



Understanding First Amendment law

Visit the [First Amendment Center website](#) and look up a press freedom case. Then, under [Frequently Asked Questions](#) read more on libel, defamation and bias. If these are too basic, find a more advanced site.

Discussion topics:

Flashlight: What does a news organization or reporter have to do to commit libel? Is that the same today in the digital age as it always was? What role does bias play? Do you think libel is more or less common in the digital age?

Spotlight: Look at this [First Amendment Timeline](#). In [Patterson v. Colorado](#) — a free-press case from 1907 — the U.S. Supreme Court said that the First Amendment only protects against prior restraint. After something is published, there can be consequences. But it also said local laws mattered and decided it could not rule on critical articles and a cartoon published in a Denver newspaper. How might this case be handled differently in the U.S. today? Students should come prepared to discuss this in class.

Searchlight: How might social media and other forms of information be protected by the First Amendment? A recent case ([Brown v. Entertainment Merchants Association](#)) dealt with video games and free speech. With this case in mind, how do you think Facebook, Twitter and blogs are protected under the First Amendment? Students should pick one, research and come to class prepared to make their arguments.

For extra credit: Students prepare two-page papers on [prior restraint](#). What is it and [what cases](#) shaped the rules? Under what circumstances can it happen? Does it apply to student journalists?