

The Oxford Blue

Reporting Guidelines

V2.0, 28/06/20

This document is a guide to sensitive and balanced reporting at *The Oxford Blue*. This document should be used as a tool by writers and editorial staff to improve and inform their writing and editing. This is a living document and we welcome input into sections for inclusion.

If you are ever unsure about the style or content of an article, please speak to the Editors-in-Chief, Managing Director or a member of the Senior Editorial team.

They are:

- Editors-in-Chief: Breeha Mazhar and Gabriella Emery | editor@theoxfordblue.co.uk
- Managing Director: Adam Thompson | managingdirector@theoxfordblue.co.uk
- Senior Editorial Team: editorial@theoxfordblue.co.uk

This document is written collaboratively. Sources and authors will be labelled appropriately for full transparency.

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Content Warnings

Source: Oxford SU

[Guide to Trigger Warnings](#)

The Oxford Blue uses content warnings (CW:) where appropriate. The newspaper must not overuse content warnings where they are not necessary (e.g CW: toys, games) or trivialise them.

Anti-Semitism and Racism

Specifics to anti-Semitism:

Source: IPSO Editors' Code

[UNESCO and OSCE: Addressing anti-Semitism through Education: a guide for policymakers.](#)

***The Oxford Blue* does not publish articles where the author expresses anti-Semitic views, including but not exclusive to Holocaust denial, use of anti-Semitic tropes, consideration of Jewish conspiracy theories, and colonialism.**

Avoid giving anti-Semites publicity. If you are covering an event in which an racist or anti-Semitic speaker is involved, do not quote their arguments at length. If the individual or organisation is small, do not report on their business if it is not explicitly relevant to an Oxford audience as it will give them unwarranted publicity. Do report on protests against such speakers or organisations if they are happening within Oxford.

United Kingdom adopted definition of anti-Semitism:

“Anti-Semitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.” (United Kingdom FCO, 2016)

“Anti-Semitic ideologies, paradoxically, portray Jews as all-powerful, conspiring and duplicitous; as an eliminatory hatred towards “the Jews”, conceived as a symbol for something that they are not. In all cases, anti-Semitism has been rooted in historical allegations of Jewish cunning, conspiracy, immorality, wealth, power and hostility to others, dating back to tropes popularized in medieval religious texts.” (UNESCO and OSCE, 2018)

Specifics to Racism:

Source: Reuters Handbook of Journalism

[The Reuters Style Guide](#)

The Oxford Blue does not publish articles where the author expresses racist views, including but not limited to use of racist tropes or stereotypes, support of scientific theories of racism and denial of systematic and institutional oppression.

Details of an individual's race, religion or nationality must be avoided unless genuinely relevant to the story. For example, if someone is facing deportation, it is appropriate to state their nationality.

Transphobia

These guidelines were developed by Oxford LGBTQ+ Society Trans reps and the External Publicity Officer.

- **Use of term “sex” instead of “gender” (ie “sex discrimination”, “sex-based rights”, etc).** This technique is commonly used to exclude trans people from discussion, and to deny the discrimination faced by trans people. It also implies that trans women aren't women, as they are not biologically female. *Solution: replace “sex” with “gender” wherever possible.*
- **Biological sex.** A simple fact-check will show that there is an incredible level of complexity and subjectivity in defining ‘biological sex’. *Solution: extensive fact-check to take into account the nuances of such definitions.*
- **“Most people are cis, so this article will focus on cis experiences“ and similar reasoning.** While this may be well-intentioned, it comes off as excluding minorities simply because they are a minority. *Solution: find a different reason (eg the author's lived experience is that of a cis person, and so they will write from that perspective, etc).*
- **Lack of clarity regarding accusations of transphobia (or other prejudice).** This is especially common when referring to organisations that advocate for “women's sex based rights”. Frequently, newspapers will say something along the lines of “this organisation claims it is simply advocating for a debate about sex-based rights; critics say they are transphobic” but do not explain how or why they are considered to be transphobic. This form of writing can give the appearance of bias in favour of such organisations, even when none is present, due to the lack of justification for the criticism. *Solution: add a*

phrase of similar length explaining the justification for the criticism; eg “critics say that such debate is used to disguise transphobic narratives”, etc.

- **Use of “female” and “male”.** These generally refer to biological sex, and therefore are sometimes used to exclude trans people from consideration. The implied binary also excludes intersex individuals. *Solution: where possible, replace with gender-related terms (women/men, cis/trans, etc). Most specific are phrases such as “people with vaginas” or “people with penises”. These terms are gender- and sex- neutral, instead referring only to the anatomical feature whose function is being discussed, making them highly applicable to situations that would otherwise reference biological sex, such as use of toilets.*
- **Use of “he/she” or gendered pronouns when someone’s gender is unknown.** Use of such binary pronouns excludes nonbinary people and makes unwarranted assumptions regarding someone’s gender. Whenever possible, ask for someone’s pronouns and honorifics, or use the ones they refer to themselves as. When in doubt, “Mx” is the gender-neutral honorific, and “they” the gender neutral pronoun.
- **Trans rights vs women’s rights.** This is a common trans-exclusionary idea that granting trans people access to single-sex spaces and allowing them to self-identify will infringe on women’s rights. There are two main issues with this narrative. Firstly, there is no statistical evidence backing up the views usually expressed in these narratives. Secondly, trans women are (by definition) women, so women’s rights include trans rights. *Solution: The Blue does not publish pieces which are aligned with narrative. Where articles do make reference to this narrative, challenge any assumptions that are made in the piece. Ensure the use of specific language eg cis women, instead of women in general and it is key that the article does not refer to women’s rights and trans rights as separate.*

Sexual assault

Source: [IPSO: Guidance for reporting on sexual offences](#)

The Oxford Blue believes that all survivors of sexual assault and sexual violence have a right to be heard.

Legally, the newspaper must consider avoidance of libel and contempt of court, which are particularly important if there is an ongoing police investigation or an arrest or charge has been made. *The Blue* supports all survivors if they make the choice to pursue legal justice, and must not interfere with court proceedings.

“All victims of sexual offences, including children, are automatically guaranteed anonymity for life from the moment they make an allegation that they are the victim of a sexual offence. A victim is guaranteed anonymity even when someone else accuses the defendant of the offence. Victims can choose to waive their right to anonymity, without the consent of the court, so long as they are over 16. The consent must be in writing. Victims under 16 cannot waive their right to anonymity.” (IPSO, 2018)

The Blue will publish pieces written by survivors of first person accounts of personal experiences. All authors writing on similar topics shall have the choice of anonymity.

An incident of rape or sexual assault may be reported on if it is in the public interest and important to hold individuals or institutions to account. Each story will be deliberated on a case-by-case basis. The anonymity of the victim must be protected at all costs, unless the victim has waived their right to anonymity.

Any article involving discussion of sexual assault should provide relevant end-links for organisations that help those affected by sexual assault and sexual violence.

Student deaths

Source: [Samaritans Media Guidelines](#)

***The Oxford Blue* does not report on student deaths as a general rule**, unless specifically requested by their family. The Blue does report on vigils, memorials and commemorative events. Such articles must always be approved by the Editor-in-chief and include appropriate content warnings.

Links should always be provided for relevant counselling services. If the death is related to mental health, relevant end-links should also be provided for this.

Research shows links between media coverage of suicide and increases in suicidal behaviour. If an article must make reference to a suicide or a family member has requested an article be run, the Samaritans provide the following advice to reporters:

1. Leave out technical details about the method of suicide.
2. Language matters. Avoid dramatic headlines and terms such as ‘suicide epidemic’ or ‘hot spot’.
3. Include references to support groups and places where suicidal people can find help.

4. Avoid dramatic or sensationalist pictures or video. Refrain from including content from suicide notes.
5. Treat social media with particular caution and refrain from mentioning websites or networks that promote or glamorise suicide.
6. Young people are especially vulnerable to negative suicide coverage. Do not give undue prominence to photographs of a young person who has died and avoid repeated use of images such as galleries.
7. Avoid speculation about the ‘trigger’ for a suicide.
8. Try not to give a story undue prominence, for example as a front page splash.
9. Don’t brush over the complex realities of suicide and its impact on those left behind. Remember that people bereaved by suicide are often vulnerable and are more likely to take their own lives than the general population.
10. Use statistics with caution. Check with Samaritans or the relevant national statistical agency to make sure you have the most recent data and are comparing like with like.

Disability

Source: Government Office for Disability Issues

- The word ‘disabled’ is a description not a group of people. Use ‘disabled people’ not ‘the disabled’ as the collective term.
- When possible, ask the source how he or she would like to be described. If the source is not available or unable, ask a trusted family member or relevant organization that represents people with disabilities.
- Refer to a disability only when it’s relevant to the story and when the diagnosis comes from a reputable source, such as a medical professional or other licensed professional.
- Avoid made-up words like “diversability” and “handicapable” unless using them in direct quotes or to refer to a movement or organization.
- Include people with disabilities in stories that aren’t explicitly about disability.
- Broaden your coverage of stories about disability.

Online accessibility

Source: Oxford SU Disabilities Campaign Accessibility Guidelines

Images on *The Oxford Blue* website should:

- Should include an image description written in the caption for the image.

- Should have appropriate alt text where the website capabilities allow or the image should be marked as decorative.
- Where images include extensive text, a plain text version should be provided.

Videos on *The Oxford Blue* should:

- Ensure that they have accurate captions (automatically generated captions are often inaccurate, but can be overwritten/edited).
- You may want to include an audio description if appropriate.
- You may also wish to provide a plain-text transcript of the video.

Medical advice

Source: Reuters Institute paper [*'Improving the Quality of Health Journalism: When Reliability meets Engagement.'*](#)

Health journalism has an impact on people's behaviour and health, and in the worst cases it is a matter of life and death. Health journalists bear a responsibility to focus on scientific accuracy — or in many cases, on its absence.

The Blue strives to report on the latest evidence-based medical research, especially that coming from laboratories at the University of Oxford. References should be given to the published paper or source.

However, *The Oxford Blue* is not in a position to give medical advice. Writers should not give guidelines for dealing with medical conditions or mental health disorders unless they are a qualified medical specialist working in the field. They should instead reflect on their own experiences and refer and link to NHS guidelines.

The Reuters Institute suggests the following:

- Good health journalism takes a rigorous look at existing research. Put the facts into context, look at the evidence, and evaluate the scientific validity.
- Combining reliable *and* engaging health journalism. A mixture of good storytelling and evidence-based reporting works best — it does not have to be boring, but avoid confusing headlines such as “this food causes cancer.”

News vs Opinion

Source: *New York Times*

News is news and opinion is opinion. Do not report quotes or opinions as statements of fact. *The Oxford Blue* has no political slant, and we do not publish news articles with a bias. Be aware of implicit biases and potential libel. All potentially contentious news must go through the Editors-in-Chief before publication.

If there is a reference to an opinion within a news article, for example within a quote from a senior government minister, the author should also seek to publish the other side of the argument or contextualise it if there is any contention with the basis of the opinion. *The Oxford Blue* should not publish factually incorrect statements. If incorrect information is published, the author should seek to remedy the mistake immediately, ask a Senior Editor to publish a notice of correction where relevant or other appropriate action, and notify the Editors-in-Chief if the incorrect report is potentially libellous.

Editing

The Oxford Blue prides itself on fostering a collaborative relationship between our writers and editors. To ensure the work of the writer and those mentioned in the article are represented correctly, we ask that the following are strictly adhered to:

- All articles that include student names must be approved by the Editors-in-Chief
- Any edits made to articles must gain explicit approval of the writer before publication through our recommended two part editing system:
 - Writers should be invited by editors to share drafts of their work in a Google doc
 - All edits should be made in **suggesting** mode and then approved by writers at this first stage.
 - All articles should be proofed by at least two editors before publication. In most cases this will be a Section Editor and a member of the Senior Editorial team
 - Every article must be edited by two individuals before publication, not including the original author even if the writer is themselves an editor.
- All individual changes post-publication must have the explicit consent of the writer. It is not sufficient to grant blanket consent to make changes to a piece, without checking every individual change on a case-by-case basis.
- Right-of-Reply must be offered to any individuals mentioned in an article. Every phrase which could conceivably reflect negatively on a person or organisation is subject to the right of reply. The individual must be notified of the allegations in reasonable time and given a chance to respond.

- In the case of any ambiguity or uncertainty, consult either a Senior Editor or the Editors-in-Chief.