



## HOW TO FIND TRUTH IN YOUR DAILY NEWS REPORTS

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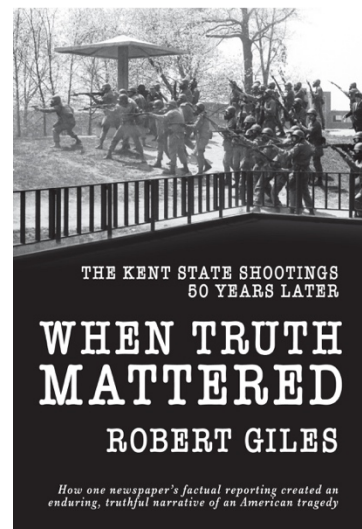
At heart, the premise of *When Truth Mattered: The Kent State Shootings 50 Years Later*, reinforces the values of journalism of a half-century ago and suggests how these might serve us all today.

Here are eight lessons from the *Akron Beacon Journal's* reporting on the Kent State tragedy, May 4, 1970. Consider them to be a toolbox for understanding today's news events.

### **NO. 1 – BE WARY OF RUMORS, MISINFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION.**

There are powerful forces out there who will mislead you on purpose, bend the truth and, even worse, lie to you. Don't be a lazy news consumer. Check the credibility of your news sources. Read, view and listen to multiple news media, not just those who agree with you or pop up on your cell-phone screen.

In today's political climate, misinformation is repeated as true again and again, even after it has been proved false. This becomes *disinformation* — a deliberate tactic of lying in the face of well-documented truth. It works only when lazy news consumers allow it to work.



### **NO. 2 – WELCOME THE SCRUTINY OF THOSE WHO ARE POWERFUL.**

Whether it's the president, a senator, someone else in government or a CEO, don't assume a news report, which puts your favorite leader in a bad light, is "fake news." Check it out before you judge. It just may be true. Trust truth to add to your understanding.

Reporting that identifies questionable or irresponsible behavior should be a welcome indication that a news organization is carrying out its obligation to hold the powerful accountable.

### **NO. 3 – BEWARE OF JOURNALISTS BEARING OPINIONS.**

Journalists seeking the truth are committed to uncovering and sharing facts. In the newsrooms of 1970, it was a firm rule that speculation and opinion were not permitted in news stories. However, a clearly labeled “news analysis” can draw informed conclusions that contribute to public understanding, if they are based on truthful reporting.

Too often today, readers find stories that merge fact-finding with opinion or points of view. Opinion belongs on the editorial or op-ed pages. The work of journalists who tend to lean on opinions rather than truth and fact-finding should not be trusted. In broadcast journalism, commentary is being heard more frequently in news programs. Look for reputable voices with a reputation for thoughtful, even-handed commentary.

### **NO. 4 – GIVE YOUR ATTENTION TO THOSE JOURNALISTS WHO DEPEND ON EXPERTS WHO KNOW THE SUBJECT BEST.**

Often, we are too quick to take short-term social media posts as gospel. Give reporters time to uncover the truth. Wait for them to prepare an authoritative account.

Look for reporters who write with authority about complex issues. Their strength often is the willingness to learn. In their reporting, they turn to experts who can explain the complexities at the heart of a story. Their ability to write explanatory stories brings a deeper understanding to news consumers. Facts are the most reliable foundation of a truthful story.

### **NO. 5 – OBJECTIVITY IS A VIRTUE IN A REPORTER**

Trust those who look at multiple sides of an issue. Objectivity is the gold standard of reporting. An objective story leaves no room for subjectivity and treats facts in a straight-forward manner. An objective story offers the best available version of the truth. Beware of a story that is based on a single source or that speculates on the meaning of things.

### **NO. 6 – BEWARE OF FALSE EQUIVALENCIES.**

You want to hear as many sides of the story as possible. But don’t assume that each and every side carries the same weight, or is as equally true. For example, climate change is an issue about which a consensus has emerged based on evidence gathered from knowledgeable sources. Be skeptical of stories in which deniers of global warming are given equal treatment with scientists affirming evidence of its existence.

Beware of reporters whose stories on public disputes make no effort to assess the opposing claims. Giving a single quote to an advocate for each side is weak, lazy, “he-said, she-said” journalism. Trust reporters who dig deeper, who explain the story’s significance, who reveal deceptions.

## **NO. 7 – DON'T GET SUCKED INTO CONSPIRACY THEORIES.**

The truth is not simple. It is not convenient. It is hard to obtain. If the story sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

Conspiracy theories tend to be driven by political or ideological beliefs. Those who advance such blanket theories generally are partially or totally misinformed. Bias in news stories is intended to serve a particular political leaning.

Conspiracy theories have one mission: To manipulate your thinking. Responsible news organizations will investigate such theories and publish the truth.

## **NO. 8 – ALWAYS BE SKEPTICAL OF WHAT YOU HEAR, SEE AND READ.**

Question the validity of everything and everyone. Even those who routinely reinforce your values and beliefs. A healthy skepticism helps keep the powerful honest. Skepticism is an important value in your toolbox to help you evaluate today's news reports and challenge what you read, hear and view.

**O**ur democracy is fragile right now; fragile because we have allowed too many politicians, business leaders and, yes, some in the news media to skirt the truth, even lie to *us*.

The responsibility to stop them falls on *you*.

The truth does matter. It matters to you, your family, your children and grandchildren.

Do the hard work of knowing what's true and what's not.

And be informed.

Our nation depends on it.

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For more information about *When Truth Mattered: The Kent State Shootings 50 Years Later*, go to **WhenTruthMattered.net**.