



BBC

YOUNG 
REPORTER

bbc.co.uk/youngreporter

Keeping your
reports **safe and**
legal

This guide outlines the issues which should be considered when taking part in BBC Young Reporter and before publishing / uploading a young person's work. It covers legal pitfalls, taste and decency, copyright, privacy and social media.

When you publish your stories you really are broadcasting to an audience. And that means you need to comply with media law the same way any other broadcasters do.

Most newspapers and media organisations have teams of lawyers to help make fine judgements about contentious stories. You may well not have the same resources but don't panic! Reading through this page of background information and applying some common sense should be enough to keep you on the right side of the law - and young people producing and featuring in the reports safe.

If a young person has followed activities relating to the law in the BBC Young Reporter lesson plans they should have a good idea of what they should and shouldn't report, but you should still check and, if necessary, amend their work before it's published online.

This double-checking (or "subbing") is what happens in media offices and newsrooms around the world, so it's a very authentic part of journalism as well taking part in BBC Young Reporter. No BBC News report or webpage should ever be published without at least two pairs of eyes having read the story, and it's a good rule to follow in the classroom too.

The following guidance provides a good grounding but you can contact the BBC Young Reporter team by email at youngreporter@bbc.co.uk if you need any further assistance.

IN A NUTSHELL

- 🗣 **Safeguarding: no surnames.**
- 🗣 **Taste and decency: don't report anything which makes you uncomfortable.**
- 🗣 **Defamation: report the facts, not rumours.**
- 🗣 **Criminal law: avoid crime stories.**
- 🗣 **Copyright: only use your own photos, music, etc.**
- 🗣 **Privacy: ask yourself "If that were me, would I want it recorded and broadcast?"**
- 🗣 **Social media: is a core part of journalism and story sharing now but it's also a potential minefield and different schools will have different rules. A key thing to remember is that social media accounts are for young people aged 13+.**

SAFEGUARDING

Only use children's first names.

One of the main aims of BBC Young Reporter is to give young people a real audience for their work and many will obviously want to publish their names alongside their reports. However, for child protection reasons, you should not publish the surname of someone under the age of 18 on anything you do for BBC Young Reporter. This is to minimise the risk of a stranger identifying and locating a young person involved in the report.

Obtain parental consent for all young people under 18.

It is the school's or organisation's responsibility to obtain the signed consent of the parents or guardians for the young people taking part in the project AND any other children appearing in any content or reports relating to BBC Young Reporter

The BBC provides a letter and form to send to parents to obtain the necessary permission.

If you are involving 18 year olds, they can sign an adult consent form.

These forms should be kept on file by the school or organisation as the BBC may ask for them at any time.

You can download electronic copies these forms from our website.

Accompanying BBC staff at all times.

The BBC Young Reporter team take child protection very seriously. All of our Ambassadors undertake training in accordance with the [BBC's Child Protection Policy](#).

We ask that you always ensure BBC staff are accompanied when working with young people. They should not be left alone with the young people, in the same way that any adult who is not a member of staff at the school or organisation should not be unaccompanied.

Contact between young people and the mentor should be maintained via the registered BBC Young Reporter contact for the school or organisation. Young

people should not ask BBC staff for their personal details, such as a phone number or email address, or give them their own details.

Risk assessments will be undertaken for all BBC activities and young people will not be directed by BBC staff to do anything which would compromise their safety.

TASTE AND DECENCY

Don't report anything which makes you uncomfortable.

Some subjects might be considered inappropriate for young people to cover. For example, stories involving sex, violence and swearing.

Views differ greatly, so you should be able to justify publishing the reports should there be any complaints. You should also refer to your own school or organisation policies in this area and consider the age of the young people involved.

While a contentious story might be absolutely acceptable for an experienced journalist on Newsnight to report on late in the evening, it will sound very different if the reporting is done by a class of 11 year olds in the classroom so think through the likely consequences of covering particular topics.

Young people may wish to report on subjects such as natural disasters or the anniversary of a bombing. Some people may deem this to be upsetting while others may regard this as part-and-parcel of making the news.

It is worth remembering that what may be fine as a class discussion will seem rather different when published which the public - including friends, parents and relatives - can access.

You should also take into account the tone of a report. It would be inappropriate, for example, for a young person to report a tragic accident in a light-hearted manner.

The risk of imitative behaviour should also be taken into account. Consider, for example, whether a report about drugs would enable children to glean inappropriate information about buying, preparing or taking illegal substances.

Take care with subjects where young people may incriminate themselves. For example, if you are reporting on underage drinking you could interview adults and other young people over 18 who can look back at their behaviour when they were younger rather than interviewing young people who are under 18.

DEFAMATION

Report the facts, NOT rumours.

Unless they can prove it's true, young people should not report anything which would damage someone's reputation. After all, they would not like to be bad-mouthed themselves.

If someone makes a legal complaint that they have been defamed, your school or organisation could be taken to court. Without sufficient evidence to prove the truth of a report, the school may be ordered to pay compensation.

The libel law in the UK places the onus on the defendant to prove the truth of what they have reported. Ask yourself whether you could do this, especially if the original story is taken from other media sources.

In particular, young people should treat "celeb gossip" with care. Just because it's in the news, it doesn't mean it's true! There are many instances of media companies being heavily fined. For example, in 2017 Manchester United star Zlatan Ibrahimović won a defamation case against a former athletics coach who accused him of doping during his time at Juventus.

Using the phrase "according to..." does not put a journalist in the clear in the eyes of the law. Each repetition of a defamatory statement is treated as a fresh case.

Using "allegedly..." doesn't help either. Someone might still think less of a person who had "allegedly lied". It may not be as bad as calling them a liar, without proof, but it would still be defamatory.

Report controversial issues with balance.

The law surrounding defamation is not, however, designed to prevent the reporting of controversial news.

Such issues often make the most interesting reports, as long as they fairly represent both sides of an argument.

Express your opinion in reviews, NOT in news.

A journalist's main job is to present the facts in an impartial way. But while they shouldn't express their own views in a news report, their opinion is a necessary part of a review.

Reviewers are allowed to have strong views. Reporting that you thought an actor's "performance was unconvincing because he was far too old for the part" for example, would not be defamatory, as long as:

- You watched the film - you can't pass someone's thoughts off as your own.
- Your opinion was honestly-held - you are not just saying it to make the review more exciting.
- Your opinion was based on fact - you would need to include evidence of the actor's age and the age of their role.

CRIMINAL LAW

Avoid crime stories.

Journalists undergo a significant amount of legal training before they report stories about crime, while many also have in-house legal teams to assist with borderline judgements.

Young Reporters may wish to report high-profile murders or robberies, but the safest option is to avoid them completely.

The law around reporting crime is very complicated and, among other considerations, journalists must:

- Avoid prejudicing members of a jury
- Protect the identity of children who appear in youth courts
- Protect the identity of victims of sexual offences

By reporting on ongoing cases, you could inadvertently fall foul of contempt of court laws. Criminal cases have collapsed or forced to go to retrials because of contempt of court in the media, so it is a very serious matter.

COPYRIGHT

Only use YOUR OWN video footage, photos, music, etc.

If you take a photograph or compose a piece of music, you have the right to say how it is used. A person who makes a copy of someone else's work and uses it without their permission is breaking the law.

Copyright law protects material such as photos, video, sound recordings, writing, music, song lyrics and drawings. Breaking the law could result in a heavy fine.

The BBC has created an [online guide called "What is Copyright?"](#).

When you publish content you must make sure you have the right to use it. The safest option is to make all the content yourself, then you own the copyright and you can determine how it is used.

Making your own music means you own the copyright.

Even though BBC Young Reporter is a BBC project, you cannot use any other material from the BBC website. Material on the site is often owned by someone else and the BBC has limited rights to use it - sometimes so limited that it can't even be used by another part of the BBC!

You should also avoid photographing a poster or recording young people singing song lyrics, if you intend to publish them on the web.

The copyright belongs to, in these cases, the poster company and the composer - and copying their work without their permission could be breaking the law.

Copying for education versus copying for broadcast.

Schools and colleges are permitted to copy some materials for educational purposes, but they don't have this privilege when it comes to publishing them on the internet.

Obtain permission for review extracts.

The law allows you to use a small extract of a film, book, song, etc. in a review, but there are restrictions on how much you can use and for how long it can remain on a website.

The safest option is to obtain permission to use an extract, and if you can't to avoid using it.

PRIVACY

Ask yourself: "If that were me, would I want it recorded?"

The law says that everyone has the right to keep some information about themselves, and their family, private. So, for example, you wouldn't film in someone's home, record their phone conversations or publish their emails without their permission.

The Human Rights Act (1998) introduced into British law the European Convention on Human Rights, which states: "Everyone has the right for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence."

But people in public places can't expect the same degree of privacy as in their own homes.

What if, for example, you were filming in a street and you captured someone receiving medical treatment? There are some circumstances where people can reasonably expect privacy in a public place. Ask yourself: If that were me, would I want it recorded?

Look closely at your footage when you get back to school as you may have captured something like this in the background, without realising it at the time.

If you are recording or taking photographs in a public place, you should do your best to make it obvious, to give people the choice of walking in front of, or behind, the camera. This is particularly important if you are using small cameras, mobile phones or webcams. In such cases, you might need to use notices to let people know what you are doing.

Before setting off to record in a "public" place, double check that it's not privately owned. For example, you might need to obtain permission before recording in shopping malls, railway stations or airports.

Please note that this guide is by no means exhaustive. BBC journalists need to adhere to a 368-page book covering legal and other editorial issues - but the guidance offered here should cover the areas you are most likely to experience through BBC Young Reporter.

If you are in doubt, it's generally better to play safe. And you can always get in touch with the BBC Young Reporter team for guidance.

For more information read the BBC Academy's [article on privacy and what's in the public interest](#).

SOCIAL MEDIA

BBC Young Reporter and social media.

Social media is a tool used by many journalists to gather news. Increasingly it is also used by the BBC to reach large audiences, for example by publishing content on the BBC Facebook pages or BBC YouTube channels. This is particularly important as more and more people are not getting their news via radio or TV.

BBC Young Reporter uses social media and has a Twitter account ([@bbcyoungreport](#)) aimed at adults interested in running the project at their school or organisation.

Because we want to promote Young Reporters' work, we may also post some reports made in partnership with participating schools and organisations on the BBC social media accounts (i.e. Twitter or Facebook). These accounts are for the general audience and the purpose of using them would be to get a wider audience via the BBC for young people's work.

Like most BBC webpages, the BBC Young Reporter website enables people to share published pictures and text to social media accounts.

How BBC Young Reporter uses social media, like all our work, is informed by the [BBC's editorial guidelines](#). These state that the physical and emotional welfare and the dignity of children and young people should be protected during the making and broadcasting of our content.

Social media and your school or organisation.

Learning how to use social media safely and responsibly is an important skill for young people and your school/college will have your own guidelines for young people in order to support their digital literacy.

The minimum age for most social media accounts is 13+. We would recommend you advise young people to adhere to the recommendations and rules of social

media sites regarding the minimum age of account holders.

If your school or organisation decides to involve young people under 13, it is possible that the work and images of under 13s could feature on social media accounts. However it is not an essential part of the project for young people to use social media themselves.

A useful website to help young people stay safe on social media is:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc/curations/stay-safe>.

Here are our top tips for using social media safely:

- Check out your school or organisations social media policy.
- Remember that the minimum age for most social media accounts is 13.
- Don't forget that when you post something on social media it may remain there forever and can be shared publicly by anyone at any time.
- Encourage young people to check their privacy settings so that only their friends can see their posts or contact them on social media.
- Encourage young people to block or report any person who makes nasty comments.
- Encourage young people to report anything that makes them feel worried, scared or uncomfortable.