

*Much has changed since the original edition of *The Journalist's Guide to Gun Violence Coverage* was published in the first year of this century. This edition updates the basic principles and makes them relevant to the news environment of 2013. Please distribute this document to your Journalist friends wherever they may be.*

THE 2013 EDITION OF THE JOURNALIST'S GUIDE TO GUN VIOLENCE COVERAGE

Guns are a sad fact of life in American culture and are a major topic in modern journalism. A good Journalist has a duty to get involved and make a difference in this important societal debate. By following certain guidelines, the concerned Journalist can be assured of having the maximum impact on this shameful problem. The concepts discussed here apply both to broadcast and print media.

For the purposes of this Guide, our work is divided into routine stories about gun violence and coverage of the political debate about gun control. They are both equally important. Let us first address the proper way to construct a news story involving common gun crimes.

Covering Common Gun Crime Stories

The purpose of routine gun crime coverage is to create the impression of a continuing, growing and terrifying tidal wave of gun violence. Your goal is to plant the fear of guns in the minds of ordinary people, fear for themselves and especially for their children.

The first and most critical principle to remember is that subtle use of terminology can covertly influence the reader or viewer. For example, when describing a gun crime, victims must be shot "by" a gun, not "with" a gun. This may seem like a small detail, but it helps establish the principal that guns are responsible for crime.

We would all love to cover the big ones: those mass shootings that really get the 24-hour news cycle humming and allow us to perform during a time of gut-wrenching emotion. In reality, most shootings involve only one victim, but this should not discourage a talented Journalist. There are ways to make even the smallest shooting incident serve the greater good.

When telling the story, use the drama skills you learned in Journalism school. Adjectives should always be chosen for maximum anti-gun effect. When describing a gun, attach terms like "automatic," "semi-automatic," "large caliber," "deadly," "high powered," or "powerful". Small pistols can be called "cheap" or "concealable." Almost any gun can be described by one or more of these terms. More than two guns should be called an "arsenal".

Whenever police confiscate guns, they also confiscate ammunition. You must include the number of rounds seized, since the number will seem large to those who know little about guns. You may simply call them "bullets" if your boss likes you to dumb down your stories for your audience. If possible, find a way to imply that each round could have resulted in a dead child if the police had not intervened. For

example, “also siezed were 200 bullets, more than were fired at Columbine.”

Try to include the term "assault weapon" if at all possible. This can be combined with any of the terms above for best results. Any weapon can be used to assault someone, so you cannot be criticized for this usage. A brief visit to the [web site of a national anti-gun organization](#) can provide you with a list of the latest talking points and propaganda terms like these old classics: "[junk guns](#)," "[Saturday Night Specials](#)," "[cop-killer bullets](#)" and the criminal's "[weapon of choice](#)". *If we control the terminology, we control the debate.*

These days it is important to include the size of a gun's magazine. If you don't know, just call it a “high-capacity clip.” The type of ammunition used is fair game too. Hollow point bullets sound especially sinister. The term, “armor piercing” comes in handy too, don't be afraid to use it.

Don't worry about getting technical details right. You need not know anything about guns. Many a reporter has accidentally written about semi-automatic revolvers or committed other minor errors. Since most people get their gun knowledge from Hollywood, this is not a problem. Only the gun nuts will complain and they don't count. The emotional content of your article is much more important than the factual details, since people are more easily [influenced through their emotions](#) than through logic.

Broadcast news teams should have stock video on hand showing a machine gun firing on full automatic. Run this video while describing common semi-automatic guns used in a crime or confiscated by police. At the least, a large graphic of a handgun should be displayed behind the on-air personality when reading any crime story, even if guns are not involved. Guns should be the symbol of crime.

Do not waste words describing criminals who use guns to commit crimes. Instead of calling them burglar, rapist, murderer, or repeat offender, simply use the term "gunman". This helps the public associate all forms of crime and violence with the possession of guns.

Whenever drug dealers are arrested, guns are usually confiscated by the police - this is ripe for exploitation. Mention the type and number of guns more prominently than the type and quantity of drugs. Obviously, the drug dealers who had the guns should now be called "gunmen" rather than drug dealers.

Never question the effectiveness of gun control laws or proposals. Guns are evil and kill people. Removing guns from society can only be good. Nobody really uses guns for legitimate self-defense, especially women or children. Any stories about armed self-defense must be minimized or suppressed.

Be careful about criticizing the police for [responding slowly](#) to 911 calls for help. It is best if the public feels the police can be relied upon to protect them at all times. If people are buying guns to protect their families, you are not doing your job.

Emphasize stories where people kill family members and/or themselves with guns. It is important to make the public feel like they could lose control and start killing at any moment if they have a gun in the house. Any story where a child misuses a gun or is the victim of an evil gun automatically becomes front page material.

View every shooting as an event to be exploited. Always include emotional quotes from the victim's family if possible. If they are not available, the perpetrator's family will do nicely. The quote must

blame the tragedy on the availability of guns, not bad decisions or upbringing. Photos or video of grieving family members are worth a thousand facts. Most people will accept the assertion that guns cause crime. It is much easier than believing that some people deliberately choose to harm others.

In some cases, armed homeowners shoot criminals, but don't be tempted to deviate from the standard narrative. In these cases, the criminal is now the victim and you should have quotes or video of his relatives saying what a "good boy" he was. The homeowner should be demonized if possible.

Your story should include terms like "tragic" or "preventable" and you must mention the current toll of gun violence in your city or state. Good reporters always know exactly how many gun deaths have occurred in their area since the first of the year. To make this number larger, you should include accidents and suicides in this total, even if your story is about intentional homicide. List two or three of the most shocking recent incidents to give the impression of a continuing and expanding crime wave.

As you know, cities with the strictest gun control laws have the [highest crime rates](#). If you work in one of these enlightened municipalities, it is critical that you blame all gun crime on weapons illegally transported from states with weak gun laws. You may embellish this concept by stating that most crime guns are purchased at gun shows in those states and flow in an "[iron river](#)" to your city. Include the fact that criminals are able to buy all sorts of weapons, including machine guns, at gun shows without any background checks.

Little space should be devoted to shootings where criminals kill each other. Although these deaths greatly inflate the annual gun violence numbers, they distract from the basic mission of urging law abiding citizens to give up their guns. Do not dig too deeply into the reasons behind shootings. The fact that a gun was involved is the major point, unless someone under 18 is affected, in which case the child angle is now of equal importance.

One detail that is often overlooked is the model of the gun used to kill someone. Get this information from the police and do an internet search for other crimes involving this model. This is how gun bans are born and you can be a part of it.

Any article about gun violence should include [quotes from anti-gun organizations](#) or politicians who are promoting their latest idea for the next new gun law. One quote should say that we must do something "for the children". If a proposed gun law seems likely to be ineffective, use the old line, "If it saves only one life, it's worth it."

The Political Debate

The ongoing public debate about the role of guns and gun laws in society has remained at a high level since the 1960's. Although many restrictive laws have been enacted, it is important to make people believe otherwise. It is also good to imply that no debate has been going on at all when we should be having a "national conversation about guns." Make your audience believe that the gun lobby has never given up anything. Our side just wants reasonable compromise and an honest dialogue. There is a famous quote by John F. Kennedy, "[What is mine is mine, but what is yours is negotiable](#)," that is our basic principle.

[Mainstream Journalism](#) mounted a massive and courageous attack on the gun lobby after the Sandy Hook gun massacre in December, 2013. By coordinating with our friends in government and gun safety groups, we were able to make our largest gains in two decades. One reason for this success is that we have finally overthrown the old concept that Journalists should appear to be unbiased.

Corporate media managers have found that conducting on-air interviews with gun lobbyists boosts ratings, so if you work on the air, you must be prepared for [this kind of confrontation](#). Always refer to pro-gun organizations as "the gun lobby". When talking to them on the air, give free reign to your feelings. This is a good time to be condescending and self-righteous. It is now acceptable to shout and call them names. They are evil, shameful and ignorant. We all know it, so why hide it?

Do not let them confuse you with facts. Do not try to engage them in a real discussion. You know you aren't the [sharpest tool in the shed](#) since you are in this business. Have your list of anti-gun talking points in front of you. If you must improvise, stick to the most emotional statements and questions you can think of. Don't ever admit that any of their facts are correct. Just cut them off and move on to your next talking point without the slightest affirmation. At least half of those talking points should involve children and if your opponent disagrees, feel free to announce that they are in favor of dead children.

This is no time for honesty. For example, it is recommended that you state, at the outset, that you believe in the second amendment. You can even say that you have owned a gun. Our analysts believe that this gives you more credibility with the public, as long as you sound sincere, and of course that's what you do for a living.

The National Rifle Association should be a primary target of your words. A great deal of work has gone into [nurturing a general hatred of this organization](#). Although the NRA is not among the top campaign contributors, you should always mention "NRA money" when discussing how they influence politicians. Their legislative lobbying efforts should be described as "arm twisting" or "threats".

Whenever mentioning the NRA, it is important to frame that reference in the right way. For example, you can mention the most recent emotional gun incident: "On the six month anniversary of the Sandy Hook shooting, the NRA announced a new program to promote gun ownership."

Gun owners must never be seen in a positive light. Do not mention that these misguided individuals may actually be well educated, or have respectable careers and healthy families. They should be called "gun nuts" if you can get away with it or simply gun owners at best. Mention details about their clothing, especially if they are wearing hunting clothes or hats. Mention the simplistic slogans on their bumper stickers to show that their intelligence level is low. Many gun owners drive pickup trucks, hunt helpless animals and live in rural areas. Use these details to help portray them as ignorant rednecks.

When a pro-gun group stages a public rally or demonstration, avoid covering it if possible. If you must cover it, underestimate the number who attended. Have your photo/video person arrive well before or after the peak attendance to show a smaller crowd. Pick out the most ridiculous signs and the oddest looking people, isolate them from the crowd, then make sure they are prominently featured in your [visual coverage](#).

Try not to cover pro-gun rallies that are held on weekends. Since working people can attend, these are generally much larger than the weekday rallies. You will also find many young families with children, which is not the image you want for your story. Weekday rallies, which are scheduled to catch

legislators at work, tend to be made up mostly of retired people. This fits our desired narrative of gun owners as old, white men who are on their way out.

One recent development is the staging of rallies where participants carry guns openly. The best way to slant this situation has not yet been determined. On one hand, carrying guns makes them look scary and menacing to good progressive folks. On the other hand, there is never any violence at these rallies, which tends to support their point that guns prevent violence. If you must cover such a rally, I suggest that you rely on close up visuals of the weapons and try to interview a Progressive bystander who felt threatened.

Don't be afraid to interview gun owners, they are harmless even though we portray them as a menace to society. Try to solicit comments that show them in the worst possible light. Gun shows are a favorite venue for this kind of journalism that veteran reporters call "bumpkin hunting." You will not be allowed to conduct interviews inside a gun show, but the parking lot may be available. Gun shop owners are excellent targets. They find it hard to refuse an interview request and can usually be relied upon to make statements that play into our preferred stereotype.

You must only interview white males over age 50 who sound and look unintelligent. Make them look ridiculous, especially when they talk about gun ownership as a barrier to tyranny. Find ways to blame them for the gun violence in the inner cities. Never show or refer to any gun owners who are women, minorities or liberals.

If you come into contact with many gun owners, eventually one will offer to [take you to a local shooting club](#) and teach you how to shoot. This can be a very tempting offer, especially if, like many of us, you have never fired a real gun. It may also seem like a good way for you to better understand the enemy. Unfortunately, this seemingly harmless activity has led to many defections. You must not, under any circumstances, accept such an offer.

Anti-gun organizations must be treated with care. They currently prefer to be called "gun safety" groups, but this may change in the future. Do not attempt to investigate their finances or their membership, which is embarrassingly small compared to gun lobby organizations. Their money comes from a small number of millionaires and billionaires who don't like the idea of ordinary people being armed. Do not mention this or the fact that these wealthy donors are protected by heavily armed security personnel who are not affected by gun control laws.

Feel secure in your advocacy journalism. The vast majority of [your fellow Journalists](#) support your activism. Simply being an urban, liberal journalist makes you one of the elite and the people should let you guide them.

The nation will be a better place when only the police and military have guns. Remember that you are doing it for the children so the end justifies the means. Some day we will all drink the Kool-Aid of victory.

When common people are eventually disarmed, the government will be all-powerful and the media will guide the government. If things don't work out as planned, just contact me then for more helpful hints.

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