

Trust

- By Ramón Bannister

As I consider other topics for this news magazine/blog, I wanted to address another issue that might be on my readers' minds. One of my readers recently told me that he/she used this website as a source for a class assignment (college level). Though I was happy to hear that, he/she also told me that the professor asked what I believe to be a very good, intelligent question. "How do you know you can trust that website?"

Trust is a key issue for readers and journalists alike. There are many websites and news sources claiming to be "unbiased" or "objective." Then you read the story and realize that there must have been something more behind the scenes about which the reporter didn't explain. Many extremists are out to voice their extremist opinions. And then there are others, like me, who try to present a "balanced" picture of the story. But what does "balanced" mean anyway? As the reader, you should always have that question in mind.

I myself often wonder about whether I can trust a source. The New York Times and the Washington Post are certainly trustworthy, but are they always "objective," or even accurate? If you've ever been interviewed by a print reporter, or if you've ever seen a reporter interview someone else, you have undoubtedly seen them write notes on a notepad as they listen to the person's comments. Well, I have news for you. Unless that reporter knows how to write in shorthand, or is very good at recalling EVERY word the person said by looking at the notes, I can almost guarantee you that the report will be somewhat inaccurate.

It's the reporters with a recorder – either audio or video – that are more accurate. They can go back to the original recording if they are unsure of the exact words. If they need to re-interpret what was said, they listen to the interview again and again. And then they quote directly from the recording.

As a journalist trained more in the scholarly approach to academic fieldwork – via anthropology traditions – I understand the complexities behind something as simple as doing an interview. I know how difficult it is to be trustworthy. Trust is built over time; so, the only way I can gain a reader's trust is by following a few key points.

1. Always use EXACT quotes if possible
2. Keep and archive every recorded interview, especially when through email or some kind of digital communication.
3. Set a standard for excellence and quality.
4. Always try to present MULTIPLE points of view.
5. If the writer has an opinion and wants to bring it into the story, openly state or make obvious that it is the writer's opinion.

These are only a few of my “quality” standards, all of which I can confidently say that I have used. For instance, in the “Virtual Debate” between Minute Man Project organizer Jim Gilchrist and Human Rights organizer Kat Rodriguez, I often made clear that either I agreed or disagreed with the view being expressed. But as point #4 requires, despite my disagreements, I feel obligated as a writer to present that point of view. It is my responsibility to be true to my interviewees by giving them a podium-like medium. Doing so brings their voices to the public and helps to engage all of us in an intelligent, respectful debate.

With that said, I record most face-to-face interviews that I conduct. If anyone ever doubted whether the interviewee said something, I would be able to prove it with the archived copy and actually post the audio online.

Finally, I have never claimed and will never claim that I am purely “objective” or “balanced.” Such an argument falls apart through philosophic, academic theory. As any intelligent person will tell you, there is no such thing as objective unless you are doing a mathematical problem. And even then, many people have different interpretations of the result of a mathematical computation. What does that result mean? The meaning behind the result is often what I focus on; I do that by studying the experiences or opinions of an individual about a global issue.

One article in particular helped to formulate my opinion about objective reporting. It is a blog/website that I have not followed very much, and only found through a google search for bias in the media. The article, [Media/Political Bias](#), written by [Dr. Andrew R. Cline](#), is an interesting explanation of my core understanding about the lack of objectivity. His [website](#) has other interesting articles.

Or, you could consult the book [Postmodernism For Beginners](#), which also helped to influence my thinking about objectivity.

Meanwhile, I will be researching more topics and possibly starting 1 or 2 other blogs. Keep checking [kenacubed.com](#) for updates.