ALL-MEDIA GUIDE
TO FAIR AND CROSS-CULTURAL REPORTING

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CMP
AUSTRALIAN KEY CENTRE
FOR CULTURAL AND MEDIA POLICY
A ‘nuts and bolts’ handbook on cross-cultural media work in Australia, covering …

- ethnic communities
- indigenous Australia
- finding contacts
- effective cross-cultural communication
- relevant legislation and codes of practice
- MEAA code of ethics

The *All-Media Guide to Fair and Cross-Cultural Reporting* is a useful day-to-day tool for dealing with the practicalities of media work among the diverse communities and people of Australia.

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For journalists, program makers
and media students

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Preface

At different times and in different situations, almost all sections of the media are decried as unfair. The constant complaint is that the media wields power, or at least influence, with casual regard for truth, objectivity and the impact of media work on the lives of people. Media workers agree on very little other than the need to be quick in getting news to the public and the need to protect sources in the process, so it is little wonder that the notion of fair reporting is subject to constant debate. The All-Media Guide to Fair and Cross-Cultural Reporting seeks to make a practical contribution to this discussion.

Almost no one likes to be considered unfair or racist, and media workers who inflict unfair treatment are rarely aware of the harm their work may cause. They are surprised, and sometimes offended, by community criticism. Usually, they don’t set out to deliberately malign people or damage their lives, but the pressures of deadlines, inadequate resources and understaffing mean that short cuts are inevitably taken.
Unfair treatment is not confined to overt words or actions that derive from malicious intent. It can result from unconscious prejudices and preconceptions, and these can affect a story idea, image, angle or portrayal. The consequences of unfair treatment in a story can have a considerable impact not only on the victims, but also on the media workers responsible. Consider how it feels to be:

- the journalist who copies a police description of a suspect into a report that results in a mosque burning down and the bashing of innocent people
- the documentary-maker who uses file footage of a now deceased indigenous person and causes intense emotional pain for grieving relatives
- the TV script writer who uses a racial stereotype to solve a plot problem but alienates a section of the show’s audience and loses a sponsor.

Both the National Inquiry into Racist Violence and the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody found that the media in Australia play an unintended but significant role in creating and maintaining intolerance and prejudice based on race. The All-Media Guide to Fair and Cross-Cultural Reporting combats that tendency with a straightforward account of how to report cross-cultural issues fairly, combined with some practical tips to covering the diverse communities and individuals in Australian society.

Media workers also confront a diverse range of laws, protocols, standards and codes introduced by governments, instrumentalities, self-regulatory bodies, non-government organisations and individual corporations in an attempt to ensure that media work is responsible and fair to all. Faced with a tricky decision and a tight deadline, who among us can wade through all that material and decide the fairest, most effective course of action in a particular story? The All-Media Guide to Fair and Cross-Cultural Reporting provides ready reference to the legislation, guidelines and codes where the formal responsibilities of media workers reside.

This guide is a practical tool for media workers involved with the representation of the diverse communities and people of Australia. It will help all media workers reach high standards of accuracy, balance, fairness, and relevance in the difficult area of cross-cultural reporting.
What is a fair go?

The notion of a ‘fair go’ is deeply entrenched in the egalitarian traditions of the Australian nation. It is significant that this notion was popularised by an entertainer from a non-English speaking background, Roy ‘Mo Macachie’ Rene through his catch phrase ‘fair go, mob’.

While a positive aspect of the Australian psyche, the fair go is a vague notion capable of distortion under pressure. It is used to argue both for and against social policy initiatives designed to address inequality.

The pursuit of fairness is a key professional practice for media workers because it cuts across interminable debates about the existence of truth, objectivity and facts. The practice of fairness allows media workers to get on with the job of assuring that their work has a high degree of accuracy, balance and ethical awareness.
To guarantee these things in Australia’s diverse culture means that media workers also need a high degree of cross-cultural competence.

By getting the story right, by getting the full story, by carefully considering who may benefit from and who may be harmed by the story, by seeking to understand and explain the implications of cultural difference, media workers have a framework to consider whether the story is fair and how it might be made fairer.

References to race or ethnicity need not be unfair or racist, as both can have relevance in stories. But reliance on irrelevant stereotypes, inserted in an unexplored and unexplained manner, leaves the audience with a story that singles out a person’s race or ethnicity for no apparent reason and no useful purpose. Historically, racial identifiers have been used to manufacture resentment against ‘other’ racial and ethnic groups for base political purposes.

Within a diverse society such as ours, it is not unfair nor racist to report cultural differences that produce news. But to do so effectively, media workers need to develop cross-cultural competency and an appreciation of the nuances of cultural difference. Once media workers become engaged with a story that involves aspects of cultural and/or racial difference, a fair approach is to ensure that the story is pursued with the same thoroughness that would be used to investigate, report and produce any other story.
2 Accuracy

Be prepared, do the background research and get it right.

Complaints about the media’s unfairness can arise due to a lack of attention to detail. Media workers may sometimes face the temptation “to not let the facts get in the way of a good story”, but accurate attention to detail produces a better story. There is also a practical need to recognise that long-term reputations depend on accuracy.

Accuracy is attained by developing work practices that incorporate:

- close observation
- detailed note taking
- use of a voice recorder
- filing material for easy reference
- use of public records to check claims of contacts
- checking that research files contain up-to-date information
- the confirmation of controversial points with other sources.

Phone numbers of contacts, particularly home and mobile numbers, should be conveniently recorded so details can be checked while completing the story. It is practical commitment to the minutiae, rather than an allegiance to idealised notions of truth, that produces accuracy. Where and when mistakes are made, errors should be corrected quickly and freely.

Particular care needs to be taken when reporting on a community or language group with whom the media worker is not familiar. In cases of unfamiliarity with a subject, media workers should take the time to check the spelling and structure of names and to understand the nuances of meaning that might be disguised by atypical pronunciation and sentence structure.
3 Balance

Getting all sides of the story

Fair representation of actuality requires the media worker to explore the breadth of the story, to check it with a range of sources and to present it in an impartial manner that discloses whose interests are served by various statements. This can be a difficult goal because it often requires media workers to re-negotiate workloads and deadlines and to argue for access to limited resources.
The attempt “to get to the bottom” of the story requires:

• interviewing all relevant parties
• observing carefully their words and actions
• leaving aside all prejudice and preconceptions
• understanding the story from the interviewees’ point of view
• insisting on equal representation of viewpoints.

Balance is more than just equal space for both sides of the story. More importantly it is about equal representation of all pertinent points of view and to do that effectively requires an effort to understand the validity of each viewpoint to those who hold it. This is the challenge to media workers: to avoid presenting events and people in sensationalised, trivialised or stereotyped ways.
How would you feel in their situation?

A common public perception is that media workers fluctuate in moral responsibility from the high-minded idealism of investigative journalism to the grubby tactics and antics of the gutter press. The media workers’ union, the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance has developed a Code of Ethics which calls on members, particularly those engaged in journalism, to commit themselves to honesty, accuracy, fairness and disclosure of all essential facts without distortion. In particular, the Code calls on media workers to avoid:
• invading anyone’s privacy or grief
• endangering anyone
• making things up
• using their positions for personal gain
• placing unnecessary emphasis on personal characteristics, including race, ethnicity, nationality or religious belief.

But ethical awareness requires more than a passing knowledge of the rules of engagement. Too often discussions of media ethics gets sidetracked into the search for legislation rather than reasoned debate about what is good or bad, or better or worse in a particular situation. There certainly needs to be a set of rules that proscribes unacceptable behaviour, particularly to help media workers resist pressure from management and colleagues to be ‘gung-ho’ in the pursuit of larger audiences by producing stories to a formula, rather than on the relevant facts.

But beyond that, there also needs to be a greater appreciation among media workers of the central ethical principle: do to others as you would have them do to you. The challenge for media workers is to be constantly asking themselves: how would I feel in the subject’s situation?
Code of Ethics

Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA)
Australian Journalists Association

Respect for truth and the public’s right to information are fundamental principles of journalism. Journalists describe society to itself. They convey information, ideas and opinions, and this is a privileged role. They search, disclose, record, question, entertain, suggest and remember. They inform citizens and animate democracy. They give a practical form to freedom of expression. Many journalists work in private enterprise, but all have these public responsibilities. They scrutinise power, but also exercise it, and in the interests of democracy, they should be accountable. Accountability engenders trust. Without trust, journalists do not fulfil their public responsibilities.

MEAA members engaged in journalism commit themselves to:

- Honesty
- Fairness
- Independence
- Respect for the rights of others

1. Report and interpret honestly, striving for accuracy, fairness and disclosure of all essential facts. Do not suppress relevant available facts, or give distorting emphasis. Do your utmost to give a fair opportunity for reply.

2. Do not place unnecessary emphasis on personal characteristics, including race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, sexual orientation, family relationships, religious belief, or physical or intellectual disability.

3. Aim to attribute information to its source. Where a source seeks anonymity, do not agree without first considering the source’s motives and any alternative attributable source. Where confidences are accepted, respect them in all circumstances.

4. Do not allow personal interest, or any belief, commitment, payment, gift or benefit, to undermine your accuracy, fairness or independence.
5. Disclose conflicts of interest that affect, or could be seen to affect, the accuracy, fairness or independence of your journalism. Do not improperly use a journalistic position for personal gain.

6. Do not allow advertising or other commercial considerations to undermine accuracy, fairness or independence.

7. Do your utmost to ensure disclosure of any direct or indirect payment made for interviews, pictures, information or stories.

8. Use fair, responsible and honest means to obtain material. Identify yourself and your employer before obtaining any interview for publication or broadcast. Never exploit a person’s vulnerability or ignorance of media practice.

9. Present pictures and sound which are true and accurate. Any manipulation likely to mislead should be disclosed.

10. Do not plagiarise.

11. Respect private grief and personal privacy. Journalists have the right to resist compulsion to intrude.

12. Do your utmost to achieve fair correction of errors.

Guidance clause: Basic values often need interpretation and sometimes come into conflict. Ethical journalism requires conscientious decision-making in context. Only substantial advancement of the public interest or risk of substantial harm to people allows any standard to be overridden.
Cross-Cultural Competence

Keep communicating

In a society with as much cultural diversity as Australia, fairness depends on involving those from diverse cultural backgrounds. The media worker who aspires to tell the full story has to leave behind the familiar and approach the unfamiliar with curiosity, sensitivity, respect and the moral imagination to understand the world from a cultural perspective that may differ from their own. Different communities have different ways of organising political and economic affairs, different ways of defining what is right and wrong and different ways of deciding who has power and how that power can or might be utilised.

The media worker who is competent in cross-cultural matters will:

- seek advice on values, beliefs and practices in other cultures
- be flexible and open to negotiation
- offer and encourage explanations
- be sensitive to verbal and non verbal behaviour
- pursue a more accurate, complete and authentic picture of communities
- be sensitive to differences among individuals within a culture
- develop more knowledgeable sources
- repair misunderstandings by making explicit statements
- provide relevant background information pertinent to the story’s aims and objectives.

Media workers should always be aware that their own values, beliefs and practices are influenced by their own experience of culture and are not the only ‘right’ view of the world. It is important to remember that there can also be enormous cultural diversity within communities, with many individuals possessing diverse ancestry and a combination of cultural heritages.

The on-going creation of relationships with diverse sectors of the community is a key method for developing cultural competence. One useful way of developing inter-cultural connections, and showing your contacts that you are committed to them as people, is to call
upon them as sources for stories that do not relate directly to their particular community, but to the wider community in general. If you are doing a vox pop about taxation issues, for example, try to interview a sample of people that matches the cultural diversity of the relevant community.
Racism

A stereotype is never the full story

Stereotypes are fixed generalisations that deny the differences between individuals in racial or other groups. They are subtle and pervasive influences that create and maintain the world before we see it. In 1922, Walter Lippmann wrote: “We imagine most things before we experience them ... [Stereotypes] mark out certain objects as familiar or strange, emphasising the difference, so that the slightly familiar is seen as very familiar, and the somewhat strange as sharply alien.”

Stereotypes are reinforced by selective remembering and selective forgetting – we tend to notice those characteristics and behaviours that confirm our views and overlook those that challenge our views. Thus stereotypes become exaggerated and distorted pictures of others. We are all constantly categorising people and things, and making judgments and generalisations about them – but by falling back on racial stereotypes, we are failing to get to the detail and texture of the full story.

The perpetuation of racism is reliant upon stereotypes. Racism is the belief that one’s own race is superior to others. It operates at interpersonal and social levels and unfairly reinforces the privileges of some and the inequality of others, and so distorts the relative contribution that all members are able to make to society.

Australian media workers have already contributed a great deal to widespread community rejection of overt racism and general disdain for specific cases of prejudice and discrimination. However, covert racism can still be present where unquestioned social myths are used to justify derogatory preconceptions and patterns of institutionalised discrimination. Sometimes media workers can become party to this more insidious type of activity, but can resist taking the easy way out and assert an intellectual independence by asking of each story that explores a culturally diverse angle:

- is there an undue emphasis on race, ethnicity or religion?
- is that emphasis relevant? Why?
• have you checked the facts on which a racist comment is based?
• are names right?
• is comment clearly distinguished from news?
• have comments been sought from all relevant sources?
• will there be an unfair impact on community members because of the story?
• are the visuals or headlines relevant to and congruent with the story?
• is the story free of irrelevant inflammatory language?

Media workers can also play a role in combating racism by normalising difference in our community, by refusing to pander to preconceptions about racial stereotypes and by avoiding irrelevant references to race and ethnicity. It is salient to again note that the breakdown of stereotypes can also be achieved through the inclusion of a diversity of voices in general reporting that has nothing to do with race or ethnicity.
Racial Vilification/Hatred Acts

The Australian media has a set of legal responsibilities with regard to reporting racist remarks. They are contained in the Commonwealth’s 1995 Racial Hatred Act and various States’ Racial Vilification Acts.

These Acts are in response to article 4(a) of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination which says that signatories:

Shall declare an offence punishable by law all dissemination of ideas based on racial superiority or hatred, incitement to racial discrimination, as well as all acts of violence or incitement to such acts against any race or group of persons of another colour or ethnic origin ...

The Racial Hatred Act introduced in October 1995 allows people to complain about publicly offensive or abusive behaviour based on racial hatred. The Racial Hatred Act makes it unlawful “to offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate another person or a group of people ... because of the race, colour or national or ethnic origin of the other person or ... group.” Section 18D exempts:

• publication, discussion or debate for academic, artistic or scientific purposes or in the public interest and

• the making of a fair and accurate report of any event or matter of public interest or a fair comment of a genuine belief.

An unlawful act is not necessarily a criminal offence. The Racial Discrimination Commissioner of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission deals with grievances after receiving written notification outlining a specific complaint. Upon receiving written notification, the Commissioner then attempts to conciliate the issue, calling a compulsory conference if necessary. The Commission can make non-binding declarations about past conduct and actions to redress the situation. It can also recommend payment of compensation for damages including humiliation and injured feelings. The Commission or the complainant must then enforce the declaration by applying to the Federal Court.

Racial Vilification and the Media

The legislation covers all aspects of Australian society and applies
to people in all walks of life. However, numerous complaints pursued under the *Racial Hatred Act* are directed towards the media. Complainants are most often concerned about:

- the perpetuation of negative racial stereotypes
- sensationalist reporting on race issues
- the use of gratuitous ethnic slurs
- the citing of ethnicity when it has little or no relevance to the story.

The legislation accepts there are legitimate social and policy issues which need to be freely and fairly debated in the public interest, and that the media has a vital role to play in that process. But media workers can only rely on the exemptions in the Act by taking an approach that is accurate, fair and reasonable:

- a report must make it clear that a racially offensive statement is not the reporter’s own,
- a report must be free from embellishment or comment that could itself amount to racial vilification,
- commentary must state the facts on which opinions are based
- commentary must reflect a genuinely held belief arrived at reasonably and in good faith.

*Example:* when reporting on racist statements made at a public meeting, media workers should clearly attribute the comments or views to the person making or holding them – so that it is absolutely clear they are not the views of the media worker or their employer.

**State Legislation**

Australian States have similar legislation but of varying strengths. Examples of this legislation include:

The *New South Wales Anti-Discrimination (Racial Vilification) Act* says it is unlawful for a person, by a public act, to incite hatred towards, serious contempt for, or severe ridicule of, a person or group of persons because of the race of the person or members of the group.

The *Western Australia Criminal Code* makes it an offence to publish material which incites racial hatred, though not by way of television or radio.

The *Queensland Anti Discrimination Act* makes it an offence to incite un-lawful discrimination by the advocacy of racial or religious hatred or hostility.
Industry Codes of Practice

Section 123 of the Broadcasting Services Act 1992 requires radio and television industry groups to consult with the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) to develop codes of practice that, among other things, prevent the use of offensive language and promote accuracy and fairness in news and current affairs programs. In particular, these codes of conduct are expected to minimise any material that is likely to incite or perpetuate hatred against, or vilify, any person or group on the basis of ethnicity, nationality, race, gender, sexual preference, age, religion or physical or mental disability.

Media industry groups have phrased their codes in different but essentially similar ways. These self-regulation codes are outlined in Appendix A. They can be found in full at the ABA website at <http://www.aba.gov.au/what/program/codes/index.htm>.

Complaints Process

It is perhaps a small comfort to media workers that the high ideals of the industry codes of conduct are rarely enforced with any degree of determination and complaints are most often dismissed. To proceed with a complaint, a complainant must first take up the issue promptly and directly with the broadcaster or publisher concerned. If a complainant considers the respondent’s reply is unsatisfactory, the complainant may then refer the matter to the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) or Australian Press Council (APC) for further investigation and determination.

Any action taken by the ABA as a result of a breach of a code of practice or the Act will depend on the seriousness of the breach. The ABA has a range of sanctions available at its disposal if it finds action against a broadcaster should be taken. It can make compliance with a code of practice a condition of a broadcaster’s licence. Alternatively, the ABA may take administrative action such as issuing a notice requiring compliance with the Act. The ABA also has the power to impose a program standard on all broadcasters in an industry sector. Licensees may face fines up to $200,000 for breach of licence conditions or up to $2m for failure to comply with notices.
By way of contrast, the APC considers the determination of its Complaints Committee and usually issues adjudication on the complaint. In its adjudication, the Council may uphold a complaint in whole or in part, or it may dismiss all aspects of the complaint. Alternately, it may simply express an opinion on the matter. It has no power to penalise a publication, or to order it to do anything, but the publication is expected to print an APC adjudication concerning that publication.
Finding Contacts in a Diverse Society

Media workers rely on a network of formal and informal contacts to help them carry out their work. Achieving fairness relies upon finding contacts that are appropriate for the story being developed, rather than rounding up the usual contacts merely because they are available.

Local community contacts are an essential part of coming to understand what is regarded as culturally appropriate by particular cultural groups. What is appropriate can change considerably for communities only kilometres apart and may vary for individual members of a community depending on not only ancestry, but also age, gender, educational background and language proficiency.

Techniques for finding contacts vary considerably with each community covered and every story undertaken. Sometimes media workers can build on contacts that their media organisation has already established in the community. But more often the approach will begin with media liaison officials in government instrumentalities or community-based organisations. Getting their view of a story is important but it is also an opportunity to seek leads on other relevant people to talk to about a particular issue.

For appropriate Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander sources of information, you might contact the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) state or regional offices to find out who...
speaks for a particular community. Land Councils, Legal Aid Services, Education Centres and Health Centres are also useful starting points to develop contacts and gather a diversity of viewpoints. The National Indigenous Media Association of Australia (NIMAA) is the peak body representing Aboriginal Media Associations. Both NIMAA and Aboriginal Media Associations located throughout Australia can direct you towards appropriate contacts in the community.

For appropriate ethnic sources of information, you might contact state and regional Ethnic Community Councils and local ethnic community organisations to find the appropriate people to source particular information.

Tips relating to contacts include:

- Don’t rely on a single point of contact; look at the phone book, walk around the community, use lateral thinking to find alternatives
- Be aware of a tendency to rely on the same set of contacts and just ‘round up the usual suspects’
- Try to ensure that the people you talk to as ‘representatives’ are representative of a cross section of the various stakeholders in the community
- When people are claiming some authority to speak on behalf of others, be sure that such authority has some basis in reality
- Be sure to determine when someone is speaking as an individual and when that person is speaking on behalf of a group or organisation
• Learn to recognise the gatekeepers who seek to control the information flow in and out of a community – work with them but seek alternative views.

If there is a problem with gaining access to a community member to speak on an issue, it could be that a breakdown in inter-cultural communication has occurred. It is not always easy to recognise when this has happened. The only way you really learn where the limits are is to make the mistakes, to realise that something has gone wrong and to ask if you have inadvertently given offence. If that is the case, an apology may be the most effective and productive course of action.
Effective communication can be difficult even within one’s own culture. It can be a struggle for media workers to follow the jargon, codes and subliminal forms of communication that develop within any group of people interacting over a length of time. Fair reporting is even more difficult to achieve when you are required to cross cultural boundaries, as all Australian media workers will have to do on a regular basis if they are dedicated to getting the full story in a diverse society.

Here are some simple steps to help strive towards effective cross-cultural communication:

**One voice does not a community make.** Speak with as many people as possible to ensure that you are not just relying on the view of one faction. Communities are not homogeneous and there may be many differences of opinion based around individual experience, family groupings, regional affiliations or political viewpoints.

**Find out about the customs of the local community.** Be prepared to look, listen and learn. Do not approach a community with the attitude that this community is the same as another community. Every community is unique. Take the time and make the effort to understand their particular situation.

**Build relationships.** Do not expect everything to happen at the first meeting. Be seen at public community events and get to know people socially. Let the community pace the meetings. Listen to what is being said and be comfortable with a silence. Allow time for people to think. In this way you can establish trust and if you make a mistake, someone will inform you of that mistake. Avoid making promises you cannot keep.

**Take time.** Building trust is not done instantaneously. Avoid appearing rude and pushy by waiting, having a cup of tea or coffee and talking about the weather, children or concerns for the
future before getting onto the main agenda. Get to know each other so you can judge whether to ask questions directly or indirectly. Useful strategies include a hinting statement followed by a silence, volunteering information for confirmation or denial followed by a silence, and waiting for a later meeting before receiving an answer.

**Keep negotiations open.** Avoid yes/no questions or questions like ‘do you understand?’ Paraphrase what you believe has been said and wait for addition or correction. When opinions are conflicting, adopt a consensus model, listen broadly, take it all on board and give representation to the broad spectrum of views.
11 Covering Ethnic Communities

Australia has people from a diverse array of cultural backgrounds. To accurately and fairly represent Australia to itself, media workers need to appreciate the complexity of different cultural norms and the impact their work has.

Consider the Angle

Avoid sensational headlines and leading statements that may exaggerate the impact of the story. Avoid stereotypical images that contain misleading associations between ethnicity and events. Avoid promoting racism. Do not associate the activities of individuals with the attitudes of entire communities or racial groups. Avoid representing the local communities as somehow existing outside of everyday Australian community life. Do not isolate communities from the general public with frequent, irrelevant references to ethnicity or ‘them’. Refer to ethnicity only in cases where it is relevant or necessary for the audience’s greater comprehension of core issues, and be sure to explain and provide a context to such use.

Balanced Representation

Ensure the accuracy of statements made by opposing sources. Explore and explain the political or publicity advantages they seek. Become aware of the hidden agendas of sources who may wish to manipulate public opinion through provocative statements. Liaise and consult with the community for advice regarding the most appropriate spokespeople and the most appropriate approach to the community and the story.

Accurate Language

Be aware of the possible repercussions of reports that make reference to the ethnicity of participants. People completely unrelated to this particular debate may be subject to derogatory comments following sensational coverage on news and current affairs programs. For example, ‘Arab’ is a term that applies to a broad region and should not be used to describe a sub-section of that region.
Names
Special care needs to be taken in reporting on ethnic communities to ensure that the spelling and pronunciation of all names is correct. It is also important to use the name that people call themselves. In some Asian and European cultures, the family name is traditionally placed before the given name. Thus when Chinese, Khmer, Korean, Sri Lankan, Tamil, Vietnamese and some Croatian, Hungarian, Serbian people use their traditional names (for example Jiang Zemin) then it is appropriate to call them Mr Jiang or, if you are on ‘first’ name terms, Zemin. People from some cultures take an Anglo-Celtic given name for convenience (eg John Jiang). Ask sources how they would like to be referred to in your story.

Keep Channels Open
Remember that ethnic communities’ previous experiences of the media may have given them cause for suspicion. Refusals of individuals and communities to participate in interviews or to cooperate with the media should not be translated as either hostility or as evidence that they have information they wish to remain concealed. Where English is a second or third language, offer interviewees the use of a professional translator. Media organisations should establish and regularly update data regarding ethnic community groups, contacts and peak bodies. Ensure complaints and comments are politely and professionally addressed. Despite the abusive or unfair comment of some respondents, all feedback can be valuable.

Crime
Differentiate between activities of individuals and their communities which may be subjected to racism by association. Avoid linking ethno-specific data or images with general criminal activity. Media workers should avoid the unwarranted introduction of race or ethnicity into a story, and particularly the unnecessary use of easy labels in reporting on suspects or convicted criminals. Avoid mention of physical features that may, often incorrectly, link criminality with ethnicity. Immigration levels are not connected to crime rates.

Describing Wanted Persons and Suspects
The media plays an important part in alerting the audience to identifying characteristics of wanted persons and suspects. Racial
identifiers can carry information about geography, about bloodlines, and about heritage. But they don’t describe much. What, for example, does an ‘Middle Eastern’ man look like? Is his skin dark or light? Pale? Is his hair straight? Curly? Wiry? Dreadlocks? Fine? Short? Long? Does he have a flat, broad nose or is it narrow and straight? Are his eyes blue or black? Is he heavy set or thin? Is he a youth or a middle aged-man? When describing suspects wanted by police, media workers can tell their audience that the suspect was around 30 years of age, about 170-180 cm, about 80-90kg, with caramel-brown skin, a crew cut, thick eyebrows, a narrow nose, thick lips and dark eyes. All of the above are physical characteristics that can help identify a suspect, but there is no need for a racial tag. What is added to the above picture if the description ‘of Lebanese appearance’ is inserted?

**Gangs**

Be aware of the potential association between descriptions such as ‘youth gangs’ and ethnic youth. It may be useful to see whether the use of the word ‘Anglo’ would alter the tenor of the story. Explore possible reasons for the congregation of young people. It is likely that it is the similarities of language, geography, age and experience that brings people together rather than criminal intent.
Immigrants and Refugees

Media workers should be aware of the differences between immigrants and refugees. Refugees have fled their homelands to avoid persecution and war. Immigrants are people who have moved from one country to take up permanent residence in a new country. People who have lived in Australia for a period of time often regard themselves as Australian and many object to being labelled ‘immigrant’. Verify whether the people in your story are applicants for refugee or immigration status. Pay attention to the language used in reports on refugee situations. Language that intimates a crisis, such as ‘flood of refugees’, ‘human tide’ and ‘mass exodus’ all contribute to the misperception that there overwhelming numbers of newcomers who pose a threat to Australia’s national stability and security. Be aware that some communities are treated with more sympathy than others. The media rarely question the asylum needs of East Timorese people, people from the former Republic of Yugoslavia or Chinese political dissidents. Why is this tolerance extended to some groups and not to others? Be careful in making judgments about the ‘genuine need’ of asylum seekers – on what grounds are you making such claims to the authenticity of such needs?

File Footage

Identify, preferably with a date, all file footage used. Think carefully about why a particular piece of footage is relevant to the story and be aware that the continual use of the same images can promote negative attitudes towards communities. For example, the repeated use of the same boat burning when discussing refugee intakes suggests both an unfounded health threat and an unwarranted emotional intensity, neither of which further the story.
12 Aboriginality

The word ‘Aborigine’ derives from Latin and means ‘from the beginning’. The associated adjective is ‘Aboriginal’ and it should not be used as a noun. It is a term with general application to the people, flora and fauna that existed in any country from time immemorial or before formal historical records were kept. Use of terms such as ‘the Aborigines’ and ‘blacks’ tends to suggest a single dimension to a broad diversity of people, and should be avoided. While editors maintain that space seldom allows use of the alternatives to “blacks” in headlines, often it is an easy option resorted to without the exercise of appropriate creativity.

The terms indigenous Australians and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people not only have specific application to Australia but also help stress the humanity of the people being described.
Capitalisation acknowledges their significance as traditional owners of the land. The abbreviation “ATSI people” should be avoided as jargon. Terms such as half-caste and quarter-caste should also be avoided as demeaning and irrelevant. The overuse of collective pronouns such as ‘them’, ‘they’ and ‘those people’ should also be avoided and are unnecessarily divisive – if they are ‘them’, then who are ‘we’?

It is not up to a media worker to question an individual’s Aboriginality. Acceptance or rejection of a person’s claims of Aboriginality can only come from within the Aboriginal community, so broad and sensitive consultation with community members is the best way to determine a person’s Aboriginality. Governments and courts have accepted the following definition:

An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person is a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which he or she lives.

It needs to be acknowledged that resolving who, or what, is indigenous is complex for both indigenous and non-indigenous people. The historical separation of indigenous children from their parents, the dispossession of their land, their economic exploitation, and the removal and suspension of their right to exercise control over their own affairs have all contributed to a breakdown in traditional connections.
Indigenous Australians and Diversity

Australian indigenous culture has always been diverse and pluralistic. There were approximately 250 separate language groups in 1788 and they each regarded themselves as separate entities.

There is no one kind of Aboriginal person or community. Indigenous communities throughout Australia have their own distinct history, politics, culture and linguistic experience. Although indigenous people may share many experiences and similar circumstances, they are not a homogeneous group and no single person can speak for all indigenous people.

There is a range of difference between indigenous people living in settled and remote Australia. Settled Australia can be broadly characterised as the zone stretching from Cairns to Adelaide and around to Perth, an area in which all the major cities, institutions and facilities are located. Indigenous Australians in settled areas have been mostly dispossessed of their land and significant aspects of their culture in the process of colonisation and have had no alternative but to adapt to the dominant culture. Remote Australia covers the remainder of the continent and includes the Torres Strait Islands. Away from settled Australia, many indigenous people have maintained their languages and their traditional relations to the land and one another. There is no clear line between settled and remote Australia, just continuous variation that produces even more diversity.

That diversity is evident in the way it has become acceptable in many instances to refer to indigenous Australians by their own terms of regional identification:–

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Region</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Koori</td>
<td>NSW, Vic, Tas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murri</td>
<td>Qld</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nungar</td>
<td>SA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyungar</td>
<td>WA – southern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yolngu</td>
<td>Arnhem Land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anangu</td>
<td>Central Australia</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Many indigenous communities refer to themselves by their own language group name such as Arrernte, Walpiri, Tiwi, Eora and Jingli. Whilst such terms are largely acceptable, you should consult with the local indigenous community for their preferred way of being collectively identified and described.
Covering Indigenous Australia

Indigenous people who have grown up in settled Australia generally expect no more sensitivity and respect than you would show to any other source or interviewee. Many indigenous people from remote Australia still participate in traditional culture and their first language is not English. To communicate effectively with indigenous people in remote areas requires patience, persistence and an appreciation of your own role as a media worker. The following information has particular relevance to media work in remote communities but also some application to work in settled areas. It is intended only to provide some insights into issues that could be relevant and is not intended to be prescriptive for all situations.

It cannot be over emphasised that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are diverse, and therefore no tips on procedural matters, or definitive list of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ approaches will be relevant to all situations. The most important thing regarding an appropriate approach is to ask around and see what protocols apply in the community with whom you want to work. Many people with whom you liaise may be bi-culturally competent and will be able to advise you in expected norms of behaviour in particular communities.

**Asking Questions/ Approach**

In many communities, asking questions of people with whom you have no established relationship is regarded as unacceptable. For many traditionally-oriented indigenous people, the proper way to learn things is through observation and personal experience. You can find out the culturally appropriate method of approach by liaising with a local community organisation, land council or ATSIC office. Don’t directly approach the entrance to a person’s dwelling and certainly don’t go inside without an invitation. Stop outside their home and wait for them to come to you. Be ready to sit on the ground to talk about why you wish to discuss a matter with them.
Who has the right to speak?

There may be people from a variety of language groups now living at one location. This sometimes leads to tensions between families who are descendants of the original landowners and those who have come from elsewhere. Speaking on behalf of people without authority on matters pertaining to country, law, business or culture can cause problems. Do your research and find the appropriate people who have the authority (in indigenous ways) to speak for a particular area. The right to speak is traditionally negotiated face to face. The safest course of action is to ask the interviewee how he/she would like to be identified in your work – some people prefer an institutional title, while others prefer to have their community status noted. Resist the use of the term ‘Aboriginal spokesperson’. If someone is speaking on behalf of a particular community, name the community.

Eye Contact

While for many media workers direct eye contact and a firm handshake are important elements to establishing rapport with a contact, in some Aboriginal communities direct eye contact is regarded as intrusive, disturbing and offensive, and will be avoided as a matter of cultural protocol. Some indigenous people may not look at you while you are talking, and it is easy to think “Are they listening to me?” Lack of eye contact should not be understood as someone’s inability to deal with ‘truth’.

Greeting and Pointing

Many indigenous Australians do not traditionally greet each other in the same manner as non-indigenous Australians do. Do not mistake a refusal to speak as hostility or indifference. The person may not feel it appropriate to speak at that particular time, under those particular circumstances. Handshakes are not universally given in all indigenous communities. Follow the local lead. Don’t think people are angry at you or do not like you because they do not wave or say hello. They may simply find it superfluous. They can see that you can see them. Similarly, many indigenous people in remote areas prefer not to use the hands to point, as this can be seen as disrespectful. Directions may be sometimes given through a pursing of the lips and a movement of the head.
Agreement/Disagreement

Agreement and disagreement can be passive in many indigenous communities. People may say yes to you to avoid the conflict of saying no directly, and instead wait for a less direct way of expressing such a response. Indigenous people can use indirectness and circumspection in expressing disagreement. Non-indigenous people may mistakenly think that an indigenous interviewee agrees with them, especially if they do not take the time to wait for the interviewee to express his or her real opinion. Indirectness and circumspection are also crucial to the process of consensus building, which is used by many indigenous people to reach decisions. Just as the media worker has a right to ask questions, people have a right not to answer them.

Time

Time is everything to the media worker: schedules dominate planning, deadlines are always looming. However conventional time-keeping methods and attitudes towards time may be of little concern to some indigenous people. This is because, in much traditional Indigenous culture, emphasis is placed on the present and finding contentment with ‘being’, rather than constantly focussing on the future and the rush required ‘to become’. 
Extended Families/Kinship

Many indigenous people are group oriented rather than individually oriented. Relatives are not seen as additional to the family – they are an integral part of the extended family and there are often obligations that need to be carried out in a manner that would not be usual in non-indigenous cultures. Kinship ties in many remote communities are not only along biological lines but also through an additional, complex social system of kinship or ‘skin’ names which involves classifying people you meet as relatives. These traditional relationships determine social interaction, privileges, obligations and also impose restrictions on social contact.

Gender Specific

Divisions of labour in traditional indigenous society is often on the basis of gender – men hunt, women gather food and look after the camp. It is not appropriate for outsiders to challenge such cultural beliefs from a perspective informed by non-indigenous cultural notions of male or female ‘rights’. Gender differentiation is also often inherent in the divisions of roles around kinship ties. Some indigenous sites are gender specific and referred to as women’s or men’s business, as are the stories, dances and rituals associated with them.

Avoidance Relationships

Some indigenous Australians observe avoidance relationships and it is not acceptable in such cases for some people to make contact and/or be alone or in proximity of one another. This might be an avoidance between adult brothers and sisters, or it might be an avoidance between a man and his mother in-law.

Sacred or Significant Sites

Such sites are an integral part of indigenous culture and are the settings of their custodians’ most important knowledge and activities. They are fundamental to a sense of self and to destroy, damage or interfere with such a site may cause great distress. When in remote areas, don’t wander around or go bush without consulting and gaining permission from the local custodians.
Visual Representation

Think carefully about the images you are taking, and why you want them. Do you have permission to record an image? Is the image pointing to or confirming a stereotype? Can you point to an issue of concern in a creative and imaginative way without relying on a cliché?

Naming deceased persons

In many indigenous communities, the depiction or mention of a person who has passed away can cause great distress to people, as can showing their image through visual media. Even using the same name as that of a deceased person, or even a similar sound, can cause distress for a period of time. Some groups have a special term that is used instead of the deceased person’s name. You will know the time has come to use the prohibited name again when you hear locals using that name. When in doubt about naming or visually showing someone who has passed away, ask people within that community for advice regarding that community’s protocol on such a matter.

Showing deceased persons

The use of archival footage presents difficulties that media workers need to address before the post-production stage of a project. Voice recordings and still photographs can present the same problems as audio visual material. Rigorous sourcing of the material allows you to issue warnings that the following material contains images of deceased people and may cause distress to people from a particular community.

Permits to visit indigenous communities

To visit designated indigenous lands in some parts of Australia, a visitor’s permit or agreement to visit must be obtained from the local Aboriginal Community Council. In some cases, you will need to contact the Land Council who will consult with the local community that you wish to visit. Aboriginal Land is private land and its owners have the legal right to refuse permission to their land. You need to be aware that permits can take up to a number of months to process, as the traditional owners may not be easily contacted. The Northern Land Council in the Northern Territory estimate that of the approximate 15,000 applications to gain access to Aboriginal land that it receives each year, about 97% are approved.
Shame

When many Aboriginal people speak of getting ‘shame’ it is not the same as when non-Aboriginal people speak of being ashamed. While people are ashamed when their wrongdoing leads to others holding a bad opinion of them, getting ‘shame’ includes feeling uncomfortable, uncertain, clumsy, out of place, out of one’s depth and a desire to be out of an unpleasant situation. So Aboriginal people talk of getting shame when non-Aboriginal people would not speak of being ashamed, for example when an Aboriginal person is entering a strange place, meeting strangers or praised for achievement.

Balancing Positive and Negative Stories

There has been a significant improvement from the Australian media in the recent past in assisting non-indigenous Australians to better understand the various successes and challenges faced by indigenous Australians. Many media workers do not merely focus on conflict when reporting indigenous issues. Investigation can reveal many positive stories, not only on the sporting field, but also across a broad range of topics, events and issues. Media workers have also realised that a story about a social problem can be made even better by canvassing members of the appropriate indigenous community on their perceptions and prescriptions, rather than solely seeking the opinions of outside experts or politicians.
Principles

Lester Bostock (1997) is a Bundjalung elder with thirty years experience in the media. He has set out some general points of protocol which are useful to media workers in a variety of reporting or production roles:

1. Program makers should always be aware of and challenge their own prejudices, stereotyped beliefs and perceptions about indigenous people.

2. An Aboriginal view of indigenous issues may differ from a non-Aboriginal one.

3. Where non-indigenous people produce programs on indigenous people they should do so in consultation with the indigenous people, being particularly sensitive to the experience of those who are the subjects of the program.

4. Any dealings with indigenous people should be negotiated openly and honestly. The indigenous people involved with the deal should be fully informed of the consequences of any proposed agreements, and they retain their right to seek independent legal advice as and when they see fit.

5. No damage of any kind should be done to the lands of indigenous people or cultural property, nor to the subject(s) of programs. Special consideration should be given to the applicability of non-indigenous notions of intellectual property rights, especially copyright, to the cultures of indigenous people.

6. The collection and use of information for a project should be done in such a way that it will not be used against or be considered detrimental to the people from whom the information comes.

7. Program makers need always to examine their own preconceptions in order to provide a report that is balanced by an awareness of the cultural norms and practices of indigenous people.
Appendix – Self-Regulation Codes

The Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations (FACTS) code prohibits members from broadcasting material likely to:

1.8.5 seriously offend the cultural sensitivities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or of ethnic groups or racial groups in the Australian community;

1.8.6 provoke or perpetuate intense dislike, serious contempt or severe ridicule against a person or group of persons on the grounds of age, colour, gender, national or ethnic origin, disability, race, religion or sexual preference.

Clause 1.9 allows exceptions where material is broadcast reasonably and in good faith as an artistic work (including comedy or satire) or in the course of any discussion or debate for an academic, artistic, scientific or public interest purpose. Clause 1.10 “expects” compliance with the Advertiser Code of Ethics which states:

Advertisements shall not portray people in a way which discriminates against or vilifies a person or section of the community on account of race, ethnicity, nationality, sex, age, sexual preference, religion, disability or political belief.

The Federation of Australian Radio Broadcasters (FARB) code prohibits members from broadcasting offensive material in terms taken directly from Section 123 of Broadcasting Services Act 1992 quoted above. In response to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, FARB has “Guidelines on the Portrayal of Indigenous Australians on Commercial Radio” which include prohibitions against inciting serious contempt for, severely ridiculing, prejudicing, belittling or unduly emphasising Aboriginal people. The Guidelines also call for respect for Aboriginal protocols and balance by providing a right of reply and weighing negative aspects of the story against positive aspects.

The Australian Subscription Television and Radio Association (ASTRA) provides codes of practice for pay-TV and narrowcasting operators in similar terms to section 123 of Broadcasting Services Act quoted above.
The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) code of practice is framed more broadly than those of its commercial competitors. Clause 2.4 addresses discrimination in the following terms: "The presentation or portrayal of people in a way which is likely to encourage denigration of or discrimination against any person or section of the community on account of race, ethnicity, nationality, sex, age, disability or illness, social or occupational status, sexual preference or the holding of any religious, cultural or political belief will be avoided." The requirement is not intended to prevent the broadcast of material which is factual, or the expression of genuinely-held opinion in a news or current affairs program, or in the legitimate context of a humorous, satirical or dramatic work.

Specifically, clause 3.4 requires program makers and journalists to respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and to take particular care in traditional matters such as the naming or depicting of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people after death.

The Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) Charter requires the public radio and TV broadcaster to cater to the communications needs of Australia’s multicultural society, including ethnic, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, specifically by increasing awareness, understanding and acceptance of the diversity of cultures and languages in Australian society. To this end section 2.1 of the SBS code of practice seeks to counter attitudes of prejudice against any person or group on the basis of their race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, sexual preference, religion, physical or mental disability, occupational status or political beliefs. SBS seeks to correct distorted pictures of cultural communities and issues of race generally by avoiding simplistic representations and presenting programs which reflect Australia’s cultural diversity and which exposes racist attitudes and stereotyping.

The Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA) code of practice also takes an activist position by requiring community broadcasters to:

(1.6) Incorporate programming policies which oppose and attempt to break down prejudice on the basis of race, sex, nationality, religion, disability, ethnic background, age or sexual preference.
Further clause 2.3 prohibits “material which may stereotype, incite, vilify, or perpetuate hatred against, or attempt to demean any person or group on the basis of ethnicity, nationality, race, gender, sexual preference, religion, age or physical or mental disability” and clause 2.4 requires news and current affairs programs to “provide access to views under-represented by the mainstream media”.

The Australian Press Council is the means of self-regulation by Australia’s print-based media and its statement of principles accepts that the freedom of the press is balanced by a responsibility to the public interest that includes commitments to accuracy and balance as well as a refusal to place gratuitous emphasis on the race, religion, nationality, colour, country of origin, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, illness, or age of an individual or group.

The Advertising Standards Council is a self-regulatory body representing publishers and broadcasters which has a code of practice complaints process that attempts to ensure that advertising in its member media complies with Commonwealth law and does not engage in unlawful discrimination.
Further Reading


