

Legal Issues

Libel

Publishing false statements that damage someone's reputation. We are legally responsible for what we publish in our yearbook--this includes quotes from sources.

How do we avoid libel?

- be cautious of what you say
- only say what you can prove
- act ethically

Copyright

**as explained on Herff Jones' website.*

A copyright protects the way in which a creator expresses his or her idea, but not the actual idea or facts behind the idea. For example, an event like a news conference cannot be copyrighted, but a reporter can copyright his or her article about the event.

A work is automatically copyrighted when it is completed or placed into a "fixed" form. For example, a photograph is copyrighted. A design or a literary work is copyrighted once it is placed on paper or saved on a computer. An original work does not have to be published to receive copyright protection.

To obtain permission to reproduce a copyrighted item, you must contact the copyright owner. The copyright information on the item should contain the name of the copyright owner or the wording requested by the copyright owner when permission is granted to use the material.

How do we avoid copyright issues?

- always ask permission before using someone else's work (save this permission for future reference)

Fair Use

**as explained on Herff Jones' website.*

There are some exceptions to a copyright owner's exclusive rights to his or her creative works, such as "fair use." However, these exceptions are easily misunderstood and often misinterpreted. Also, copyrights do not last forever and older works once protected by copyright may now be in the public domain. However, the rules of copyright duration are complicated and it is often difficult to determine when a work is no longer protected by copyright. To be safe, you should not rely on these exceptions or assume a work is in the public domain. Instead, it is best to seek permission to use all creative works.

Ethics

Your job is to accurately cover the story of our school year--have strong moral principles which will guide how you handle this coverage.

- take responsibility for the accuracy of your work
- "I was in a hurry," is not an excuse for inaccuracy
- clearly identify your sources
- avoid stereotyping
- never distort facts
- always attribute

Press Freedom

The best way to carry yourself as a student journalist is to have strong ethical principles. You will be able to defend your choices in coverage if you've covered your subject matter ethically. Meridian Moments Yearbook is a public forum for student expression. Student editors make content decisions--do so with strong morals.

If you need them, the [Student Press Law Center](#) is a phenomenal resource.

Censorship

As a student journalist in Illinois, it is important you understand the Illinois New Voices Act which was signed into law on July 29, 2016. You may read it in its entirety here: <http://www.splc.org/article/2017/01/illinois-new-voices-act>