

## Staff guidelines for jumping in to the comments section

For many of us, we think our jobs end once the story publishes. In an effort to help play a more active role in helping the community understand their content and encouraging conversation, the following practices should be considered.

### General guidelines:

- All reporters should look at their stories and check the comments at least once a day for the first 48 hours after that story is published. If it is a more controversial issue, they should be checking more often and responding when necessary.
  - If the story is getting many comments over a longer period of time, reporters should definitely be monitoring more often.
  - Any time a staff member interacts in the comments, he or she should leave his or her name and position in the newsroom.
- Before a reporter responds, he or she should check with someone else in the newsroom to discuss how he or she wants to respond and the content of that response — be it a copy editor, city editor, ACE or member of the outreach team. More than one set of eyes should see the comment before action is taken.

### When to jump into the conversation:

- When a reader (reasonably) disputes the facts of an article, asks a question or requests some kind of clarification.
  - You should: fact check or answer, and then either correct the article if it was wrong, or if the commenter was wrong, respond to them with the correct facts and how you got the information. Make sure reporters follow up when anyone responds. If a factual correction needs to be made, it will, like all other submitted corrections, be changed and put at the top of the story.
- When a commenter mentions a piece of local news that we have not yet reported on.
  - You should: thank the user for the contribution and let them know you will follow up, but only if you actually intend to do so. We should always let users know we appreciate the information they give us, but we want to be genuine with our responses and follow through.
- Acknowledge the contribution that thoughtful conversation can make to the coverage. When appropriate, thank people for commenting, especially if you can be specific (not generic) in doing so.
- Letting people know about follow-up stories you're working on, especially if there's a correlation between the conversation and your upcoming coverage.
- To ask questions, or request specific types of feedback. Sometimes it's appropriate for reporters to leave the first comment on a story, to kick off a conversation. Feel free to jump in to ask people if they have follow-up questions, sources to recommend, etc.

### Example of a good contribution by a reporter:

- <http://www.columbiamissourian.com/stories/2011/09/27/downtown-parking-task-forces-looks-parking-technologies/#c38741>
- <http://www.columbiamissourian.com/stories/2011/08/25/school-board-approves->

[levy-adjustment/#c37612](#)

### **How staff members should moderate comments:**

- Reporters, if you see a violation of the Missourian's comment policy, including profanity, obscenity, vulgarity or personal attacks, send an email with a link to the questionable comment to the copy desk. ([mujourmissouriannewsdesk@missouri.ed](mailto:mujourmissouriannewsdesk@missouri.ed))
  - Making a judgment on what does or does not violate our policy can be difficult. Oftentimes, tone plays a big role. Using profane language in an aggressive way ("You should be killed for having such a f\*\*\*ing stupid opinion") is different from using mild profanity to give emphasis, (Ah hell, I have no idea what this conversation is even about.").
  - If you have a question about a comment you've seen, just ask. Asking other people to weigh in means the difference between moderating effectively and being too lenient or heavy-handed.
- Any copy editor or outreach team member who deletes a comment should remember to email that commenter and tell him or her why the comment was deleted and remind him or her of our policy. Include the part of their comment that violates our policy in the email, and invite him or her to update and repost it.
- Copy editors and outreach team members need to also be looking for commenters who don't use real names. If you suspect someone is not using a real name, [use this email format](#) when contacting them.

### **Questions:**

Does anything needed to be added, deleted or adjusted about the full policy?

Obscenity, profanity and vulgarity need to be added. In general needs to be rearranged

What's the best way to highlight key parts of the policy on the bottom of each story?

We're using the numbered list.

What qualifies as a a personal attack? As profanity?

A personal attack is a statement that is an insult to another commenter in a personal way, for example, about their intelligence, upbringing, employment status, marital status, health, etc.

Allowable curse words: ass, damn, hell, crap. Still not allowable in context of personal attack.

Please create a fake account to go through the steps.