ON TO DISGUISE AN INTERVIEW SUBJECT CAN RESULT IN A LEGAL CLAIM AGAINST VOA.**
- **GENERALLY, WE WANT TO AVOID PROMISING ANONYMITY FOR PEOPLE TRYING TO EVADE LAW ENFORCEMENT.**
- **EXCEPTIONS SHOULD BE CLEARED WITH A SUPERVISOR, THE EDITOR FOR NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES AND/OR SENIOR MANAGEMENT AND THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL.**

[\(Also see Sourcing, p. 28\)](#)



### **“AMBUSH” INTERVIEWS**

So-called “ambush” interviews, where a person who has refused to be interviewed is approached without notice by a reporter or producer, are discouraged and should be avoided. An “ambush” is different than a “stakeout,” where cameras are set up in advance to get comments from individuals who are going to or leaving meetings and/or work.

**CONSULT WITH SUPERVISORS, THE EDITOR FOR NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES AND/OR SENIOR MANAGEMENT AND THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL WHEN CONSIDERING WHETHER TO DO AN AMBUSH INTERVIEW.**

### **ADVANCE SCRIPTS/SCREENING**

You should not show a script to a third party not affiliated with VOA or USAGM in advance of the story’s broadcast or online publication. However, you can call an interviewee and review portions of a script in order to fact check. As part of the reporting process you may also show portions of other interviews or other footage prepared for the report to an interview subject to obtain their reaction or comment for use in the same report. You should videotape the individual watching the other interview or other footage whenever possible.

Advance screenings of VOA news stories are not permitted without the prior approval of senior management. An exception: press screenings for review purposes.

### **SUBJECT TAPING INTERVIEW**

On occasion, a subject may ask to do his or her own recording of an interview. That is permissible as long as the subject understands the taping is for personal use only, not for broadcast, publication or other distribution. As noted above, VOA will not provide an audio or video copy of the raw interview to an interview subject.

### **REQUESTS FOR UNAIED/UNPUBLISHED MATERIAL**

As a general policy, **VOA should not give third parties access to unaied or unpublished material** or discuss the existence of such materials. Refer those requests to senior management and the Office of General Counsel.

[\*\(Also see Usage Requests, p. 78 and VOA Firewall, p. 91\)\*](#)

### **PAYMENT**

VOA does not pay people for interviews. However, it may be appropriate to pay certain travel-related expenses for an interviewee. Refer questions on this subject to VOA senior management and the Office of General Counsel.

### GUESTS

#### **NOTIFYING VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT OF HIGH-LEVEL GUESTS**

As a major international broadcaster, VOA often welcomes to the Cohen Building high-level foreign government officials and other important individuals, such as prominent dissidents and exiles. To better determine when additional protocols may be appropriate, VOA journalists who schedule these meetings or visits should immediately notify senior management through their chain of command. Division Directors will then notify the Programming Directorate using the email address [programming-directorate@voanews.com](mailto:programming-directorate@voanews.com) for coordination with the Office of the VOA Director. Decisions about any special actions that may be needed will be coordinated between the Office of the VOA Director and the CEO's Office. Notification at each stage should occur prior to the visit, with sufficient time for senior management to take any actions that may be necessary.

VOA journalists who schedule meetings at the Cohen Building with audience members, members of the diaspora, or lower-level government officials should also immediately notify their Division Director. That Division Director will then decide whether additional coordination within VOA and/or the CEO's Office is required.

#### **SECURITY PROCEDURES FOR GUESTS**

Security procedures for entry into the Cohen building are set by the Federal Protective Service (FPS), the agency that provides integrated security and law enforcement services to federally owned and leased facilities. FPS, not USAGM Security, manages the contract for the building's Protective Security Officers (PSOs), thus they report to and are represented by the FPS Inspector.

As with other federal buildings, all visitors must show proper photo ID and go through security screening upon arrival.

**FOR PROGRAM GUESTS, THIS PROCESS CAN SEEM CUMBERSOME.  
CONSEQUENTLY, EMPLOYEES MUST EXPLAIN THE SECURITY PROCEDURES AND PHOTO ID  
REQUIREMENTS TO ALL PROGRAM GUESTS PRIOR TO THEIR ARRIVAL, AND ASK THAT THEY  
ANTICIPATE ABOUT 10 MINUTES FOR THE CHECK-IN PROCESS.**

Types of Accepted Identification:

1. U.S. Citizens: Valid U.S. Driver's License or U.S. Passport
2. Non-U.S. Citizens: Valid Passport/Visa

Please notify your guest/visitor that they will be required to process through security screening (walk-through magnetometer and x-ray machine for hand-carried items) prior to arrival.

If you are sponsoring an event, please provide USAGM Security with a guest list that includes the date/time of their arrival, along with their full names and your contact information (Sponsor). Please remember that all visitors **MUST** be escorted while in the Cohen Building per FPS requirements. This list should be emailed to the central Security email at: [usagm-security@usagm.gov](mailto:usagm-security@usagm.gov).

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

In those rare cases when an important guest arrives without any ID, contact Security immediately so they can work with the FPS to request an exception to normal procedures and allow the guest entry into the building. Please understand that the final decision to waive normal security procedures for your guest rests with FPS, not USAGM Security.

Exceptions to these procedures can be made in some cases for VIPs. VIPs are granted access without having to sign in or go through the metal detectors. Under some circumstances, they also enter the building through a different entry point than the C Street visitors' entrance.

The following are automatically considered VIPs:

1. The President and his cabinet, including sitting Ambassadors
2. Sitting and former members of Congress
3. Anyone who has a federal law enforcement detail, such as foreign dignitaries

For these and other special guests, employees can request VIP status from USAGM Security managers or from the USAGM Chief of Staff.

Please contact Security with any additional questions at 202-382-7777.

### **GUEST BOOKING PROCEDURES**

- ALL REQUESTS FOR THE PRESIDENT, VICE PRESIDENT, FIRST LADY AND THE VP'S SPOUSE WILL BE MADE THROUGH THE VOA DIRECTOR'S OFFICE. **THERE ARE ABSOLUTELY NO EXCEPTIONS**
- REQUESTS FOR OTHER WHITE HOUSE OFFICIALS, CABINET SECRETARIES, CONGRESSIONAL LEADERSHIP AND THE KEY BEATS SHOULD COME FROM THE NEWS CENTER CORRESPONDENTS AT THOSE BEATS.

### **THE CORRESPONDENTS ARE THE FACE OF VOA FOR THOSE BEATS AND WE CANNOT UNDERCUT THEIR POSITIONS**

EDUCATION	Kathleen Struck
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES	Katherine Gypson
IMMIGRATION	Molly McKitterick, Aline Barros, Victoria Macchi, Ramon Taylor
INTELLIGENCE/NATIONAL SECURITY	Jeff Seldin
JUSTICE	Masood Farivar
MEDICAL	Carol Pearson
PENTAGON	Carla Babb
POLITICS	Jim Malone
SENATE	Michael Bowman
STATE DEPARTMENT	Cindy Saine & Nike Ching
UNITED NATIONS	Margaret Besheer
WHITE HOUSE	Steve Herman & Patsy Widakuswara

These requests **SHOULD BE SENT FIRST** to the appropriate beat correspondent. When an interview has been confirmed, an e-mail should be sent to the Guest Booking group: [guest-booking@voanews.com](mailto:guest-booking@voanews.com)

- When we get an interview with the President, Vice President, First Lady, VP's spouse, key Cabinet secretaries or Congressional leadership, VOA Public Relations should be notified immediately: [PublicRelations@voanews.com](mailto:PublicRelations@voanews.com)

### **ADDITIONALLY: LARRY LONDON'S BEAT IS MUSIC AND PENELOPE POULOU'S BEAT IS FILM.**

If a Language Service is thinking of interviewing a major musician or musical group, or thinking of getting an interview with a film personality who is on a junket or making an appearance in a bureau city, **an advisory e-mail should go out first to Larry or Penelope accordingly, and to Guest Booking.**

By the same token, when Larry, Penelope or anyone else has a major music interview or movie-related interview scheduled, they should advise the Guest Booking e-mail group.

When there are major awards shows – usually in Los Angeles -- Mike O’Sullivan in the L.A. bureau should be brought into the conversation. As with State, Pentagon or elsewhere – it does not make VOA look good if a studio or a musician’s or filmmaker’s press person is hearing from multiple VOA individuals.

### **LANGUAGE SERVICES & NEWS CENTER GUIDELINES**

Language Services and the News Center should use the “Guest Booking” email group for notifications about the following types of information:

- Guests they intend to book, whether newsmakers or experts.
  - Should a Language Service seek an expert on a topic but has not yet identified the expert, it would still be helpful for Guest Booking to be notified of the Service’s interest in an expert on a specific topic.
  - Guests that have already been booked.
  - Unplanned interviews that were conducted in the course of newsgathering.
- Whenever possible, Language Services and the News Center should include whatever germane information is available in their guest booking notifications: details such as date and time if known, location of the interview, platform and device (Skype, smartphone, ENG camera, audio only), language, where content may be accessed, gist of interview, full log or transcript about what was said, if available.
- **The News Center will collect this information** and provide via email a several-times **daily calendar** that will track all known guest activity at-a-glance for all to see.
- This calendar will permanently reside in the shared drive for the whole how to easily access, thus serving as a back-up for the email distribution and providing an easily accessible archive of all guest activity.

When and where possible, stringers for the News Center and the Language Services should keep the field correspondents and/or Washington advised of potential interviews of interest.

**IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT ALL STAFF RESPONSIBLE FOR BOOKING GUESTS/INTERVIEWS SEND A NOTE TO GUEST BOOKING AND TO THE APPROPRIATE INDIVIDUALS BEFORE MAKING A REQUEST.**

### **HOSTING A GUEST ON VOA PROGRAMS**

- **IT IS MANDATORY** that a discussion takes place at the Language Service and/or Division level when a service is considering a live interview with a potentially controversial or hostile guest, or about particularly sensitive issues.
- The discussion should focus on determining the format for that interview, and the final decision about the format will be determined at the Division level.
- An interview with a controversial guest or about sensitive issues **SHOULD NOT BE PROMOTED** until the final decision on the interview format has been made.
- It may be decided that the best approach will be to **RECORD** the interview so that it can be edited for time and presented to the audience in the best editorial and production formats possible.
- **All potential guests must be pre-interviewed** to get a sense of what to expect during the actual interview. You can discuss general topics, but do not give the guest the actual interview questions in advance. That pre-interview should be available for review by producers, anchors and Language Service or Division management.
- When you know you're going to have a controversial or potentially hostile live guest, prepare a game plan with the show staff and the show Director about what to do if the interview goes downhill, so that everyone in the control room and on the set know in advance what to do, including implementation of a back-up plan.
- It is the responsibility of a program's host to do his/her homework about the guest and the subject matter. If a guest starts making unsubstantiated accusations or questionable statements, it is the responsibility of the anchor to challenge the guest about those accusations/statements, whether asking for clarification about the source of the accusations/statements or refuting those accusations/statements with facts.
- If a guest uses language that is unsuitable for air (cursing, insulting, racial or homosexual slurs, for example) it is the responsibility of the host to immediately cut the conversation off and apologize to the audience for the offensive language. It is the responsibility of the Executive Producer to alert the Director about what has happened so the Director can make sure the guest's microphone is silenced. At that point the EP must communicate to the Director and the Line Producer to implement a back-up plan.
- The Executive Producer is responsible for a written report of the incident. Detail the unacceptable or irresponsible language used by the guest, how the anchor handled the situation and what steps were taken to end the interview and go to alternate programming. The report is to be sent to the Service Chief, Division Director, Associate Director for Language Programming and the Associate Director for Operations.

- Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the Executive Producer to ensure that the program is clean and airs correctly. The anchor can only do so much. The EP has his/her finger on the button, so to speak, with the authority and ability to tell the Director and the Line Producer to go to something else. That's why you need to have a backup plan.

**GOING TO BLACK DURING A LIVE INTERVIEW IS A  
LAST DITCH OPTION, WHEN NOTHING ELSE WORKS.  
IT IS NEVER THE FIRST OPTION.**

[\*\(Also see Interviews, p. 36\)\*](#)

### **DIGITAL MEDIA**

#### **SOCIAL MEDIA**

VOA journalists are encouraged to participate in social media. By joining networks that are popular in your target regions you can forge closer relationships with your audience, discover new angles and stories and experiment with different ways of covering the news.

Reporters are encouraged to break news on social media platforms that are most popular in their region, but certain editorial priorities should be followed.

**REMEMBER THAT ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND OTHER PUBLIC SPACES,  
YOU ARE A JOURNALIST.**

**IT IS CRITICAL THAT YOU ARE FAIR, IMPARTIAL AND OBJECTIVE  
IN ALL PUBLIC SPACES.**

#### **PROTECTING YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL REPUTATION IN SOCIAL MEDIA**

Using social media can have as many pitfalls as pluses. If your account is hacked, or you find that an imposter account is impersonating you, your reputation and that of VOA can be damaged.

Your first line of defense – maintaining good online security practices.

- Monitor your digital identity by periodically conducting an online search for your name using several of the leading search engines, e.g. Google, Yahoo, Bing, etc. Examine the results on the first two or three pages to make sure there are no unfamiliar accounts.
- Use strong passwords (combining uppercase letters, lowercase letters, numbers, and special characters)
- Change passwords frequently
- Do not use the same passwords for multiple accounts
- Keep your passwords safe
- Make sure your email address is secure
- Be sure who you are actually connecting with or following; connect with Verified public profiles
- Get Verified for your own social media accounts used for VOA work

**Twitter:** Log in, then go to [verification.twitter.com](https://verification.twitter.com)

**Facebook:** Log in, then go to [this page](#) in Facebook's [Help Center](#)

The second option is to take images used for your profile picture and do a reverse image search, since impersonators will often use pictures you've posted online to create fake accounts. [This primer](#) from Google is a good place to start and will show you how to find all the places your pictures are showing up across the internet.



If you find or suspect problems with your accounts:

- Contact the Office of VOA Digital Strategy as soon as possible [voadigital@voanews.com](mailto:voadigital@voanews.com). They will work with the social media companies to help take care of hacks or imposter accounts.

To help prevent security problems, or once your account has been fixed, please follow these best practices for securing your account:

- Change your password
- Make sure your email address is secure
- Revoke connections to third-party applications
- Update your password in your trusted third-party applications

More details on these practices, and additional steps to protect your accounts:

- Twitter: <https://support.twitter.com/articles/31796>
- Facebook: [Keeping Your Account Secure](#) (part of the Facebook Help Center)

PEN America, the global group that ensures that people have the freedom to convey information and ideas, has created an [Online Harassment Field Manual](#) which may prove useful.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA AS REPORTING TOOL**

- **REPORTERS SHOULD QUICKLY FILE FOR VOA-OWNED PLATFORMS AFTER BREAKING NEWS ON SOCIAL MEDIA, PARTICULARLY FOR HIS OR HER SERVICE'S WEBSITE, BUT ALSO FOR RADIO AND TV WHEN APPROPRIATE.**
- **IF A VOA REPORTER/PRODUCER HAS A BREAKING STORY, HE OR SHE SHOULD BE THE ONE TO FIRST REPORT THAT ON THEIR OWN SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS OR ON THE SERVICE'S OFFICIAL ACCOUNT. DON'T BIG-FOOT YOUR COLLEAGUES.**

It's also important to remember that social media is more than Facebook and Twitter. Niche audiences often have their own niche social networks, like Sina Weibo in China or Orkut in India and Brazil. Get to know which ones are popular with your audience and experiment with them. Whatever your topic or medium, there's a probably a social network around it.

Reporting has always been about amplifying certain voices from the public. But rather than a list of carefully cultivated sources that reporters have traditionally relied upon, social media can present millions of competing voices that we must select from wisely. Whether you call it citizen journalism, user-generated content or social media, our readers often report and share news stories before we are able to verify the facts. While it's good to highlight those voices, it is critical to verify rumors before reporting them as facts.

There are techniques for confirming the validity of certain social media accounts, including examination of how long the account has been in existence, looking at the account's message history, and scrutiny of photo streams or other bits of the user's digital trail. If you have doubts, reach out to your service's or [Return to Table of Contents](#)

division's social media lead for guidance. You must do your due diligence before relying on a source as credible. In other words, report the story.

**Do not retweet or pass along unconfirmed rumors without a clear indication that the information is not yet verified.**

For example: @VOANews Lots of reports and photos of this blast. Working to confirm RT @manonstreet Bomb in front of parliament. Hundreds dead!

**ADDING COMMENTS FROM SOCIAL MEDIA TO YOUR REPORTING IS ACCEPTABLE AS LONG AS YOU CLEARLY IDENTIFY THE SOURCE OF THE COMMENT AND IT REFLECTS AUDIENCE OPINION, SIMILAR TO A VOX POP IN RADIO OR TELEVISION.**

**MAKE SURE YOU BALANCE OPINIONS TO PROVIDE A FAIR PICTURE OF PUBLIC SENTIMENT, AND CONTEXTUALIZE THOSE OPINIONS WITH THE LARGER STORY.**

*(Also see [Fairness, Objectivity and Balance](#), p. 7)*

## **OPINION**

If you take a controversial position or make a controversial comment online it can reflect poorly on you and on the agency. It could lead our readers to believe that we are untrustworthy and unable to fairly cover a controversial story. VOA has spent 75 years building its reputation, and you have spent your career building yours. To keep that trust intact we must adhere to a high standard of objectivity.

This not only includes individual posts or tweets, but also posting your political affiliation or causes in your social media profile. Privacy policies change and people can take screenshots. Assume nothing is private in social media, even if your account is visible only to your online circle of friends.

In particular, retweeting or “liking” an opinion on one side of the issue or another could be seen as an endorsement from you or from VOA. If you want to put that comment in front of your followers, make sure it is clear you aren’t endorsing the opinion, but simply showing both sides of the conversation.

For example: @VOANews The budget fight continues RT @AngryPundit Why can’t Washington get its act together?

Don’t be afraid to engage with either side of a controversial issue. It is okay to follow or friend individuals or interest groups on either side of an issue. In fact, it should be part of the reporting process; paying attention to what both sides have to say is critical to getting as much information as possible on an issue. But never endorse only one side or the other by “liking” a cause or political figure, and make sure you follow all sides of an issue.

While personal endeavors on other sites are fine, they must not involve the use of agency materials, time or facilities, including information that is available to you because of your position at VOA.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### **MANAGING YOUR PROGRAM'S OR SERVICE'S SOCIAL PRESENCE**

VOA programs and services are encouraged to maintain official accounts on the major social media platforms in your region. These presences can help you engage with your current audience and reach new audiences with your content.

Before launching a new official social media presence, you and your service chief should answer the following questions:

- Who are you trying to reach and why is this the right way to reach them?
- Who is responsible for keeping each account active and how often?
- How will success be measured and who will track it?
- Does your branding align with the branding already established on your website?

You are also responsible for moderating the comments on your Facebook page, website, or agency blog to remove comments that violate our Terms of Use. In particular, you should be on the lookout for comments that are vulgar, racist or incite others to acts of violence. If you choose to respond to those comments, your replies should be professional and courteous. If the commenter continues to respond in a rude manner, you can report the individual to that site's staff and/or you can block the user from commenting. **DO NOT** engage in a debate with anyone who is trying to stir up anger and violence. Be aware that our spam filters sometimes fail; always be vigilant about shaping a lively and responsible conversation by removing comments that distract from the free and civil exchange of ideas.

### **POSTING VOA CONTENT TO OTHER SITES, INCLUDING YOUR OWN**

Uploading proprietary VOA or wire agency material directly to personal accounts is prohibited. Not only can you be held legally liable for posting photos or video that belongs to wire and newsfeed agencies, but you will hurt your service's ability to build an audience on official channels.

Instead, you should link to VOA material posted on your service's website or other official VOA accounts, like your service's official Facebook page or YouTube channel.

*Example:* Jack is a video editor in a VOA language service. He regularly combines wire service video and VOA video into packages for broadcast and web. He sometimes takes interesting video from APTN, as well as video he has shot, and uploads it directly to his personal YouTube channel and Facebook page. Is that permitted?

*Answer:* **No.** Jack should only upload VOA material to official VOA YouTube accounts. Once it's there, he can link to it from his personal YouTube account, Facebook or other channels.

*Example:* Jack embeds video from his service's VOA YouTube channel on his own YouTube page and shares VOA reporting with his friends on Facebook. Is this permitted?

*Answer:* **Yes.** Any material shared from your service's official, public-facing website, YouTube channel, or other official outlets is okay.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### **LINKING TO OTHER SITES**

You are encouraged to provide links that are relevant to story content and suitable for all audiences. Editors should exercise judgment and not use links that may be offensive, or in any way, inappropriate.

Linking does not constitute endorsement. While you should avoid pointing readers to anything that is an affront to common decency, you can link to the websites of institutions or causes if they are relevant to a story. If your link is to the site of a particular candidate or party please be even-handed: if you link to the website of one political party, you should be just as willing to link to the website of the opposition party, when relevant to the story. Failure to do so could not only call into question our objectivity; it could be a violation of the Hatch Act.

[\*\(Also see Political Activity, p. 10\)\*](#)

### **BE TRANSPARENT ABOUT YOUR MISTAKES**

Every news outlet makes mistakes. When a piece of reporting on your VOA website contains a factual error it should be corrected as quickly as possible. Talk to a senior editor in your service about what needs to be changed and place a correction at the bottom in italics that notes the original error.

Never delete a story or video from your VOA website without correcting and acknowledging the mistake. Not only will the incorrect story remain in the caches of major search engines, but your readers will believe that you are trying to cover something up instead of being honest and open. Full disclosure is always best.

While you should not delete incorrect stories or video from your site, you should use the content management system to remove it from major section fronts until it is corrected. The URL will continue to work, but will not be highlighted on the site.

[\*\(Also see Corrections, p. 89\)\*](#)

[\*Return to Table of Contents\*](#)

### **USER-GENERATED CONTENT**

Like all news organizations, VOA receives video, audio and photos from outside sources. The content may be sent for the purpose of showing an up-close look at a news event; to present a particular point of view; to cast a negative light on a government, an organization or individuals.

In all cases, VOA journalists must take every editorial precaution to ensure the legitimacy of the submissions before broadcasting them or publishing them:

- **CONTACT & IDENTIFICATION**

Reach out to individuals or groups who have posted material to verify that they are the owner of the work. Clearly identify yourself as a journalist when making inquiries about user-generated content.

- **NEWSWORTHINESS**

Is there a valid editorial reason to use video, audio or photos that we receive from an outside source? Does the user-generated content help to further inform our audience about an issue or incident?

- **MOTIVE**

Does the individual or group sending the material have an agenda? If VOA determines the content is agenda-driven and decides to air/publish the content, we should reveal why the material was submitted, and who submitted it.

- **REAL OR STAGED**

Can VOA confirm that the video, audio or photo is real? Or, can VOA determine whether the content is fake or staged, produced in the hope that VOA might air or publish it?

- **COPYCAT INCIDENTS**

Will the broadcasting or publication of the video/photos encourage others to create or produce similar content that in some cases could be life-threatening?

- **RIGHT TO PRIVACY**

Was the material recorded or photographed without the knowledge of the individuals involved? In other words, was the material recorded with a hidden camera or microphone?

- **HOW WILL THE CONTENT BE USED**

Should VOA receive sensitive or graphic content, follow the guidelines in the section on [Sensitive and Graphic Material, p. 18](#). In some cases it may be more appropriate for such material to be posted online only, where users can choose what they do or do not want to see or hear.

- **PERMISSION**

Once it's established the content is valid and its owner is identified, ask for permission to use the material. As always, VOA gives credit where credit is due, so the person who created the content should be identified accordingly; it is up to the individual or group whether to use real names or a website/social network username.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

- **PAYING FOR MATERIAL**

Other than our existing agreements with the news agencies and our freelancers, VOA does not pay for content. Please keep this in mind when dealing with user-generated content.

*(Also see [Payment, p. 39](#))*

- **DISCLAIMERS**

We must always tell our audiences when we are airing or publishing user-generated content. In addition, we should tell our audiences that while we have checked for the legitimacy of the material, we cannot absolutely verify the content. As with all of VOA's reporting, transparency is key.

[Follow this link to a useful at-your-desk tool for verifying user-generated content.](#)

It provides various case studies that can easily be applied to potential UGC situations at VOA.

If you are uncertain about using photos or video taken from social media, please see the guidance on copyright and fair use in the [Legal Issues](#) section of this Guide, or e-mail the Office of General Counsel at [copyrightclearances@usagm.gov](mailto:copyrightclearances@usagm.gov).

**AUDIO, VIDEO OR PHOTOS THAT ARE FREELY AVAILABLE  
ON THE INTERNET DOES NOT MEAN THEY ARE IN  
THE "PUBLIC DOMAIN."**

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### YOUTUBE GUIDELINES

- YOUTUBE VIDEOS ARE NOT A PRIMARY MEANS OF ACCESSING AND USING B-ROLL FOR A VIDEO PACKAGE. ALWAYS CHECK THE ABC NEWSONE, AFP, APTN AND REUTERS FOLDERS IN DALETPLUS AND THEIR ONLINE SITES FIRST. IF NECESSARY, CONTACT THE SENIOR ARCHIVISTS ([SENIOR-ARCHIVISTS@VOANEWS.COM](mailto:SENIOR-ARCHIVISTS@VOANEWS.COM)) FOR ASSISTANCE.
- THE VOA VIDEO LIBRARY ([VIDEO-LIBRARY@VOANEWS.COM](mailto:VIDEO-LIBRARY@VOANEWS.COM)) HAS EXTENSIVE FILE VIDEO AVAILABLE; ALWAYS CHECK THERE BEFORE RELYING ON YOUTUBE FOR FILE VIDEO NEEDS.
- USE CAUTION AND COMMON SENSE AND AVOID USING VIDEOS FROM YOUTUBE THAT MAY VIOLATE SOMEONE'S COPYRIGHT. WHEN IN DOUBT, PLEASE CONTACT THE EDITOR FOR NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES FOR GUIDANCE.

Although YouTube is the most popular site for video, similar rules apply to other sites, such as Vimeo and VEVO.

Use of YouTube videos should be cleared through the Editor for News Standards & Best Practices. The video can be used full-screen as long as credits, chyron information and other on-screen information is not obscured or deleted.

The actual YouTube logo **MUST** be burned into the video and remain on-screen throughout the clip:



YouTube should also be credited in narration: "In this video posted on YouTube..." or something similar.

YouTube has a blurring tool that lets you blur any part of a video, including moving objects. Details on how to use the tool are here:

<https://youtube-creators.googleblog.com/2016/02/blur-moving-objects-in-your-video-with.html>  
*(Also see Sensitive & Graphic Material, p. 18)*



### AUDIO

**The audio from a YouTube video cannot be stripped from the video.** YouTube’s Terms of Service stipulate that embedded content cannot be manipulated or downloaded for use away from [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com).

**In addition, YouTube – as well as Facebook -- takes audio copyright very seriously.** If you add music to a video that doesn’t come from one of VOA’s free music accounts – Firstcom.com, Dewolfemusic.com, Apmmusic.com or Audioblocks.com -- your video will likely be taken down from the site, and **after three “copyright strikes,” your account will be terminated—and you’ll be barred from creating a new account.**

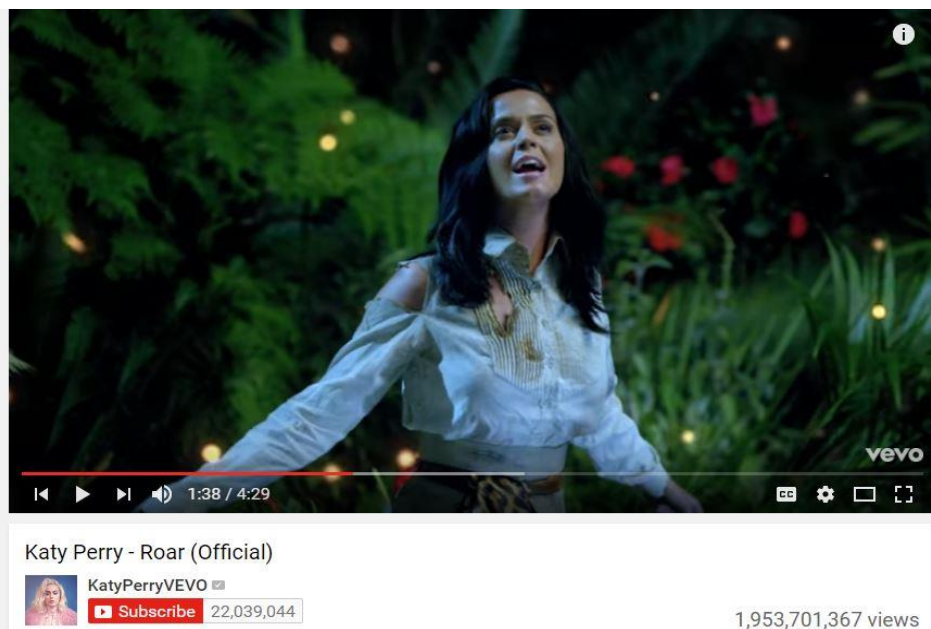
While we can always attempt to make a fair use claim for audio clips, it is highly recommended that you rely on the free music sites that are available.

[\(Also see Music, p. 62\)](#)

### EMBEDDING

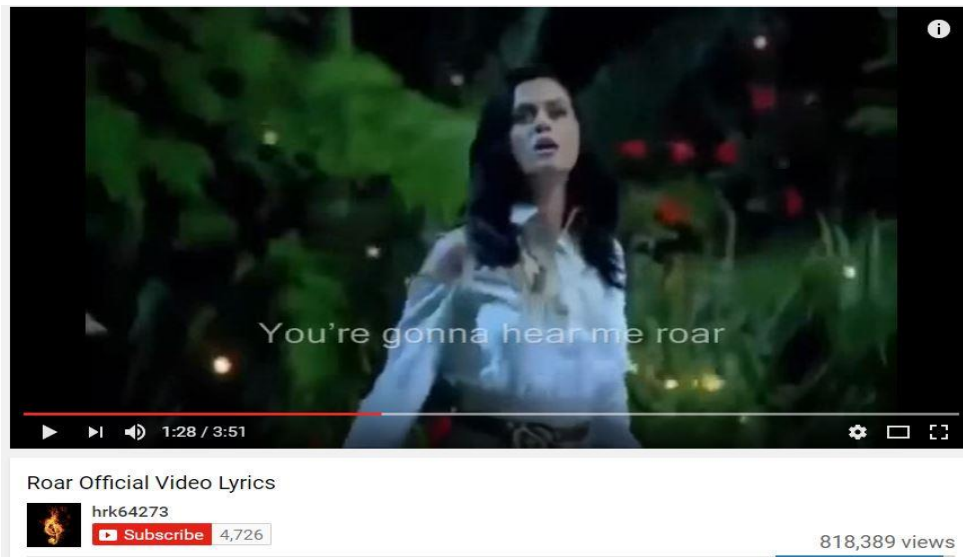
Embedded video is effectively just a link; no copy of the video is being stored on your server. Therefore, you may use embedded video on VOA websites. However, you should still use caution and common sense and avoid posting videos that may violate someone’s copyright. In particular, do not post videos that contain music, movies or television broadcasts unless those videos are posted on the official YouTube channel of the copyright holder. Many movie studios and music companies allow you to take embed code for trailers or video clips directly from their main site. In those cases, it’s much easier to tell that you’re using an official video when it’s on the company website.

On this page is the official version of Katy Perry’s music video of “Roar” posted on YouTube by VEVO, an entertainment consortium of music producers. On the next page is the exact same song, and although it also says “official,” it is clearly a fan upload. The first is okay for use; the second is not.



[Return to Table of Contents](#)





**YOUTUBE MAKES NO REPRESENTATIONS ABOUT THE  
ACCURACY, USEFULNESS, SAFETY OR INTELLECTUAL  
PROPERTY RIGHTS OF CONTENT APPEARING ON ITS SITE**

### **GOOGLE EARTH GUIDELINES**

VOA has rights to use Google Earth for the following VOA products:

- Television programs (including promotional ads)
- DVDs and video on demand
- Any long-form video products, including documentaries
- Printed materials

Google Earth can be used to create fly-throughs, locator maps, or basic illustrations of cities or geographic features.

**We are required to credit Google Earth with an unobstructed graphic module that clearly shows that the content is provided by Google and, when applicable, a third-party data provider.** [This example](#) from CNN shows how it should be done.

Please work with your EP and Graphics person to make sure Google Earth is clearly credited for any usage.

Also, any Google Maps/Google Earth images used must reflect how they would look online. For example, you are not allowed to make any changes (delete, blur, etc.) to these products that would make them look different than in the actual product.

Because it is a standalone software package, IT will need to install Google Earth on your computer.

### **REVEALING WEBSITES AND ADDRESSES**

In most cases, websites are not considered in the public domain for purposes of publishing pictures of them. They fall under the same fair use guidelines as other copyrighted material. If you have questions about whether you can show a website, please contact the Office of General Counsel.

Generally, website addresses can be revealed, as long as they are not for sites which promote criminal behavior or contain pornography. Avoid showing website addresses if it might be construed as a commercial for the site. Exceptions would include educational or informational sites, or charitable sites raising money for victims of a natural disaster.

When reporting on political campaigns, include links to the websites of the candidates mentioned in the piece. ([Also see Political Activity, p.10](#))

### **AFFILIATE/RECIPROCAL LINKS**

Reciprocal links to affiliate websites are permitted, under the following guidelines:

- The decision to establish an online affiliation should reflect the same editorial considerations that go into establishing a broadcast affiliation – including credibility, reputation, trust and audience reach.
- VOA Language Services should consider the total number of affiliates when determining the placement of reciprocal links. A service that has a small number of large, reputable partners is justified in establishing front-page reciprocal links. A service that has dozens of broadcasting affiliates should create an Affiliates page where they may all be listed. Each situation must be considered separately. It may be appropriate to have a homepage reciprocal link with a major web portal that is a primary news source in the language, and a separate Affiliate page with reciprocal links to broadcasting affiliates.
- Affiliate logos or text links may be used to establish reciprocal links, as appropriate.
- Reciprocal links should be reviewed on a regular basis, and VOA must reserve the right to remove the link at any time, if the affiliation ends or the target site no longer reflects the editorial integrity under which the relationship was established.
- Terms of Use must include a disclaimer that “VOA is not responsible for the content of external websites.”

If you have questions about these guidelines, please contact Matthew Baise ([mbaise@voanews.com](mailto:mbaise@voanews.com)) or Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com)).

### PHOTOGRAPHS

Photographs add a great deal to VOA stories and are necessary to give the audience a fuller experience and understanding of VOA reports. While VOA has wire services and other sources for photographs, original content taken by VOA reporters and staff is always useful.

Keep in mind that some stories will have no wire photos available so it is particularly useful for the reporter to shoot a few photos while doing the story.

The photo contracts for AFP, AP and Reuters are administered by Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com), x4276). When there is a question about news agency photos, please contact Steve.

### GENERAL RULES

- The goal of images is to enhance the readers' understanding of the story – and make it look better on the web. Take photos that add to your story, and submit as many as you can so editors can decide which are best.
- Show the people, places and things that you talk about in your stories - If you emphasize a place or interview a person get a picture. If you cover a demonstration, show the protest signs or faces of the people. However, be aware that minors may be present at demonstrations, and you should use good judgment in photographing them in those situations.  
(Also see [Interviewing & Videotaping Minors, p. 24](#) and [Filming in Public vs. Private Places, p. 95](#))
- Get close up to your subject if you can. Take photos from different perspectives and distances.
- Make sure your subject is clear, focused, and lit as well as possible.
- Always send in the largest file size possible. Photo and web editors can crop as needed and warranted.
- Headshots are good. Also try to get images of the subject in their environment and in action.
- Remember the [rule of thirds](#).
- [Shoot landscape \(horizontal\) instead of portrait](#). Landscape photos look better on social media and in Pangea. That means turning your phone 90 degrees when taking the photo.

### **EDITING PHOTOGRAPHS**

VOA allows for the adjustment of photos for brightness, contrast and color.

However, VOA **does not permit** altering a photograph in any way that changes the meaning of the photo. This includes adding or subtracting elements to create a scene that is not an accurate representation of what was originally shot.

While it's OK to crop a photo, that should not change the meaning of the photo; for instance, cropping a photo that may leave out a key individual in the story.

### **CLOSELY EXAMINE DIGITAL PICTURES FROM OUTSIDE SOURCES TO ENSURE THAT THOSE IMAGES HAVE NOT BEEN ALTERED.**

### **PHOTO ILLUSTRATIONS**

When creating a photo to illustrate an idea, whether in the camera or using Photoshop or a similar program, the reader must always be informed that the image is a photo illustration and not a standard news image. This should be done either with a caption or in a tagline.

### **TECHNICAL TIPS**

- Use your flash to balance out the light - If you are outside on a sunny day and you are shooting in the shade use your flash to fill heavy shadows if needed. If you are indoors and taking an image of someone in front of a window use your flash.
- Don't shoot portraits with the sun or bright light behind your subject unless you are using a flash to fill the light.
- Be careful of using a flash in front of glass or a mirror - The flash will bounce back into the lens. If you have to do this don't shoot straight on toward the glass, try to shoot at an angle to the glass.
- Be careful of microphones - Try to get a clear shot of the person without a microphone in front of their face

### **SENDING PHOTO FILES**

Always email your service and [CentralNewsWebMedia@voanews.com](mailto:CentralNewsWebMedia@voanews.com) when submitting photos.

Always include who is paying for the photos and if they are available for use by the house. Always include caption info.

Photos can be submitted via email, any photo sharing service such as flickr or Picasa, or via ftp.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### CAPTIONS/CREDITS

Reporters and producers in the field must supply the captions for your photos. Caption info is:

- Who, what, when and where.
- Credit – who took the photo.
- Keep captions short and clear – photo and web editors will often rewrite and edit them.

VOA's caption style is the same when crediting staff and stringers: **John Doe/VOA**

VOA's photo contracts with AP and Reuters allow us to use their photos on all VOAnews.com websites. At this time, AFP's photos can be used only on the English voanews.com site.

It is **MANDATORY** that **ALL** news agency photos be given proper credit, as seen in the example below:

[\(Also see Crediting the News Agencies, p. 34\)](#)



U.S. Vice President Mike Pence speaks during an Easter fellowship dinner at a military base in Seoul, South Korea, April 16, 2017.

Credits are also required for photos from other sources, including other news organizations, NGOs, a business or a social media post. Social media posts should include the social media site and the name of the person who took the photo. For example:

CBS News

Pew Research Center

Instagram/JohnSmith

Twitter/@JohnQSmith

Facebook/John Smith

Some public domain images also require a credit, such as the White House, State Department, Defense Department, Library of Congress and National Archives.

[\(Also see Attribution, p. 30\)](#)

### MUSIC

#### **GENERAL GUIDELINES**

The Music Library (Room G-510A) serves as the resource and research center for VOA programs containing music. Not only does the library catalog music, it also provides a historical and educational setting for producers and broadcasters to research various sources relating to music: biographies, event-driven materials, periodicals, almanacs, encyclopedias, etc.

The Music Library database currently contains a variety of musical recordings dating as far back as the 1930s. The database is catalogued by album titles, song titles, artists, and record company names/numbers. Broadcasters, producers and directors can borrow music from the Music Library. Go to the Library and apply for a Library card. You can also contact the Music Library at:

[Music-Library-Staff@voanews.com](mailto:Music-Library-Staff@voanews.com)

CD, albums and other music sources can be borrowed for one week at a time. **Any item you borrow cannot be taken out of the building.** Borrowers are responsible for replacing any items that are lost or stolen.

#### **COPYRIGHT GUIDELINES**

- All of the music in the Music Library, both commercial, popular and production, can be used for radio programming.
- Popular music includes Top 40, rock, jazz, pop, soul, jazz, reggae, country, folk, rap, dance music, etc.
- **VOA DOES NOT HAVE THE RIGHTS TO DISTRIBUTE POPULAR MUSIC RECORDINGS FOR VIDEO PROGRAMMING OR ON ANY DIGITAL PLATFORM, INCLUDING SOCIAL MEDIA.**
- **ONLY** production music can be used for TV programming and digital platforms.
- The Music Library has free accounts available to all VOA staff for these online production music sites:
  - Firstcom.com
  - Dewolfmusic.com
  - Apmmusic.com
  - Audioblocks.com

PLEASE CONTACT VINCENT BONNER ([VBON@VOANEWS.COM](mailto:VBON@VOANEWS.COM), 202-382-7932) OR DELONDRA BARRON ([DBARRON@VOANEWS.COM](mailto:DBARRON@VOANEWS.COM), 202-382-7394) TO GET AN ACCOUNT OPENED WITH THESE SITES.

It is possible that commercial music could be used in a transformative (fair use) manner in a VOA video piece – perhaps 15-20 seconds to demonstrate Prince’s virtuosity as a guitarist – but those uses should always be checked in advance with News Standards & Best Practices Editor Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com), 202-203-4276).

The Music Library hours are 7:15am until 5:00pm, Monday through Friday.

(*Also see YouTube Guidelines, p. 53 and Ambient Music, p. 93*)

[Return to Table of Contents](#)



### AUDIO USAGE RIGHTS

These guidelines **DO NOT APPLY** to the video news feeds that VOA subscribes to. Please see the next section for that information.

Some of the news organizations listed in this section have given VOA blanket permission to use audio excerpts from some of their news programs. These permissions should be respected. Requests to use audio not covered by listed blanket clearances should be sent to Steven Springer, ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com)), the Contracting Officer's Representative (COR) for VOA's contracts with the news agencies.

### AUDIO CLIPS FROM TV NETWORKS

VOA has had longstanding permission to use the voices of the persons being interviewed on network news programs.

VOA should use the following credit in the radio script for all programs: "As reported on [Network and program name]," or equivalent language giving credit to the appropriate news organization.

While we will always claim fair use for relevant audio excerpts, there are a few exceptions, listed below.

#### **ABC NEWS**

**DO NOT** use the voices of any ABC News anchors, correspondents, reporters, commentators and stringers.

- **This Week** – VOA has received permission to record the entire Sunday talk show to use content of particular interest to our audiences. However, with this permission there are some restrictions listed below:
  - We are authorized to excerpt up to two (2) minutes of the program.
  - Material may be posted on VOA's websites only if it is part of a VOA television program or video package.
  - Use of ABC talent should be kept to a minimum in the story. This is the **ONLY** exemption to the restriction on using ABC News talent in VOA programming.
  - Excerpted material cannot be used after three (3) days and the *This Week* program cannot be archived for future use.
  - This permission is **ONLY** for *This Week*.

**AUDIO-ONLY USAGE FROM ALL OTHER ABC NEWS  
OR ENTERTAINMENT PROGRAMS MUST BE CLEARED PRIOR TO USE.**

### **CBS NEWS**

**DO NOT USE** the voices of **ANY** CBS News employees, including anchors, reporters, correspondents, commentators or stringers.

**WE DO NOT HAVE PERMISSION TO USE ANY CBS NEWS AUDIO CLIPS ON VOANEWS.COM OR ON ANY OTHER VOA WEB PRESENCE.**

### **CNN**

VOA has no overall agreement with CNN for use of audio clips, but we will claim editorial “fair use” as necessary on a case-by-case basis.

### **FOX NEWS CHANNEL**

VOA has permission to excerpt for radio no more than 3 minutes of audio from the *Fox News Sunday* broadcast. VOA must credit *Fox News Sunday*.

**ALL OTHER FOX TV PROGRAMS MUST BE CLEARED PRIOR TO USE.**  
**FOX DOES NOT ALLOW ANY OF ITS MATERIAL TO BE REBROADCAST OVERSEAS.**

### **NBC NEWS, MSNBC & CNBC**

VOA has blanket permission to use audio excerpts from *The Today Show*, *Meet the Press* and *NBC Nightly News*. All news specials, documentaries and other special programming must be cleared prior to use. There is no restriction on the use of NBC correspondents’ voices, but use of NBC correspondent reports is limited to U.S datelines. VOA does **NOT** have clearance to use audio actualities from any CNBC programs.

### VIDEO USAGE RIGHTS

VOA has contracts with three different video newsfeed providers: Agence France Press (AFP), Associated Press (AP) and Reuters. We receive video from ABC NewsOne through our contract with AP. Each contract is unique and stands on its own.

Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com), x4276) is the Contracting Officer's Representative (COR) for the newsfeeds. Oscar Rodriguez at OCB is the Alternate COR ([orodriguez@usagm.gov](mailto:orodriguez@usagm.gov), 305-437-7159). The Media Asset Management Branch assists in administering and facilitating use of the video and audio newsfeeds.

### BEFORE USING ANY VIDEO, IT IS THE PRODUCER'S RESPONSIBILITY TO REVIEW THE NEWSFEED SCRIPT SOURCE INFORMATION TO CHECK FOR RIGHTS RESTRICTIONS

### COMMON FEATURES – ALL NEWSFEEDS

Newsfeed scripts for the video stories are provided as basic information for our own script writing, and **do not** constitute a separate element. In other words, **newsfeed scripts cannot be used on the Web as a text-only story**. However, the information contained in video scripts can be used within a VOA story when they are combined with pertinent information from other news sources and follow VOA's sourcing guidelines.

### RIGHTS RESTRICTIONS

We have negotiated the rights of use with each provider to broadcast and publish our stories containing newsfeed material on TV, radio and internet. Restriction statements vary from provider to provider and cover different ground; the most common restrictions are described on the following pages.

Restrictions are usually listed near the top of the script, but also appear above specific items in the script when necessary. VOA must adhere to rights restrictions as listed in the associated scripts and we must pay attention to the source of the video. Our providers send stories in which the video may come from a variety of sources, from FIFA to ESPN to handout video to other broadcasters and awards programs. The restrictions listed reflect the rules of both the source organization and the newsfeed providers.

Since all VOA programming is available on the web, newsfeed items marked **NO ACCESS INTERNET** or **NO WEB** means the video/audio cannot be used at all, unless permission is granted by the newsfeed provider. Reuters, however, has a special requirement regarding our streaming shows, so please see the Reuters page for details. Please contact Pam or Steve if you need help with this.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

## BEST PRACTICES GUIDE

You may see some variation of the following restrictions, regardless of the provider, on all the feeds:

- **TIME-LIMITED USAGE**

You will often see limited windows of usage on stories, especially for entertainment and sports programs. Footage must be pulled off the web by the date and time listed in the script info or in advisories MAM has posted in e-mail.

- **MANDATORY COURTESY**

When noted in the script the courtesy must appear on-screen in TV and web stories, and an audible courtesy must be used on radio.

- **NO LIBRARY / NO ARCHIVE**

Items with this restriction should be deleted soon after use. This material is available in the DaletPlus production system for up to thirty days and is then purged. Using video labeled **NO LIBRARY** or **NO ARCHIVE** after its initial broadcast or web posting puts our contracts in jeopardy.

### USING VIDEO FROM TV NETWORKS

- We **DO NOT** have blanket permission from ABC, CBS, CNN, FOX or NBC (including MSNBC and CNBC) to record and use clips from their newscasts or weekend talk shows. The only exception is ABC's ***This Week*** program (see next page).
- All soundbites from the other networks' weekend talk shows should be taken from our regular agency newsfeeds. However, we must follow whatever restrictions the networks place on the usage of those clips.
- There are times when we will claim "fair use" for a network news video clip that has not been fed on an agency newsfeed, but you must contact Steve to get clearance. If necessary, Steve or Pam will consult with the General Counsel's office regarding any potential legal considerations.  
[\(Also see Copyright and Fair Use, p. 93\)](#)

### **ABC NEWS**

ABC News and ABC TV Entertainment programs' on-air talent **cannot** be used. This includes shots of the back of heads, cutaways, walking shots, standups, or anything else that may show those individuals.

### **THIS WEEK**

- VOA is authorized to excerpt up to two (2) minutes of ***This Week***.
- Material from ***This Week*** may be posted on VOA's websites only if it is part of a VOA television program.
- Material excerpted from ***This Week*** cannot be used after three (3) days and the ***This Week*** program cannot be archived for future use.
- **THIS PERMISSION IS ONLY FOR ABC'S *THIS WEEK* PROGRAM.**

### **ABC NEWSONE**

- VOA receives material daily from the ABC News affiliate service NewsOne. As noted above, VOA cannot use on-camera talent; this applies to anchors, show hosts and reporters, whether for ABC Network or an ABC affiliate station.
- When an ABC item is listed as **PACKAGE ONLY**, it generally means that VOA must run the package as fed by NewsOne. Pam or Steve can contact NewsOne to see if that restriction can be lifted.
- **NO EXCERPTING** is similar to **PACKAGE ONLY**, in that we cannot lift individual sequences or shots out of a package. The wording may be "No Excerpting Package," "No Excerpting [specific video]." Please contact Pam or Steve to see whether the No Excerpting restriction can be lifted.
- **NO RETRACKING** generally means that VOA cannot translate, summarize, adapt or otherwise make the piece shorter or longer. Please contact Pam or Steve to see whether the No Retracking restriction can be lifted.
- **NNS** is a news-sharing cooperative between ABC News and other news organizations. VOA is cleared to use all video that is marked as NNS.
- Use of all ABC standard graphics must be addressed on a case-by-case basis and users must contact Pam or Steve to seek permission before using.
- 3D graphics can be used **only if the entire package is used. There are no exceptions.**
- If a story is marked **ABC AFFILIATES ONLY**, VOA is cleared to use it. However, if a story is marked **ABC AFFILIATES ONLY, NO INTERNATIONAL CLIENTS**, please contact Pam or Steve to get clearance for use.

**NO BROADCAST OR INTERNET USE OF ANY COLLEGIATE AND  
PROFESSIONAL SPORTS VIDEO FED BY ABC NewsONE!**

**NO USE ON ANY PLATFORM OF ABC NEWS OR  
ABC ENTERTAINMENT PROMOS!**

### **AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE (AFP)**

VOA has clearance to use all AFP video unless otherwise noted below.

#### **EXAMPLES OF AFP RESTRICTIONS**

- **Source: NNIS**  
**Restrictions: \*NO RESALE FOR NON-EDITORIAL PURPOSES\***  
VOA broadcast purposes are EDITORIAL, therefore we are clear to use items with this statement. In addition, VOA must version content for our audiences before broadcasting or posting it online.
- **Source: PARLIAMENTARY RECORDING UNIT (British Parliament)**  
**Restrictions: NO RESALE FOR NON-EDITORIAL PURPOSES / NOT FOR USE IN ENTERTAINMENT OR POLITICAL SATIRE PROGRAMMES**  
VOA is clear to use items with this restriction, but not in a satirical, Daily Show-type production.

#### **WEB-RELATED RESTRICTION STATEMENTS**

- **NO WEB USE or NO AFP WEB** - Stories carrying either of these restrictions cannot be used on any VOA websites.
- **NO ENGLISH OR SPANISH WEB** - VOA English and Spanish **CANNOT** post the video to their websites, but all other VOA language services CAN post the video to their websites.

#### **CBS NEWS VIDEO**

- Some AFP items may carry the multiple restrictions listed below, which normally indicates the video comes from CBS News. AFP regularly feeds CBS News video, and we are working with AFP to clarify the restrictions regarding VOA's use of CBS material. In the case of these restrictions, VOA CAN use the video.  
**NO RESALE FOR NON-EDITORIAL PURPOSES**  
**NO JAPAN**  
**NO FREE OVER-THE-AIR BROADCASTERS IN AUSTRALIA, NO U.S. CABLE OUTLETS, FREE OVER-THE-AIR NETWORKS OR STATIONS, THEIR WEBSITES AND THEIR MOBIEL PHONE SERVICES.**

#### **SOCIAL MEDIA SITES**

- VOA can post on its social media pages AFP video that is contained within VOA-produced TV packages. It is also OK to use AFP material in programs which are broadcast and streamed on VOA webpages.
- **VOA CANNOT post raw or live AFP video on any of its social media pages.**

If you have questions about using restricted video fed by AFP, please contact Pam or Steve to see if the restrictions can be lifted.

### **ASSOCIATED PRESS (APTN)**

- **APTN Clients Only** – VOA is able to use all stories with this restriction
- **Horizons clients and AP Lifestyle, Health and Technology clients Only** – VOA subscribes to these categories and can use any story that carries this restriction.
- **SNTV Clients** - VOA has unlimited use of stories with this restriction, as long as SNTV is the “Original Provider” or “Source” of the video. You will know these stories are SNTV stories, because “SNTV clients only” will be stated somewhere in the rights restrictions section of the script.

However, if the “Original Provider” is a third party, such as *FIFA, IOC, Tennis Properties Ltd., TAF Sports, Dorna*, etc., you must follow the restrictions listed within the “Rights Restrictions” section of script.

- **Check Script For Details** – VOA can use stories with this restriction, but you must follow specific restrictions within the script if there are film clips/music videos.
- **NO ACCESS IRAN AND NO ACCESS VOA PERSIAN TV**  
VOA Persian cannot use APTN stories shot in and sent from Iran. This includes **ALL** video of Iran, even when the restriction isn’t noted on the script and includes video previously received that we have in the Video Library and the VOA Persian video server.  
NOTE: The stories restricted to the Persian Service can be used by the News Center and the other Language Services.
- **OTHER RESTRICTIONS**  
VOA can use stories that have restrictions to other geographic regions. For example, stories marked No Access Russia or No Access Indonesia can be used by those Language Services as well as all other VOA services.

However, non-regional restrictions, such as No Access Internet, must be followed. Sometimes permission will be granted; in those cases please contact Pam or Steve to gain clearance.

- **ABC Talent on APTN-fed stories:** On occasion, APTN will feed an ABC story. ABC talent cannot be used.  
([Also see ABC News, p. 67](#))



### **REUTERS**

- Most Reuters videos are listed as **NO RIGHTS RESTRICTIONS** or the restriction listed is as **NONE**; those stories can be used across all platforms at any time.
- If a Reuters video is marked **FOR EDITORIAL USE ONLY**, we can use it.
- Reuters videos may sometimes be marked **NO MOBILE USE**. VOA has clearance to use these videos on our Internet and mobile platforms. Please contact Steve or Pam if you have questions about NO MOBILE USE restrictions.
- **NO ACCESS USA/CNN/YAHOO/AOL/WIRELESS**  
Stories with this restriction generally originate from NBC News and cannot be used by VOA

**VOA DOES NOT HAVE CONTRACTUAL RIGHTS TO USE NBC CONTENT. PLEASE BE DILIGENT ABOUT CONFIRMING THE SOURCE AND DO NOT USE NBC CONTENT. THIS INCLUDES CONTENT FROM CNBC AND MSNBC.**

**IF THERE IS A STRONG EDITORIAL REASON TO USE NBC NEWS OR NBC AFFILIATE MATERIAL – AND SIMILAR MATERIAL CANNOT BE FOUND ON THE OTHER NEWSFEEDS – PLEASE CONTACT STEVE OR PAM TO SEE WHETHER WE CAN GET CLEARANCE TO USE THE VIDEO.**

- **RESTRICTED POOL** - The five U.S. news networks -- ABC, CBS, CNN, FOX and NBC – shoot video daily that is designated Pool material. In most cases, Restricted Pool applies to domestic and overseas coverage of the president, and in election seasons, coverage of presidential candidates.  
**VOA CAN USE THIS RESTRICTED POOL VIDEO.**

**However, VOA cannot use Restricted Pool video of the vice president, First Lady, VP's spouse, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense or other Cabinet members.**

It is strongly recommended that you call Steve or Pam if there is any uncertainty about the Restricted Pool designation of a video.

- **Sports items will often be heavily restricted.** Many have **NO ARCHIVE** restrictions, very often 48 hours but also 15 days or a specific date. As a rule, golf, tennis, cricket and motorcycling are heavily restricted. Stories about U.S. hockey (NHL) can be used until the end of the current hockey season. Soccer matches are often restricted, but we can use video of soccer practice / press conferences.

- Video shot in the UK often carries this restriction:  
**ITN COPYRIGHT: TV: NO ACCESS ALL DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL CHANNELS DISTRIBUTED IN UK & EIRE ON SKY/VIRGIN/FREEVIEW; BBC/BSKYB GROUP: NO ACCESS WORLDWIDE ANY MEDIA; INTERNET: NO ACCESS.CO.UK WEB SITES AND ALL WEBSITES PRINCIPALLY TARGETED AT THE UK AND/OR EIRE; MOBILE: NO ACCESS WORLDWIDE; NO USE AFTER 30 DAYS FROM DATE FIRST USED ON ALL PLATFORMS.**

This is an extremely targeted restriction statement and it is recommended to call Steve or Pam for guidance. Typically we parse the statement to find the relevant info, and call for clearance or clarification when necessary. In this example, “MOBILE: NO ACCESS WORLDWIDE” is the relevant statement we’d need to decipher.

- **NO ACCESS IRAN AND NO ACCESS VOA PERSIAN NEWS NETWORK**  
VOA Persian **cannot** use Reuters material filmed in or sent from Iran, whether shot by Reuters or the national networks. However, stories received at VOA prior to June 9, 2010 are OK to use – for now – even if a restriction is listed.  
NOTE: The stories restricted to the Persian Service **can be used** by the News Center and the other Language Services.
- **OTHER RESTRICTIONS**  
VOA can use stories that have restrictions to other geographic regions. For example, stories with No Access Russia or No Access Indonesia can be used by those Language Services as well as all other VOA services.

However, non-regional restrictions, such as No Access Internet, must be followed. Sometimes permission will be granted; in those cases please contact Pam or Steve to gain clearance.

### **THE RESTRICTIONS OF ANY OF OUR VIDEO PROVIDERS CAN CHANGE AT ANY TIME**

### **IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS, PLEASE CONTACT STEVE OR PAM**

### **NEWSMARKET**

Newsmarket ([www.thenewsmarket.com](http://www.thenewsmarket.com)) is an online provider of video. Although the site has a lot of available material, there are a number of guidelines that VOA must follow in order to use the video.

- You must be an employee or contractor working with VOA and use your work e-mail (@voanews.com) to access the site. Pam Commerford ([pcommerford@voanews.com](mailto:pcommerford@voanews.com)), chief of the Media Asset Management Branch has done pre-registration for many employees; if you need to establish an account, please contact Pam.
- Keep your password confidential; it is for your use only.
- Registered users are responsible for searching images and **ensuring that no costs are associated with the material. If costs are required, funding must come from your Language Service or Division.** The Office of Information Services will **NOT** pay for material acquired from Newsmarket.
- The VOA producer or Language Service is responsible for obtaining the terms and conditions of use of the material. Newsmarket makes no claims about the accuracy of the content on its website, so producers must be sure to exercise VOA journalistic standards in the choice and use of material.
- Credit must be given for content used and **logos or copyrighted images cannot be changed or obscured.**
- You must use the content for editorial purposes only.
- You **cannot** store the original content for future use. The content from Newsmarket must be deleted from your workspace when you are finished with your initial use. Should you need the content again, you can go back to the website and re-capture it.
- **The material that you use in a VOA story or program can and will be archived;** there is no restriction on this material.
- The content incorporated in your stories and shows can be distributed on all VOA platforms.
- **The Office of Cuba Broadcasting (OCB) is included in this agreement, meaning that VOA and OCB ONLY can share material that is acquired from Newsmarket.**

### RESTRICTIONS

- You cannot provide unedited content to other organizations, **including the USAGM grantees RFE/RL, RFA and Alhurra.**
- You cannot use the Newsmarket logo or trademark in a way other than how it is presented in your story.
- You cannot use any technology to monitor, copy or deep link with Newsmarket.

Assets are brought into DaletPlus to the NEWSMARKET folder: INCOMING FEEDS > NEWSMARKET. Associated metadata needs to be added to the Asset Manager Form (AMF), include source information, and a **VOA DOT added to the video.**

[\(Also see Domestic Distribution of VOA Content, p. 78\)](#)

Example of Newsmarket info to add to AMF in DaletPlus:



US Distribution:	<input type="checkbox"/> All Clear	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Restricted
Footage Sources:	<input type="checkbox"/> APTN	<input type="checkbox"/> ABC NEWSONE
Feed Provider:	thenewsmarket.com	
Source Comments:		
Origin of Video:	Source: NATO TV ]	
Background Wires:		

**US Distribution:** Rights of use do not extend beyond VOA's use, so US DISTRIBUTION should be marked RESTRICTED.

**Footage Sources:** OTHER should be selected.

**Feed Provider:** thenewsmarket.com

**Origin of Video:** Indicate the owner of the source video. In the example, it's NATO TV.

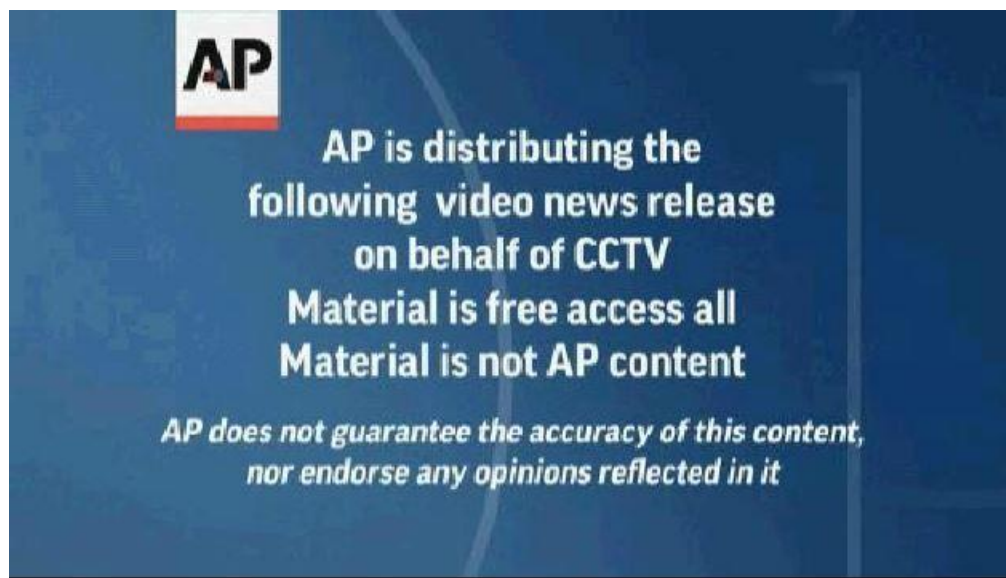
All questions regarding registration on [Newsmarket](#) and the use of its material should go to Pam Commerford ([pcommerford@voanews.com](mailto:pcommerford@voanews.com), 202-382-7124)

### USING CONTENT FROM STATE-RUN MEDIA

Any country's official news agency is a valid single source **when referring to government policy or news events in that country**. In these cases VOA must identify the news agency in its copy.

Note the distinction, **in that country**. For example, a report by China's official news agency about North Korea may not be a valid single source.

In addition, VOA's newsfeed providers AP and Reuters have agreements in place to distribute material provided by CCTV, Chinese State Television. AP includes a disclaimer for all CCTV material, as seen in this screen grab:



Reuters does not provide a video disclaimer for CCTV material, but this notice appears at the bottom of every script Reuters provides from CCTV:

**© Copyright CCTV. The content in this story, including video and script is provided by China Central Television (CCTV) and is copyright CCTV. Thomson Reuters does not guarantee the accuracy of, or endorse the views or opinions given in, this package. THIS STATEMENT SUPERSEDES ALL OTHER STATEMENTS RELATING TO COPYRIGHT ATTACHED TO THIS CONTENT.**

While the video that CCTV and other state-controlled media outlets like RT produces often comes from areas where coverage is otherwise unavailable, VOA policy for using content provided by state-controlled media is that it should be reviewed by senior editors in a service, by the News Center or by the agency's Editor for News Standards & Best Practices before any decision is made about airing or publishing the video.

State-run media material that is cleared for broadcast or for use on the web **MUST** include proper credit to that news organization and the disclaimer that VOA cannot confirm the accuracy of the material. For video usage, the on-screen credit should be either: "From CCTV" or "CCTV Video." This guidance is the same for material received from RT or similar state-run media outlets.

It is understood that there may be times when we would want to use the video, such as when it's the only known video of a major news event or if we're comparing how VOA and other news organizations cover stories.

**HOWEVER, ANY USE OF STATE-RUN MEDIA VIDEO SHOULD BE DONE WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF A LARGER PACKAGE THAT IS BEING PRODUCED BY THE NEWS CENTER OR A LANGUAGE SERVICE.**

**WE SHOULD NOT RUN A FULL PACKAGE FROM CCTV, RT OR  
ANOTHER STATE-RUN OUTLET SIMPLY BECAUSE WE HAVE IT AVAILABLE.**

*(Also see [Video Usage Rights, p. 65](#))*

### VIDEO NEWS RELEASES (VNRs)

A video news release (VNR) is a video segment made to look like a news report, but is instead created by a public relations firm, advertising agency, marketing firm, corporation, or even by a government agency. VNRs are produced with the aim of shaping public opinion, promoting commercial products and services, publicizing individuals or supporting other interests.

VNRs may include interviews with experts (who may be paid by the company or ad agency for their appearance in the VNR); man on the street interviews that may be done with professional actors; and pictures of corporate logos to support the product or brand being promoted.

Although we occasionally receive VNRs from APTN and Reuters that does not make them any more legitimate for use by VOA.

There may be times when material from a VNR is appropriate for **excerpting** in a video package.

#### **Example #1**

If the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York discovers a new treatment for prostate cancer and the Center provides a video of its research work, VOA can, and should, use some of that video to illustrate the story.

- The script must say the video was provided by the Center, and there must be a visual credit to the Center as well.

#### **Example #2**

Apple unveils the latest version of the iPhone and sends out a VNR showing the latest changes in the phone and how it operates. VOA can use some of the video to illustrate its story.

- The script must say the video was provided by Apple, and there must be a visual credit to Apple as well.

Please keep in mind, however, that as with fair use of video, all instances of whether to use material from a VNR will not be the same, so always check first with Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com)) or Pam Commerford ([pcommerford@voanews.com](mailto:pcommerford@voanews.com)).

### VOA SHOULD NEVER AIR A VIDEO NEWS RELEASE IN ITS ENTIRETY

More detailed information about feeds and rights can be found in Rights Usage Guidelines Presentation and the Video Newsfeed Guide found on the [Media Asset Management Branch \(MAM\) page on Sharepoint](#).

### DOMESTIC DISTRIBUTION OF VOA CONTENT

- **THE SMITH-MUNDT RESTRICTIONS APPLY TO DISTRIBUTION OF VOA CONTENT & PROGRAMMING WITHIN THE UNITED STATES.**
- **THEY DO NOT IN ANY WAY IMPACT VOA'S COVERAGE OF NEWS STORIES. VOA IS FULLY AUTHORIZED AND EXPECTED TO COVER STORIES IN THE U.S. FOR DISTRIBUTION TO FOREIGN AUDIENCES OVERSEAS.**

### USAGE REQUESTS

The law authorizes individuals and organizations to request VOA content. From time to time, VOA staff may receive requests for **one-time** use of VOA content, or the request may be for **ongoing use** of VOA programming. These requests could come from U.S.-based media organizations, diaspora media outlets, overseas media outlets, or from educational institutions.

### VOA STAFF SHOULD NOT RESPOND DIRECTLY TO REQUESTS

Instead:

- Requests for **ONE-TIME USE** of VOA original content should be directed to this online form: <https://www.usagm.gov/work-with-us/content-requests/voa/>
- Requests for **ONGOING USE OF VOA PROGRAMMING** should be sent to the USAGM Business Development Office at [BusinessDevHQ@usagm.gov](mailto:BusinessDevHQ@usagm.gov).

**ALTHOUGH VOA MAY MAKE ITS CONTENT AVAILABLE TO QUALIFIED REQUESTORS, SMITH-MUNDT PROHIBITS VOA FROM:**

- 1. SPENDING ITS FUNDING TO DIRECTLY INFLUENCE PUBLIC OPINION WITHIN THE UNITED STATES, AND**
- 2. SYNDICATING ITS CONTENT THROUGH DOMESTIC MEDIA OUTLETS WITH THE INTENT TO DEVELOP AUDIENCES WITHIN THE UNITED STATES.**

- **UNAired/UNPUBLISHED ORIGINAL VOA MATERIAL SHOULD NOT BE SHARED.**

Please forward those requests to VOA senior management, the News Standards & Best Practices Editor and the Office of General Counsel.

[\*\(Also see Requests for Unaired/Unpublished Material, p. 39 and VOA Firewall, p. 91\)\*](#)

If you have questions about usage requests, please email [Usage-Requests@voanews.com](mailto:Usage-Requests@voanews.com).



### **TALKING ABOUT VOA CONTENT & PROGRAMMING**

The Smith-Mundt Act forbids VOA personnel to attempt to develop audiences within the United States. The funds which USAGM and thus VOA receive are only authorized to create and distribute news and information to “foreign audiences abroad,” and the law requires VOA to ensure that VOA does not distribute content & programming with the intent of influencing “public opinion in the United States.”

If you attend a journalism or media conference such as NAB, EIJ, ONA, NABJ, NAHJ, SAJA, or attend an event at the National Press Club, and someone from a domestic U.S. news organization asks you about VOA’s work, you can freely talk about the content we produce every day. Nothing in Smith-Mundt prevents that.

### **VOA STAFF SHOULD NOT ATTEMPT TO MAKE A DIRECT OFFER OF VOA CONTENT TO ANY DOMESTIC NEWS OUTLET.**

### **IN ADDITION, VOA STAFF CANNOT SPEND ANY ADVERTISING OR OTHER FUNDS TO SPECIFICALLY TARGET OR DEVELOP AUDIENCES IN THE U.S.**

### **VIOLATION OF THIS RULE AND/OR OTHER PROVISIONS OF THE SMITH-MUNDT ACT WILL RESULT IN THE TERMINATION OF YOUR AD BUDGET AND THE LOSS OF ADMINISTRATIVE ACCESS TO YOUR SERVICE’S SOCIAL ACCOUNTS.**

### **THIS IS IN ADDITION TO ANY OTHER ACTIONS THAT MAY BE AUTHORIZED TO BE TAKEN AGAINST INDIVIDUALS VIOLATING THE RULE.**

### **TOWN HALLS, FORUMS, AND OTHER SUCH EVENTS; PARTNERSHIPS; AND ACTIVITIES TO SUPPORT THE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF HIGH QUALITY JOURNALISTS**

VOA journalists or other staff may host or play a role in Town Halls or related events if the purpose of the event is to engage overseas audiences.

In line with efforts to adhere to the highest standards of broadcast journalism, there may be times, subject to any required approvals, that VOA journalists appear as subject matters experts in other news outlets. This may be allowed if the purpose is to benefit VOA and thus the agency by either facilitating development of new sources of information, enhancing VOA's credibility, and/or contributing to the recruitment or retention of high-caliber journalists. In other cases, the purpose may be to disseminate VOA content overseas as part of an arrangement with another news organization.

Agency leadership may be able to engage in certain partnership arrangements if the purpose is to enhance the quality or distribution of USAGM content to foreign audiences overseas. Such partnerships must be reviewed and approved on a case-by-case basis

Please clear such events in advance with VOA leadership, who should consult with the Office of General Counsel.

### **SUMMARY**

Smith-Mundt allows us to:

- Provide materials upon request
- Engage in certain partnerships
- Provide opportunities for exposure for our journalists to enhance retention and recruitment; etc.

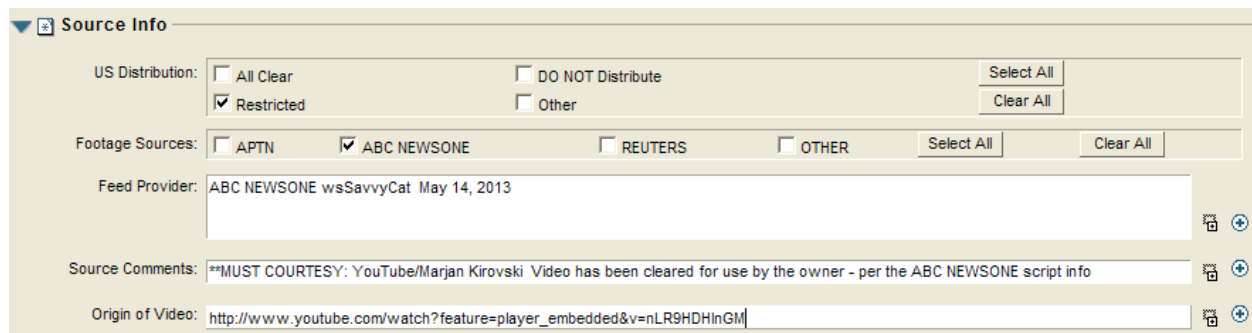
It **does not** prevent us from using the internet and social media to distribute our products to audiences overseas just because people in the U.S. might also see the material.

These exceptions do not allow VOA to attempt to target audiences in the United States. Ultimately, **if** it looks like the intent is to subvert the rules – i.e. **if the USAGM goal is to influence U.S. opinion, or otherwise develop audiences within the United States** -- then the activity is prohibited.

### DOCUMENTING SOURCE VIDEO IN DALETPLUS

To be able to share our broadcast programs with U.S. requestors, we must be able to identify non-VOA content, including that provided by our newsfeed suppliers, ABC NewsOne, AFP, APTN and Reuters, in the stories and programs we air.

Everyone who creates a story or program using DaletPlus must take time to enter source info in the Asset Manager Form (AMF). The **Source Info** module is the third section on the AMF form. The example below is an example of source info in an AMF of a story, showing the kind of information expected when available. (Plus signs at the end of each field allow additional space for more info.)



**U.S. Distribution:** A quick reference field to indicate whether the story is cleared for fulfilling a request from a U.S. requestor. If your story or program master is entirely VOA original, **All Clear** should be check-marked. If it has non-VOA content (ABC NewsOne, AFP, APTN or Reuters) **Restricted** will be checked. **This means that some clips will have to be cleared for US distribution.** The default is **DO NOT Distribute**.

**Footage Sources:** A quick way to note the feeds that are included in the story or program master. For **program masters**, the archive liaison may use “select all” for news programs, if in assembling the program the service uses all of our content providers. For **VOA stories**, the producer will need to be specific, so the searcher knows how involved tracking down the sources may be.

**Feed Provider:** A free text field to note specifically the story slug /date and source of vendor-provided clips used in a story. When a U.S. request is being filled, this information will allow the requestor to contact the appropriate newsfeed source to obtain clearance to use the video in the United States.

**Source Comments:** Can be used to further clarify use if necessary / possible.

**Origin of video:** To be used when video is different from the newsfeed source itself; for example, video from YouTube. This field should be used for story AMFs, rather than for use for program master AMFs.

Please e-mail questions or concerns to [senior-archivists@voanews.com](mailto:senior-archivists@voanews.com). You may also call the Video Library’s point person on this project, Bojan Klima at 382-5510.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

### **NEWS AGENCY IDs & THE DOT**

Incoming video from AFP, AP and Reuters are stamped with the ID of each news agency.

ABC NewsOne will continue to be stamped with the Dot.

### **THE IDs AND THE DOT INDICATE THAT THE STAMPED MATERIAL CANNOT BE SHARED WITH OR USED BY ANY VOA DOMESTIC CLIENTS OR REQUESTORS.**

The IDs and the Dot appear in the **UPPER LEFT** of the frame **AND CANNOT BE OBSCURED.**

- **IF A SERVICE INCLUDES NEWS AGENCY VIDEO IN ITS PACKAGES, PROGRAMS OR SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS, PLEASE MAKE SURE THE AGENCY ID OR THE DOT IS ALWAYS VISIBLE.**
- **THIS IS THE ONLY WAY WE CAN GUARANTEE THAT NON-VOA VIDEO WILL BE PROPERLY NOTED AND AVAILABLE FOR EASY REFERENCE DURING A VIDEO ASSESSMENT.**
- **ALL VIDEO DOWNLOADED FROM THE ABC NEWSONE, AFPFORUM, AP VIDEO HUB AND REUTERS CONNECT WEBSITES MUST HAVE THE PROPER ID ADDED TO THE VIDEO.**
- **IF YOU INSERT THE WRONG AGENCY ID YOU CANNOT RE-INSERT ANOTHER ID. YOU WILL HAVE TO START THE PROCESS OVER.**

This is how the agency IDs and the dot appear on incoming feeds:



- ABC, AFP, AP AND REUTERS VIDEO IN THE VOA LIBRARY PRIOR TO JULY 3, 2013 DOES NOT HAVE THE AGENCY IDs OR THE DOT EMBEDDED IN THE VIDEO. THEREFORE, ALL ABC, AFP, AP OR REUTERS LIBRARY VIDEO PRIOR TO 7/3/13 MUST HAVE THE PROPER AGENCY ID OR DOT ADDED TO THE VIDEO.
- IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE REPORTER, PRODUCER AND/OR VIDEO EDITOR TO ENSURE THAT THE PROPER AGENCY ID OR DOT IS ADDED TO THE EDITED MATERIAL.
- EXISTING FILE FOOTAGE THAT ALREADY HAS THE DOT DOES NOT NEED TO BE RE-STAMPED WITH AN AGENCY ID.

### **THE DOT MUST BE ADDED TO CLIPS PRIOR TO 7/3/13 FROM THESE SOURCES**

- IRINN
- Journal of American Medicine (JAMA)
- NewsMarket
- UNIFEEDS (United Nations video)
- Other Acquired Material:
  - From VOA Acquisitions Branch
  - Obtained by VOA Reporters
  - Obtained from a Third Party

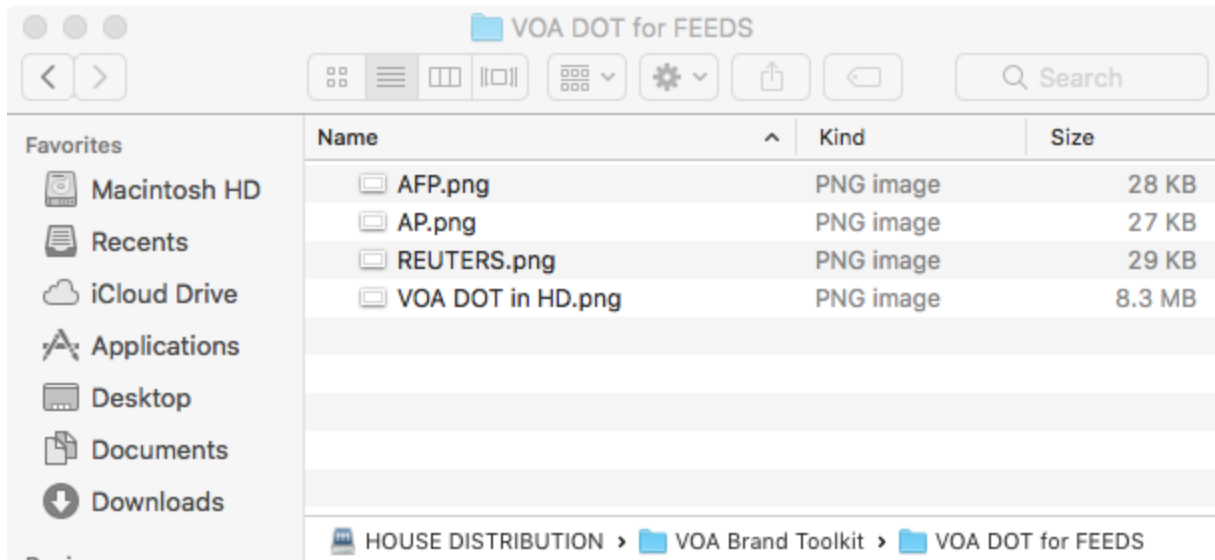
### **THESE SOURCES PRIOR TO 7/3/13 DO NOT REQUIRE THE DOT OR OTHER ID**

- VOA Original Footage
- House Recording Studio (Including hearings and news conferences)
- NASA
- Pentagon
- Senate Recording Studio (Including hearings and news conferences)
- State Department
- White House

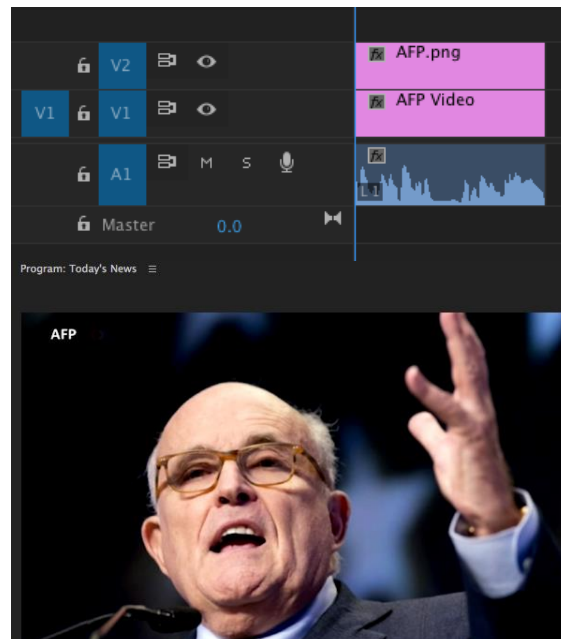
### **ADDING AN AGENCY ID/DOT IN PREMIERE PRO**

In order to add the news agency IDs or the Dot to your video in Premiere, you will first need to import the graphic files.

They are located at: [\\voa\\_creative\HOUSE DISTRIBUTION\VOA Brand Toolkit\VOA DOT for FEEDS](\\voa_creative\HOUSE DISTRIBUTION\VOA Brand Toolkit\VOA DOT for FEEDS)



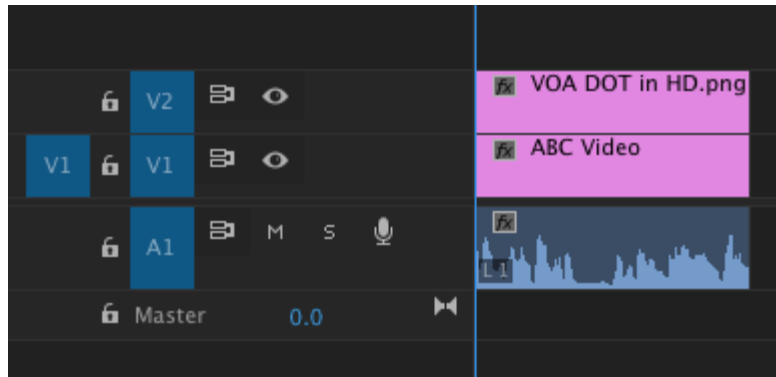
Import the needed files into Premiere and drag them to a video track above your footage. The graphic files will automatically key themselves over the video with their built in alpha channels.





## BEST PRACTICES GUIDE

Use the **VOA DOT in HD.png** file for ABC News video:





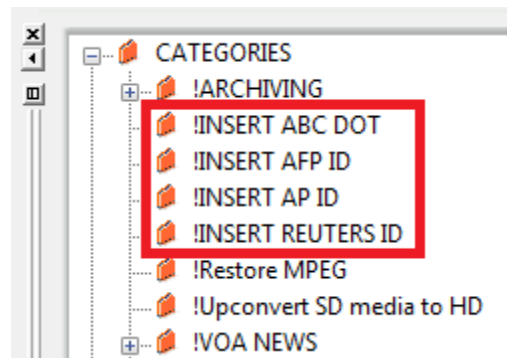
### ADDING AN AGENCY ID/DOT IN DALETPLUS

**THE DROP FOLDER PROCESS WILL REPLACE THE ORIGINAL VIDEO.**

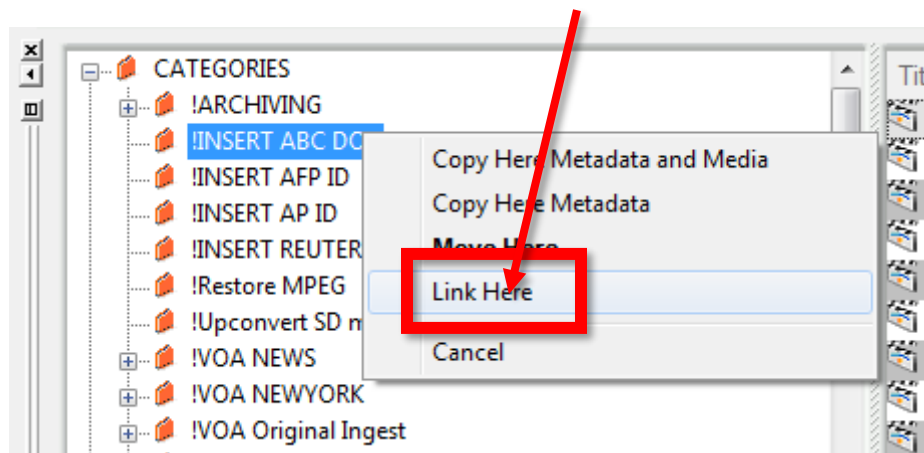
**IT CANNOT BE UNDONE.**

**BE SURE THE VIDEO IS LINKED TO THE CORRECT FOLDER!**

Dalet users will find drop folders towards the top of the CATEGORIES folder. There is a folder for each of the newsfeeds.



Locate the footage in Dalet that needs the bug. Right mouse click, hold and drag the video to the appropriate folder, and release the mouse button. Choose Link Here.



## BEST PRACTICES GUIDE

The video will begin rendering and the original video will be replaced with the video and the bug. While the video is processing, the status will change to OFC (Out for Conversion). This process usually takes a few minutes. The Clapboard Icon will first show a 'Red X' followed by a 'Red Circle'.

When the status changes back to 'NEW' and the Clapboard Icon is clear, the process is complete and you can view your video with the selected bug burned into the upper left corner.



**DO NOT VIEW OR USE THE VIDEO UNTIL THE CONVERSION PROCESS IS COMPLETE  
AND THE VIDEO IS BACK ONLINE!**

Once finished, the original video will have the appropriate agency ID or dot burned into it.

This link takes you to the video tutorial version of these instructions: [Agency ID & Dot Video Tutorial](#)

**THE VOA DOT MUST BE ADDED TO CERTAIN PROPRIETARY VIDEO!**  
**SEE LIST ON PAGE 84**

**IF THERE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT WHETHER TO ADD  
THE DOT TO OLDER LIBRARY VIDEO, PLEASE CONTACT  
STEVEN SPRINGER ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com))  
OR PAM COMMERFORD ([pcommerford@voanews.com](mailto:pcommerford@voanews.com))**

### CORRECTIONS

VOA's reputation and credibility are the hallmarks of the organization. The News Center and the Language Services produce news content, programming and services across many platforms and under daily deadline pressures. While our goal is always to be accurate and fair, occasionally we will present incorrect or inaccurate information. A meaningful policy for correcting significant errors will strengthen our trust with viewers, listeners and readers. As such, these errors will be corrected in a clear and timely manner, with appropriate prominence.

### TV & RADIO BROADCASTS

If we make a mistake that needs correcting, we should do so as quickly as possible while the same show is on the air. If the error is not detected immediately, then preferably the correction should be aired on the same program in which the original error occurred, whether it's the following day or week. Make a point to say "On \_\_\_\_\_ day (state the day and date and time), we erred in our reporting..." then go on to explain what we said that was wrong, make the correction and close by saying, "Voice of America regrets the error."

### VOA WEBSITES

If the error is a simple typo that does not change facts or understanding of the story, we consider it a minor change and simply correct it without further mention. If the error is substantive or one of fact, we change it, add an asterisk (\*), then a note at the bottom saying when it was corrected and what was wrong originally.

### SOCIAL MEDIA PAGES

**Facebook:** Correcting an error on Facebook should follow the same procedure as on voanews.com websites. Update/edit the Facebook post and explain why the information was corrected.

**Twitter:** A good method for correcting an error on Twitter is to **subtweet** the correction. On the next page you'll see how *Slate* handled posting the wrong photo (actor Javier Bardem) when tweeting about Vladimir Putin.

The correction begins "@Slate CORRECTION:" so that *Slate* is replying to its own original tweet. The result is that anyone viewing the original tweet can see the correction in the stream of replies. Equally important, it refers to the photo without showing it again.

People viewing the correction tweet on its own can also see it is part of a conversation linked to the original, offending tweet.

**NOTE:** If you reply to yourself, then anyone who follows you will see the reply. So in terms of who can see the correction, it's just as good as sending it as a normal tweet.



### **LEGAL ISSUES**

This section provides brief introductions to various areas of the law that may apply to VOA journalists. These guidelines provide an overview to certain areas of the law and are not a substitute for a legal opinion from the Office of General Counsel (OGC). Please contact OGC when you have a specific legal question.

#### **VOA FIREWALL**

The “firewall” exists to maintain the credibility of reporting by U.S. international broadcasters. The firewall is violated whenever another U.S. government agency or a U.S. government official tries to influence our work by putting undue pressure on a VOA journalist or on the agency itself or takes any other action that may undermine the journalistic credibility or independence of VOA journalists. This protection arises from numerous provisions of the International Broadcasting Act (IBA), the Agency’s governing statute.

#### **WHAT COULD RESULT IN A FIREWALL VIOLATION**

- A firewall violation would likely be a U.S. ambassador or other State Department personnel demanding that you not air a particular interview or that you give a specific slant to a VOA news story.
- If a federal official from outside of VOA or from another federal agency asks you to use your access/position as a journalist to gather or provide information on their behalf, that would appear be a firewall violation.
- Firewall violations could also occur when someone outside of VOA takes actions that directly intrude on VOA’s professional independence and interferes with news coverage. If a directive from outside the newsroom, including from USAGM, is imposed which you think impermissibly restricts your ability to objectively report the news, or otherwise act in a manner inconsistent with the best practices of professional journalism, please notify your Service Chief and Division Director immediately.
- A direct request from non-VOA personnel to the News Center or a Language Service for your notes or unpublished recordings of video or audio may be a firewall violation. Those requests must immediately be directed to the VOA Director and the General Counsel’s Office.

**UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES SHOULD A VOA EMPLOYEE OR  
CONTRACTOR TURN OVER UNAired OR UNPUBLISHED NEWS  
COVERAGE TO ANY THIRD PARTY WITHOUT FIRST CONSULTING  
WITH VOA SENIOR MANAGEMENT.**

### **WHAT IS NOT A FIREWALL VIOLATION**

The firewall should not discourage VOA journalists from interviewing government officials or USG officials from appearing on VOA programs. It is critical to ensuring that VOA journalists and editors make the final decisions on what stories to cover and how they are covered.

Should a third party, such as a court, law enforcement agency, or other person or organization request that VOA turn over reporters' notes or unpublished content through appropriate legal authority -- such as a court order or Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request -- that is not a firewall violation. However, **immediately** turn the request over to your Service Chief, Division Director, or to the VOA Director's Office. (For FOIA requests, please coordinate through VOA's designated FOIA point of contact.)

A supervisor or editor who asks for relevant editorial script or video changes in a story is not committing a firewall violation. That is part of the everyday nature of journalism.

Finally, the firewall does not start or stop at one specific point in the agency. It exists across the entire USAGM and VOA. It is important that staff not only reports up the chain of command when other government officials or agencies approach VOA, **but that leadership communicates challenges to VOA's reporting down the chain** so that it's clear to editors that coverage has been called into question and the journalistic reasoning behind any corrective actions.

**IF YOU BELIEVE THAT A FIREWALL VIOLATION HAS OCCURRED,  
NOTIFY YOUR SERVICE CHIEF AND DIVISION DIRECTOR  
IMMEDIATELY.**

**IF YOU BELIEVE YOUR IMMEDIATE SUPERVISOR HAS ENGAGED IN A  
FIREWALL VIOLATION PLEASE DISCUSS THE ISSUE WITH THE EDITOR  
OF NEWS STANDARDS & BEST PRACTICES.**

[\(Also see Requests for Unaired/Unpublished Material, p. 39 and Domestic Distribution of VOA Content, p.78\)](#)

### **COPYRIGHT & FAIR USE**

Copyright is a form of protection provided by U.S. law to the authors of original artistic works. Artistic works include photographs, video, audio, music, motion pictures, commercials, written products, as well as footage from other news broadcasters. You should not use a copyrighted work unless (1) you have permission to use, whether via VOA's contracts (such as VOA's video feed or photo contracts) or another negotiated license agreement, or (2) your use of the work falls under the "fair use" doctrine.

#### **FAIR USE**

Determining whether use of copyrighted material is a **fair use** requires a balancing of four factors: (1) the purpose and character of your use; (2) the nature of the copyrighted work; (3) the amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole; and (4) the effect of the use upon the potential market for the copyrighted work. Application of these factors and the fair use doctrine is highly fact-specific and requires a case-by-case analysis.

A use of a copyrighted work is more likely to be a fair use if the material is directly relevant to a news story and the excerpt used is no longer than necessary to achieve the intended purpose. On the other hand, the use of copyrighted material such as a music clip simply to enhance the production value of a television package, for example, is not likely to be a fair use. Keep in mind that just because a video or audio clip is newsworthy does not automatically make VOA's use of it fair. [A Fair Use Self-Help Guide](#) with Frequently Asked Questions is available on the agency's Sharepoint site.

*(Also see [YouTube Guidelines, p. 53](#), [Music, p. 62](#), [Audio Usage Rights, p. 63](#) and [Video Usage Rights, p. 65](#))*

#### **AMBIENT MUSIC**

Generally, there is no copyright issue where music is naturally appearing in the background during an interview or taped event. There may be, however, a copyright issue if the music is incorporated into a news or feature report in other than its incidental form.

*(Also see [YouTube Guidelines, p. 53](#) and [Music, p. 62](#))*

#### **PUBLIC DOMAIN**

Copyright restrictions do not apply to works in the public domain, which include most U.S. federal government works, such as photos, maps, or video found on [whitehouse.gov](http://whitehouse.gov), [state.gov](http://state.gov), [nasa.gov](http://nasa.gov), [cia.gov](http://cia.gov), and other government websites. Be sure to check the Copyright or Terms of Use/Terms of Service pages of these and other websites before using any content.

A work is also in the public domain if it is no longer under copyright protection. This depends on when and where the work was first published, but generally, works published in the U.S. before 1923 are in the public domain. Contact OGC for specific questions about older works or copyright terms in foreign jurisdictions.

### LICENSED MATERIAL

VOA has several license agreements with third parties to use their copyrighted material. The terms of these agreements govern use of the material provided by the licenses, notwithstanding the applicability of the fair use doctrine. When using material from one of VOA's feed providers, such as ABC NewsOne, AFP, APTN and Reuters, for example, you must check all restrictions that may limit the story's use. Questions about the video feeds should be directed to the COR, Steven Springer, and to VOA Media Asset Management Branch at [Senior-Archivists@voanews.com](mailto:Senior-Archivists@voanews.com).

*(Also see [Video Usage Rights, p. 65](#))*

### REQUESTING PERMISSION

Because fair use can sometimes be difficult to determine with certainty, VOA producers are strongly encouraged to seek permission to use copyrighted material from the rightful copyright owner. You should start the process of identifying and contacting the owner of copyrighted content as early in your production process as possible, since it may take several days or weeks to identify the copyright owner and negotiate a license. Please note that obtaining permission in writing, using the standard USAGM/VOA release form, is highly preferable to getting permission orally or via email. A template release form -- to be edited and modified, as needed -- is available on the [Best Practices Sharepoint page](#).

On occasion, a third party may request to either amend the VOA form or insist on using its own licensing agreement. Such outside agreements may contain terms to which USAGM/VOA cannot agree. Please consult OGC when presented with a third party release form or licensing agreement.

### TRADEMARK

A trademark is an intellectual property right in a particular "mark" used to identify a good or service, such as a name, slogan, symbol or logo. For example, "Voice of America" is a registered trademark. It is unlawful to use a trademark in a manner that confuses consumers about the source or sponsorship of goods or services. This is rarely an issue in news broadcasting, since the law allows you to use a mark without permission in a news story if the mark is used in an informational sense. For example, if you are reporting on the BP oil spill, it is appropriate to show the BP logo to identify the company. However, if you are launching a new VOA program, avoid using trademarked slogans or titles.

### TRADEMARK & SPORTING EVENTS

When covering major sporting events such as the Olympics, VOA journalists must be careful with using official trademarks, such as the interlocking Olympic rings. For example, it could be argued that a VOA graphic incorporating the VOA background/colors/image with the official Olympic logo creates an unauthorized association between VOA, a non-Olympics marketing partner, and the Olympic brand.

**ALTHOUGH THE PHRASE "VOICE OF AMERICA" IS TRADEMARKED BY THE AGENCY,  
"VOA" AND THE VOA LOGO ARE NOT TRADEMARKED.**

[More information on the above topics can be found at the Best Practices site on Sharepoint.](#)



### **FILMING IN PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE PLACES**

Generally, news media have the right to be in public places and on public property to gather information, photographically or otherwise. VOA journalists should be mindful, however, about rules, permits, or prohibitions on filming or taking of photographs at certain meetings, sporting events, or in private spaces such as businesses and shops. Similarly, journalists should seek permission from an owner or occupant (even if the occupant is not the owner) before entering private property or a residence.

[\*\(Also see Covering Criminal Activity, p. 21\)\*](#)

### **REQUEST FOR PROOF OF INSURANCE**

From time to time, VOA staff may be asked to provide a certificate of liability insurance when filming in locations where event organizers or property owners want to protect themselves against third party bodily injury and property damage. While most private sector media organizations have liability insurance, the U.S. Government self-insures against liabilities. Therefore, the agency does not purchase liability insurance, and there is no such certificate that we can provide.

Instead, the Office of General Counsel provides a letter explaining this that staff can send to the appropriate parties. Two versions of the letter – one on VOA letterhead and one on USAGM letterhead - are now available in Word documents on the VOA Best Practices Sharepoint page:

[VOA Insurance Letter](#)   [USAGM Insurance Letter](#)

Each letter has blanks so that you can fill in the names of VOA staff that will be on location and the name of the property/location you will be working at. Use the VOA letterhead if you choose to have your service chief or division director sign it. Use the USAGM letterhead if you prefer to have an attorney in the General Counsel's Office sign it.

If you have any questions about this, please contact the General Counsel's Office or Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com)), the Editor for News Standards & Best Practices.

### **DEFAMATION/PRIVACY/FALSE LIGHT**

Under U.S. law, the central question in an action for defamation or invasion of privacy is whether the statements in question are true or false. Truthful publication or broadcast of matters pertaining to legitimate public interest should generally not expose VOA to liability in the United States, especially if VOA's reporting concerns a public figure.

However, VOA may be liable for invasion of privacy in certain situations for the publicizing of private facts or falsehoods. Not only that, other countries' defamation and "insult" laws are not as protective of the press, so broadcasts that are legal in the U.S. may still expose VOA to liability overseas.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

VOA journalists should not intercept or record any private conversations without the permission of the participants, as this may be a crime in certain jurisdictions. The Office of General Counsel should be consulted when a VOA journalist receives intercepted conversations from a third party or in any other special circumstances.

[\*\(Also see Recording Telephone Interviews, p. 37\)\*](#)

**The following guidance is provided by the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press (rcfp.org):**

- Check sources thoroughly. Get independent corroboration whenever possible. A source could have a vendetta against the subject and willfully or unintentionally misrepresent the facts for his or her own purposes. Confidential sources may disappear or recant in the face of a lawsuit. Don't rely on someone else to be accurate.
- Do not let your opinion about whether someone is a public figure or official color your decision to verify the accuracy of a story. Juries do not respond favorably to reporters who fail to confront their subjects with defamatory information and provide them with an opportunity to comment.
- If you cover the police or courthouse beat, make certain you understand criminal and civil procedure and terminology. Be especially careful to restate accurately any information obtained about arrests, investigations and judicial proceedings.
- Be cautious when editing. Make sure the story does not convey the wrong information because of a hasty rewrite.
- Watch for headlines and cutlines that might be defamatory even though the text explains the story.
- **Make sure news promos or teasers used to stir audience interest are not misleading or defamatory.**
- **Do not use generic video footage or file photos when reporting on an activity that might be considered questionable.**
- **Just because someone else said it does not mean that a news organization cannot be sued for republishing it.** This includes letters to the editor. Check out any factual allegations contained in them as carefully as you would statements in a news story.
- Be sensitive about using words that connote dishonest behavior, immorality or other undesirable traits, whether in your published story or in comments in your notes. Remember that a judge may order a news organization to produce reporters' notes, drafts and internal memoranda at a libel trial.
- If contacted by someone threatening a libel suit, be polite, but do not admit error or fault. Talk the case over with your editor, supervisor or attorney immediately, and follow procedures established by your news organization.

### **DO NOT BE RECKLESS WITH THE TRUTH**

### **REPORTER'S PRIVILEGE & CONFIDENTIAL SOURCES**

The reporter's privilege originates in the First Amendment's guarantee of a free press, under the rationale that forcing journalists to disclose confidential sources will discourage sources from communicating with reporters, thereby disrupting the free flow of information protected by the First Amendment. In some circumstances, journalists are compelled to disclose confidential sources. Because of USAGM's special status as a federal government agency, some internal VOA documents may also be subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

[\*\(Also see Sourcing, p. 28\)\*](#)

**VOA JOURNALISTS SHOULD CONTACT OGC IF APPROACHED  
BY ANY LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS.**

**IN SOME SITUATIONS, THIS COULD BE A FIREWALL VIOLATION.**

[\*\(Also see VOA Firewall, p. 91\)\*](#)

### **REPORTING ON CLASSIFIED DOCUMENTS**

A number of laws and regulations, including several criminal statutes, regulate access to, and transmission of, classified information. VOA has a specific protocol in place regarding its reporting on classified documents in the public domain, such as the documents released by WikiLeaks in 2010.

**ONLY CERTAIN VOA JOURNALISTS ARE ASSIGNED TO REPORT ON THESE TOPICS.**

**THE SUPERVISORY INVESTIGATIVE EDITOR SHOULD BE CONSULTED BEFORE  
YOU BEGIN ANY ASSIGNMENT RELATING IN ANY WAY TO CLASSIFIED MATERIAL,  
EVEN IF THE CLASSIFIED DOCUMENTS ARE PUBLICLY AVAILABLE ON A WEBSITE  
LIKE WIKILEAKS.**

**THE SUPERVISORY INVESTIGATIVE EDITOR WILL CONSULT WITH SENIOR  
MANAGEMENT AND THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL REGARDING ALL  
APPLICABLE LAWS.**

[\*Return to Table of Contents\*](#)

### **SUBPOENAS OR REQUESTS FOR TESTIMONY OR DOCUMENTS**

- **IF YOU RECEIVE A REQUEST OR DEMAND TO TESTIFY IN A LEGAL PROCEEDING ON MATTERS RELATING TO OFFICIAL AGENCY INFORMATION OR YOUR OFFICIAL DUTIES, OR IF YOU RECEIVE A REQUEST TO PRODUCE AGENCY RECORDS OR INFORMATION, CONTACT THE OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL IMMEDIATELY.**

There is a special regulatory procedure for handling requests for testimony by current and former employees and handling the production of documents in legal proceedings in which USAGM is not a named party.

[\*\(Also see What Is Not a Firewall Violation, p. 92\)\*](#)

### **INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL BY VOA STAFF**

While U.S. government employees must usually obtain a country clearance from the State Department before official government travel abroad, VOA reporters traveling to cover and report on the news may travel to countries in which U.S. Missions are located with minimal formality, which will typically only include a notification of intent to travel to the State Department. Please be mindful that travel to some sanctioned countries may require additional licensing or documentation. Reporters should contact their supervisors and the Travel Office before planning travel to these countries.

### **OUTSIDE ACTIVITIES**

#### **ALL FULL-TIME VOA STAFF ARE REQUIRED TO FOLLOW THESE PROCEDURES BEFORE RESPONDING TO A REQUEST OR MAKING ANY COMMITMENTS**

Anyone looking to engage in activities outside of VOA should first check with their supervisor to ensure that doing so won't conflict with official duty schedules or requirements.

Then, you should forward your proposed activity to [OutsideRequests@voanews.com](mailto:OutsideRequests@voanews.com). This will reach VOA Public Relations Director Bridget Serchak ([bserchak@voanews.com](mailto:bserchak@voanews.com)), Editor for News Standards & Best Practices Steven Springer ([sspringer@voanews.com](mailto:sspringer@voanews.com)) and the Ethics Group in the General Counsel's Office. We will review your proposal to ensure that it will not violate government ethics regulations or journalistic ethics and best practices.

Federal regulations prohibit employees from receiving compensation for outside teaching, speaking, or writing activities that directly relate to their official duties.

Some activities may not be appropriate if they:

- Constitute a conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest.
- Involve use of agency materials, time, or facilities.
- Involve a particular matter you've worked on in your official capacity.
- Are likely to adversely affect the agency's ability to fulfill its mission
- Would involve working for outlets that broadcast to or publish in the same target area as the employee's VOA language service.

Additionally, if you will be identified as an agency employee in connection with your outside activities, in order to avoid appearances of impropriety, you must include a disclaimer that the views expressed are your own and not that of VOA (or the U.S. Government, as appropriate).

Because the highest standards of journalism require a reputation for impartiality, VOA journalists should not perform public relations or similar work, either paid or unpaid. Journalists should also not counsel individuals or organizations, either in the United States or abroad, on how to deal successfully with the news media. Lastly, you should not provide advice to government officials other than to those in VOA, USAGM or any other government broadcasting entity, or to candidates for public office, again regardless of whether in the United States or abroad.

Outside speaking and writing opportunities can be highly beneficial, both personally and professionally, but if not done properly they can have serious consequences. Please don't hesitate to contact Andrew or Steve if you have any questions or need advice.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Aside from the types of activities outlined here, there is also the issue of whether VOA staff can, or should, express themselves outside of the office.

Needless to say, this is a very delicate issue, given our unique status as government employees as well as journalists.

With that in mind, this is the recommended guidance for VOA staff:

- VOA's mission is to provide accurate and objective news and information. To facilitate that mission, as journalists, you are expected to remain neutral and objective. That means that you should be careful and try to avoid conduct or activity that would question your neutrality and objectivity as well as the neutrality and objectivity of VOA.
- For example: If as a VOA journalist you are reporting on or otherwise working on a story regarding "X" situation, it is recommended that you avoid publicly voicing your personal opinion about that situation because such activity may call into question your credibility as a journalist and could compromise VOA's reputation as a reliable and credible news organization.

### **PLEASE EXERCISE GOOD JUDGMENT WHEN CONSIDERING YOUR OPTIONS AND MAKING YOUR DECISIONS.**

[\*\(Also see Opinion, p. 48\)\*](#)

## **CONTRACTORS**

VOA contractors generally have wider latitude to engage in activities outside the scope of their contracts with the Agency, but they should keep in mind that certain activities and actions could jeopardize continued performance on their current contract, or their ability to obtain a follow-on contract.

When doing work outside of VOA, it is important for VOA contractors to refrain from stating or creating the impression that they are employees, agents or representatives of the agency. They should not say that they "work for" VOA or are "correspondents at" VOA. Rather, they should indicate that they are "freelance journalists," "regular contributors to VOA," or use a similar description.

Also, VOA contractors must exercise caution to ensure that their journalistic integrity or impartiality is not compromised by their activities outside the scope of their contract.

VOA contractors employed by the employee management firms should advise the respective on-site managers from each company when they receive offers of work outside VOA. Contractors must also send their requests to the respective VOA Program Manager responsible for their language service, as well as to Outside Requests ([OutsideRequests@voanews.com](mailto:OutsideRequests@voanews.com)).

VOA contractors with any questions as to whether or not an outside activity poses a potential journalistic conflict are encouraged to contact Steve and Bridget for advice.

[\*Return to Table of Contents\*](#)

### **COMPETITIONS & CASH AWARDS**

Any employee who wants to enter a particular journalism competition using his/her VOA-produced work **must** first advise his/her supervisor. If the supervisor determines the entry to be of merit, please advise Pat Bodnar ([pbodnar@voanews.com](mailto:pbodnar@voanews.com)) in the Language Programming Directorate. All entries should be sent to Percy Rogers, the Agency's Incentive Coordinator ([ptrogers@usagm.gov](mailto:ptrogers@usagm.gov)). Percy will compile all entries.

**ENTRIES FOR JOURNALISM COMPETITIONS ARE TO BE  
SUBMITTED BY THE AGENCY'S SENIOR MANAGEMENT ONLY**

**INDIVIDUAL STAFF MEMBERS SHOULD NOT ENTER COMPETITIONS  
ON THEIR OWN USING WORK PRODUCED FOR VOA**

While the majority of journalism competitions that VOA enters award trophies, plaques or certificates to the winners, a few of them may include cash awards. Should a winning entry result in a cash award, that award will be designated to the agency, **not to the individual**. It will be the responsibility of VOA senior management to determine whether it will accept the cash award under its gift acceptance authority, and how that cash award will be administered.

### **APPENDIX – CONTROL ROOM EMERGENCY PROCEDURES**

#### **EMERGENCY EVACUATION TV CONTROL ROOM ACTIONS**

1. The Director will direct the Producer to tell the anchor to make the statement,  
**“We must interrupt this program, please stand by. We will return as soon as possible.”**
2. Director or TD fades to black on anchor and fades up on generic VOA full screen graphic.
3. Director or TD notifies TVMC that an ID graphic is up and that the control room and studio staff are vacating the building.
4. Using the same graphic, TVMC takes control of the path seamlessly when ready.  
TVMC evacuates the building.

#### **EMERGENCY EVACUATION RADIO CONTROL ROOM ACTIONS**

1. Producer tells anchor to make the statement,  
**“We must interrupt this program, please stand by. We will return as soon as possible.”**
2. Technician plays VOA1 “The Hits” so that VOA branded content continues standard frequencies.
- 2a. **Alternate:** Producer tells anchor to introduce “linked” show. This means all remaining show elements could continue to playout without live inserts until done.
3. Technician links remaining program elements and executes.
4. Technician notifies RMC of programming status.
5. Radio MC takes necessary steps to ensure program continuity.
6. Master Control, Control- room, and studio staff evacuate the building.

#### **EMERGENCY NCC ACTIONS**

NCC receives the broadcast product from Master Control and transmits it to the respective distribution points. NCC does not alter the product content sent to them for distribution.

#### **TO IMPLEMENT THE TV CONTROL ROOM PLAN, OPERATIONS MUST**

1. Load the TVMC full screen VOA graphic in each TV control room switcher. This may be updated in the future pending further guidance.
2. The Broadcast Operations management is responsible for making sure the graphic is installed in all control rooms and Master Control, and that the emergency plan is communicated to their respective staffs.
3. Broadcast Operations is responsible for maintaining the emergency full screen VOA graphic in their daily operation control room set up, and show programming.

#### **TO IMPLEMENT THE EMERGENCY EVACUATION ACTION PLAN, LANGUAGE SERVICE MANAGEMENT MUST**

1. Communicate the emergency action plan to service leadership and staff.
2. Each service must provide to Division management the service action plan for contacting affiliates about disruptions.

### **ALL LANGUAGE SERVICES AND BROADCAST OPERATIONS STAFF ARE REQUIRED TO EVACUATE THE BUILDING DURING AN EMERGENCY**



**NOTE:** This Emergency evacuation guide for Broadcast Operations and Language Services is for real emergencies, and when there is any doubt please respond as though it is a real emergency.

**However, a fire drill is not an emergency.** If a fire alarm drill will be conducted, employees and managers will be notified in advance of the testing.

### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The contents of this Guide represent the contributions of many VOA staffers. Thanks to all for your input. Other entries in the Guide come from previous House-wide guidance.

In addition, certain elements in the Guide were produced with the cooperation of the following non-Federal entities:

CNN

Freedom Forum

Hootsuite.com

Los Angeles Times

New York Times

NPR

Project for Excellence in Journalism

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press

Radio Television Digital News Association

Society of Professional Journalists