

The Mustang Morning News Staff Manual Revised 2023

This document covers behavior and actions by our staff, and acts as a guide for our work as journalists.

The Mustang Morning News (“MMN”) is a broadcast journalism publication for Mira Costa High School. The website and social media channels are updated throughout the school year. It is an open forum for student expression, providing the opportunity for students to have their voices heard by the Mira Costa Community.

This publication provides staff members with independent reporting opportunities, as well as space to comment on current issues. Stories are based on a wide variety of research for a broad and often critical audience. Staff members are encouraged to explore and develop digital literacy skills through videography, sound, writing, and design. Marketing skills are put to use via social media and other strategies to increase the publication’s readership and involvement. The Mustang Morning News demands individual responsibility, teamwork, adaptability and effort from each member of the staff.

The Mustang Morning News is a public forum for student expression. We follow the First Amendment and California Ed. Code 48907 and Ed. Code 48950.

Purpose

The MMN strives to deliver accurate and factual journalistic reporting on significant aspects of school life and other subjects of concern to its viewers. In particular, the staff will:

- Reveal the truth, based on verified facts and professional journalistic standards
- Dispel myths and rumors
- Hold those in power accountable for their actions or inactions
- Strive to tell the stories of the weak, underrepresented, or minority groups and individuals
- Serves as a leadership group on campus.
- Allow for commentary from the greater Mira Costa population, and may publish community reactions through signed letters to the editor.
- Allow space for satire (though, it must be stated in the story that the piece is satirical in nature), columns and interesting feature for entertainment.

CODE OF ETHICS

Freedom of expression involves adherence to the highest standards of journalism. The Mustang Morning News will observe legal and ethical responsibilities expected of them as practicing journalists.

- All reporters and producers will assure that stories are fair, facts are correct and information is as complete, balanced and as unbiased as possible.
- Sources of information and ideas will be clear. The MMN will use anonymous sources only in instances discussed in the section below.

- The MMN will not publish material which attacks an individual or group in a way which might be ambiguous, except in stories dealing with clear satire.
- No story, visuals or audio work will distort or sensationalize the news.

The MMN will deal with rumor and gossip only when they raise an issue of concern to the school community and will then research it with the intent to clarify the truth. Biases of sources will be carefully considered when determining what is fact.

In dealing with issue-oriented content, especially when it involves the potential for controversy, staff members must demonstrate sensitivity, objectivity and caution. Also, reporting must be based on specific sources representing diverse points of view, be balanced and fair, and represent a full understanding of the issues. Controversial topics, based on the need to inform the public, may be reported by the MMN.

A journalist may not use crude or profane remarks in quotations, unless replaced by asterisks, or their own writing. Audio of such remarks will be beeped out.

Audience

The primary audience for the Mustang Morning News is comprised of students, faculty, and parents of Mira Costa High School. However, the staff keeps in mind that their content is viewed by audience members around the world. Thus, Mustang Morning News will also report on issues pertaining to these parties.

Funding

The Mustang Morning News is funded primarily by donations, and the PTSA.

Absence policy

Being a productive member of The Mustang Morning News is much like having a real-world job. Each day, others rely on your participation. Therefore, great care should be taken when planning pre-arranged absences and field trips. Students should be mindful of the deadline schedule when planning for other activities. For example, speaking with peers on the day of a deadline is avoidable. Excessive absences may result in the removal from staff.

Accuracy

Students enrolled in the Broadcast Journalism class, and the student staff members who produce the MMN, are responsible for the making of and publishing of its content (not the adviser, school, or district administration).

The MMN must always strive for the highest standards of accuracy, completeness and careful research in its presentation of material. However, material will be published with the facts as they stand at deadline. If something is inaccurate, deadlines will be extended for online publication.

A correction for any significant error of fact or omission, as determined by the editorial board, will be promptly published shortly after notification or identification of a mistake. If the mistake was in an article published on the website, a correction will be run in italics both at the beginning

of the article and within the article where the mistake originally appeared. The responsibility for the composition of the correction lies with the producer, subject to review by the editorial board.

Sources quoted in stories will, upon request, be presented a copy of their quotes for confirmation by the reporter assigned to the story. If a source demands that a quote originally made on record be retracted, the editorial board will discuss the possible ramifications of printing the article and act accordingly, but is not obliged to comply with the source's request.

Quotes and facts will always be checked. Consequences for inaccuracy will be directed toward the reporter, and will be decided on a case-by-case basis by the news directors and adviser.

Advertising policy The news directors, with guidance from the adviser, shall determine if any advertisement is not acceptable. Ads for illegal products or services will be rejected. Advertisers without credit history may be required to prepay.

Anonymous source policy

At the discretion of the news directors, anonymous sources may be used. To provide transparency and accountability to our audience, it is preferred to use sources who will go on the record. However the Mustang Morning News understands there are instances when the use of an anonymous source is appropriate, in accordance with NSPA Model Code of Ethics policy 7.10. When anonymous sources are used, only the reporter and news directors should know the identity of the source.

Instances in which a reporter may grant anonymity on the spot, without informing the editorial prior to granting it are as follows. All cases regarding anonymity must be made known to the editorial board, but the following allow a reporter to grant it without prior approval from the editorial board.

Sensitive personal topics may include:

- Sexuality.
- Drug addiction and use.
- Pregnancy.

Incriminating cases include:

- Commenting on someone else in a case where they could reap serious consequences.

In instances where it appears someone has broken the law, it must be brought to the attention of the editorial board for discussion prior to publishing said article and/or granting a subject anonymity. However, upon reporter reviewal of transcription, if something said by the subject is glaringly illegal and the writer intends on publishing said comment, the reporter has the option to contact the subject to notify them if they so desire.

Before publication approval policy

Stories, interviews, notes, video or audio footage will not be shared with non-staff members before publication unless the reporter and/or news directors determine the need to confirm information for clarification. Interviewed subjects have no right to approve a story they appear in.

Byline & photo credit policy

All stories written/produced by an individual will receive a byline with the exception of an editorial. Any photos/videos that appear in the Mustang Morning News publications will receive a credit. Reporters are expected to write their own captions. If more than three people contributed to a story the byline will read, "staff."

Cafeteria/Quad/Hallway policy

The school grounds are a great place to find sources and conduct interviews. However, a staff member should never leave class to eat or socialize during a period they are not scheduled to do so. On a rare occasion Mr. Hernandez might give permission for someone to leave class early to record footage. Students found leaving class for reasons other than journalistic purposes will (a) be disciplined or (b) be removed from staff.

Cell phone/mobile device policy

We understand that cell phones and mobile devices are an important tool for journalists. If you are found to be using your phone or mobile device for purposes other than a journalistic purpose during class, it will be confiscated and returned to you at the end of the day on a first offense. Additional consequences may also apply. A second offense will result in the phone being given to the appropriate administrator.

Class interruptions policy

Every effort should be taken to complete Mustang Morning News business in a manner which is not disruptive to another classroom or student sources. If a class must be interrupted, the staff member should introduce himself or herself to the teacher (preferably in advance), mention why you are there and ask permission to conduct your business.

In addition, we attempt to make interruptions only toward the beginning of a class period, or at a time when the teacher has expressed you should be there. The best bet is to always plan ahead and take care of business during a passing period, lunch or before or after school.

Classroom cleanliness policy

It is everyone's job to keep the Media Arts Lab neat. The room is not a locker or cafeteria. If you are keeping something in the room it should be placed somewhere that does not create a mess. It is your responsibility to keep your immediate work area and entire lab free of dirt, dust, food, trash and other items that may damage the equipment.

Class time work policy

It is expected you will stay active and engaged on your work for MMN each class period. At no time should you leave early, line up at the door before the end of the period, or work on assignments from other classes without the permission of the adviser.

Communication policy

Staff members must stay in constant contact with each other, the adviser, and sources using pre-approved channels like e-mail, Slack, Canvas, and iMessage. This means having alerts turned on for your laptop and phone. It is your responsibility to develop a routine for checking your accounts for correspondence.

Communication regarding publications policy

Letters-to-the-editor are the most appropriate way to communicate with the staff, however the correspondence we receive takes a number of forms. E-mails, posts and calls will be shared with appropriate staff members. Exceptions to this are unsigned letters, libelous comments or comments intended to cause harm.

Computer policy

Computers are for Mustang Morning News use. Computers are not for game-playing, shopping or homework. Students on deadline always have first-use of computers.

Students should never download applications to the computer. Students should take every effort to take care of the computers at all times.

Students should avoid using proxies and passwords to access websites that are not appropriate for school and could cause viruses or other problems. Should a student need to access a blocked site, they should see Mr. Hernandez first.

Conduct policy

It is expected that when you are conducting Mustang Morning News business you act professionally and courteously. You are not only representing yourself, but the staff, adviser and school. You should always do your best to leave a positive impression.

Conflict of interest policy

There are several occasions when, as a student journalist, a conflict of interest might arise. For starters, a reporter should never quote him or herself, nor use his or her friends as sources. This is unprofessional. Reporters should avoid producing stories about activities they participate in or they, their friends or family have a vested interest in.

Student journalists wishing to hold an editorial position such as news director may not be president of student council or a class council. This is seen as a major conflict of interest. Mustang Morning News students are encouraged to be active in school, but must understand that there are limits to activities a producer can be involved with so as to maintain journalistic independence and avoid conflict of interest, whether implicit or explicit.

Content-decision policy

Content of the Mustang Morning News is determined by student producers in accordance with the US Supreme Court case *Tinker v Des Moines* and California Education Code 48907. The adviser does not determine content. The Mustang Morning News does not engage in prior review before publication.

Controversial topics policy

The Mustang Morning News may from time-to-time cover controversial topics. Student journalists should be responsible when covering such topics and work closely with the Adviser

for guidance. While not under prior review, student producers may decide to give the principal a head's up on the controversial topic before the news story is distributed.

Sensitive Issues/Legality

The Mustang Morning News is subject to state and federal laws; content reflects student interests and concerns.

School officials and the publication adviser may offer advice on sensitive issues and criticism following publication, but, as per the Ed. Code, may not obstruct the publishing of controversial, yet legally written articles. The Mustang Morning News shall not be subject to censorship or restraint by school administrators, faculty, school board members or any other individual parties outside the editorial board as per the California Ed. Code.

Students must refrain from publishing or disseminating material which:

- Is obscene to minors, according to current legal definitions.
- Is libelous or slanderous, according to current legal definitions.
- Is an invasion of privacy, according to current legal definitions.
- Creates a clear and present danger of immediate material and substantial physical disruption of the school.
- Would cause the commission of an unlawful act or the violation of a lawful school regulation.
- Advertises illegal products or services.

If the MMN is presented with facts that involve a student or group of students who have broken the law, are pregnant or dealing with any other personal issues, MMN members must entirely fact-check any personal and/or touchy subject claims.

MMN will also fact-check any rumors reported to us as facts, and will require two other on-record sources (one being an adult) for such situations.

Subject to legal restrictions, and the ethical code detailed below, student journalists have the right to report and editorialize about all topics in the op/ed section. Otherwise events or issues, including those which are controversial, will remain unbiased.

Corrections policy

The goal of the Mustang Morning News is to have no errors; however, the goal is not easily accomplished. The staff will apologize for such errors and will run corrections when possible.

Once a story has been aired or posted on online platforms, it may not be removed or deleted. An exception may be made in the case of a compelling journalistic reason, such as a violation of standard journalistic ethics (for example, the story is found to be libelous, slanderous, or may cause harm). Factual errors are not cause for deletion of a story, but will compel the staff to correct to make corrections, and include an editor's note to reflect the change from a previous version.

Crime policy

If a student or faculty member at Mira Costa commits a criminal act, or is alleged to have committed a criminal act, it is considered newsworthy and will be reported on appropriately.

Deadline policy

Meeting deadlines is of the utmost importance to journalists. If you feel as though you will not be able to meet a deadline you should immediately discuss with a producer. The news director may grant extensions at his or her pleasure. Failure to meet a deadline could result in (a) a failing grade and/or (b) dismissal from staff.

Dismissal from staff policy

Being on staff is a privilege, and there are times when students might be removed from staff. These infractions include, but are not limited to: plagiarism, fabricated work, breaking of school rules, breaking of the law, lapses in journalism ethics or failure to meet deadlines, violation of rules in this staff manual.

The Editorial Board

The Editorial Board is the voice of the Mustang Morning News. It will include the News Directors and producers. The Editorial Board, along with the adviser, will recommend disciplinary action and review staffing problems when they arise. The adviser can bring attention to problems as they arise.

The adviser will prevent publication only when legal advice confirms that the staff may be in violation of a legally prohibited form of speech or has violated its own ethics policy.

The editorial board will determine the issue and stance for all editorials published, review all editorials for publication, and approve, order revisions of or withdraw an editorial from publication. Any material considered potentially controversial will be reviewed by the board.

Before the assignment of a controversial topic for any story, the editorial board will meet to determine how the topic will be handled and how the story will be developed. The board will decide if there is a genuine need to produce the story and will recommend how the story will represent opposing views.

Upon completion of the story, the board will meet again to determine if the material is publishable or if revisions are needed.

The members of the editorial board must be in agreement when making decisions.

“Editorial” policy

From time to time, The Mustang Morning News will feature an editorial, which reflects the viewpoint of the majority of the editorial board (with contribution from the entire staff). Final decisions regarding the editorial will be made by the news directors, though the actual editorial might be written by a different member of the editorial staff.

Editorial policy enforcement policy

The news directors shall interpret and enforce the editorial policy.

E-mail address policy

For the purposes of conducting Mustang Morning News business, students should have a professional e-mail address not associated with the school that is frequently checked.

Producers as leaders policy

It is expected that producers and news directors will lead by example at all times during class time. It is also expected that producers will behave appropriately when representing their publication outside of the classroom.

While they cannot be monitored 24/7, producers are role models and should follow all school rules and laws. Failure to adhere to staff ethics policies, school rules or laws could result in (a) loss of position or (b) removal from staff. More details are found in the Producer Contract.

Equipment use policy

Any equipment borrowed from the class should be used responsibly and returned in the condition it was lent. Students are responsible for any damage to Media Arts equipment. Staff will follow the equipment sign out procedures as defined by the adviser, and must return all equipment promptly. If a student in possession of equipment is absent, they must make arrangements with their parents or other staff members to return all equipment for them by the due date.

Faculty & staff name policy

In accordance with AP Style, faculty and staff will be referred to by full name on first reference and by last name on future references.

Food & drink policy

Food and drink are prohibited from the Media Arts Lab. Food and drink are only permitted in the Studio area. Having food and drink outside of the Studio area will result in disciplinary actions.

Grading policy

To ensure detailed feedback and professional growth, staff members will be provided feedback from peers and the adviser throughout the production process as well as at the conclusion of production. Grades are assigned by evaluating a staff member's unique assigned responsibilities, as well as their courage, generosity, and professionalism. This includes but is not limited to: technical ability, journalistic integrity, collaboration skills, work ethic, and leadership.

Guest reporter policy

The use of guest writers is at the discretion of the news directors.

Internet media policy

Staff members should never use photographs, video or audio from the Internet unless they are for reviews or of legitimate news-value. Even then, a staff member should seek approval from the news director regarding the appropriateness of such use. As a general rule, media found on the internet may violate copyright or privacy laws, and the accuracy and quality of such media may not meet the standards of our newscast.

Interviewing policy

Every attempt should be made to conduct in-person at a neutral location or location comfortable for the interview subject. Should an in-person interview not be possible, a Facetime, Skype, Zoom, or Google Hangout interview is an appropriate back-up solution. Texting and Q&A sheets are never acceptable interviewing techniques. E-mail interviews are discouraged and should only be done at the approval of the news directors. If an interview is done via e-mail, it should be documented in the story.

In the state of California it is legal to record a conversation as long as one person involved knows the recording is taking place. That being said, it is appropriate to let a person know if you are planning to record your conversation.

In every recorded interview the subject must state and spell his or her name at the beginning of the recording. Written interviews must be signed by the subject at the conclusion of the interview. All recordings and notes must be kept for at least one full calendar year.

All interview notes and recordings are to be archived and saved by individual reporters and must be presented on-demand if and when requested.

Leaving school policy

Generally, outside-of-school work needs to be completed during non- school hours. There are special circumstances, though, when a reporter will need to leave school during class time. Adviser, Mr. Hernandez, will determine whether or not leaving school is an appropriate option on a case-by-case basis. Planning ahead at least 24 hours is preferred. An Off-grounds pass must be obtained from the attendance office.

Leaving the room policy

Whenever you leave the room, you should check with the adviser and news directors, letting them know where you are going. You should check back in when you return. There are no exceptions to this policy.

Letter to the editor policy

Letters to the editor are welcomed and encouraged, but will only be published if they are signed. News directors reserve the right to edit letters for length, grammar and unacceptable content. Letters to the editor should be delivered to Room 108.

Minors' names policy There is no law regarding the use of the name of a minor involved with a criminal activity in the media. The news directors will determine when it is appropriate to withhold the name of a minor in a publication. Victims of sex crimes are generally not named. The news directors will determine if and when any names should be published or withheld.

No harm policy

It is possible that in the act of reporting a story, a reporter will come upon on a troubled source who may need outside help. In addition to being a reporter, you are a human being. Adhering to the Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics edict to "do no harm," a reporter should notify an adult if they believe a source is going to injure themselves or others, or take their own life immediately.

Obituary policy

In the occurrence of the death of a faculty member or student, The Mustang Morning News will produce a news story about the deceased with his or her name, a list of survivors, school activities list and student quotes. The obituary is a news story, and will not play on emotions or serve as a memorial tribute.

All student or faculty deaths will be handled in the same, fair manner.

Opinion policy

The views of columnists are not necessarily those of the rest of the staff. The publication strives to present a variety of diverse views.

Outside-of-school behavior policy

While you may not be an on-duty student journalist 24/7, it is important to understand how you conduct yourself outside of school will reflect upon you and the Mustang Morning News when you are working as a student journalist. It is strongly encouraged that you always behave appropriately and professionally, being mindful of how you conduct yourself in public and on social media. Should inappropriate behavior interfere with your responsibilities as a student journalist or productive member of the MMN, you may be removed from staff.

When attending a school field trip all school rules are to be followed at all times.

Ownership policy

Assignments completed as part of a publications class will become the exclusive property of The Mustang Morning News for the entire school year. At the conclusion of the year, publications will share rights with the owner of the work.

Photos and Graphics

Photographs, graphics, and artwork are a necessary part of the MMN. Assignments for photos, graphics, and art must be included upon article submission. All editorial cartoons will be submitted to the editorial board before publication.

Electronic manipulations changing the essential truth of a photo, illustration or video will be clearly labeled as a "photo illustration."

Plagiarism & lying policy

Plagiarism and/or the use of reporter-created quotes or information in any form will result in the immediate dismissal from staff and a F for the class. We do not tolerate or condone plagiarism, misquoting or misinformation of any kind.

Press pass policy

Having a press pass is a privilege. Passes should be used responsibly at all times. Any time you leave the room you should have your press pass out and visible. Press passes can get you into special events you are covering, however you should plan ahead when using your press pass at an athletic event or school program.

Students who abuse their press pass will be (a) required to surrender their pass and/or (b) be removed from staff.

Printing policy

The printer is for adviser and Mustang Morning News use. The printer is not for personal use. Students should plan ahead or go to the library for personal printing needs.

Profanity policy

Profanity may appear in a news story, but only in cases of direct quotes or if the profanity is necessary to the content of the story. In questionable cases, the news directors will determine whether the use of profanity is vital to the story.

Please do not confuse profanity with obscenity. No stories or pictures/videos of an obscene nature will be published. Definitions and examples for the above instances can be found at splc.org.

Mustang Morning News-driven complaints policy

Viewers with concerns or complaints regarding news stories will be directed to speak with the news directors. The adviser will become involved when deemed appropriate by the news directors or should the adviser determine the need to become involved sooner.

Reenactments policy

Reenacting or recreating events through video, audio, graphics or other means should be avoided, and may be used only at the discretion of the news directors. Any re-creations or reenactments will be clearly labeled as such.

Reporting policy

Reporting is at the heart of journalism. Therefore, there are several expectations when it comes to reporting. First and foremost, reporting should be authentic, fair and accurate. A reporter should always keep all his or her notes from a story, including, but not limited to: research, interviews and observations.

Staff conflict policy

Occasionally, staff members will have disagreements that can get out-of-hand. Staff members should always try to remain calm and respectful and deal with issues before they become large-scale problems. Should a conflict arise, the news directors will devise a resolution plan. Should further assistance be needed, the adviser will determine the appropriate course of action to end any conflicts.

Staff manual policy

Every staff member is expected to become familiar with this manual and use it as a constant resource throughout the year.

Staff position policy

Each year, new producers are chosen for the Mustang Morning News. This happens through a combination of application, interviews and recommendations. Any staff member is welcome to apply for producer positions.

All students wishing to be on staff must commit to attending journalism workshops and trainings outside the school day and/or school year. Students who do not attend a workshop will not be considered for the position. A student who says they will attend and does not will have their position revoked.

***This staff manual is based on that of Highlights (Beverly Hills High School).**

References:

**National Scholastic Press Association [Model Code of Ethics](#) (2009)
[Student Press Law Center](#)**