

Seattle Times guidelines for addressable errors

The Seattle Times is committed to the accuracy and clarity of its news report, to building an accurate record over time, and to maintaining trust and credibility with the public. To that end, we will make it a priority to correct all substantive errors or misleading information in the newspaper, on seattletimes.com and in our archives. Further, we will clarify, explain or elaborate on published items (whether in stories, headlines, photographs, captions or graphics) that could create misunderstandings, misimpressions or confusion on the part of a significant number of readers.

The threshold for what constitutes an addressable error, clarification or explanation is whether published information is factually inaccurate, whether it affects readers' understanding in a meaningful way or whether it is offensive or disrespectful to a significant number of readers. The decision about whether and how to address an error should be based on reader respect, journalistic clarity and common sense.

The assumption is that errors will be corrected and unclear/inadequate information will be clarified. Exceptions can be made only with the approval of an AME, the Executive News Editor or the Managing Editor. The Executive News Editor and/or Managing Editor is the final arbiter.

Components of credibility

The following factors combine to create a credible and accurate report:

- Factual accuracy
- Precision
- Clarity
- Relevance
- Context
- Fairness/balance

Addressable errors or misunderstandings

Factual inaccuracies, including:

- Proper names
- Wrong dates/times/places (even after the fact)
- Wrong technical or factual information (prices/votes/data, etc.)
- Other verifiable information (ages/timelines/histories, etc.)

Misunderstandings, misimpressions or confusion created by:

- Lack of necessary context
- Imprecise language or shorthand
- Incomplete or inadequate information
- Insensitive or offensive language

- Production problems or missing/incorrect navigational information

Categories of corrections

- Standard formal corrections to correct verifiable factual errors or significant misimpressions
- Clarifications to explain or elaborate on confusing or misleading information
- Retractions to address serious error that has legal or ethical implications,
 - to address a specific legal challenge,
 - or when the newspaper's reputation is affected
- Apologies to readers in cases of insensitivity or significant confusion
- Republication of stories where significant information was missing or in error
- Follow-up stories that correct the record as news develops
- Unpublished corrections to create an accurate archive, (includes errors too minor or discovered too long after publication to warrant a standard, public correction)

Placement and timing of corrections

- All standard corrections, clarifications and explanations are to be published on A2 and in archive if needed to correct the record
- A second correction/clarification will run on page-of-problem as warranted, (example: targeted audience information, columnists)
- Corrections should be published as soon as possible after an error is identified and the correct information is verified; errors that occur in the Sunday Times should be corrected as soon as possible and again in Sunday editions.
- In cases serious enough to warrant consideration of placing a correction, clarification or explanation on A1, the issue and text must be approved by an AME, or the Executive News Editor or the Managing Editor.

Response procedures

1. As soon as you are alerted to an error, regardless of source, inform your primary editor or department head.
2. Negotiate time to report the error. Unless an inflexible news deadline prohibits, your first priority is reporting a complaint and correcting the error, if one was made.
3. Go into reporter mode. Don't be defensive or argumentative. Listen to the complaint with an open mind and return to other sources of information, if necessary. Seek specifics. Keep reader clarity and trust in mind. Determine not only what the error was, but how it was made.
4. Get sign-off for the correction from your primary editor.
5. Notify news editors and online producers of the error for correction on the Web as soon as possible by e-mailing the Corrections group in Outlook,
6. Correct the error as soon as possible on the Web by alerting the online producers.

7. Using the online correction/explanation form on Cafe, write the correction and an explanation of how it occurred and steps to mitigate similar errors in the future. (If you're unable to provide an explanation right away, send the correction to the on-duty news editor for publication as soon as possible. Complete the correction/explanation form when you have adequate information.)
8. Fill out the online correction/explanation form on Cafe.
9. In cases where a reporter/editor have been alerted to an error or other problem, but feel a correction or clarification is not warranted, have that decision "caged" by an AME, or the Executive News Editor or Managing Editor. Determine, with your primary editor, whether the subject of an error or complaining party needs a follow-up call.