



SEARCHLIGHTS AND SUNGLASSES

LEARNING LAYER

“The Elements of Journalism”

Through the history of communications, humans always have needed information. In their book *[The Elements of Journalism](#)*, Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel call this the “awareness instinct.” They noted how people in different eras and cultures share similar definitions of news. The instinct to seek news is natural; having timely knowledge of the world around them helps people live their lives, protect themselves and bond with one another.

As civilization grew and self-government spread, the need for independent information grew. Journalism evolved into a profession. The best journalists came to believe in a specific set of principles. Kovach and Rosenstiel call them **The Elements of Journalism:**

1. Obligation to the truth
2. Loyalty to citizens
3. Discipline of verification
4. Independence from those they cover
5. Monitor power
6. Provide forum for public criticism and compromise
7. Make the significant relevant and interesting
8. Keep news comprehensive and in proportion
9. Practitioners are obliged to exercise their conscience
10. Citizens have both rights and responsibilities regarding the news

Questions for students: What do you need to know to be free and self-governing? Ask your peers, your parents, your professors. Do they have different needs? Does news you consume come with all the elements of good journalism? Do you agree these are the best elements? If you had to choose, would you say it is getting harder or easier to find excellent journalism?

Activity: Now that you know the elements of excellent journalism, look at the [history](#) of [The Wall Street Journal](#), which was first published in 1889. How have its journalism and practices changed over time? Can you categorize the changes into the ages of the evolution of human communication the author describes?